

The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
University of Algiers 2 Abou El Kacem Saadallah
Faculty of Foreign Languages
Department of English



CRAFTING PEACE:
THE PEACE PROCESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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By: Ms. Rania MERZOUG

Supervised by: Prof Brahim MANSOURI

Examination Board

Chairperson: Prof. Assia KACED

Supervisor: Prof. Brahim MANSOURI

Internal Examiner: Prof. Mohamed DOUIFI

Internal Examiner: Dr. Karima SAOUDI

External Examiner: Prof. Amar GUENDOUZI

External Examiner: Dr. Hichem SOUHALI

University of Algiers 2

University of Algiers 2

University of Algiers 2

University of Algiers 2

University of Tizi Ouzou

University of Batna

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference or acknowledgment is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

I am duly informed that any person practicing plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary sanctions issued by university authorities under the rules and regulations in force.

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Dedication

To myself

Abstract

The Northern Ireland conflict stands as one of the most protracted disputes in contemporary history. It was described as a conflict with no solution. In the late sixties of the twentieth century, Northern Ireland sank into bloodshed for three consecutive decades. Endeavours to solve the conflict were made to no avail until the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. Nevertheless, the established peace is in jeopardy due to the repercussions of Brexit, as Northern Ireland voted to remain within the European Union but not the United Kingdom, leading to tensions regarding solutions to the borders with the Republic of Ireland. This dissertation aims to comprehend how such protracted conflict amidst a profoundly fragmented society with different stakeholders was eventually resolved. It also seeks to underscore the significance of the existing peace in Northern Ireland and highlight the arduous journey of the peace process to attain it to raise the awareness of the newer generations. The latter did not experience the “Troubles” or the violence at the time, overlooking the value of the prevailing peace. The study applies a quantitative approach. It hinges upon a thorough examination of primary and secondary sources. I will attempt to show that the conflict resolution in Northern Ireland stemmed from a combination of factors: external pressure and internal attempts, such as secret and overt talks, agreements, and strategic manoeuvres to settle the conflict. Notably, the Provisionals’ violence significantly impacted decisions and, consequently, the dispute settlement. In essence, the conflict resolution in Northern Ireland offers hope for settling other long-lasting and complicated disputes, such as the Israeli-Palestinian or North-South Korean conflicts.

Keywords: Northern Ireland, conflict, violence, conflict resolution, peace process, mediation.

Acronyms

ADRIC	Auxiliary Division of the Royal Irish Constabulary
APNI	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
CIRA	Continuity Irish Republican Army
CLMC	Combined Loyalist Military Command
DSD	Downing Street Declaration
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EEC	Economic European Union
EU	European Union
FF	Fianna Fail
FFR	Forum for Peace and Reconciliation
GFA	Good Friday Agreement
HRA	Human Rights Act
IAPL	Irish Anti-Partition League
IICD	Independent International Commission of Decommissioning
IPP	Irish Parliamentary Party
IRA	Irish Republican Army

IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
LVF	Loyalist Volunteer Force
NI	Northern Ireland
NICRA	Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association
NIHRC	Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo
PSF	Provisional Sinn Fein
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party
RHI	Renewable Heat Incentive
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
RIRA	Real Irish Republican Army
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SF	Sinn Fein
SPA	Special Power Act
TCA	Trade and Cooperation Agreement
TUAS	Tactical Use of Armed Struggle document

UCC	Ulster Unionist Council
UUUC	United Ulster Unionist Council
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

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Introduction

Since time immemorial, conflicts have permeated Man's life. Disputes are as old as Cain and Abel's conflict. Nevertheless, they are not limited to families' relations; conflicts can manifest among relatives, friends, colleagues, states, the latter and their citizens, and even among the citizens themselves. The presence of conflicts propels the pursuit of their resolution, aiming for peaceful coexistence – no need to emphasise that a peaceful life in society is more than cherished. The notion of peace started to gain prominence in the late eighteenth century with the emergence of revolutions. Then, this notion of peace became more critical and valuable when conflicts threatened human existence; their study became a prerequisite. Thus, the aim has been to study conflicts to control and eventually resolve them.

Northern Ireland's history bears in memory the imprint of a protracted bloody conflict and its resolution. In fact, the dispute was one of the most prolonged ones in contemporary history. It was delineated as a conflict with no solution; thirty years of violence characterised people's daily lives in the Republic of Ireland, England, and, most significantly, Ulster. Two communities shared the same territory but carried distinct histories and aspirations. On the one hand, the majority, Protestant Unionists, claimed a stronger connection with Britain; on the other hand, the minority, Catholic Nationalists, aspired to reunify with the Republic of Ireland. Injustice, inequality, and oppression stemmed from the Protestant community's supremacy, eventually leading to the emergence of the Civil Rights movement and the escalation of violence. The divergence developed to become a complex conflict entailing paramilitaries fighting not only among themselves but also against the British Government. The dispute was complicated because it did not encompass only the Unionists and the Nationalists. Both were supported by states, the United Kingdom and the Republic, respectively.

As a consequence, attempts were initiated to ameliorate the situation. Secret talks, dialogues, negotiations, mediation, documents, and agreements constituted part of the

protracted process undertaken in Northern Ireland to attain peace. The objective of the peace process was to convene the warring parties at the same table to seek solutions and sign an agreement permitting the resolution of the conflict. An accord was signed in 1998 under the name of ‘the Good Friday Agreement,’ which has resulted in a fragile peace since its implementation. Accordingly, shifting from instability and war to stability and peace was a tremendous accomplishment. It was an achievement that deserves significant attention and investigation. Hostile groups in Northern Ireland, at long last, could agree on a compromise that suited the involved political parties, the Republic of Ireland, and the British Government as well.

However, the abovementioned Agreement was put into jeopardy because of an event that occurred in the UK, namely Brexit. In 2016, the United Kingdom held a referendum regarding UK membership in the European Union and subsequently left the Organisation. Consequently, the borders between Northern Ireland (part of the UK) and the Republic of Ireland (a member of the EU) constituted a problem. Since then, Brexit has haunted relationships amongst Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland. Indeed, the Democratic Unionist Party leader refused to nominate the Deputy First Minister and the Speaker to the Northern Ireland Assembly unless changes were made to the Northern Ireland Protocol, which was suggested as a solution to the border issue. The Protocol created a boundary between Northern Ireland and Great Britain since some goods entering Ulster from Great Britain had to undertake checks, for Ulster, which is constitutionally part of the United Kingdom, is the only region in the UK that has borders with a European Union member, the Republic of Ireland. Even the 2023 Windsor Framework, endeavouring to alleviate the checks between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, has not solved the Deputy First Minister and Speaker issues. The latter has been postponed until responses were provided from the British Government regarding concerns raised by the Unionists.

Furthermore, Sinn Féin, the Nationalist party, secured the most votes and seats in the 2022 Stormont Election in Northern Ireland. It was unprecedented news since Ulster's formation in 1921. The most startling point was not that the Nationalists won the Stormont

Election, but that Sinn Fein did. Their journey to such a pivotal instant has been long. For decades, Sinn Fein had been the political wing of the Irish Republican Army before they decided to renounce violence and espouse peaceful and democratic means in their quest for reunification with the Republic of Ireland, which represented a significant change in their ideology. Indeed, reunification has also been the primary purpose of Sinn Fein since the party's formation at the dawn of the twentieth century.

Brexit and its aftermath, coupled with the Sinn Fein majority in the Northern Ireland Assembly Election, can potentially endanger the Good Friday Agreement and reshape the community dynamics in Ulster. Consequently, it would affect the prevailing fragile peace in the Republic of Ireland, Great Britain, and, more importantly, Northern Ireland, where the conflict subsisted and escalated. Such a looming threat makes the peace process and the Belfast Agreement more valuable for the three regions. The peace process of so many difficult years is in jeopardy and faces a precarious future; collapse is not excluded. Due to this imminent risk, the conflict in Ulster and the peace process are worth revisiting.

The fundamental underlying assumption of my work is that in conflict resolution, the disputing parties must seek solutions. Endeavours have to be at the front. The conflicting sides must engage in discussions and, eventually, agreements to attain a resolution of the dispute. In other words, one assumes that the parties engaged in the process of conflict resolution are willing to participate in negotiations and have a sincere commitment to attain a reciprocally acceptable settlement to the conflict. Simply put, the conflict resolution process is not characterised by disputing camps interested in maintaining the conflict and using the negotiations to humper its resolution. The aim of the conflicting factions must be a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Given the assumption that the warring parties engage in negotiations to achieve a peaceful settlement, it is hypothesised that the disputing sides' aim was to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland.

As mentioned above, amidst the vehemence of the conflict in Northern Ireland, doors were opened for a resolution, several attempts were made to solve the conflict,

compromises were sought to overcome stalemates, and objectives evolved. These intricacies define the enigmatic nature of the peace process in Ulster, which until 1998 had been marked by repeated failure. Nevertheless, at a particular juncture, the resolution of the conflict materialised. Despite the bloody confrontation between the Unionists and the Nationalists/Republicans, with the latter opposing what they deemed British colonisation, not to mention the claims of the Republic of Ireland over Ulster, the conflict was resolved. Regardless of all these complexities and overlapping dynamics, the warring parties reached a peace agreement, raising the following main research question:

- What factors, if any, underpinned the willingness of the conflicting parties to enter into an agreement and thoroughly pursue its implementation to resolve the dispute?

The dissertation also delves into the following sub-questions:

- What were the antecedents of the conflict that arose on the island of Ireland, and how did the conflict transcend to Northern Ireland?
- What were the fundamental elements that set the peace process in motion?
- What were the impediments encountered during the peace process in Northern Ireland?
- How was the Good Friday Agreement ratified, and what were the difficulties and challenges it faced during its implementation?
- Finally, what were the key political and social challenges confronted during the Post-Good Friday Agreement (2006-2023), and how did they impact the pursuit of lasting peace in Northern Ireland?

At the forefront of contemporary issues, Northern Ireland's fragile peace stands as a pressing concern. Renowned for its protracted peace process, the world is eager to witness the fallout of Brexit and the Stormont Election that might endanger the peace process in Ulster. The latter captivated numerous specialists in peace and conflict studies. Myriad interpretations have been developed, and diverse theories have been applied. The intriguing point in this prolonged process is the shift from armed conflict to peace, though radicalism was highly pronounced.

The relevant literature suggests that if the Good Friday Agreement was signed, highlighting a settlement to the Northern Ireland conflict and a prevalence of peace, it was because of the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Jonathan Stevenson wrote in “Peace in Northern Ireland: Why Now?” that the Maastricht Treaty propelled both Britain and the Republic of Ireland to put an end to the conflict. Indeed, the notion of sovereignty altered with the closeness engendered by the Treaty, resulting in its weakening. This shift in sovereignty prompted the British to devolve powers to Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. That must be true if it concerned only the Republic of Ireland. The Republic’s membership in the European organisations, EEC and EU, emancipated it and made it adopt looseness towards sovereignty and acceptance of the UK through the myriad meetings and the status of equality with Britain the membership provided it with; nevertheless, such could not be the case regarding the UK. The extent to which Stevenson made the Maastricht Treaty a key factor in attaining peace regarding the British Government is exaggerated. Sovereignty has consistently been a contentious issue for Britain, eventually leading to Brexit. Moreover, Devolution has never implied ceding and surrendering sovereignty.

Convergence on the point of the European Organisations’ impact emanated from Clodagh Harris, who also pointed out, in “Anglo-Irish Elite Cooperation and the Peace Process: The Impact of the EEC/EU,” that British and Irish membership in the European Organisations led to peace. According to her, the membership of the British and Irish Governments in the European Organisations permitted the British and the Irish to develop and stabilise their relationships and consequently attain peace. Certainly, the EEC, together with the European Union, provided a neutral soil in which both could meet and even share the same interests and motives behind their adhesion. However, Harris did not consider all the conflicting parties; she neglected that the dispute in Northern Ireland also encompassed the Northern Irish political parties. If tribute is paid to both countries to achieve lasting peace in Northern Ireland, it suggests that the political parties had no role in the conflict or the peace process. The UK and the Republic indeed represented the Unionists and the

Nationalists, respectively, but in no case could the warring political parties, especially the Sinn Fein Party, be considered puppets of the process leading to peace.

In his analysis of the peace process in Northern Ireland, Ryan Gawn suggested in his “Arms to Agreement: Northern Ireland’s Move from War to Peace” that the conflict maturity compelled the weary conflicting parties to seek and embrace peace as the most viable way out. According to Gawn, the conflict had become ripe, and the time was right. I cannot deny that the alternative courses of action on the horizon were limited, if not absent, at a particular junction, especially for the British Government and the Unionists. However, the same cannot be said about the Republicans. The IRA remained prepared to resort to violence if concessions were not made to them and their objectives were not achieved. Moreover, the concept of conflict ripeness requires two essential aspects: the conflicting parties must understand that they are in a reciprocally hurting deadlock and that a solution for the subsisting conflict is possible. In fact, if I assume that the first condition was met since the British and the IRA could not defeat each other militarily, it was not the case for the latter aspect of the peace process in Northern Ireland. On the one hand, the Unionists (DUP) refused to join the multi-party talks, which left no doubt about the party’s stance regarding a solution to the issue, leaving no doubt about their commitment to the status quo and reluctance to explore other solutions. On the other hand, if the Unionists (UUP) joined the talks for an eventual solution and signed the peace agreement, it was under deception and pressure and not out of the belief that a solution could be attained. Hence, the conflict during negotiations and even when signing an accord did not achieve the level of ripeness as suggested by Ryan Gawn. Furthermore, the British and the Unionists doubted the IRA’s goodwill, even their ceasefires, leading to questioning the possibility of negotiating a settlement with them.

Other scholars advocated that the military stalemate was the reason that compelled the disputing camps to convene at the same table and sign a peace accord; nevertheless, these scholars overlooked the crucial element of the timing in the process. In fact, Jonathan Powell supported the said thesis in his *Great Hatered, Little Room: Making Peace in*

Northern Ireland. The deadlock indeed existed and was acknowledged by the British Government and the IRA; however, it took place in the mid-1980s. Such a suggestion does not answer the following question: Why did it not lead to a conflict resolution by the end of the 1980s, when it was recognised? Such a question indicates that either the deadlock was not the cause of achieving peace in Northern Ireland or that it was not enough to attain it.

In “Constructive Ambiguity and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland,” James Dingley wrote that the ‘Accord’ leading to peace was a scam because of its language. He suggests that the Irish and British used language strategically to prompt the political parties to espouse the Agreement and peace. Dingley’s assertions deny the fact that each of the conflicting parties gained something from the Accord. Of course, not all of their demands were met, which is called making concessions, and the Belfast Agreement was primarily a compromise. Both the Unionists and the Nationalists understood that the objective was to find a middle ground. Besides, at first glance, and since the Good Friday Agreement was a peace agreement leading to violence cessation, if it were espoused only because of the scam, peace would not have been prevalent in the present time. Paul Dixon converges with Dingley regarding the focus on the political parties, Unionists and Nationalists. He argues, in *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace* and *Performing the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, along with “An Honourable Deception? The Labour Government, the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Peace Process,” that deception and manipulation were used as political skills leading to peace. Simply put, the political parties have been propelled and drawn towards peace using twisted manoeuvres. In reality, such a fact cannot be denied. Indeed, both the Conservative and Labour parties used aberrant manoeuvres in dealing with the peace process. However, could deception and manipulation alone lead to resolving a conflict that has subsisted for decades? The answer is no, especially with multi-dimension and multi-party disputes. It can only facilitate encounters, for example, but not resolve the conflict. Moreover, Dixon’s assumptions imply that the

political parties were dupes, and this could not be the case, especially for the Republican Party.

In *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Hugh Miall et al. believe that peace was achieved because of a change in the Republicans' thinking. The latter refers to the IRA's abandonment of violence in 1994 and then 1997 and the espousal of political means in the pursuit of reunification with the Republic. The ceasefires, especially the one of 1994, were of tremendous importance to the peace process in Northern Ireland. The 1994 IRA declaration permitted the effective jumpstart of the process. However, a change in only one conflicting party cannot lead to conflict resolution, especially the one taking place in Northern Ireland. It is worth noting that Ulster's dispute encompasses the Unionists, the Nationalists, the Republicans, the Loyalists, and the British and Irish Governments. All had to change their perceptions of the conflict and its resolution together with making concessions to attain peace. Moreover, the Republicans' refusal to decommission could not ensure that violence was renounced, especially after breaching the 1994 ceasefire. Marc Mulholland also focuses on the Republicans and concludes in *Northern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction* by stipulating that violence was pointless in the peace process in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, none of the parties accepted the talks, and the peace agreement for violence weighed on them. In fact, he tackled an essential and sensitive point in the process. The latter was permeated by paramilitaries' brutality, especially the IRA. However, such a judgment does not explain the eagerness of the Irish and, more specifically, the British to start multi-party talks and secure the Agreement. In fact, Republican violence was the wind that led the boat to the shores in 1998.

There are two types of interpretations in the above literature: Those who address external factors as the reason behind the conflict resolution in Northern Ireland and those who advocate internal causes. It is noteworthy that there are some common features among the explanations above. The first one is that violence is excluded as a reason behind the conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. Basically, the Republican violence has not been acknowledged as a possible cause that propelled the warring parties to seek a peace accord.

The second one is isolating some events and disputing parties from the broader context. In fact, the peace process was not studied entirely as one entity encompassing all its dimensions and aspects. The Northern Ireland peace process must be viewed as a complex puzzle; in the absence of any single piece, the overall picture remains incomplete.

My dissertation is structured around three theories imposed by the nature of the topic. The first is Historicism, the second is Marxism, and last but not least is Conflict Resolution. As the first chapter provides background to my dissertation, I deemed it conceivable to apply Historicism since the aim is to look at the genesis of the conflict in Ulster. In fact, history forms the foundation of human existence. Thus, to elaborate on a specific reality, the use of historical knowledge becomes a means to comprehend the present. Accordingly, Historicism is a theory that explains the conflict in Northern Ireland. Besides, Karl Marx related Historicism to class struggle. In the Communist Manifesto, the link was explicit with Historicism. It must be noted that Marxism is crucial to the conflict in Northern Ireland, especially in the first chapter, for the fight between the two existing classes, the wealthy and the deprived classes, resulted in a conflict. The former evolved from a pure class struggle into a political dispute. The class introduced in Ireland, the English Protestants, was provided with wealth, and the latter engendered power. This resulted in the introduced class gaining ascendancy over the deprived natives. The latter, as an economically disadvantaged community, sought their political liberties.

The third and most important theory is Conflict Resolution. Since my dissertation's core relates to the peace process in Northern Ireland, it indicates that the work concerns shifting from conflict to its resolution through a process. In reality, myriad theories can be applied to Northern Ireland's conflict and resolution. Conflict Settlement, for instance, is one of these theories. The aim of conflict settlement is to solve the existing strife; however, its focus is only on an agreement signature to settle the armed dispute. The shortcoming of Conflict Settlement is that the strife often reopens later for the disputing parties disagree on how to live together and do not accept one another, not to mention that incompatibilities may not have been addressed since it is not the aim of the conflict settlement. That is,

relationships between the conflicting parties remain unresolved. Conflict Management also seems applicable to Ulster's conflict. Nonetheless, it does not aim to resolve the conflict either. It merely provides tools to alleviate the destructive potential of the dispute. The management of the conflict does not meet the underlying discrepancies. It aims to freeze the struggle by negotiating a permanent ceasefire. However, in many cases, the ceasefire does not subsist for a long time. The conflicting parties may sign accords without having the intention to endorse them. Accordingly, the causes of the conflict and the incompatibilities are not dealt with, leading to the conflict's reopening.

An alternative proposed theory can be Conflict Transformation. It is important to mention that Conflict Transformation theory is tempting, for as its name indicates, transformation occurs. This theory's objective is profound since it endeavours to deal with the roots of the conflict. It goes beyond the resolution of specific issues. In *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, John Paul Lederach, a Conflict Transformation pioneer, maintains that the theory is based on two realities: that conflicts do occur in relationships and, most importantly, that disputes lead to change. As such, something new can be built out of the strife. Transforming the conflict requires a change at the following levels: personal, relational, structural, and cultural. It involves transforming the insights of issues, actions, and even how the existing dispute is expressed; it must happen at the personal and systemic levels. In other words, Conflict Transformation suggests eliminating the conflict. As ambitious as it seems, I believe that it is idealistic and utopian.

Hence, the three theories provide minimal prospects for achieving lasting peace and resolving the conflict. On the one hand, Conflict Settlement and Conflict Management exhibit limitations in their approaches to disputes. They can be deemed as short-lived solutions to existing conflicts. On the other hand, Conflict Transformation is excessively ambitious and utopian to be applied and succeed, especially in protracted and deeply divided societies comparable to Northern Ireland. Besides, significant time is required for its attainment, especially if culture is considered. Working on culture to make it uniform in a multicultural society requires considerable effort, acceptance, and a long time. A middle

ground between the two types of approaching disputes can be Conflict Resolution. It is not as limited as Conflict Settlement and Management and not as unrealistic as Conflict Transformation. Conflict Resolution theory is reasonable and realistic; it is more substantive because all or at least most of the incompatibilities are cleared up; however, it is not flawless. Even if Conflict Resolution is applied to zero-sum games to generate positive-sum constructive outcomes, it may be more short-term and result-oriented than conflict transformation.

In retrospect, the emergence of Conflict Resolution theory goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century. The failure of numerous endeavours to prevent the outbreak of the First World War led to seeking a science of peace that would constitute the basis for averting the eruption of future wars. However, the proposals did not emanate from organisations but were from individuals. It was not until post-Second World War that institutions pondered the question of peace and conflict research. It is worth noting that data was already collected and analysed between the First and Second World Wars by some individuals such as Pitirim Sorokin, Lewis Fry Richardson, and Quincy Wright. Tribute must also be paid to Mary Parker Follett's thinking related to behaviour and relations, which contributed to the field of conflict resolution. Indeed, politics, psychology, and international relations initiatives proved essential to conflict resolution study. Besides, non-violent means and strategies toward conflicts, prevailing in Quakers' and Mennonites' beliefs along with Gandhi's ideas, were also crucial to the emergence and development of the conflict resolution field. John Burton cannot be excluded as a key founder of the domain, especially when he became director of the Centre for the Analysis of Conflict in 1966 at the University College of London to help later in founding the Center for International Development and Conflict Management, working on long-lasting conflicts.

In fact, between 1945 and 1965, the first conflict and peace research institutions were established. The Hiroshima bombing seemed significant to such founding since it was followed by the creation of the Peace Research Laboratory by Theodore Lentz in Missouri. Then, the Center for Research on Conflict Resolution was founded in 1959 by Kenneth

Boulding after the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* initiation in 1957 with a few colleagues' help. Some of Boulding's critical writing encompasses *Conflict and Defense* (1962), *Stable Peace* (1978), and *Cultures of Peace* (2000). While in North America, the emphasis was on conflict, in Europe, the focus was put on peace research thanks to Johan Galtung, who wrote *Peace by Peaceful Means* (1996); *Searching for Peace: The Road to Transcend* (2000) and *Transcend and Transform: An Introduction to Conflict Work* (2004). Galtung was one of the principal founders of the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), which was established in 1960 in Oslo, as he was one of the key founders of the *Journal of Peace Research* in 1964. The least that can be said of Galtung's contributions to peace research is that they were seminal. Other institutions saw the dawn in Europe in the 1960s. Others carried the conflict resolution field forward after the abovementioned pioneers, such as Herbert Kelman, Roger Fisher, Wilham Ury, William Zartman, Adam Curle, and Elise Boulding. Their contribution led to the development of what is commonly known as contemporary Conflict Resolution, which emphasises halting violence and building the conditions to establish peace, encompassing post-violence reconciliation, embedding justice, and other issues.

Conflict Resolution emerged as a theory at the beginning of the 20th century and did not take shape until the late 1980s. It is defined in Peter Wallensteen's book *Understanding Conflict Resolution* as "a situation where the conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solves their incompatibilities, accept each other's continued existence as parties" (8). This definition applies to non-armed conflicts, of course. Since our concern is armed disputes regarding the nature of the disagreement in Northern Ireland, conflict resolution can be explained as a situation where the armed opponents sign an accord in which they approve of living with or/and dissolving the incompatibilities subsisting among them and consequently approve to halt violence against one another (Wallensteen 50). That is, the agreement must solve the incompatibilities between the conflicting parties and simultaneously end the fighting.

Accordingly, conflict resolution is more than attaining peace; it goes beyond the absence of violence. In fact, the disputing parties agree to accept, respect, and prepare to cohabit with one another in a signed accord. However, the first assessment of conflict resolution is that weapons are not used anymore. It must be made explicit that an agreement is only one component of the process. It indicates the end of the armed chapter and the commencement of a new era. Conflict Resolution expects the conflicting sides to deal with their incompatibilities and seek a solution to living with or dissolving them. In other words, either the parties renounce some of their ambitions or approve of disagreeing; nevertheless, they agree to a disagreement framework. Therefore, they accept to live with their incompatibilities, suggesting adopting democratic forms of politics. Basically, the disagreement has not been dissolved; instead, secure channels have been created for the political process.

In reality, seven ways exist according to which the disputing parties can live with their incompatibilities or dissolve them:

1. One of the parties changes its objectives but not necessarily a complete change of position.
2. The conflicting sides stick to their objectives but come upon a middle ground.
3. When all the demands of one party are met in a given issue, and the other party's requests are granted in another matter.
4. The conflicting parties approve of ruling together over the disputed issue as power-sharing.
5. The conflicting parties agree to leave the control of the disputed issue to somebody else.
6. To use conflict resolution mechanisms (arbitration, mediation, and others) if the conflicting parties accept.
7. Postponing issues since the latter can lead to a decrease in the significance of the problem. That is, giving less priority to the disputed issue.

In fact, conflict resolution approaches include negotiations and mediation as key elements before resolving the conflict. As a matter of fact, the warring sides resort to

negotiations when unilateral ways to resolve the dispute are beyond use. At a specific juncture, the disputing camps need negotiations. The imposition of deadlines and the embrace of compromises are prerequisites for the success of the talks. Recognition and dialogue are requirements for negotiations; for this to occur, the conflicting parties must be legitimate. Thus, the objective of negotiations is to address the parties' concerns. These negotiations can stem from the parties' decision and, in some cases, from mediation. Henceforth, third parties can serve as facilitators in negotiations.

Third parties' involvement in conflict resolution is crucial. It started with the end of the Cold War. Of course, the disputing parties would like the mediation of a third party but not necessarily a neutral one. In fact, the closeness between the third party and one of the conflicting groups can be beneficial since pressure can be exerted on them. However, it must be noted that mediation does not necessarily mean the success of conflict resolution. For the latter, Adam Curle recognised four elements of mediation:

1. The mediator aims to build, preserve, and enhance communication.
2. To circulate information between the warring parties.
3. To assist the conflicting sides.
4. The willingness to engage in cooperative negotiations (64).

Consequently, the purpose of mediation is mainly to facilitate communication between the different disputing parties, but of course, it is not confined to this. They can make suggestions and interpret.

The aim of this study is two-fold. The first purpose is to comprehend how such a prolonged conflict could be resolved within a highly divided society and with multi-conflicting parties. In fact, such a resolution gives hope to settling other current disputes like the one between North and South Korea or the Israeli-Palestinian one. The second aim is to highlight the importance of the prevailing peace in Northern Ireland and the long and challenging path to achieving it to raise the new generations' awareness. These new generations did not experience the "Troubles" and the accompanying violence of that era

and hence overlook the value of the peace they enjoy. It needs to be reiterated that this peace is in jeopardy, especially with post-Brexit and its fallout in Ulster.

My research applies a qualitative approach; it relies on a close observation of primary and secondary sources. It focuses on selected documents and speeches along with memoirs and reports written and issued by politicians, public officials, and governments related to the dispute and its resolution, besides the various agreements signed after fruitful talks throughout the lengthy peace process in Northern Ireland. The secondary sources are consulted for the data collection; they are the source of historical events and myriad interpretations. Their importance lies in providing the benefit of hindsight since they were written after a certain period. This gathering of data from primary and secondary sources is for an analytical purpose. Those different sources are scrutinised and evaluated to infer and formulate a standpoint. The ultimate objective of this amalgamation of references is to explain how conflict resolution occurred in Northern Ireland.

The work is divided into five chapters. The first one provides a background to the conflict since no resolution can occur in the absence of a dispute. The latter's origins are dealt with because they are crucial to its development in the late 1960s. The chapter digs into the introduction of an English Protestant class in Ireland and the failure of the natives' rebellions and fight against the Protestant ascendancy, leading to the constitutional Union between Great Britain and Ireland (1801). The chapter also investigates the endeavours to repeal the said constitutional Union and the imposition of Home Rule in Ireland, which led to Northern Ireland's birth (1920) and the conflict's inheritance. Additionally, it delves into the extent of the dispute in Ulster, which culminated in a Civil Rights movement and eventually bloodshed.

The second chapter explores the foundations of the peace process, focusing on the documents and talks that laid the basics for initiating the peace process. Prior to the official peace process, preliminary efforts were undertaken. At the dawn of 1972, secret talks, which must be examined, were launched to test the waters. Subsequently, the Sunningdale

Agreement was signed, and it is a must to dig into it since it was the first Accord, including all the conflicting parties, which espoused peaceful means. Other endeavours were made to solve the conflict, encompassing the Ang-Irish Agreement, talks between the Nationalists and the Republicans, and the Downing Street Declaration. These attempts will be examined to comprehend their role in shaping the base of the peace process in Northern Ireland.

The third chapter of my dissertation explores the mediation and the paramilitaries' ceasefire, which permitted substantive talks to take place and the peace process to begin. The chapter delves into the role of the Irish Americans and Bill Clinton, who won the election in 1992, for the IRA ceasefire did not come out of nowhere. The interference of the Irish Americans and Bill Clinton triggered it. The IRA Declaration has to be dealt with thoroughly since it is regarded as a pivotal moment in the peace process of Northern Ireland, for it allowed negotiations to start. These negotiations, in turn, were facilitated by the mediation of the US. This chapter also reaches the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, the first attempt to materialise the IRA's involvement in the peace process after renouncing violence. However, it was hindered by Unionist's opposition. Moreover, the decommissioning issue, which remained a stalemate in the peace process, will be examined.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the substantive talks that led to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. It was challenging to make the different political parties of Northern Ireland participate in the talks, especially with the Republicans' resumption of violence in 1996. For such a reason, the talks must be considered to comprehend the dynamics, demands, compromises, and the why of their success. Moreover, the change that took place at the time in the administration, the 1997 General Election in the UK and Tony Blair's victory, must not be overlooked because they boosted the peace process in Northern Ireland when preconditions were omitted, apart from renouncing violence, which permitted the signature of the Good Friday Agreement. Furthermore, the Accord implementation is to be explored to evaluate its difficulties. This implementation proved to be difficult due to unsettled issues, such as decommissioning, prisoners, and policing.

The last chapter evaluates the situation in Northern Ireland between 2003 and 2023. In other words, it starts from the negotiation for the St Andrews Agreement to the latest events taking place in the United Kingdom and the decisions of the British Government, proceeding through violence and sectarianism. Obviously, reference will be made to Brexit and its aftermath, which could impact the fragile peace in Northern Ireland. Additionally, the decision to repeal the 1998 Human Rights Act and the probability of adopting the 2022 Bill of Rights will be scrutinised. The speculation about the British Government withdrawing from the European Convention of Human Rights is dealt with because, for many, the British decision would explicitly breach the Good Friday Agreement.

1 Chapter One: From Genesis to Inheritance: The Conflict in Northern Ireland

The Northern Irish Conflict is known to be one of the most notorious unrests in modern history. The dispute lasted for over thirty years, yet it was solved a few years ago. Even though this clash seems to be recent, starting in the twentieth century with the Civil Rights movement, in reality, it goes back to centuries ago. Accordingly, its seeds must be investigated. The seeds scattered hundreds of years ago gave bitter fruits in the twentieth century. For such a reason, it is required to burrow deep into the past to uncover the roots, aiming at studying them and tracing their evolution. Such is the purpose of the present chapter.

The objective is to search for the genesis and the nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland, explain it in the present day, and understand how it evolved to become a Civil Rights movement and eventually the “Troubles.” For this reason, excavating Ireland’s¹ past is necessary because history is crucial to comprehend the present, leading to Historicism. In his poem “Digging,” the Irish poet Seamus Heaney emphasised the significance of the past for a more prosperous present through exploring the “roots.” The latter alludes to burrowing Irish history. Dwight E. Lee and Robert N. Beck, in discussing Historicism in their article “The Meaning of Historicism,” wrote: “The history of anything is a sufficient explanation of it, ... the nature of anything is entirely comprehended in its development” (qtd. in 568). It basically hints that history is the foundation of the human world. Thus, to expound on a given reality, history, or historical knowledge is to be used as a medium for a more adequate understanding of the present.

Moreover, to define philosophy, Hegel suggested that “philosophy is the history of philosophy” (qtd. in Hirschberger VI), which means that it is always vital to excavate into the history of a given thing to define and understand it. In alignment with this perspective,

¹ Ireland refers to the Island of Ireland. Simply put, before the partition of the Island into North and South. However, in a very few cases, the Republic of Ireland is referred to as simply Ireland in subsequent chapters.

Stephen, in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, remarked that "History,... is a nightmare" (31), which is quite right for history often haunts the present. Even if the definition of Historicism varies from scholar to scholar, the literature converges on one point: the use of the past and history to explain present events. Put simply, a comprehensive understanding of the conflict in Northern Ireland necessitates revisiting the past, which is what Lee and Beck claimed in their definition in the aforementioned article.

Marxism also can explain the present through the lenses of the past. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx penned, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." (9), which is a clear link to Historicism since the essence of the latter is the history of things. It is worth noting that Marxism is essential to the conflict in Northern Ireland, especially in the first chapter, for the fight of classes led to the dispute. The latter developed from merely being a class struggle to a political one. "Every class struggle is a political struggle," said Karl Marx (18). Accordingly, if an economic struggle is waged between proletarians and the bourgeoisie, such a fight will become a political conflict. This intersection can be applied to the conflict in Ulster due to the affluence bestowed upon the introduced class, the English Protestants, which subsequently generated power. It led to the ascendancy of the introduced class over the deprived native Irish. As an economically impoverished class, these Irish asked for their political rights. In other words, the development of societies is driven by the dynamics of class struggle, and this historical development is perceived as a set of conflicts among social classes. As such, Karl Marx clearly related Historicism to Marxism in his *Communist Manifesto*. Accordingly, this chapter focuses on the English Protestant plantation in Ireland and how it led to the emergence of conflict after the introduction of a new class within the existing population in Ireland and how this conflict transcended time and place.

1.1. The Anglicisation of Ireland:

The unrest in Northern Ireland that started as a Civil Rights movement in the second half of the 1960s, subsequently known as the Troubles, can be traced back centuries. Already under the Tudors, the aim was to bring Irish estates under English control. And "if Ireland

had to become a political extension of England, it would also have to become a religious extension” (Gibney, *Short History of Ireland* 15). The latter implies a connection between politics and religion. Controlling Ireland had always been on the agenda of England, and it was in 1556, during Queen Mary's² reign, the last Catholic Queen of England, that an elaborate plan was drawn up for the confiscation of the land, the dispossession of the natives and the resettlement by English subjects. Thus, the very first plantation in Ireland was established in the estates of Laois-Offaly in the middle of the sixteenth century (1556), which was renamed as King's and Queen's counties and is nowadays known as Leix and Offaly. It is important to note that attempts to establish plantations in the second half of 1540 were made but foundered during Edward VI's times.

King's and Queen's counties plantation was urged by the Archbishop of Armagh as a solution to Irish rebellions; he suggested either killing or evicting the Irish (Ranelagh 58). The upheaval, which the Archbishop referred to, was the Kildare Rebellion that took place right before the plantation of Laois and Offaly in 1556. After this insurgency, the land of the O'Connor and O'More, Gaelic Irish families, was confiscated (Lennon 171). However, the plan of planting Lois and Offaly existed before the said rebellion because the lands of former rebels were already allocated to some Old English and English Tenants (171). This plantation was but the first of a series of many others through land confiscation that was to culminate with the Cromwellian settlement and Williamite seizure.

Interest in Ireland became ostensible in the late first half of the sixteenth century. In 1541, the Irish Parliament, which was only Irish in name, enacted the Kingly Title for Ireland, which made it an independent Kingdom. In truth, the growing interest in Ireland manifested itself when King Henry VIII³ assumed the title of King of Ireland in 1541. I believe that the measure presumed that further decisions were to be taken concerning

² Mary Tudor (1516- 1558) was born and died in England. As the daughter of Henry VII, she ruled England as Queen of England from 1553 to 1558. As a Catholic, she was known for her intolerance for Protestants which owed her the nickname of Bloody Mary. She aimed to restore Catholicism after she married the Spanish Philip II but to no avail.

³ Henry VIII (1491- 1547) was born and died in England. As the son of Henry VII, he became King in 1509. He got married five times and was responsible for the English Reformation. The latter was his most important achievement and resulted in declaring himself the head of the Church of England.

Ireland in terms of politics, hinting at the intention of controlling the whole island. For Robbie Mcveigh and Bill Rolston, the period that followed, the close of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century, marked a shift towards “an explicit development of a plantation policy” (11). So, if prior to 1541, England’s interest in Ireland was implicit, after this same year, it became explicit. King Henry showed more interest in Ireland and appointed the Earl of Surrey, Henry Howard, to take charge of it. Howard suggested the plantation of English settlers to occupy Irish estates, but affording such a policy was not an option (Cosgrove 171). From my perspective, the English had an aim behind such a scheme.

I contend that the plantations in Ireland aimed to discard the dependence on the English aristocracy. Whether Gaelic or Anglo-Norman like the O’Connor or the Desmond and the Kildare families, respectively, England wanted control to be exclusive. The Old English, who settled in Ireland with the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in the twelfth century, acquired power through time and provided England with an indirect rule over Ireland. Gerald Farrell suggested that direct control in Ulster began in 1570 as a new strategy instead of relying on the local Gaelic rulers (1) or the Old English, the Anglo-Normans. The latter became rather Irish in nature; Irishness permeated them. Counting on the Gaels and the Old English indicated that proxies ruled Ireland.

England embarked on a new policy in the sixteenth century: Anglicisation. Anglicisation can be defined as a process of permeating the Gaels with English manners, institutions and tenure. R. F. Foster, however, describes it as putting the “administrative reins” in the hands of the English, which means “governing Ireland with English priorities and English interests” (51), implying also making the power Protestant. The purpose in Ireland starting from the 16th century was, thus, the Anglicisation of power. Before this period, the 16th century, Anglicisation bore rather the definition of permeating the Irish with Englishness. In reality, the process of Anglicising Ireland did not start with the plantation; it goes back to the previous centuries. As early as the fourteenth century, for instance, “the

Statutes of Kilkenny”⁴ (1366) attempted the Anglicisation of Ireland. The English language, for instance, had to be used by both English people living in Ireland and the Irish under penalty of land seizure.

Then, in the first half of the sixteenth century, “the English Order, Habit and Language Act” was passed by King Henry VIII in 1537, aiming to promote the statutes of Kilkenny and consequently strengthen the Anglicisation of Ireland. Nonetheless, with the policy of plantation in the second half of the sixteenth century, the English instead introduced a whole class that was English and Protestant and provided it with privileges together with the opportunity to hold power. The English Protestant ascendancy that would see the dawn in the following years reflects the success of the English in Anglicising Ireland. I believe that this class was not only an example of civility but also a group destined to rule because of its Englishness and Protestantism. The introduction of an English and Protestant class suggested a change in the policy of controlling Ireland, and as a result, Anglicisation took another form. But this policy linked politics to religion for the coming centuries.

Lands were granted to newcomers. Starting from 1606, settlers of both English and Scottish nationalities were given estates and asked to be the defenders of the area at the same time (Mulholland, *Northern Ireland: Introduction* 2). Of course, it was more comfortable for the Scots to set up home in Ireland since Scotland was not that far from England. In fact, it was only a few miles away from Ireland. Settlers in the latter were either English or Scots, but both were Protestants. Even if the Scots were Presbyterians, they were still Protestants. Those settlers were allocated privileges when provided with lands that initially belonged to the Irish. I believe that giving these new settlers land was, in itself, a reconstitution of the Irish society classes that encompassed the Old English (Norman lords) and the indigenous. It is noteworthy that the British Protestants were small in number in comparison to the Catholics, who composed most of the Irish population, including the Old

⁴ Kilkenny Statutes consist of thirty-five acts, aiming at addressing social and political issues arising from the intermingling of the Anglo-Norman settlers and the natives. .

English and the natives. However, the importance did not lie in number but rather in power. Indeed, the settlers were a minority yet a privileged class, economically and politically. The link must be drawn between the economy and politics. In fact, prosperity, be it landownership or business, confers power.

The different plantations in Ireland were met with resistance. Myriad rebellions took place, such as the Desmond Rebellion (1569), the rebellion under the leadership of FitzGerald, Earls of Desmond (1580-1584), or the one undertaken by the Gaelic Shane O'Neill in 1594. After each revolt, land confiscation took place, and new plantations were established. For instance, the 1594 rebellion resulted in the establishment of Ulster Plantation in 1609. About a hundred English and Scottish undertakers were allocated estates of 1000, 1500, and 2000 acres and asked to populate them with new settlers (Farrell 4). By the late 1630s, the Protestants possessed, in Ulster, 3,000,000 out of 3,500,000 acres (Johnson 41-2). The latter meant that, practically, the whole of Ulster fell into Protestant hands to the detriment of the dispossessed Catholics. This plantation suggests the end of Gaelic Ireland, as claimed by Ranelagh (61), which was soon followed by the waning of the Old English power starting from 1613.

Despite the aforementioned defeat, the Irish were not discouraged. They undertook one of the most significant uprisings in Irish history, the Irish Rebellion of 1641. The latter is another example of Irish resistance and one of the most studied events in Ireland's past. The consecutive land seizure and land dispossession prompted the Irish to rebel against both the Crown and the settlers despite being aware that after each uprising, the English confiscated the lands of the rebellious and allotted them to the English and the Scottish. The uprising was not religious because, as mentioned by Michelle O'Riordan, English Catholics were sometimes attacked by the Irish rebels (68) despite sharing the same religion. However, the 1641 rebellion paved the way for massive land confiscation based on religious beliefs. Hereafter, religion became the separating wall between the Irish and the English. The 1662 "Act of Settlement," which reversed the Cromwellian settlement of land that took place in the 1650s, referred to the dispossessed Irish proprietors as

dispossessed from their properties “merely for being papists” with no euphemism for the word “papist.”

The Irish Catholics were the majority but were disadvantaged. They were deprived of their lands and, hence, divested of economic and, more importantly, political power. Marxism cannot be overlooked in this context, for economic power provides political power. This dispossession was accentuated by the rebellion of 1641 and the accession of William of Orange⁵ to power. It did not deter, however, the faith of the Irish Catholics in regaining their liberty, for they were armed with their belief that “the greatest wealth is to enjoy liberty” (qtd. in Mcveigh and Rolston 10). It is essential to state that land dispossession also impacted social order. Undoubtedly, the land was a source of wealth and the basis of power, and its dispossession meant, by all means, a deprivation of power. The new social structure reflected the dominance of the English, who were also Protestants. In fact, such authority was the aim of England, and it gave way to the emergence of the Protestant ascendancy and the seeds of republicanism.

1.2. The Protestant Ascendancy Emergence and the Seeds of Republicanism:

The outcome of the 1641 rebellion was disastrous for the Catholics. Their position and conditions compounded. Catholics slaughtered the Protestants in their upheaval, and Oliver Cromwell⁶, who came at the head of English Parliament forces, was determined to take revenge and suppress the enemy. From my perspective, the 1641 revolt provided Cromwell with a reason to justify his massacres against the Irish (old English and Natives), especially those of Drogheda and Wexford in 1649, and his land confiscation policy that he undertook between 1642 and 1653. His intention of vengeance was expressed openly in his speech in

⁵ William of Orange or William III (1650-1702) was born in the Netherlands but died in Ireland. He was a Dutch Prince and became King of England, Ireland, and Scotland in 1689 and remained as such until his death. He married his cousin Mary II, the daughter of King James II, which allowed him to become King. As Protestants, Mary and William were invited by the Protestants in Britain to rule to prevent the Catholic James II from seizing the Crown. As a result, a battle was fought between William III and James II, which ended by the latter's defeat.

⁶ Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) was born and died in England. He started his political career as an MP in 1628. Then as a consequence of the English Civil War (1642-1651) between Charles I and his Parliament, Cromwell ruled England, Scotland, and Ireland for he led the parliamentary forces during the Civil War. He dissolved the Parliament in 1653 and became the Lord Protector refusing to be a King. He died of Malaria.

1649 when he said, “We are come to ask an account of the innocent blood that hath been shed and to endeavour to bring to an account ... who, by appearing in arms, seek to justify the same” (Carlyle 21). By these words, Cromwell attempted to justify the reason that brought him to Ireland. It was the injustice undergone by the Protestants on the Irish Catholics’ hands.

Accordingly, he tried to vindicate the use of violence against the “lawless rebels” as a punishment for slaughtering and killing the “innocent” Protestants. The depositions that were made after this period ascertain the horrors inflicted upon the Protestants by the Irish rebellious though inflated, according to William Edward Hartpole Lecky (I: 81). In my opinion, the 1641 Rebellion came to occupy an essential place in Protestants’ culture and memory. However, during the upheaval, not only Protestants were killed, but even Catholics were massacred by the Protestants; nevertheless, all means were suitable to justify the end. Cromwell embarked on the confiscation of land and the transplantation of Irish Catholics. The massacres, the seizure, and the transplantation of the Irish are considered to be the most critical features of the Cromwellian settlement. The land confiscation, undertaken by Cromwell as a punishment, came with three acts: The Adventurers’ Act (1642), “the Act for the Settling of Ireland” (1652), and “the Act of Satisfaction.” (1653).

The ostensible aim of the three acts was to take measures against the insurgents of the rebellion. However, its hidden intention was not the retribution itself because of the uprising against the English Government and the slaughtering of hundreds of Protestants. The ultimate goal was to deprive them of their lands, a massive confiscation that would allow the planting of English Protestants and the control of Ireland. The English Protestants would be the means through which England would rule Ireland again, but this time, it would be a direct rule. As mentioned above, the Old English were no longer an option for the English Government to rule Ireland for them because they proved to be traitors, especially if they were Catholics. J.G. Simms argued that “the Cromwellian settlement was not so much a plantation, as transference of the sources of wealth and power from Catholics to Protestants” (*War and Politics* 203). Indeed, acres of land were transferred from Catholics’

hands to Protestants'. 500.000 acres of land were to be granted to the settlers, according to the Articles of Plantation (Johnson 31). In Ulster, for example, out of the fifty-eight landholders in 1641 who were Gaelic Catholics, only five remained landholders in 1660 (Elliott 109), and the other fifty-three landholders were dispossessed. The new Protestants were the path to a new establishment, one of a new class, a new aristocracy provided with privileges because they were landowners.

As a result of the measures taken against the Catholics regarding land confiscation in the 1650s, the land owned by the Catholics plunged from 59% to 22% (Bernard 159). By the 1670s, and according to William Petty, who mapped Ireland in the 1650s, the number of Protestants was at 200,000 English who were predominantly Anglicans and about 100,000 Scots who were mostly Presbyterians (Gibney, *Short History of Ireland* 75), suggesting that Ireland was acquiring a Protestant population. This land confiscation strengthened the new class created with the Cromwellian seizure of the 1650s. This group constituted the new elite, a Protestant class with the privilege of owning land and authority. It also meant that the deprived Irish were excluded economically and politically.

After the plantation of the English Protestants in Ireland's different corners, the dispossession of the Irish of their lands, and their transplantation, two separate communities shared the same territory. And as it had always been a zero-sum game, one group had to have an advantage over the other. The English Protestant community had an advantage over the Irish Catholic one. Through the eighteenth century, the nascent Protestant ascendancy had been consolidated.

In fact, after the Limerick Treaty's⁷ signature on the 3rd of October 1691, another land confiscation wave took place with the Protestant William of Orange. This seizure occurred after an important event in Irish history, the Battle of the Boyne.⁸ In fact, in the latter, the Protestant William of Orange defeated the Catholic King James II in Ireland. Nowadays, the victory of the Protestants over the Catholics is celebrated yearly on the 12th

⁷ The Treaty that ended the war between William of Orange and James II in 1691.

⁸ The battle fought between William of Orange and James II in 1690.

of July in Ulster. After defeating the Catholic James II in the battle of the Boyne, William embarked on land confiscation, one of the significant land settlements in Ireland alongside the Cromwellian one. Nevertheless, it was not as massive as its precedent or the last one. In 1688, the land that remained in the hands of the Catholics was estimated to be 22 % (Bernard 160). Still, as a result of the Williamite confiscation, it plummeted to 5-10 % (Gibney, *Short History of Ireland* 92), and if the land was not in Catholics' hands, it was in Protestants'.

The land confiscation wave dispossessed further the Irish Catholics and thus empowered the Protestants, for it was a zero-sum game. At the turn of the century, the Irish Parliament became Protestant, offices were held by Protestants, the judiciary sector was controlled by Protestants, and even businesses were monopolised by them. The eighteenth century witnessed the consolidation of the new class, the new elite that emerged in the seventeenth century and became the oligarchy in the eighteenth century. However, the Irish and the Catholics' threat subsisted in the minds of the English and Protestants. Thus, it was natural for the Protestants to take further measures, laws, against the Catholics to maintain their position and privileges; such laws were fundamental to their ascendancy, and a whole code of penal laws was enacted.

To cite but a few, "The Popery Act," which is also known as the "Act to Prevent the Further Growth of Popery," was issued in 1704, and the "Act for Explaining and Amending an Act Intituled an Act to Prevent the Further Growth of Popery" (1709). The former restricted Catholic land ownership and inheritance, not to mention that it favoured Protestant heirs in this land inheritance. The latter came to overcome the loopholes of the previous Act, permitting the Protestants to claim the estates if they revealed that a Catholic was hiding the increased output of his holding. Land ownership was significant for political life because the political system in Ireland at the time privileged landed property; the latter conferred social and political authority. Dispossessing Irish Catholics of their political rights was not only through depriving them of the land but also by preventing them from exercising them.

If the land was targeted to prevent Catholics from acquiring power, their political and civil rights were not less important to prevent them from regaining at least some authority. In Parliament, the Catholics were excluded. Besides, they were even prohibited from voting in Parliament and corporation elections according to the “Popery Act of 1704.” Bartlett asserted that having access to the state was denied to 75 per cent of the Irish population (140). Besides, provision XV of this same Act made holding any office, civil or military, subject to the taking of the oath of adjuration. According to the latter, the Catholics had to reject Catholicism as a religion and acknowledge that Queen Anne was the rightful Queen, which was, of course, an act to abjure the Stuart Dynasty. Furthermore, the 1709 Act enlarged the category of people who could take the oath under the law of 1704. This new act made all the registered priests liable to take the adjuration oath under the penalty of banishment for their whole life and death in case of return to Ireland (Lecky, I: 158). The enactment of such laws hid aims.

The 1704 Act aimed to diminish estates in Catholics’ possession to deny them access to power. The latter was achieved by dividing the land between the Catholics so that they would hold small estates or pass them on to the Protestants to enhance their authority. Thus, this Act can also be considered a continuation of Cromwell and William's policy regarding land confiscation. It also aimed to prevent the Irish Catholics from having a political voice. The Penal Laws were not only undermining the Catholics regarding the practice of their religion, but they were also a hindrance to their adherence to the society from which they were successfully excluded, economically and politically. It is worth reiterating that Karl Marx tied economic power to political power. For him, the class that controls the means of production also exercises influence over the political institutions, and of course, the policies, the acts, and even the actions of the government are designed to preserve the interests of the ruling class. In the context of Ireland, the economic and political exclusion of the Catholics was achieved by making the Irish Parliament Protestant with both Houses and by transferring estates from Catholics’ hands to Protestants’ hands. In Ireland, the land was not the symbol of power but power itself because whoever held it held power.

I believe that the Penal Laws were not only a loss of land and power but also a loss of faith in the Irish Government. The latter could no longer be trusted, for the Treaty of Limerick was breached when the clauses that induced the rebels to surrender were no longer respected with the enactment of the Penal Laws. In the Irish Parliament's eyes, the terms agreed on in the Limerick Treaty were too lenient, and measures had to be taken to counter the mercifulness of its clauses. The Penal Laws were the solution. These laws could secure Protestants' position and weaken Catholics' power if any was left. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the penal code did not just target the Catholics but also the Presbyterians, though they were Protestants. The enactment of the "Sacramental Test Act" of 1704 in Ireland affected these Presbyterians because they had to take the Anglican Sacrament of Lord's Supper following the rite of the Church of Ireland as a condition for holding governmental posts (military or civil) in Ireland.

Thus, the penal code came as a consequence of the new social order; it came as a means to secure Protestants' interests and maintain the status quo. The latter had always been under threat in Protestants' eyes. The menace subsisted in the minds of the Protestants because they were still a minority, and any change or withdrawal of official favours or allocating the Catholics with new favours would not be in their interest, as it happened with the "Restoration Act of Settlement" in 1662. With the latter, the Catholics, "innocent papists," were given back their estates. Moreover, the accused Protestants of treason, whose estates were given to the adventurers for satisfaction, were also restored to them. British Protestants, at the time, were disappointed, for they had to give up some of their lands to the Catholics. From this point of view, the Penal Laws had more advantageous motivations than punitive ones.

I contend that the penal code was to maintain the conquest of Ireland in a society where the majority belonged to the conquered population. Even if the Penal Laws could not be fully enforced, they were successful machinery to keep the Irish Catholics as second-class citizens and consequently make the English Protestants first-class residents. They also inflamed hatred against this new English Protestant elite. Thus, with the Catholics' defeat

in the Battle of the Boyne, the confiscation wave that followed the 1690 defeat, the Irish soldiers' departure to France, and the Penal Laws enactment that kept the Irish as subjugated citizens seemed to have solved the strive over power in Ireland. Power was in the Protestant Irish Parliament's hands, and Protestant hegemony was undeniable. This establishment would remain until the end of the nineteenth century.

After the series of plantations of English Protestants that took place in Ireland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, two peoples came to co-exist in the same geographical area. On the one hand, English Protestants who formed a minority within the population of Ireland but who, at the same time, detained power for they possessed the land and the critical positions in the administration. In my opinion, their small number led to a mentality siege that would haunt them for the coming centuries. On the other hand, the Irish Catholics who formed the population majority but were dispossessed and excluded from essential posts in the administration and even political life. But could they really co-habit with all the differences that separated them? The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries events, referring to the plantations and the development of the conflict, led the ground to the troubles later on.

The above suggests that the unrest started with the establishment of the English plantations. The English Protestants' plantation amongst the Irish Catholics in Ireland and the privileges allocated to them resulted not only in the formation of the Protestant ascendancy but also in Irish Catholics' persecution. Against this new order, the depressed class reacted. Their response was epitomised in rebellions, and consequently, a conflict emerged between the two groups. The aim was not achieved if the Penal Laws were meant to dissuade any Irish Catholic rebellion. The limiting Penal Laws of the Catholics' right of worship, land ownership, and civil and political rights had to be abolished in the eyes of those against whom they were enacted.

The first act to provide the Irish Catholics with some civil rights was the "Relief Act," issued by the Irish Parliament in 1778. This Act aimed to ease landed property, which,

of course, encountered fierce opposition from the Protestants before its enactment. From my perspective, the opponents of such a relief feared land acquisition by the Catholics and, consequently, accession to power, which was the core of the Penal Laws. Pressure to issue such an act came from the Westminster Parliament, as suggested by Robert E. Burns (189). Some scholars interpreted the 1778 Act as a result of toleration related to enlightenment ideals; as J. C. Beckett wrote, ‘Tolerance, which earlier ages had been regarded as a sin, came to be regarded as a virtue. This more charitable attitude . . . prepared protestant opinion for a gradual relaxation of the penal code’ (qtd. in Hill 98). However, more material was needed to enact the 1778 Act. The American War of Independence and the French threat could not be excluded as one of the causes that resulted in the act above. Indeed, Catholics’ mobilisation in the war with America and the imminent war with France played a role in the 1778 Act issuing. But the fear of the Irish following Americans’ steps haunted British minds. Accordingly, they supported the relief bill, especially since this relief came only two years after the American Revolution started.

If an Irish revolution had taken place, it would not have been in favour of Britain. The latter was facing the American Revolution. Moreover, the threat of an imminent French invasion was more than probable, particularly after the signing of the Franco-American Treaty in 1778. The latter mentioned mutual military aid in case of war, a war that broke out in the same year, 1778. In the words of Frederick Hervey, the Protestant bishop of Derry, in a letter sent in 1778 to Perry, the Irish House of Commons speaker, “In Ireland, if the war with France takes place, ... the Roman Catholics, exasperated by repeated disappointments, are ripe for an almost general revolt” (qtd. in Lecky, II: 212). These assumptions are supported by the fact that only the Catholics of Canada and Ireland were granted some citizenship rights during the period of imperial tensions and the American War of Independence, unlike the Catholics of other British colonies. Thus, the ostensible reason was the fear of a revolution near home.

Two other relief acts followed the 1778 Act, “The Relief Act” of 1782 and “The Relief Act of 1793.” Both laws granted further concessions to the Catholics. The latter

granted the Catholics the right to vote but not the one to sit in parliament because it would have meant that Catholics could participate in the making of laws, which would not, obviously, be in favour of the Irish Protestants in Ireland. Both acts were issued only after pressure from the British Parliament. However, the three relief acts were not sufficient to satiate the Catholics' hunger for enjoying full rights. In fact, the United Irishmen Association was one of the claimers of these acts' provisions. Its initial goal was to break the chains of the remaining limitations imposed on the Catholics in Ireland. Nevertheless, its aims soon changed. In reality, the Irishmen Association represented the seeds of republicanism in Ireland.

Attempting to abrogate the remnant Penal Laws and ask for independence came with the formation of the United Irishmen Association in Belfast in 1791. The common aim between disadvantaged Catholics and Protestants led to their union. The Protestants included the Presbyterians, who suffered marginalization in Ireland. Its formation was the result of successful outside revolutions. The purpose of this organisation was, initially, the repeal of the Penal Laws. However, separation from England became the goal. For such a reason, Theobald Wolfe Tone, who established with others the Association, is considered the father of republicanism. The particularity of this Association was that it united both Catholics and Protestants. It is through this Society that republicanism saw the dawn. A declaration that drew the objectives of the Association was issued in 1791 and pointed at its resolutions. The declaration's focus was: No distinction between the Irishmen, including all the people of Ireland, regardless of their religion; an accusation made against the Government implying that it was not acting as a national government but rather a government used to rule Ireland for the profit of England; union of all the people of Ireland without distinction based on religious persuasion; and above all, representation in Parliament should change to achieve civil, political and religious liberty (Curtis and McDowell 238-40).

Meanwhile, in March 1794, the Dublin Society of United Irishmen established a strategy for parliamentary improvements. It encompassed the right to vote for men above

21 without being subject to any oath, property qualification abolition for representatives who should also receive a fair stipend; swearing that the representatives should not use their position to promote their own interest to ensure the representatives' honesty and fairness (Curtis and McDowell 237-8). Some of these demands were already included in their 1791 manifesto, which, of course, aimed at alleviating Catholics' grievances through gaining civil, political, and religious rights. The demands were also the exact requests fought for by the chartists in the late nineteenth century, and they were subsequently adopted by Britain. In reality, the United Irishmen's claims for parliamentary reforms hinted at Catholic emancipation. Eliminating property qualification for electors would include the Catholics. Even with the Relief Act of 1793, not all Catholics could vote because it was subject to a property qualification. Besides, electors, according to the 1793 Act, had to take an oath.

The oath bounded the Catholics. Once it was taken, they could neither claim Ireland to become Catholic in the future nor prejudice the sanctity of the Protestant Parliament. The latter was an apparent attempt from England to maintain the Protestant Parliament that served its interest in Ireland. For such a reason, the United Irishmen members thought of including the abovementioned demand, abolishing the oath for electors. However, the requirements of the Association were not met.

The aim of the Society shifted from mere alleviation of Catholics' conditions to separation. The separation of Ireland from England was a hidden aim to be attained through the creation of the United Irishmen Society. In the words of W. McCarney, the Society was rather concerned with cutting ties with England than with repealing the remaining Penal Laws (77). The idea of separation from England was not encompassed in the Declaration of the United Irishmen Association but instead introduced in speeches and writing. Wolfe Tone, for instance, in one of his letters, expressed it not as a wish but rather as an insinuation and an idea that would penetrate the minds of the people smoothly. In a letter sent to the editor of Faulkner's Journal in 1793, Tone wrote that the dissolution of Ireland from England would be "a regeneration of this country" (502). The aim was to portray the country without England's influence, an image that would ignite a desire for independence.

This desire would be transformed and developed into action against a rule that lasted for centuries. Moreover, Thomas Addis Emmet⁹, another member of the United Irishmen Association, expressed his view, in a committee of the Irish House of Lords, about the independence of Ireland from England, describing it as the happiest country in the World (Gilbert 179) if it were separate from England. Because of these separatist ideas, the United Irishmen Association is considered to be the progenitor of the republican party in Ireland.

Independence was not only envisioned by Catholics. Even Ireland's Protestants, who constituted the Protestant ascendancy, were threatened by the growing interest of England. It was bald-faced that the latter was using the Irish Parliament for its benefit, which could not be beneficial for the Protestant ascendancy because its interest was inconsistent with that of England. With the commerce restrictions imposed on Ireland, the Protestant ascendancy would not make a profit. Thus, these protestants thought it sufficient as a reason to envision the independence of Ireland from England to enjoy prosperity, and consequently, they became part of republicanism.

I believe that republicanism stemmed from the successful American (1776) and French (1789) Revolutions. The latter, for example, armed itself with notions of liberty and equality and was accompanied by the emancipation of the Protestant minority in France. S.J. Connolly, commenting on the French Revolution's impact on Ireland, argued that this revolution brought to the surface conflicts that have been buried (433). The French Revolution gave the Irish hope, the hope of regaining full citizenship and the possibility of abolishing the remnants of the Penal Laws. These revolutions proved that change was possible if it was fought for. The apogee of inspiration came from the American and the French Declarations of Independence and the Rights of Man. From my perspective, both declarations made the Irish believe in a better future and the possibility of obtaining some rights, if not equal ones. Among the ideas that the Irish also adopted were the views of

⁹ Thomas Addis Emmet (1764- 1827) was born in Ireland but died in New York, USA. He studied medicine and law but practised the latter in Ireland. Four years after the establishment of the United Irishmen Association, Thomas took the oath of the society to become, after two years, its leader.

Thomas Paine. In his book *The Rights of Man* (1791), he argued that if the government fails to preserve the rights of its people, including liberty and property, these people can revolt against it (Assis and Xidias 11). For the Irish, the Government was unable to provide all the Irish people with their rights, so it was rightful to revolt against it and ask for change, especially since a category of the Irish society was still denied religious, political and civil rights. It is worth noting that the Catholics, in the eyes of the Protestants, could not be citizens with full rights because history showed that they could not be trusted, for they were revolutionary people.

Even if these revolutionary people, the United Irishmen Association, failed in its supposed mission of emancipating the Catholics, acquiring political and civil rights for the oppressed, and breaking connections with England, it did not fail to influence future generations. This Association handed the torch of independence to the following generations, who achieved separation in the future. The latter was attained through undertaking an upheaval in 1798. It symbolised Irish resistance to British rule, and the complete separation was considered. It is imperative to note that the British authorities used the failed rebellion to achieve an aim. The latter was to secure a union between Britain and the island of Ireland. In 1800, a constitutional union was sealed between Great Britain and Ireland, leading to the Repeal movement.

1.3. The Union between Great Britain and Ireland and the Repeal Movement:

Sealing the Union between Britain and Ireland was not easy for the British. The Union ended the Irish Kingdom created by Henry VIII and the long-standing Irish Parliament, formed with the Magna Carta in the thirteenth century. I believe that the 1798 Rebellion was but the ostensible reason behind the Union; the hidden aim was else. The 1798 insurgence was but a propitious moment and an opportunity to bring Ireland under direct British control. If the Union aimed to avoid losing Ireland and keeping it from falling into France's hands (Bew 77) and being used against England, religion was not to be excluded as the primary purpose of the Union. Joining the two kingdoms together would create an imbalance in the number of Catholics and Protestants. The Protestants would outnumber

the Catholics in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. To achieve his aim, William Pitt, the then Prime Minister, even proposed the emancipation of the Catholics.

The Union, suggested by Pitt, was to be accompanied by the Emancipation of the Catholics. The latter was opposed in the two proposals before 1800 and after the rebellion of 1798 by King George III. Catholic Emancipation was not considered a threat in Pitt's eyes because the Catholics could be controlled, especially since they would be only a minority with more rights. Pitt declared that 'The admission of Catholics to a share of the suffrage could not then be dangerous,' adding 'the protestant interest in point of power, property and church establishment would be secure because the decided majority of the supreme legislature would necessarily be protestant' (qtd. in Patrick Geoghegan 244). Pitt was not wrong, for the Catholics in Ireland outnumbered the Protestants; they constituted four-fifths of the population; however, when merged with the people of Britain, in which Protestants formed the majority, the Catholics would become a small minority. The latter could easily be manipulated and even oppressed since authority would be in the Protestant community's hands, making the Union Protestant.

Even after the Union, in 1803, the Prime Minister, Henry Addington¹⁰, wrote to Lord Redesdale¹¹ expressing his desire to render Ireland Protestant. He made part of his thought in the following words: "Let me assure you in the meantime that no impression can be more deeply rooted in my mind than the importance of rendering Ireland a Protestant country, nor more remote than that of an estate for the Catholic religion" (qtd. in Bew 67). Making Ireland Protestant had always been an aim of the British Government to rule it. It takes us back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when England introduced the English Protestant class in Ireland to control it.

Once the Union was achieved, Catholics remained marginalised. And since it is a union, the problems of Ireland became the ones of Britain. The latter implied that Britain

¹⁰ Henry Addington (1757- 1844) was born and died in England. He was the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland prime minister from 1801 to May 1804.

¹¹ Lord Redesdale (1748- 1830) was born and died in England. In 1791, he introduced the Catholic Relief Bill, which two years after became a law.

had to deal with its new challenges. If Daniel O’Connell¹² aimed to cancel the Union through Emancipation, Robert Peel¹³, then Home Secretary, proposed reinforcing the Union when accepting Emancipation. In the words of Stuart Andrews, “In any case, Catholic Emancipation had made the Union irreversible” (120). For Peel, the Catholic liberation was a hook used to make the Catholics accept the union between the two kingdoms. His aim was not to grant them emancipation as a principle or as a belief in the right to enjoy full citizenship. Patrick Geoghegan suggested that Pitt’s decision as Prime Minister to seal the Union was an attempt at securing the faithfulness of the Catholics, pro-Union, to the British Crown (244). Consequently, the Union was concerned mainly with Catholicism and Protestantism.

The Act for the Union of Great Britain and Ireland made the Protestant Church the established church. It suggested that the Catholics were still not considered full citizens. Besides, these Catholics could not become MPs in the Westminster Parliament. In reality, there was no law preventing the Catholics from being Westminster Parliament members, nor was it included as a clause in the Act of Union. However, the new representatives in Parliament had to swear the oath of allegiance, abjuration and supremacy. The Abjuration Oath required the new Catholic MP to stipulate that ‘the sacrifice of the mass and the invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and other saints as now practised in the Church of Rome, are impious and idolatrous’ (qtd. in Hegarty 255). This oath is a repudiation of Catholicism and incompatible with the beliefs of most Catholics. For such a reason, agitation for complete Catholic Emancipation intensified and in April 1829, Emancipation was conceded and “the Roman Catholic Relief Act” became a law according to which the Catholics could sit in Parliament but were still not eligible for some positions. An oath

¹² Daniel O’Connell (1775- 1847) was born in Derrynane and belonged to the Catholic Gentry. He believed in peaceful means to achieve independence. He was concerned by the situation of the Catholics in Ireland and tried to ease them; for this reason, he entered politics to emancipate them and undo the Union sealed between Ireland and Britain.

¹³ Robert Peel (1788- 1850) was born and died in England. A leader of the new Conservative Party, he was the Prime Minister of the UK for two terms (1834–35, 1841–46). He was a fervent opponent of Catholic Emancipation until 1828 when he changed his mind and one-year later presented the Bill of Emancipation to the House of Commons. One of his most important achievements was the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846.

accompanied the Act. It was the Oath of Allegiance that I can describe as insulting to the Catholics.

Thus, the least that can be said about this Union is that it was an imposed, Protestant, and oppressive one. In the words of Grattan, the Union was ‘not an identification of two nations, for it excludes the Catholics; it is only a merger of the Irish Parliament.’ (qtd. in Morris 55). It was merely the merger of one nation’s Parliament with that of another one. It makes one wonder whether the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland could be considered one nation. The aim, according to Robert Peel, before becoming Prime Minister of Britain, was to become one nation (Alexander 18). The latter suggested equality among all the individuals in the two kingdoms. Nonetheless, the answer was evident because there were still two nations sharing one territory: the Protestant majority enjoying all the rights of citizenship and a Catholic minority deprived of these same rights.

If the Union aimed to bring and achieve peace within Britain and with Ireland by uniting them, it was a failure. The Union ignited the desire for liberty and independence again. In his speech, Grattan made it explicit that the Irish Parliament's abolition did not mean the suppression of the people and their souls nor their sentiment and spirit of liberty (416-17). Grattan was not wrong because the Union proved to kindle the desire to repeal it, which in the future would draw the path for independence that would witness the creation of a republic. For him, the Prime Minister aimed to eliminate opposition by abolishing the Irish Parliament, and in doing so, the Prime Minister was wrong, for this would not kill resistance but rather would produce conspiracy (Grattan, 417). Even if the Union was sealed, the notion of liberty remained, and nationalism intensified. And with this Union, the seeds of instability have been sown. Put simply, the Union, instead of containing the Irish, it thrust them to ask for independence, embodied in the fight of O’Connell for the repeal of the Constitutional Union.

O’Connell believed the best way to reverse the Union was through peaceful means. However, nonviolence cost him a split within his Repeal Association in 1847. Some young

men did not share his belief in the effectiveness of such peaceful ways. Naming themselves the Young Ireland group, they formed their own organisations. The new group established the Irish Confederation and the Irish League just before the 1848 uprising. Young Irelanders had republican tendencies and aspired to a republican revolution inspired by the 1848 French Revolution. However, O'Connell had never had separatist ambitions since he never alluded to the idea in his speeches or deeds. His only aim was to repeal the Union and to keep ties with Britain for the purpose was resolving Ireland's problems. It must be mentioned that many members of the Young Irelanders were Protestants, such as the two leaders, Thomas Davis¹⁴ and John Mitchell.¹⁵ Hence, the idea of republicanism witnessed a revival with the formation of the Young Irelanders.

It is essential to specify that republicanism already started with the United Irishmen and Theobald Tone in 1791 and was energised in the 1840s with the Young Irelanders. They obtained the support of some noticeable Protestants such as Issac Butt¹⁶ and Samuel Ferguson. The meetings of these young Irelanders were devoted mainly to appeasing Protestants' fears. It suggested that they aimed to convince them that establishing a native Parliament would not lead to Catholic ascendancy. The latter was epitomised in the words of Thomas Francis Meagher, a Young Irishman, when he said, "'Repeal' means something nobler than 'Catholic Ascendancy' - that is not Irish Protestantism we thirst to put down, but the English interest that predominates in this country" (VI).

His message was twofold: To reassure the Protestants and to make explicit that the problem was England. Accordingly, the Protestants of Ireland would not suffer from Catholic intolerance if an Irish Parliament was ever set up because the aim was not to fight against the Protestant ascendancy but rather against British rule. The gatherings' purpose

¹⁴ Thomas Davis (1814-1845) was born and died in Ireland. He was the editor of the newspaper, the *Nation*, and a member of the Young Ireland movement.

¹⁵ John Mitchell (1815-1875) was born and died in Ireland. He joined the Repeal Association from which he split, then he launched the *United Irishman* newspaper which became the propagator of Young Irelanders' views.

¹⁶ Issac Butt (1813-1879) was born and died in Ireland. He founded the Home Government Association, which rallied Irish Catholics and Protestants to demand Home Rule. Then, Home Government Association branches generated the Home Rule Confederation of GB under his presidency. Thus, Isaac Butt can be considered as the father of Home Rule.

was clear: to obtain the support of the Protestants of Ireland against English authority. In their mission of uniting people around the repeal, they succeeded, for they won the support of the Protestants. Thus, The Union led to agitation in Ireland. It culminated in an uprising in July 1848. However, the rebellion was short-lived, lacked the population's support, and consequently foundered. After the Upheaval fiasco, the repeal movement weakened. It lost its leader, O'Connell, for he was imprisoned after a meeting at Clontarf in 1843. Besides, the movement's sustenance decreased, and the Young Irelanders' leaders were jailed.

After the Union and even with Emancipation, the Irish were still denied some rights, such as the right to vote. The Reform Act of 1832 increased the county franchise from 10 to 40 shillings, reducing the Irish electorate considerably. The only explanation that could be provided for such legislation was to reduce Irish political influence. Out of the 116 dwellers in Irish county, only one dweller could vote compared to one out of 24 in England (Kinealy 182). This electorate decreased during the Irish Famine. Besides, the seats in the House of Commons awarded to Ireland, even with the 1832 parliamentary reform, were not enough to represent the significant number of the population in Ireland. Nothing was done to enhance the situation in Ireland by the British Parliament, though a union suggests equality in rights. Even with the applied reforms, the Irish were still second-class citizens; the Union was a sham one. However, if the rebellion foundered, the agitation around the repeal sowed the seeds of Home Rule and the birth of Northern Ireland.

1.4. From Home Rule to the Birth of Northern Ireland:

The 1848 abortive uprising was far from being the last attempt to achieve independence. Indeed, the Union between Great Britain and Ireland could not be undone with the repeal movement in the 1840s, but other opportunities were available as Home Rule. The latter was born from the ashes of the 1840s agitation and its fiasco. Charles Stewart Parnell¹⁷ led

¹⁷ Charles Stuart Parnell (1846- 1891) was born in Ireland but died in England. He led the movement of Home Rule from the 1880s to 1890. He became in 1879 the president of the National Land League to fight against the Irish land laws and obtain land reform. He incited the peasants not to pay the rents to make pressure on the Government.

it in the 1880s. Its aim was the resuscitation of the Irish Parliament, which represented Irish political rights, and that was abolished under the Union.

However, I believe that the seeds of Home Rule did not stem only from the unsuccessfulness of the repeal agitation. The Young Irelanders played an essential role in its emergence. In fact, their participation was an indirect help. After their 1848 upheaval failure, some of its members, James Stephens, John O'Mahony and John O'Leary, founded the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). In reality, there were two parallel wings of the same organisation. In 1858, James Stephens went back to Ireland from Paris, where he settled after the failure of the 1848 rebellion and started the Irish Republican Brotherhood. After one year, John O'Mahony and John O'Leary founded a sister organisation named the Fenian Society. However, both are commonly known as the Fenians. The latter, who were famous for their violence use and republican orientation, went on an insurgency in 1867. Nevertheless, as the precedent attempts, it foundered.

The failure of their rebellion and the execution of some Fenians facilitated the establishment of the Constitutional Home Rule movement. The 1867 revolt bestowed martyrs, "the Manchester Martyrs,"¹⁸ who became an example of sacrifice for future generations, martyrs that should be honoured through the takeover of the tradition of revolt against British occupation. Isaac Butt defended these Fenians. In this regard and to emphasise the importance of the Young Irelanders, Grenfell Morton wrote that without the link between Butt and the left wing of Irish politics, neither Butt nor Parnell would have accomplished what they attained (13). Thus, the Home Rule germinated after the 1867 uprising. Even though it was an abortive tentative against British rule, it supplied martyrs. According to Alvin Jackson, the failure of this uprising was essential to the success of Home Rule in its beginnings because it provided martyrs to the national cause (26). Indeed,

¹⁸ Manchester Martyrs were three Fenians who tried to rescue their colleagues caught by the police. In attempting so, one of the policemen was killed accidentally. The mission was successful, but some of them, four Fenians, were captured by the police and put on trial and sentenced to death. Only three of them were killed for one of them became a naturalised American. Before being executed, they sang "God save Ireland" a slogan with an enduring impact over the coming generations, especially the 1916 rebellion.

sympathy was gained, and the people felt outraged. Moreover, some of the Young Irishmen who participated in the 1848 uprising took part, years later, in the Home Rule campaign, like John Martin, a Young Irishman who became a founder of the Home Rule movement, or John Mitchell (Jackson 18).

From my standpoint, the merit goes also to the Tories. They are not to be excluded as one of the roots of Home Rule. Isaac Butt's position regarding Ireland was the perfect example. The shift in Isaac Butt's beliefs, though an opponent to the repeal, started when he was called to the Bar to defend some Young Irishmen, then some Fenians, who were sentenced to jail after the 1848 and 1867 uprisings. Moreover, the British response to the Famine in Ireland made him change his mind about the Union between Britain and Ireland. When he defended the Young Irishmen in 1848, he pleaded that they were right in asking for repeal because of Britain's insensitivity regarding the starving Irish hit by the Famine (Hachey and McCaffrey 82). Such circumstances led him to found the Home Government Association in 1870 and then the Home Rule League in 1873 in support of Home Rule, though he was a Protestant Conservative. In 1874, when Gladstone called for elections and was defeated, the Irish Home Rule parliamentary party was formed by Butt. A few years later, and after his death, Charles Stewart Parnell superseded him. It was not until the late nineteenth century that Home Rule would make its first steps in the House of Commons.

Ewart Gladstone¹⁹ introduced Home Rule as the Prime Minister to the House of Commons for the first time in 1886. However, the Bill was rejected. On this ground, another law project was presented in 1893, but again it was defeated. I believe that the reason behind opposing the two bills in the House of Lords was that Home Rule was perceived as a threat. It would probably be a path leading to Ireland's total independence. If for some, like William Ewart Gladstone, Home Rule was a means to pacify Ireland, for others, like Colonel Waring, it was "no more than a stage on the road to complete Irish independence"

¹⁹ William Ewart Gladstone (1809- 1898) was born in England and died in Wales. He was the Prime Minister of GB four times, 1868–74, 1880–85, 1886, 1892–94. He began his career in parliament as a Tory then became a Liberal. In 1868, he held his position as prime minister.

(Morton 37). Joseph Chamberlain²⁰ also shared these fears when responding to Gladstone, stipulating that Home Rule was “tantamount to a proposal for separation” (Morton 66).

I believe that signs of breaking the Union between Britain and Ireland started when the Church of Ireland was disestablished in 1869. It is to be noted that the Church of Ireland was established with the Union Act, and its disestablishment can be interpreted as the Union dislocation. One of the essential components of the Amalgamation had been removed. If the Union was undone, it would portend the symptoms of the British Empire dissolution, which was to be averted. Such fear could explain the hidden aim behind introducing Home Rule Bills; the dislocation of the British Empire was on its road. It was made clear that the least of the demands would be the restoration of an Irish legislature, and not responding to these demands would lead to an Irish revolution.

Accordingly, a third Home Rule Bill was presented by the Liberals in 1912. However, these Liberals, to propose the Bill, required support from Home Rulers. They wanted to limit the power of the House of Lords in 1910 in vetoing bills. Because of this, they needed the Nationalists’ votes in the House of Commons, where they lost their majority. The deal was that the Nationalists would support the Liberals, and in return, the latter would introduce the third Home Rule Bill. The choice resulted from priorities set when the British bargained with Home Rule. In 1911, when the House of Lords could no longer veto a bill twice according to the Act of Parliament²¹, the third and last Home Rule Bill was initiated in 1912 by Herbert Henry Asquith, then Prime Minister. It passed into an act in 1914. Therefore, an Irish Parliament, consisting of two chambers, was established but was subject to the supreme power of the Westminster Parliament. The introduction of this third Bill was the reason behind the foundation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Irish Volunteers. The former was a Unionist organisation that opposed Home Rule

²⁰ Joseph Chamberlain (1836- 1914) was born and died in England. He was a fervent opponent of Home Rule. He is mostly known for tariff reforms.

²¹ It made a bill rejected by the House of Lords twice an act after two years.

and was even ready to resist it by force. The latter was a nationalist organisation that supported Home Rule and founded the Irish Volunteers as a response.

In reality, the UVF was established by the Ulster Unionist Council (1905) to oppose the inclusion of Ulster in a United Ireland. The UUC evolved, in a while, to become the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). Then, with the establishment of Northern Ireland in 1921, it became the Government's party under the leadership of James Craig. However, its power waned when another party, the Democratic Unionist Party²² under Ian Paisley's²³ Leadership, was created and competed for votes with UUP. In truth, the UVF rose from the Ulster Volunteer militia that was founded a year earlier, in 1912, by Edward Carson²⁴ and James Craig²⁵. Thus, The Ulster Volunteers organised themselves into what became known as the UVF. The latter was started in January 1913, just after the third Home Rule crisis, to support the campaign against Home Rule. In their view, this Bill was a threat for it highly endangered the Union because it bore a potential success.

Nevertheless, in 1914, the First World War broke out, and the Irish Home Rule was delayed. Some of the Irish supported Britain in its war against Germany, especially those in Parliament, and considered the English problems Irish concerns. However, others saw the current circumstances as an opportunity to seize, and they claimed independence and a republic. Connolly penned in 1916 that while England was enjoying peace, the Irish question would not trouble her (Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland* 125). It implied that if Britain were at war, the Irish question would worry her, and, in this case, it would seek a solution to the problem, and the Irish question would be settled. Accordingly, some Irish went on a rebellion against Britain in 1916, known as the Easter Uprising. The insurgents aimed to

²² The Democratic Unionist Party was established in 1971 under Ian Paisley's leadership. Some members of the UUP were founders of the DUP as Desmond Boal. Its first entrance to Westminster was in 1979 with two seats.

²³ Ian Paisley (1926-2014) was born and died in Ireland. He served as Northern Ireland's Prime Minister for one year only (2007-2008). As a devoted Protestant and a man of religion, he founded the Ulster Protestant Volunteers, in 1966, to counter suggested reforms by Prime Minister Terence O'Neill. In 1971, he founded the DUP after a split in the UUP.

²⁴ Edward Carson (1854-1935) was born in Dublin and died in NI. In 1910, he became the leader of the UUP to preserve the Union between Britain and Ireland. In his fight against Home Rule, he founded the Ulster Volunteer.

²⁵ 1st Viscount Craigavon (1871-1940) was born and died in Ireland. He is the first Unionist to become prime minister of NI and served as such for twenty years. Known as the Founding father of Northern Ireland, since the idea of the six counties was his, he was an opponent of Home Rule, a founder of the Ulster Volunteers, and a supporter of partition.

rise against British power in Ireland and establish a republic. Moreover, on Easter day, a Proclamation was read by Patrick Pearse,²⁶ stating that the aim of the Uprising was the founding of a republic, and that the planner was the Irish Republican Brotherhood (Curtis and McDowell 317). Such a declaration can but imply that Home Rule as a demand or an offer was no longer desired and debatable because the claim at that stage was total independence, which probably struck the hopes of moderate nationalists and put down years of work and negotiations for Home Rule. However, the outcome of the Uprising was already known.

I believe that the insurgents knew perfectly that the rebellion would not be successful. Patrick McCartan, when addressing the members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in January 1916, stated, “Who are we... to call a rising. Before you commit a nation to war, you should have the support of the people. We haven’t the support of the people” (qtd. in Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland* 122). Such was an overt affirmation that the revolt lacked support. In fact, the lack of support lay in the population's disinterest. It is important to note that the last rebellion went back fifty years ago, and uprisings are reminders of goals. Eoin MacNeill, in February 1916, made it clear that to launch an upheaval, “deep and widespread popular discontent” is a prerequisite and, in Ireland, “no such condition exists” (qtd. in Kearney 207). Indeed, history has always known stagnation and upheaval periods. Ireland was in a time of motionlessness just before the 1916 rebellion. For such a reason, an upheaval had to take place to remind the people that Ireland was not independent and that actions had to be taken against the enemy.

Even though the insurgents knew that the British had intercepted the arms and countermanding made by Eoin MacNeill²⁷ to avert the Uprising, they decided to execute their plan. Thomas Bartlett claimed that the 1916-armed rebellion was maintained because

²⁶ Patrick Henry Pearse (1879- 1916) was born and died in Ireland. He was the first president of the Provisional Government that was declared on the reading of the proclamation of the Irish Republic issued in 1916 and a leader in the Easter Uprising. He was a member of both the Irish Volunteers and the IRB. Because he was one of the planners and the executors of the Easter Uprising, he was fired after his surrender when the Rebellion was put down.

²⁷ Eoin MacNeill (1867- 1945) was born and died in Ireland. He became a member of the Irish Volunteers as its chief of staff and one of the founders. He is remembered as the man who attempted to call off the Uprising of 1916.

the insurgents were adamant about going on an insurgency to compensate for past failures (387). No doubt, they aimed to continue the work of their predecessors. However, they sought another kind of victory, the triumph of a sacrifice, one resembling Jesus' sacrifice. The circumstances, as mentioned above, confirm the assumption of blood sacrifice and the revival of Irish nationalism. Tom Clarke²⁸ said, "This insurrection, though it has failed, will have a wonderful effect on the country.... We will die, but it will be a different Ireland after us" (qtd. in McConville 433), and he was not wrong, for such was the outcome. In fact, the result of the upheaval was portrayed in William Butler Yeats's poem "Easter 1916" as "A terrible beauty" (53).

In reality, the rising day choice was not random. It was Easter, Christ's resurrection day. The 1916 Uprising symbolised the renewal and revival of Irish nationalism. Despite the awareness of the revolt's failure, the rebel's sacrifice symbolised rebirth because what would come after was the sacrifice's fruit. In his poem, "Song of Myself," Walt Whitman penned about the useful death resulting from a renaissance, and the 1916 rebellion outcome was the rebirth of nationalism and republicanism that led to the Free State's foundation. In my opinion, the Irish blood was the fertiliser, and the separation was the bloom. Tom Clarke was among those condemned to be killed and his death and that of other rebels had its significance. Sean McDermott recalled that one of the volunteers upset about the separatist nationalism decline suggested already in 1914 that this separatist nationalism would disappear completely unless a blood sacrifice was made to revive it (Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland* 124). Indeed, he summarised the situation and its needs well at the time. The rebellion did not succeed, yet it bore the flowers' buds.

The 1916 uprising succeeded in gaining the Irish population's sympathy and provided it with the popularity that had been previously lacking. Right after the rebellion, according to Michael Laffan, the primary reaction of the Irish was fear of being declined

²⁸ Thomas Clarke, mostly known as Tom Clarke (1858-1916) was born and died in Ireland. A member of Feminism, he emigrated to the US. He returned to Ireland and became a member of the IRB's Supreme Council and a key figure in the planning of the Uprising. After the Rebellion was squashed, Clarke was among the leaders that were executed.

the Home Rule demand. Anxiety emanated from the thought of Britain breaching its promise of granting Home Rule after the War to end all wars would be over (“The Rebellion” 47). However, when the British started executing the uprising leaders, *inter alia*, Patrick Pearse and Tom Clarke, it caused feelings of repugnance, and the popular sentiment shifted instead towards sympathy for this rebellion and the cause of the rebels. In my opinion, it did not come to the British mind that even if people were imprisoned or killed, the ideas could not be so; they could neither be imprisoned nor assassinated. In Alexandre Dumas's words, the ideas “sleep sometimes, but they wake up stronger than before falling asleep”²⁹ (155), and that is true. In fact, such was the case for the separation idea. The Irish rebels were jailed, and some were executed, but the thought of total separation from Britain thrived. The swing was reflected in the 1918 General Elections, where the Sinn Féin party swept the Irish Parliamentary Party. Thus, the Easter Rising's significance laid not only in protesting against British rule but also, and, more importantly, in making it a catalyst for Irish awakening. Accordingly, the Easter Rising succeeded in putting Home Rule on the path of achievement, establishing the Free State, and bringing about the birth of Northern Ireland.

With this widespread sympathy, the British had but to put Home Rule on their agenda. Lloyd George started negotiations between Unionists and Nationalists even though it was decided at the beginning, in the Government of Ireland Act of 1914, that Home Rule would not come into force until the War was over. However, after the Uprising, a Home Rule offer was made but excluded six counties in the North because of Protestant Unionists' concentration. In fact, these six counties would become Northern Ireland after the passing of the Government of Ireland Act in 1920. Ulster (NI) included the following counties: Antrim, Armagh, Down, Londonderry, Fermanagh, and Tyrone. This Act also created two governments, one in Belfast and another one in Dublin. It is important to note that those favouring union with Britain constituted only 18% of the population of Ireland (Ó Beacháin 11). It is imperative to highlight that the salient aspect of the said Act was its stipulation of

²⁹ Elles [les idées] sommeillent quelquefois, mais elles se réveillent plus fortes qu'avant de s'endormir

an ephemeral partition and the possibility of a united Ireland. Such a provision gave hope to the coming generations to achieve a United Ireland under a republic. A hope that subsists until nowadays.

It is worth noting that the Easter Uprising was also known as “the Sinn Fein Revolt” or “the Sinn Fein Rebellion,” which is related to the nationalist Sinn Fein Party (SF). The latter was founded in 1905 by the journalist Arthur Griffith³⁰ to oppose the policy of the moderate Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) led by John Redmond,³¹ which was parliamentarianism. If the IPP aimed to achieve Home Rule, the Sinn Fein Party rejected this idea and hoped to gain separation from Britain but not a total one. For SF, Home Rule was insufficient because it kept Ireland subordinate to the English Parliament and gave England legitimacy in its rule over it. It is worth mentioning that SF appealed to non-violent means, unlike the Irish Republican Brotherhood. They refuted the armed struggle to attain political change, though its founder was a member of the IRB known for violence use. In fact, SF believed that their constitution was not the English one but the Irish Constitution of 1782. As such, SF was a constitutional party, similar to the IPP.

Though named “the Sinn Fein Revolt” or “the Sinn Fein Rebellion,” some scholars, such as Eoin Ó Broin, believed that the Party had nothing to do with the 1916 Uprising (182). From a certain point of view, it was not wrong, for politically, the party had neither support nor money nor the ability to launch such an upheaval. Besides, the 1916 declaration explicitly stated the rebellion’s perpetrators. However, Sinn Fein did not embody only a political movement but also and, most importantly, a cultural one. When the Party started, it rose like a phoenix from the ashes of literary societies and leagues such as the Young Ireland Society (1881), the Gaelic Athletic Association (1888), and the Gaelic League

³⁰ Arthur Griffith (1871-1922) was born and died in Dublin. He was a member in the Irish Republican Brotherhood. His most important achievement was the establishment of the Sinn Fein Party in 1905 which is still active as a political party in the Republic of Ireland and Ulster. He was the president of the Sinn Fein Party but then stood down to make room to de Valera to lead the Party but again headed it in 1919.

³¹ John Redmond (1856-1918) was born in Dublin but died in London. He was an MP in Westminster and the Irish Parliamentary Party leader from 1900 after its reunification. Redmond was a fervent defender of Home Rule and an anti-partitionist of Ireland. His most notable success was the passing of Home Rule in 1914.

(1889). These societies and leagues aimed to revive the Irish language, music, nationality, history, and culture in general. Accordingly, SF as a party and Arthur Griffith, its leader, were saturated with nationalism and Irishness. The latter substantially influenced the future in terms of nationalism and the fight for Ireland and separation. However, the “Sinn Fein Rebellion” appellation was not to honour the Party. Naming the Easter Rising as such was intentional, hinting that the revolt was just a minor unsuccessful incident to hit its credibility in the people’s eyes. The latter was explained in the lines of Eoin Ó Broin when he referred to Redmond and some Irish media as the providers of the name as a ruse to emphasise the Uprising’s unpopularity (183). It needs to be reiterated that, at the time, Sinn Fein lacked popularity.

The Sinn Fein Party, with its policy and ideology, could not take off at the beginning of its foundation. Home Rule affected its development. People’s eyes were drawn to Home Rule together with the IPP moves to secure it, which overshadowed SF and its policy. The people had eyes on what could be achieved in a few months and put aside what could be attained in years. However, after the 1916 revolt, the Sinn Fein Party emerged as an important component of the political struggle in Ireland. The execution of some of the Uprising leaders and the insurgents’ imprisonment shifted public sentiment from supporting the nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party to sustaining the nationalist Sinn Fein Party, especially starting from 1917. Besides, the disappointment with the failure of the postponed Home Rule made the Irish people abandon the IPP and seek hope in the SF. The swing towards SF was epitomised in the General Election’s³² results in 1918, in which SF won 73 out of the 105 seats, a considerable stride compared to previous votes. The least that can be said is that what rallied Irish people around SF was its objective and means, together with the circumstances of the time.

³² The MPs elected in the 1918 General Election were to sit, in 1919, as MPs in the newly established national Parliament in Dublin, the first Dáil (the Parliament of Ireland). Accordingly, the Dáil issued a declaration of independence and a republic constitution. Such a deed implied that Ireland was an independent and sovereign state and, above all, a Republic.

On the 26th and 27th of October 1917, and during a Sinn Fein Convention in which Eamon de Valera was appointed as the party's president, the following statement was made: "Sinn Féin aims at securing the international recognition of Ireland as an independent Irish Republic" ("Documents Relative" 36). These were a few words but of extreme importance. In fact, they pinpointed the change in Sinn Fein's aim from mere separatism to republicanism. Nevertheless, the resolution did not concern only the objective but also the means. De Valera specified that the Party could use "any and every means available to render impotent the power of England to hold Ireland in subjection" ("Documents Relative" 37). He meant that a war would be fought against Britain, and all means were considered, including violence. Accordingly, peaceful ways were about to be renounced, and blood was to be shed. It marked Sinn Fein's commencement of its long history of violence.

Two years later, in 1919, on the 21st of January, the Irish War of Independence or the Anglo-Irish War broke up. On this same day, the first meeting of Dáil Eireann³³ was held, and most importantly, the Soloheadbeg Ambush³⁴ took place. This attack is cited as the official start of the Irish War of Independence. Britain had to face the war against the Irish. The war between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the British forces lasted for one year and a half. The death toll was high, for more than 500 police officers and soldiers were killed, over 700 IRA members were murdered, and about 700 non-combatants lost their lives (Taylor 25). None of the two could defeat the other, and neither accepted to stoop. Hence, a truce and negotiations were the best exits to war. The said truce can be explained by the fact that, on the one hand, after the First World War, Britain was exhausted militarily and financially, and a fight with the IRA cost money and lives. On the other hand, the IRA was ill-supplied with arms, funds, and recruits compared to the British army, and the police could not sustain the war. Time for compromise could not be more welcome after eighteen months of murder and fighting.

³³The Irish National Assembly.

³⁴ An ambush that took place in January 21st, 1919 and perpetrated by IRA men who wanted to seize a shipment of explosives transported by two policemen of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). During this surprise attack, the two policemen were killed.

Accordingly, a ceasefire took place in July 1921, succeeded by negotiations to sign a treaty providing a chance to settle the issue. Lloyd George met with Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith in London, representing the Irish Government. After protracted negotiations, Collins and Griffith returned to Dublin with a signed treaty, the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The latter stipulated that the 26 southern counties would become the Free State, considered a dominion, like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, excluding Ulster. Besides, it provided that the Irish Parliament would have to swear allegiance to the Crown (Curtis and McDowell 322). In British negotiators' eyes, the accord seemed to be fair, for it provided the Irish with more than Home Rule, a Dominion Status, and Britain was not to witness the disintegration of its empire. Nevertheless, for the Irish radicals, such a treaty was but a breach of a long tradition of republican eagerness. It was an illusion of freedom for the Irish Parliament. Under such an oath, the Free State would be a puppet in British hands. It also meant forgetting and burying a long history of revolutions, bloodshed, martyrs, and a dream of a republic at a time when they were so close to achieving it. After three weeks of debating the said Treaty, it passed in the Irish Parliament on 7th January 1921. The thorny issues concerned Ulster and the Oath of Allegiance. The Treaty led to a Civil War in the Free State (1921-1923).³⁵ If the Free State faced a civil war, Northern Ireland experienced a civil rights movement and, eventually, the "Troubles."

1.5. The Transition from the Civil Rights Movement to the Troubles in Northern Ireland:

Meanwhile, in the North, Ulster, things did not go better. Since 1922, the Northern Ireland Special Powers Act³⁶ had been in operation. This law aimed to establish order when chaos spread in Northern Ireland after partition and during the Civil War. This legislation gave power to the Stormont Government³⁷ to prohibit demonstrations and deploy the B-specials³⁸ to restore order. For this reason, it was seen by the Nationalists as a means of

³⁵ For more information refer to *Irish Civil War: A History from Beginning to End* by Hourly History.

³⁶ The Special Powers Act (SPA) was enacted in 1922 by the Stormont Government. It encompassed thirty-five regulations, inter alia, prohibiting public meetings, curfews, close licensed premises, and other measures. Later on, some regulations were amended or replaced, and others were introduced, such as internment.

³⁷ The Government established in Northern Ireland after partition took place between North and South.

³⁸ The Ulster Special Constabulary is a part-time uniformed and unpaid auxiliary force.

oppression by the Unionists. It is important to note that the B-specials were Protestants, and it was believed that they acted against the Catholics. Moreover, the Special Powers Act was enacted to deal with violence. When adopted, it was supposed to be momentary as an emergency measure. However, it subsisted long after the brutality decreased. This act was a fundamental complaint that led to the Civil Rights movement. The law was maintained and renewed each time until it became permanent in 1933.

However, violence plummeted in Ulster (Donohue 1090). Since it diminished, it meant that the Special Powers Act was successful. Nevertheless, nothing justified its use beyond the significant decrease in violence. In truth, the Special Powers Act allowed the Unionists and the police to ill-treat and even kill Catholics while following the law, for the aim was to re-establish Order. A notorious incident occurred in 1922 when police raided a house looking for Sinn Fein members and murdered sleeping people, inter alia, a septuagenarian and his grandson, who was only seven, and other members of the same family (Brewer and Higgins 95). Consequently, Sectarian violence became a daily routine in Ulster. Both Catholics and Protestants frequented different places, and many streets were inhabited either by the former or the latter. Violence escalated not only among Catholics and Protestants but also between Catholics and police. The latter brutalised them, and the Catholics responded using force. As a consequence, paramilitary activity increased to defend the Catholics.

The Irish Republican Army was the most notable nationalist paramilitary organisation. Officially constituted in 1919, it came to terrorise police in Northern Ireland and operate in Britain and elsewhere. In reality, the IRA was a descendant of the Irish Volunteers formed in 1913 and who organised themselves as the Irish Republican Army a few years later. They were known for their use of violence as the only means to achieve a republic, along with their guerrilla warfare tactics. Under Michael Collins' leadership, the IRA led a war against the British in 1919-21, just after the Dáil establishment in Ireland. The IRA aimed to terrorise the police and protect the Catholics, who underwent injustices following the decision to re-establish Law and Order in Northern Ireland. In reality,

Stormont was dominated and controlled by the Unionists; consequently, Ulster's Parliament was corrupt. It aimed to keep out the Nationalists, which, of course, displeased these Nationalists. Thus, the latter disrespected and ignored Stormont, which, in their eyes, was not legitimate. Even the Nationalist Party in Stormont could barely bring reforms, if any. The only act they could pass through Stormont was the Wild Birds Act in 1932 (Cochrane, *Northern Ireland* 32).

The idea of a reunited Ireland did not vanish on either side, the Free State and Northern Ireland. On the one hand, claims over Ulster were encompassed in the 1922 and 1937 Irish Constitutions. On the other hand, in the six counties, in 1928, the National League of the North was formed as parliamentary opposition. Its aim embodied ending partition and unifying Ireland, but to no avail. Eight years later, another attempt was made with the establishment of the Irish Union Association, but like its antecedent, it came to nothing. However, their failure did not deter the Nationalists. The anti-partition movement escalated after the Second World War for Ulster Nationalists were resolved to attain a united Ireland. Their determination was epitomised in the 1945 Irish Anti-Partition League (IAPL) foundation. However, the League foundered to make the six counties part of what became the Republic of Ireland under the 1949 Act.

In 1945, when the Labour Party won the General Election, under the leadership of Clement Attlee, they implemented the Welfare State in the UK after the publication of the Beveridge Report.³⁹ The aim of this Welfare State was mainly to fight poverty and promote education. For this reason, the Labour Party issued many laws until 1951 to improve British lives. Northern Ireland, since part of the UK, has benefited from the welfare state. However, it made it financially dependent on Westminster, which did not please the Unionists in Stormont. The latter enjoyed *carte blanche* and were sovereign in the six counties, but with this, they had to rely on Britain, which made the Ulster Parliament subordinate to

³⁹ government report issued in November 1942 while Britain was at war, the Second World War. It was named after the economist William Beveridge who commissioned it. Due to this Report that identified the five giants in Britain as want, ignorance, disease, squalor, and idleness, the Government put laws under the Welfare State which were implemented with the Labour Party just after the end of the war.

Westminster. Nevertheless, many Nationalists welcomed these new measures, for they were about to uplift their living conditions. In reality, that was true because the Welfare State brought advantages to Northern Irish people. The latter benefited from health care (1948) and housing (1945) with the setting up of the Housing Trust and education (1947). Besides, children could access free secondary education and grammar schools under the Butler Education Act. Moreover, students could benefit from grants to frequent universities. As a result, more Catholics could attend universities.

The generation that benefited from the 1947 Education Act was the one that ignited the Civil Rights movement twenty years later. This act resulted in educated people who were sick and tired of inequalities, people who understood that British rights were for British people. Northern Ireland benefited from the Welfare State but not to the same extent as the mainland. Thus, the Welfare State was a double-edged weapon for Westminster. On the one hand, it silenced many Nationalists because they saw hope in it, but on the other hand, it bred an enemy, the Civil Rights campaigners. It is noteworthy that the Irish Nationalists did not only suffer from oppression and persecution under the newly established government, Stormont; the Nationalists also faced discrimination in Northern Ireland.

Basically, if the South suffered a civil war after partition, the North suffered alienation, suppression, and, more importantly, discrimination. The 1920 Government of Ireland Act did contain no mention of minority rights in Northern Ireland. One-third of the population of the six counties, or what became named Northern Ireland, was non-Unionist, that is, Nationalist (Hennessey, *History of Northern Ireland* 6). These people, though British, had no guarantee for fair treatment in terms of religion, work, education, and opportunities in general. In 1921, in the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the foregoing point was broadly settled when clause 16 stated that:

Neither the parliament of the Free State or the parliament of Northern Ireland shall make any law so as to either directly or indirectly to endow any religion or prohibit or restrict the free exercise thereof or give any

preference or impose any disability on account of religious belief or religious status. (Curtis and McDowell 325)

The above text dealt with the Free State and Stormont. Accordingly, in the North and South, freedom of religion was not to be hindered, nor was any religion to be higher ranked over another one. The questions to be asked are as follows: Was the above clause respected afterwards? Did the Stormont Government, at least, try to enforce it?

The insecurity that was prevailing in the plantations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has reemerged. But this time, it changed sides because the minority shifted from the Protestant camp to the Catholic one. The new government, Stormont, declared itself in 1934 to be “a protestant parliament for a protestant people” (qtd. in Hollowell 142), suggesting Protestant members and Protestant interests. Once again, the Parliament was Protestant; consequently, the Government would look for Protestants’ welfare only, and the Catholics would be excluded if not persecuted. In most of the twentieth century, the Catholics found themselves in the same situation as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but this time as a minority, for they constituted only one-third of the population of Ulster, which worsened their situation. Hence, once again, they became subject to discrimination in Ulster in terms of jobs, housing, and voting.

Catholics in Northern Ireland were discriminated against in public and private sectors. Some scholars, such as Richard Rose, claimed in *Governing without Consensus* that discrimination between Catholics and Protestants regarding employment was not discernible. However, the censuses and some other reports prove the opposite. The 1969 Cameron Report, named after John Cameron, stated, “[As of October 1968] In County Fermanagh, no senior council posts, (and relatively few others) were held by Catholics” (qtd. in Hennessey, *Northern Ireland: the origins of Troubles* 68). According to the 1971 Northern Ireland population census, the unemployment of male Catholics was estimated at 17.3%; however, unemployment for male Protestants was only 6.6%. The same census showed that female Protestants were also more likely to be employed than female Catholics (Osborne 209). The former represents 3.6% and the latter 7.0%. For instance, in public

administration and Defence, only 4.5% of male Catholics were employed in these two sectors compared to 17.3% of male Protestants. The account between the two is quite large.

Besides, the Protestant worker's salary was higher than that of the Catholic employer. The former's average annual mean income was estimated at \$2822; however, the latter's mean revenue was valued at \$2249 (Ovello and Ashby 95), which makes a difference of \$573. The Unionists had never admitted discrimination; however, establishing the Fair Employment Agency to eradicate segregation on religious grounds was an implicit recognition and confession that discrimination regarding jobs did really exist. In reality, employment was not the only area where the Catholics were segregated.

Housing was not to be excluded from the list of the areas where the Catholics were discriminated against. In fact, this issue can be considered as the one that led to the ignition of the Civil Rights movement. It occurred after a Catholic family was evicted from a house that was allocated to a single Protestant girl of 19, Emily Beanie. As far as this latter, the Cameron Commission was appointed in 1969 to write a report declaring that "by no stretch of the imagination could Miss Beanie be regarded as a priority tenant" (*Disturbances in Northern Ireland*). It implied not only an abuse of power since Beattie happened to be working for the local councillor's solicitor and the sister of a policeman who settled with her in this same house but also discrimination against the Catholic family and favouritism towards the Protestant girl. Allocation of houses was based on religious grounds, but to be fair to the Stormont Government, this practice did not exist in all the counties. It was mainly practised by the local ones and the Northern Ireland Housing Trust, which led to the establishment of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in 1972.

On the one hand, as claimed by Paul Brennan, in the county of Fermanagh, 1589 houses were erected in a period of 23 years starting from the Second World War's end; however, only 568 houses were allotted to Catholics, which is the equivalent of 36% and the remnant houses were allocated to Protestants ("Discriminatory" 32-3). On the other hand, Bob Purdie contends that in 1963, Councillor J.J Donnelly of Enniskillen Borough

stated that Protestants owned 178 out of the 179 houses built by the council (84-5). Purdie added that two years later, in 1965, a house was given to a single man known to be a Unionist, while the application of a Catholic family living in an uninhabitable home was rejected. The man was added to the list of applicants one day before the decision to refuse the family's application (85). It suggested that the houses were just built to be allocated to the Protestants, and without these Protestants' need for homes, no house would be built.

In fact, the above was a natural consequence of Protestants controlling the Northern Ireland Government. It was forcibly going to favour Protestants, especially since they held key posts. These Protestants would use their power to provide their alike, religiously, with houses. John J. Kane concludes in his article "Civil Rights in Northern Ireland" that the purpose of controlling housing was controlling voting (60). It indicated that it was a policy followed by the local governments. It is not surprising because when the Northern Ireland Government was set up, it was meant to be Protestant and for Protestant people. Thus, such practices, referring to the discrimination in housing allocation, were not without consequences. They led to the emergence of associations and leagues, such as the Homeless Citizens League and the Campaign for Social Justices, in the mid-1960s. Both can be considered critical to founding the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. In fact, if Catholics were left without houses, they would obviously leave the place, and this would impact voting. The housing matter is not to be dealt with without relating it to the question of the vote in Northern Ireland.

The problem of voting was not less important than the two previous issues. This matter revolved around the fact that only householders and their spouses had the right to vote. Since in Ulster Catholics suffered from housing problems, we could find parents, grown-up children who were married, and grandparents living together in the same house; however, only the owner and his spouse could vote. According to Paul Dixon and Eamon O'Kane, a quarter of the adults in Northern Ireland were disenfranchised (21). The latter included not only Catholics but also poor Protestants, but the majority was Catholic, for the latter was segregated in jobs. This law was unfair because all the other family members

were deprived of their political right to vote in local elections, which is undemocratic. Moreover, since the Protestants were allocated houses even if single, as in the case of Emily Beanie, it meant that an imbalance existed in the voting system. Protestants were more likely to vote than Catholics and, consequently, more Protestant representatives than Catholic ones. Thus, Protestants always had the majority votes in local elections, which engendered more segregation. Simply put, the Protestants were favoured regarding voting, which also meant that the Catholics were segregated in this same issue.

The Catholics in Northern Ireland tried to solve the above problems through protests. They went to the streets but not to destroy or damage cars and stores. They marched to make their voice heard and attract attention. They succeeded in both being listened to and noticed. They triumphed in the former when reforms were brought and in the latter when they were broadcast. They were shown being beaten by the police while protesting peacefully. Inside Britain and outside, the demonstrators were depicted as the victims who were brutalised for asking for their rights. They organised marches that were decided to be peaceful, and those started on the 24th of August 1968. Additionally, associations for this specific purpose, which was bringing discrimination against Catholics to an end, were formed, the most important of which was the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). The latter was founded in February 1967, and its demands encompassed: Establishing laws against discrimination by local government; allocation of housing on a point system; one man, one vote in local elections; repeal of the Special Powers Act, and the disbandment of the B-specials (Brennan, “Birth Conflict” 39).

In my opinion, the demands of NICRA were legitimate. They aimed at countering discrimination in employment, housing, and local elections. Besides, they aspired to abolish both the B-Specials and the Special Powers Act, which weighed on them. The Civil Rights movement was claiming the same rights for everyone. It is essential to state that this Association's demands never included aspirations for a union with the Republic of Ireland. Still, it did not mean that other sections did not have separatist purposes. As in all societies and such situations, the government's reaction would either be reforms or repression. In the

UK, the Prime Minister at the time, Harold Wilson⁴⁰, opted for reforms. The Government responded by proposing some improvements like allocating houses using points. The latter meant allotting homes according to some factors such as salary and family size.

The upgrades also included the establishment of a Fair Employment Agency; transferring housing allocation power to central authorities instead of Local Councils; one man, one vote and replacing the B-Specials. Such reforms were supposed to calm the streets, but that was not the case. As Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, “The most dangerous moment for an oppressive government is that at which it begins to reform. There is only one great genius who can save a prince who undertakes to relieve his subjects after a long oppression”⁴¹ (73). The latter suggested that if a government undertakes reforms, it can lead to its end for both opponents and proponents would be against it, and this was the position Stormont Government faced by the end of the 1960s. The reforms displeased both sides, Protestants and Catholics. For the former, such improvements were unaccepted, for they threatened their authority. It is not unusual for them because they were subject to such menace when the Penal Laws were abolished. Siege mentality haunted them even in the twentieth century. The Unionists perfectly knew that once out of office, it would be difficult to re-join it. For the latter, the reforms were not enough; at this juncture, demands altered.

Segregation existed; it could not be denied. However, it was not admitted by the Unionists. If it were confessed, it would discredit their authority and system. It would lead to Nationalists asking for more reforms and why not bring the issue of total separation from Britain and union with the Republic of Ireland again. However, even with the changes made by the Government, a civil rights movement ignited, violence escalated, and communal tensions reappeared.

⁴⁰ Harold Wilson (1914-1995) was born and died in England. As a Prime Minister twice (1964-70, 1974-6), his main concern was to modernise Britain. His most important achievement was reforms in education, health and housing.

⁴¹ Le moment le plus dangereux pour un mauvais gouvernement est d'ordinaire celui où il commence à se réformer. Il n'y a qu'un grand génie qui puisse sauver un prince qui entreprend de soulager ses sujets après une oppression longue.

In reality, segregation was not the only problem faced by the Northern Irish Catholic Nationalists. British neglect to govern this part of the United Kingdom is also to be blamed for the descent into violence. I believe that Britain wanted Ulster as part of it but without its problems. Westminster neglected the fact that when Ulster became part of it, it meant that Ulster's problems became hers, too. Feargal Cochrane penned about the "Troubles" that "The fact that it was not predicted by those who had the capacity to do something about it partly explains why it broke out in the first place" (*Northern Ireland* 31). He openly accused Britain of being unable to forecast the Troubles outbreak. His words also implied that Britain had the duty to govern Northern Ireland, which it ignored wilfully. By disallowing Northern Ireland's affairs to be discussed in Westminster, Britain provided itself with the opportunity to forget about Ulster. Devolution in Northern Ireland was a blessing for Britain because it avoided her troubles, but at the same time, it was a curse because it troubled her for thirty years. Moreover, British neglect of Ulster made the Unionists believe they were sovereign.

The protests, which were meant to be peaceful, degenerated. Degeneration occurred when some radicals attempted to manipulate the marches (Mulholland, *Northern Ireland: Introduction* 50), leading to confrontations with the RUC⁴² on the 5th of October 1968. The outcome was seventy-seven wounded marchers (McKittrick and Mcvea 246). Hereafter, violence became frequent between the Civil Rights marchers and the RUC. Besides, the protest held by the Apprentice Boys of Derry⁴³ led to communal confrontations between Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists. These skirmishes lasted for three days, from 12 to 14 August 1969, and became known as the Battle of the Bogside. This violence spread to other counties and, most importantly, to Belfast in support of the rioters in Derry. The RUC responded by using force. During these clashes, guns were used, and many houses were burned. Due to the 1969 violence, about 1,600 Catholics and 350 Protestants were forced out of their homes (Punch 70). The number of Catholics driven out of their houses

⁴² The Royal Ulster Constabulary was the state police force in Northern Ireland, founded in 1922.

⁴³ A Protestant Fraternal society that was created in 1814 which was similar to the Orange Order.

highly outnumbered that of the Protestants. When the police could not control the riots and the rioters, help was sought from Britain. Ulster Prime Minister Chichester-Clark appealed to London to assist him in restoring order. On the 15th of August, following the riots in Belfast, the British forces were deployed in Northern Ireland.

Reaction to British interference varied. On the one hand, some Nationalists and even Unionists believed that Britain's interference meant the end of Stormont (Feeney 29), and they were not wrong. Direct Rule was imposed a few years later, in 1972, when Stormont was abolished. On the other hand, some Nationalists saw the presence of British troops as an occupation reminding them of the past. Others welcomed the British Forces, believing they would protect them against the Unionists and Protestant paramilitaries attacks. However, soon, the enthusiasm with which the Nationalists received the British forces became dissatisfaction. The Nationalists comprehended that the deployment of the British troops intended to support the Unionists and not to protect the Nationalists. This discontentment was epitomised in violent confrontations between the Nationalist rioters and the British forces. On the 30th of January 1972, 13 civilians were killed, and seventeen demonstrators were injured. This day became known as Bloody Sunday.⁴⁴ The presence of the British troops in Northern Ireland reignited the issue of reunion with the Republic of Ireland.

To conclude the chapter, it can be said that the Northern Irish conflict is regarded as one of the most protracted conflicts in modern history because it persisted for over three decades. However, the unrest did not start with the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s; it goes back, in truth, to the sixteenth century. Prior to this century, Ireland was controlled by the English families who settled in Ireland after the Norman invasion. These English families were serving the interests of England in Ireland. However, England could no longer trust this class, which prompted the Government to alter its policy from indirect to direct rule. The latter consisted of planting English Protestants in Ireland, which began in the

⁴⁴ For more information refer to The Northern Ireland Bloody Sunday in a New Perspective by Rania MERZOUQ: <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/downloadArticle/226/7/4/137440>.

sixteenth century, and the aim of which was the country's domination. It implies that England relied no longer on the Anglo-Norman families but on English subjects enticed by land. The English Government allotted the estates of the Irish rebels to these English Protestants. The redistribution of estates created a new social order in Ireland: English Protestants as a minority and wealthy class and the Irish Catholics as a majority and a deprived group. It was this new social order that provided the English Protestants with political power, a power that was used to secure the status quo in Ireland and the interests of England in the area.

Introducing an English Protestant class meant the co-existence of two different communities in Ireland. This cohabitation led to permanent confrontations between them. These hostilities ended not only with the forming of a Protestant ascendancy in Ireland but also with its strengthening through the different land confiscations that took place. The latter permitted the English Protestants to enhance their power and use it against the Irish. The ruling class issued a penal code under which the Irish and, more specifically, the Catholics were prohibited from myriad rights. Nevertheless, this was abrogated, and the Catholics were emancipated in the nineteenth century. Emancipation, in fact, did not take place until the Union between Britain and Ireland was sealed. This Union did not make the Irish Catholic situation better; on the contrary, they became the deprived minority within the Union. In reality, Northern Ireland inherited the conflict after the fight for constitutional repeal and separation between North and South.

In the eyes of the deprived Irish class, the Union with Great Britain had to be dissolved. Accordingly, Home Rule was sought to resurrect the Irish Parliament. Tribute must also be paid to the Young Irelander and Fenian martyrs for Home Rule germination. Some British politicians introduced bills to adopt it, but to no avail. Eventually, the British had to cede to the Irish determination and managed to pass Home Rule in 1914.

Outwardly, British conduct suggested that Britain wanted to pacify Ireland since it was part of its Kingdom. Nevertheless, the reality was quite different, for as has always

been the case, Britain looked for its own interests. Introducing Home Rule was a ruse to avoid the United Kingdom's dislocation, and what would come with it as peace and stability would just be welcomed consequences. However, the most important result of Home Rule was the formation of a loyalist paramilitary group and the emergence of the Ulster Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionists Party. Meanwhile, the demands of the Irish haltered. Home Rule was not enough, and independence and the establishment of a republic were sought. It marked the beginning of the Republican quest. An important episode in Irish history was the 1916 Easter Rising or the Sinn Fein Revolt, which epitomised such demands. However, its aim was symbolic since the objective was to make a sacrifice for a better future and not an imminent result. It must be noted that Sinn Fein's aim was just separation and not total independence using peaceful means, unlike the Republican Brotherhood; however, it evolved and made violence its arm and a republic its objective. The uprising led to a Home Rule offer, suggesting Home Rule for Ireland, excluding six counties and establishing two governments. Such an offer bore the partition of Ireland's seeds and the foundation of Northern Ireland and the Free State, which evolved into a republic. This scenario was embodied after the Irish War of Independence, which led to the Free State's concrete establishment and Northern Ireland's birth as part of Great Britain when the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in 1921.

However, this partition did not solve the problem of the two communities sharing the same territory in Ulster. Protestants outnumbered the Catholics in the latter, and the government was Protestant. Discrimination in employment, allocation of houses, and even in voting re-emerged. The outcome of such injustices was a civil rights movement that culminated in the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland. As a result, attempts were made to establish the foundations of the peace process in Northern Ireland.

2 Chapter Two: The Foundations of the Peace Process in Northern Ireland (1972-1994)

In Northern Ireland, the late 1960s witnessed the rise of the Civil Rights movement, culminating in widespread vehemence. The movement that began as peaceful protests deteriorated into what became known as the “Troubles.” The two communities formed their own paramilitary organisations, contributing to the escalation of violence. The police force representing law enforcement in Northern Ireland was also embroiled in the conflict. Additionally, the British Army, which was deployed in Ulster to restore order, was entangled in the dispute and a target of Republican attacks. Another layer of complexity was the involvement of the Republic of Ireland in the Northern Irish conflict. It is unnecessary to state that the North and the South of Ireland constituted geographically and historically one country before the partition. Such a complex situation led to an apogee of violence at the beginning of the 1970s; 1972, for example, was classified as the bloodiest year.

Solutions had to be sought to plummet the violence that shrouded Northern Ireland. It was the duty of the British Government to bring peace to Ulster. In fact, the current chapter aims to delve into this time span to investigate the foundations of the peace process. The latter started after the IRA ceasefire in 1994. Before the latter, the Provisionals and the British Government attempted covert talks, which must be examined to understand the conditions in which they were held, their aim, and what resolutions they led to. However, the situation in Northern Ireland required more than secret talks to establish solid foundations for the peace process. For such a reason, higher levels of endeavours had to take place encompassed in agreements. In reality, two accords were signed, the Sunningdale and Anglo-Irish Accords. Both were essential attempts, requiring their scrutiny and the comprehension of the reasons behind their signature to uncover their special input to the beginning of the peace process.

Talks were not excluded as an attempt to resolve the conflict as an efficient means in conflict resolution processes. Accordingly, some discussions were held, such as Atkins Talks, Brooke/Mayhew Talks, or Hume-Adams Talks. The latter was paramount for setting the base of the peace process. Thus, the chapter will attempt to analyse these talks to conclude whether they impacted the decisions of the political parties, SDLP and Sinn Fein, since they were held between the Nationalists and Republicans. Last but not least, the Downing Street Declaration must be scrutinised. This Declaration preceded the 1994 IRA ceasefire, which suggests that it played a significant role in the foundation of the peace process from where the importance of not only shedding light on it but also dissecting its content to comprehend its dimensions and impact on the Republicans' decision and the peace process.

2.1 Testing the Waters before Initiating the Peace Process:

One approach to resolving a conflict in a society subject to a dispute is secret talks. They are of prime importance and a common approach in the process of settling conflicts. To ensure their success and protect the parties' image, they are conducted outside the general public and the media's knowledge to avoid public pressure. As a matter of fact, the main objective of these covert talks is to foster personal bonds and trust between the disputing parties and, more importantly, to communicate. It must also be highlighted that a key component of resolving conflicts is trust. Through the backchannel discussions, the parties involved can begin an initial evaluation of the circumstances and look into one another needs and desires. They also enable them to assess the possible areas of agreement and disagreement. This way, the different parties can gain visions that would pave the way for more valuable future negotiations.

Since a conflict existed in Ulster and the British Government was a stakeholder, secret talks were one of the attempts to tackle the conflict. Before secret talks between the British and the IRA, the military wing of Sinn Fein, were initiated, the way was paved for them. On 9th September 1971, the Provisional IRA suggested a ceasefire in a public statement if the British Government accepted their demands. The latter encompassed

Stormont's dissolution and the establishment of a regional parliament for a nine-county Ulster; however, their initiative was ignored (Coles 225). From my vantage point, it was the Republicans trying to solve the conflict in Northern Ireland. Their conduct implied negotiating from a position of strength. In fact, it was understandable since they considered the British as colonisers. However, publicly, the British wanted to convey the non-acceptance of such demands and the refusal to deal with a terrorist organisation. The issue was the image of Britain domestically and internationally.

Nevertheless, the British rebuff cost violence escalation between the IRA and British forces; it coincided with the end of 1971 and the beginning of the Troubles' bloodiest year, 1972, in which 500 people died, 10628 bullets were shot, and 1900 bombs were implanted (Coogan 317). This same year epitomised one of the British bloodiest actions toward demonstrators in Northern Ireland, Bloody Sunday. However, despite the ongoing circumstances, the Provisionals announced a one-sided truce. Accordingly, a three-day ceasefire took place as an act of good faith, starting from midnight on the 10th of March 1972. In return, the IRA requested the same demands: political prisoners' amnesty, Stormont dissolution, and a declaration of intent to withdraw (Coles 225). I consider that the Republicans' unilateral action implied their eagerness to make things move toward talks and settlement, but one as they desired. It is worth noting that their demands did not include reunification with the Republic. It can be explained by the fact that they believed in attaining their objective step by step at that juncture.

I believe that the Provisionals' requests were overall unreasonable. If the political amnesty was somehow acceptable, Stormont's suspension and British withdrawal from Ulster were more than far-fetched. Nevertheless, these demands reflected the Provisionals' determination to achieve union with the South. Freddie Cowper-Coles, interpreted the PIRA's repeated attempts to contact the British and stop the violence as anxious for peace (237); however, in my view, as violence-prone and as determined as they were to achieve an all-united Ireland, peace was the least of their objectives and their bloody journey

through the peace process proves it. Their attempts were just a means to negotiate Britain's withdrawal from Ulster and, ultimately, attain reunification with the South.

In an interview, Jim Gibney, a Republican who played a key role in the Sinn Féin ballot box adoption, made it clear that the aim of the IRA in 1972 was to “fight the British Government to a point where they would accept negotiations involving the question of the British declaration of intent” adding that British withdrawal “was what the motivation of the 72 ceasefire was all about”. Indeed, their strategy was to burden the British with attacks and then provide them with an opportunity to negotiate through a ceasefire until withdrawal was attained. At last, they succeeded in bringing the British to the table but not to make them withdraw.

Nonetheless, two weeks later, Stormont was suspended. Some scholars, such as Stephen Kelly and Joseph E. Thompson, suggested that Direct Rule was Bloody Sunday's consequence (n.p; 37); however, the latter came three months after Bloody Sunday and only two weeks after the three-day ceasefire, and the IRA demands. The Prime Minister, Edward Heath, announced the suspension of Stormont on the 24th of March 1972; therefore, Direct Rule was imposed. In my opinion, that dramatic change in British policy could not be a coincidence regarding its timing. In fact, it was one of the different options to solve the problem in Ulster, including internment without trial and violence, which failed. I believe that since the Protestants have always run Stormont, according to the British Government, depriving them of power would satisfy the Republicans. Consequently, William Whitelaw⁴⁵ was appointed Secretary of State for Ulster, and the “Northern Ireland Act,” also known as the “Temporary Provisions Act,” was passed on 28th March 1972 by the British Parliament stating Direct Rule. The latter meant that Westminster could legislate in matters concerning Northern Ireland since Stormont was suspended as it was supposed to be temporary. It can

⁴⁵ William Whitelaw ((1918–99) was born in Scotland and died in England. He entered the Parliament as a Conservative MP in 1955 and became president of the House of Commons in 1970. Then with the suspension of Stormont Parliament, he was appointed as Northern Ireland Secretary of State. His sympathy towards the Catholic question earned him the nickname of “Willie Whitewash”. When holding his position, in Northern Ireland, he conceded the special category status, secretly met the IRA in July 1972, and ended the no go areas under Operation Motorman.

also be inferred that direct Rule was an affirmation that Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom and implied that reunion with the South was not negotiable. Of course, reactions towards Direct Rule varied between proponents and opponents.

If most of the Unionists were disappointed with Direct Rule, it was because Stormont's suspension signified the removal of the political power from their hands, a power they had been monopolising since Northern Ireland's formation, that is, for half a century. On the other hand, the Nationalists and Republicans interpreted Direct Rule, in my opinion, as the beginning of change, a triumph. The latter was the outcome of the Republicans' violence, which forced Britain to undertake alteration, and it was a positive one that implied that more violence could bring more change, and why not reunite with the Republic?

In fact, one out of the three PIRA demands was met: Stormont dissolution, though it was not a dissolution but a suspension. I believe that Direct Rule was an implicit British response to the PIRA's three-day ceasefire even when British officials could not meet PIRA members and negotiate with them, for it would undermine Britain's image and principle embodied in not negotiating with terrorists. More violence meant more pressure on Westminster for the Provisionals, leading to more concessions to the PIRA, including withdrawal from Northern Ireland. It can be said that Direct Rule was not enough for the PIRA because it was an affirmation of possession. For such a reason, the Republicans increased violence. For instance, on the 14th of April 1972, only two weeks after Heath's declaration, twenty-three explosions occurred in different parts of Northern Ireland (Bew and Gillespie 51). Thus, the violence, which followed Direct Rule, was the IRA strategy to force Britain to negotiate and obtain more concessions, as stated in Gibney's interview mentioned above.

Accordingly, another offer was made by the PIRA to meet with Northern Ireland Secretary of State William Whitelaw on the 13th of June 1972. The IRA was ready to cease fire for seven days, expecting British acceptance of their offer within forty-eight hours

(English 157). Of course, such an ultimatum from terrorists could not be accepted in the eyes of Whitelaw. The importance of such an initiative lies in the fact that it was an opportunity seized by the Nationalist party, the Social Democratic Labour Party, to meet Whitelaw in London on the 15th of June for talks. The SDLP transmitted the IRA conditions for a meeting after an encounter with them the previous day. The Provisionals requested IRA prisoners' amnesty, an independent witness to the encounter, and the meeting to be held out of Stormont, along with no restrictions on the names designated by the IRA to attend the meeting (Bew and Gillespie 53). All of the conditions were accepted this time by Whitelaw for a meeting. From my perspective, the fact that he agreed to meet the IRA indicated that the British could not defeat the IRA. Consequently, the British attempted to find an alternative to violence.

Moreover, it suggested that the British wanted to resolve the Irish issue thoroughly. Since the Northern Ireland Act was passed in 1920, which made Ulster's problems Britain's, the British suffered unrest and disturbing politics. The Irish question had been a pain for many years, and it was time to finish with such discomfort. Thus, accepting to meet the IRA could affirm such assumptions; therefore, the British had to make some concessions. The aim behind these concessions was to discuss a truce with the PIRA. Hence, Whitelaw granted Special Category Status⁴⁶ to prisoners convicted of crimes related to the Troubles. However, the price of such a concession proved to be heavy in the coming years for the Special Category Status led to the famous 1981 Hunger Strike. It is crucial to note that prisoners played an essential role in Northern Ireland and the attempt to solve the conflict.

It must be noted that Whitelaw initially refused to meet the IRA and rejected their offer until the IRA showed openness when the Republicans requested the right to self-

⁴⁶ Special Category Status was conceded in June 1972 by William Whitelaw. It meant that PIRA prisoners were no more asked to perform prison work, were permitted more visits in addition to put on civilian clothes instead of prison uniforms. The Special Category Status was withdrawn in March 1976 for those convicted after this date and four years later, in March 1980, Humphrey Atkins, then Secretary of State ended the Special Category Status for all prisoners, including those convicted prior to March 1976.

determination and no mention of Irish reunification (Ó Dochartaigh 55); it was a democratic solution. That is, already in 1972, self-determination was tackled. In the beginning, Whitelaw did not accept encountering SDLP's representatives, John Hume⁴⁷ and Paddy Devlin⁴⁸. It denoted that, publicly, the British made their position explicit about not negotiating with terrorists. It must not be overlooked that they refused to do so directly. Needless to say, the PIRA members were considered terrorists by the British Government. Nevertheless, such a clear decision proved to be only a façade, for the British held meetings with these same terrorists they refused to meet previously.

The SDLP facilitated the encounter between the PIRA and the British Government. New releases of archives permit to state that on the 20th of June 1972, the first covert talk between the two sides took place. It was held near Donegal County and was attended by Gerry Adams⁴⁹ and David O'Connell⁵⁰ on the IRA side and Philip Woodfield⁵¹ and Frank Steele,⁵² officials representing Whitehall. This secret talk aimed to lay the ground for the PIRA ceasefire and a future secret personal meeting with Whitelaw (Woodfield 1).

⁴⁷ John Hume (1937-) was born in Northern Ireland. He entered Stormont in 1969 as an MP and was one of the founders of the SDLP one year later. To the Northern Ireland Assembly, he was elected in 1973 and was one of the negotiators in the peace process in Northern Ireland. He participated in the Sunningdale Conference (1973), discussions with Gerry Adams (1988) and last but not least, he signed the Good Friday Agreement (1998). As a result, in 1998, he was awarded the Noble Peace Prize. He resigned from Westminster in 2005.

⁴⁸ Paddy Devlin (1925-99) was born and died in Northern Ireland. At an early age, he joined the IRA and as a consequence, he was interned for three years (1942-5). However, he left the republican movement to become an SDLP member and a cofounder (1970). However, he was expelled, in 1977, from the SDLP for criticising it as being less socialist. With the suspension of Stormont, he was elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1973.

⁴⁹ Gerry Adams (1928-) was born in Belfast. He is an Irish republican politician. He was the leader of the Sinn Féin Party from 1983 until 2018. As an MP in Westminster, he followed the policy of abstentionism until 1986. He played an important role in the Irish peace process through participating in different talks and was the one who signed the Good Friday Agreement.

⁵⁰ David O'Connell (1938-1991) born and died in Ireland. He was an Irish political activist and a cofounder of the Provisional IRA. He became leader of the PIRA after its split from the Official one as he joined Sinn Féin Party. He is known for participating in the first meeting between the PIRA and the British officials in 1972 along with his leading role in the 1974-5 cease-fire.

⁵¹ Philip John Woodfield (1923 -2000) born and died in England. He served under three prime ministers (Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home and Harold Wilson) as Private Secretary to become an Assistant Secretary in the Home Office. He participated in the first secret meeting between the Republicans and British Government officials as a British representative.

⁵² Frank Fenwick Steele (1923-1997) was born in India. As a Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) in NI, his most important achievement was to facilitate an encounter between the IRA and William Whitelaw in 1972. Even if these talks collapsed, clandestine channels through Frank Steele remained open.

On the 22nd of June, an IRA statement announced an intention to suspend activities from the 26th of June if the British armed forces would do the same. I believe that such a declaration suggested an eagerness to initiate talks. In the eyes of the PIRA, a ceasefire would encourage the British to start discussions. Indeed, a truce took place on the 26th at midnight and lasted for ten days, as discussed and agreed upon in the 20th of June secret meeting. Such a truce allowed a second secret encounter, on the 7th of July 1972, between the PIRA members, counting Gerry Adams, as vice president of Sinn Fein, along with Martin McGuinness and four other Republicans, and William Whitelaw, whom other officials accompanied.

The Provisionals' demands were made public in the House of Commons by Whitelaw, making the meeting public. They encompassed the British Government's public recognition of the right of Ulster's people and Ireland as one unit to decide about their future, as they required a declaration of intent to withdraw from "Irish soil" prior to the 1st of January 1975 and emphasised the fact that British forces should be departed from sensitive zones instantly and amnesty for political jailed people in both Irish and British prisons (House of Commons, 10 July 1972, vol. 840 cols. 1179). This time, the Republicans included self-determination in their demands; however, no explicit request regarding Ireland's reunification was made. Nevertheless, referring to Irish soil and the right of people in the North and South to decide about their future implied the belief in the North and the South as one unit. Whitelaw ended his speech with an interesting statement: "Before I could even discuss these matters with my Cabinet colleagues, the fragile truce was broken, as I have already set out" (House of Commons, 10 July 1972, vol. 840 cols. 1179). Whitelaw obviously blamed the IRA for the failure of the talks since they broke their ceasefire.

If the aim of Whitelaw through making the secret talks public was transparency, bringing the IRA to a political process, and exploring peaceful means, I believe such an announcement could but erode the Unionists' trust. By holding secret meetings with the IRA, the terrorist organisation, Whitelaw compromised the trust of the Unionists in their Government. In reality, this marked the beginning of a series of let-downs for the Unionists

throughout the lengthy peace process. While his decision to publicise the covert talks might have been rational, the means should have been carefully weighed against the end goal.

In my opinion, the meeting was not fruitful, for the demands of the IRA were not rational in the view of Whitelaw. Regarding the encounter, Whitelaw wrote: “The meeting was a non-event. The IRA leaders simply made impossible demands, which I told them the British government would never concede.” Adding that “They were in fact still in a mood of defiance and determination to carry on until their absurd ultimatums were met” (qtd. in Smith 107). Indeed, he was not wrong in his IRA analysis; in 1972, the Provisionals negotiated from a strong position. Besides, he clearly saw the IRA’s aim: pursuing violence until achieving their objective. Even if a truce resulted from this meeting starting on 8th July, it did not last long; it was breached after only two days of its start. The PIRA break of the ceasefire was epitomised in an exchange of gunfire in Belfast over some Catholic families rehousing⁵³.

Indeed, the Provisionals’ requests were unrealistic, for they demanded British army withdrawal, which implied an end of occupation though Ulster was and is still constitutionally part of the UK. The right of self-determination of all Ireland suggested the right of the South to meddle in the affairs of Britain, along with the release of prisoners in the Republic. As far as the latter was concerned, the Provisionals could not overlook the fact that the South in 1972 was a Republic, a sovereign country, and consequently, the British did not have authority over such decisions. Besides, they could neither compel them to a referendum nor release the prisoners. Nevertheless, such demands denoted that the Provisionals attempted to make Britain start relations with the Republic of Ireland to work together. Such ties would develop and allow a United Ireland. The Republican’s requests were crippling for the British. However, despite its failure, the 7th of July meeting was far from being the last secret talk. On the 18th of July 1972, with Prime Minister Edward

⁵³ The British Army prevented some Catholic families to occupy the empty houses in Lenadoon Avenue. Consequently, a confrontation took place between the crowd and the said soldiers who shot rubber bullets. To defend the Catholics, IRA opened fire on the soldiers, which put an end to the ceasefire.

Heath's consent, Harold Wilson and Merlyn Rees held a meeting with the PIRA, which was again a failure.

The repetitive meetings' failure between the Provisionals and the British, along with the IRA demands' rejection, resulted in violence escalation. The Provos went into a series of attacks; between the 13th and 14th of July, the IRA shot dead four soldiers and a civilian. The day was noted in British history under the name Bloody Friday. A few days later, on 21st of July 1972, they detonated twenty-five bombs in Belfast and one in London; the explosions killed eleven people and injured one hundred and thirty others (Bew and Gillespie 54). I believe that through such violence, the IRA hoped to propel the British for further encounters to obtain more concessions. However, apart from Stormont suspension in March 1972, no concessions were granted to the Provisionals. On the contrary, the British exercised a military crackdown against the Provisionals instead. It can be said that since the talks did not lead to a solution, a return to old methods was again on the British agenda.

The British reacted immediately to IRA violence; ten days later, on 31st July, an operation was mounted. 'Motorman Operation' is considered one of the most extensive British military actions. The British aimed to end the no-go areas in both Belfast and Derry. They mobilised twelve thousand soldiers for the manoeuvre. It is crucial to state that this operation was mounted against the Republican's no-go areas and the Loyalists'. The latter was epitomised in the Ulster Defence Association⁵⁴, which began creating its no-go areas on the 30th of June 1972. The casualties resulting from such an operation were not significant; only two youths were killed, and two others were injured during a fight between the soldiers and the Republicans (Bew and Gillespie 55). In my opinion, if the victims' number was meagre, it implied either a lack of resistance on the Republicans' side or cautiousness from the soldiers. According to Gordon Gillespie, the armed forces had in

⁵⁴ Ulster Defence Association (UDA) was a Loyalist paramilitary Organisation. The latter was founded in 1971 under Charles Harding Smith leadership with the primary aim of defending the areas of the Protestant working class against Republican assaults. One year after its creation, the UDA members started establishing no-go areas in Belfast and Portadown for the British Government was unable to take action against the Republican no-go areas. The Association played an important role in the 1974 Ulster Workers' Council strike through roadblocks and pickets. It remained legal until 1992.

mind that the victim toll would be up to forty victims due to resistance (Gordon *A to Z* 193). However, the confrontation was not as significant as expected. It can be explained as both sides trying to avoid confrontation and violence. The bloody Sunday scenario was probably to be avoided. Nevertheless, even with the Motorman Operation, violence did not decrease. According to Huw Bennett, by late August, the Provisionals shot dead fourteen and wounded fifty-six security force members (522). The Republicans retaliated to British violence.

In fact, if the secret negotiation failed at that juncture, it was not a surprise. Each party tried to affirm its position and demands at the beginning of the talks. Seán MacStiofáin, chief of staff of the PIRA at the time, gloated in 1972 that “we’ve no doubt that military victory is within our grasp” (Mulholland, *Northern Ireland: Introduction* 84). It implied that the PIRA made use of violence to achieve its aim as it indicated that it believed in its ability to defeat the British. The latter, on its side, tried to convince the Provisionals that they could stand against the IRA’s violence when MI6 officer Frank Steele made explicit to the IRA leader on the plane on their way to meet Whitelaw secretly in 1972 that the British could bear the losses inflicted by the IRA and that they lost more soldiers on the Rhine accidentally (Ó Dochartaigh 41-2). To say that the damages the IRA is causing are minimal and the British Government is much stronger than that; however, there was no mention of retaliation, only enduring the IRA’s deeds. Nevertheless, the failure of the talks led to more attempts, making them grope in darkness to start the peace process.

2.2 Groping in Darkness to Start the Peace Process:

In Conflict Resolution theory, an agreement is a negotiated resolution between conflicting parties. The aim, of course, is to solve the fundamental issues and grievances which caused the conflict. In Northern Ireland, the dispute was between the dominant Unionists and the deprived Nationalists. In fact, any accord involves concession and obviously compromises from all the participants. The Sunningdale agreement was signed on December 9th, 1973, to settle the dispute in Northern Ireland. It proposed power-sharing Executive and institutional

arrangements for collaboration and consultation between North and South under the Irish dimension idea. In my opinion, the Nationalists were enticed by the Irish dimension, leading to their participation in the Sunningdale Conference, held between the 6th and 9th of December 1973, on the one hand. On the other hand, the Unionists were drawn to the British initiative, epitomised in the White Paper called “Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals,” stipulating political self-determination for the people of Ulster. In the Sunningdale Conference, the Ulster Unionist Party, the SDLP and the Alliance Party representatives of the newly established Assembly of Northern Ireland, together with representatives of both British and Irish Governments, participated.

The Sunningdale Agreement finalised the details concerning the adopted Power-sharing Executive and Irish dimension. Thorny issues revolved around the extradition of criminals and, more importantly, Northern Ireland’s status. If the former could be solved after some time, the latter posed a significant challenge to all the parties involved. Since Articles 2⁵⁵ and 3⁵⁶ of the Irish Constitution stipulated authority over Ulster, it was difficult to achieve an agreement. The Republic of Ireland refused to change the two constitutional articles under the pretext of a necessity for a referendum. It can be contended that the Irish were aware of the significance of such a change, for it meant the loss of the hope of reunification with Northern Ireland. Moreover, the Unionists rebuffed the Agreement without such a declaration. In their view, maintaining claims over Ulster constituted a menace to their Union with Britain, which, in fact, is sealed constitutionally.

The concern was already raised by Brian Faulkner, the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party at the time when he was given the floor at the Conference opening (Hennessey, *The First Northern Peace* 112). In my opinion, the Unionists’ fears were well-founded. Their anxiety during the Conference was based on history and mistrust. History haunted the

⁵⁵ Article 2 of the 1937 Irish Constitution stipulates that “The national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands and the territorial seas.”

⁵⁶ Article 3 states that “Pending the re-integration of the national territory, and without prejudice to the right of the parliament and government established by this constitution to exercise jurisdiction over the whole territory, the laws enacted by the parliament shall have the like area and extent of application as the laws of Saorstát Éireann and the like extra-territorial effect.”

Protestant Unionists from the early centuries; they were subject to Catholics' barbarism when they were slaughtered and killed in the 1642 Rebellion and subsequent upheavals. I believe their siege mentality was transmitted from generation to generation and precluded agreement facilitation with what was considered an eternal enemy. Moreover, Catholic Nationalists were not worthy of trust, for history was evidence of their treason.

Nevertheless, if the foundation of their fears was history, in 1974, their apprehensions proved to be correct and substantiated. During the Conference and to lull the Unionists' vigilance and worries, John Hume, the leader of the SDLP, according to Thomas Hennessey, remarked that a notable development took place regarding the Catholic minority acceptance, in Ulster, of the government institutions epitomised in the Party involvement in the Conference and consequently it was unessential for the Irish Republic to alter its constitution (*The First Northern Peace* 120). It indicates that Hume tried to convince the Unionists that there was no need to ask for the Irish constitution's change. The aim was to win the Unionists' trust and make them accept a deal; his move was but a ruse to secure the signature of the Agreement. A few weeks after the Sunningdale validation, the hidden intentions surfaced.

Austin Currie⁵⁷, an SDLP member, said on the 16th of December 1973 that the Agreement "fulfilled Wolfe Tone's desires to break the connection with England" (qtd. in Jackson, 277). It implies that cracks were introduced to the Union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Currie referred to the Union as successfully undone, which was, obviously, not the case yet. However, the Agreement could indeed be an entrance that leads to the exit. If this union were reversed, it would mean that a union with the Republic of Ireland would be possible. Tone's purpose was a united Ireland, and the latter was on the verge of taking place by virtue of the Sunningdale Agreement from the Nationalists' perspective.

⁵⁷ Austin Currie (1939-2021) was born in the United Kingdom. He was a civil rights activists advocating equality for the Catholic Nationalists. He became a member of the Social Democratic and Labour Party in 1989 and then was elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1998.

The same statement about the Sunningdale was reiterated in a speech at Trinity College Dublin on the 17th of January 1974; one of the SDLP Assembly members, Hugh Logue, who could not be more explicit when attesting that the Council of Ireland was “the vehicle that would trundle Unionists into a united Ireland” (qtd. in Bew and Gillespie 77). The speech was twofold; it maintained that the Nationalists rejected the Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals implying self-determination by a majority. Its words bore some gloating along with a triumphant tone, for the emphasis was on the Unionists rather than the Nationalists. For him, the signature of the Sunningdale was a guarantee to his stipulations, which proved wrong, for the Agreement soon collapsed. Even Liam Cosgrave, the Irish Prime Minister, on 16th December 1973, stated that due to the Sunningdale Agreement, a union between the North and the South was not difficult to attain (Dixon 147). Such allegations could only pressure the Unionists and trigger their fear.

The Sunningdale Agreement was perceived as a threat. The Agreement brought a change in the status quo of the Unionists. It deprived them of some power because of power-sharing. In their perspective, the Accord was but a path leading to a Union between Ulster and the Republic of Ireland. The Unionists, after the Sunningdale Agreement, felt defeated. Their downfall had already started when Stormont Parliament was suspended. The inability of the British Government to safeguard the Unionists’ power in Ulster was another nail in the coffin for them. The apogee of their misfortune came with this Agreement.

As a result, the Sunningdale Agreement faced Unionists’ opposition. The United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC) was founded on 6 December 1973. It means it immediately responded to the Sunningdale Conference's holding. It was established by Unionist parties⁵⁸, whose primary and only aim was to oppose the Sunningdale Accord. It is important to remark that in the UK General Elections of February 1974, the Council won 11 out of 12 seats in Northern Ireland and received 51.1% of the vote (Oberschall 166). The

⁵⁸ Three Unionist parties sharing the same reticence towards the Sunningdale Agreement decided the establishment of the UUUC. The three parties entailed the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) under the leadership of Ian Paisley, the Vanguard Unionist Progressive Party (VUPP) led by William Craig, and the Official Unionist Party (OUP) headed by Harry West.

latter can be interpreted as massive support for its aim. Besides, a strike was called on the 15th of May 1974 by the Ulster Workers' Council (UWC). It began with cutting power and closing factories; this strike represented Unionists' response to the Sunningdale Agreement. It must be highlighted that The UUUC also supported the strike. The latter resulted in the paralysis of the region.

Accordingly, the Sunningdale Agreement collapsed owing to the strike. For instance, in his account of the events taking place in Northern Ireland in 1974, Jonathon Tonge maintained that the Sunningdale Accord, which established power-sharing, collapsed because of the strike of the Loyalists, which happened five months after its signature (*Northern Ireland* 216), especially that on 28th of May, Brian Faulkner, as the head of the Executive, resigned. His resignation marked the end of power-sharing. As a result, people began resuming work the next day, for the Council of Ireland was no more a menace to them. Two days after the said resignation, the Assembly was abolished. Thus, both the strike and the UUUC epitomised the panic that seized the Unionists after the Sunningdale Agreement.

In reality, the Sunningdale Agreement collapsed much earlier than the strike. The latter was but the wind that spread the already ignited fire. The Sunningdale Conference was stormy; disagreement prevailed over the agreement, which was secured by the ambiguity of some of its provisions; the latter was crucial to its signature. The Conference was supposed to be held in two days, but it took four days instead (Hennessey, *The First Northern Peace* 142). The two additional days were the result of the divergence between the different parties. Even the areas where an agreement was reached were hazy. For instance, the most important and primary purpose of the conference was to agree upon the establishment of the Council of Ireland. In fact, the latter was validated by all parties, but its role and function were not detailed. The Sunningdale Agreement specified that the Council would “comprise a Council of Ministers with executive and harmonising functions and a consultative role, and a Consultative Assembly with advisory and review functions” (par. 7). Then, it added in a subsequent paragraph, “the Council of Ireland would undertake

important work relating, for instance, to the impact of EEC membership” (par. 8). What did the word “Harmonising” imply? In which areas should the Council specifically be consulted? What was deemed as important work, and what was not? The Accord did not provide many clear-cut answers.

The criminal extradition question was also difficult to agree upon; however, a clear text was included in the Agreement to settle it. The paragraph stipulated that “persons committing crimes of violence, however motivated, in any part of Ireland should be brought to trial irrespective of the part of Ireland in which they are located” (par. 10). That is, the deal was to deliver the criminals referring to IRA members, who commit crimes in Northern Ireland and flee to the South. Accordingly, Northern Ireland’s courts will sentence them. Even modification of legislation in the two parts of Ireland and the establishment of common law were agreed upon.

The ambiguity surrounding some parts of the Agreement facilitated its signature but not its longevity. In fact, ambiguity can have positive aspects as it can have negative aspects in peace agreements regarding conflict resolution. One of the ambiguity's most important positive features is that it allows agreement over the peace accords because it provides room for different interpretations. Moreover, ambiguity narrows the gap among the parties with conflicting interests. The disputing sides may be more willing to endorse an accord when it leaves some issues ambiguous. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 epitomises such a situation. However, ambiguity can lead to implementation challenges. In other words, implementing the peace accords can encounter difficulties, which was again the case of the Good Friday Agreement, which will be detailed in chapter four of my dissertation. In fact, difficulties in implementation stem from disputes over interpretations of specific words or commitments.

Regarding the Sunningdale Agreement, as stipulated above, if ambiguity secured the accord endorsement, it did not contribute to the accord's sustainability. In fact, as soon as disagreement arose between the different parties before the Agreement's signature, the

parties signed its death warrant. In his Sunningdale Agreement's analysis, Gordon Gillespie endowed it with a body and a spirit. According to him, December 1973 represented Sunningdale's effective death when its spirit died ("Sunningdale Agreement" 112). Thus, the strike was an essential factor in the Sunningdale collapse; however, it was not the reason behind its downfall. It was instead the accelerating element leading to its demise.

Moreover, restricting participation in the Conference to some parties and not others was not in the favour of the Agreement. Sinn Fein Party did not take part in the Sunningdale Conference. It means that the Agreement was not inclusive. In my perspective, by excluding the Republicans from politics, Britain attempted to exercise more pressure on them to renounce violence. The Nationalists were represented by the SDLP, the parliamentary party. Reference should be made to the fact that the SDLP was also seeking reunification with the Republic of Ireland, just like the Republicans, but the difference between the two laid in the means to achieve the ultimate goal. The Republicans, who did not adhere to peaceful means, had no place in the political arena.

Thus, instead of bringing together the different conflicting parties, the Sunningdale Agreement revealed that the gap between them was wider than thought. Therefore, it can be stated that it was far from being an agreement. A few issues were solved, and many disagreements were raised. However, with the collapse of the Accord, the hope of the Nationalists dissipated with the wind. The Sunningdale Agreement would have been a real advance for the Nationalists' cause if it had not collapsed. However, even if it failed to achieve power-sharing, it did mean it was possible to attain it in the future.

In conflict resolution processes, different reasons can lead to the failure of agreements. Among other things is the lack of trust, the absence of a political will, and cultural and identity factors. Mistrust was prevalent in Northern Irish society. On the one hand, the Unionists did not trust the Nationalists, which is not justified but understandable because of history. On the other hand, they mistrusted the British Government; was it not the one that held talks behind the scenes with the enemy, the Republicans? Moreover, the

political will was non-existent. The Unionists could not accept the idea of sharing power either with the Republicans or with the Nationalists. It must not be overlooked that it had always been a zero-sum game in Northern Ireland. It must be reiterated that the Unionists have held power in Ulster since its formation. That is, power-sharing was a defeat to their hegemony.

Another factor, in my opinion, which prevented the success of the Sunningdale Agreement was the exclusion of the Republicans. The latter was an essential link in the conflict in Northern Ireland. It means that the Republicans must also be part of the conflict resolution. Additionally, excluding international support as an active participant in the signature of the Accord to facilitate mediation between the conflicting parties was another factor that led to its downfall. In conflict resolution, a third party is essential; it eases communication between the conflicting parties. From my perspective, the Agreement came too early. None of the conflicting parties was ready for change, yet the Accord established the awareness that a solution to the conflict must be sought and sowed the idea of power-sharing, which started to germinate in the coming years.

After the Sunningdale Agreement had failed, other solutions were sought. The conflict in Northern Ireland had to be resolved, for it became a burden to the British Government. Other secret talks between the British Government and the IRA were initiated between 1974-75 but to no avail. Inter-party discussions, Atkins Talks, were initiated between Humphrey Atkins⁵⁹ and SDLP, DUP, and Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI) delegates but met failures in 1980. Even the Rolling Devolution⁶⁰ suggested in 1982 by the

⁵⁹ Humphrey Atkins (1922–96), was Conservative Party politician. In 1979, he was named Northern Ireland Secretary of State by Margaret Thatcher. Atkins's term as such was dominated by the republican hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981. He attempted to talks with the Republicans, but he failed in achieving results. He participated in the meetings between the Irish and British Governments that culminated in the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

⁶⁰ It proposed the election of a 78-member Assembly to attain agreement regarding how devolved power should be exercised. If seventy per cent of the members could attain an agreement, power devolution would occur under the Secretary of State approval. Devolving power from Westminster to Ulster would come about in stages from where its name Rolling Devolution. However, the Assembly initially would have only a consultative role. The latter would evolve to become legislative if a cross-community basis was demonstrated to be possible for the Assembly's work.

Secretary of State, James Prior⁶¹, failed. Rolling Devolution did interest neither the Unionists nor the Nationalists. The former was not interested in power-sharing, as with the Sunningdale Agreement. The latter was not attracted because of the absence of the Irish dimension. However, the following steps would make the peace process looming on the horizon.

2.3 The Peace Process Looming on the Horizon:

As stated above, agreements are standard in peace processes, if not the most sought-after. The Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) was among the accords inked during Ulster's peace process. However, unlike its precedent, the Sunningdale Agreement, the AIA was signed between two states, excluding Ulster's conflicting political parties. The key characteristics of the AIA are those of any other agreement: negotiations, resolution of grievances, and mutually accepting the outcome.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom Governments on the 15th of November 1985 at Hillsborough Castle. It is crucial to note that all Northern Ireland political parties' leaders were excluded apart from John Hume, the SDLP chief. The decision to ban the Unionists from the negotiations regarding the AIA came from London and not at Dublin's request. The Agreement was indeed signed in 1985, but its roots go back to 1980. At the time, both Irish and British Governments expressed the wish to develop cooperation in the summit meetings held in May and December 1980 between the then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Taoiseach, Charles Haughey⁶². The idea materialised in 1981 with the two Prime Ministers, Thatcher and Garret FitzGerald, who established the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council that would become the Anglo-Irish Agreement in a few years.

⁶¹ James Prior (1927–2016) born and died in England. He was a Conservative Party politician and secretary of state for Northern Ireland. His main achievement was his attempt to bring about a resolution to the ongoing Republican hunger strike and his visit to Maze prison on his first day as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

⁶² Charles Haughey (1925–2006) Fianna Fail (FF) leader and Taoiseach of Ireland. He occupied posts in different ministries before becoming Taoiseach in 1979 until 1981 then again in 1982 after the resignation of Jack Lynch. He believed in a united Ireland but with peaceful means.

A thorough reading of the Anglo-Irish Agreement permits me to shed light on its dimensions. In Article 1, the Anglo-Irish Agreement established a pivotal foundation by stipulating that under both Governments' approval, any change in the status of Northern Ireland was subject to majority consent in Ulster. I believe that by putting such a democratic process at the heart of this clause, the aim was initiating a peaceful and negotiated settlement and addressing a deeply rooted controversial concern between the Nationalists and the Unionists regarding the status of Ulster peacefully and democratically. The Agreement recognised the importance of democracy and legitimacy in determining Ulster's fate. In fact, it was more an assurance to the Unionists than the Nationalists since the former outnumbered the latter.

Moreover, the Agreement established an Inter-Governmental Conference. Its role was primarily consultative, for Article 2 stipulated that "The Conference will be mainly concerned with Northern Ireland; but some of the matters under consideration will involve cooperative action in both parts of the island of Ireland, and possibly also in Great Britain." These words were explicit regarding Irish interference in British affairs. The Article implied a wide range of issues. Such a statement infers that the Unionists no longer had a monopoly over Northern Irish affairs. They had to work with the Republic of Ireland and find compromises for the benefit of the minority in Ulster. Consequently, the Republic of Ireland had a say in Northern Irish affairs, which also meant contributing to the United Kingdom matters.

I believe that the Agreement gave the Irish Government more than a consultative role as Article 2 specified that "efforts shall be made through the Conference to resolve any differences." These few words bear a deep understanding, for they meant that the British Government was ready to make concessions to the Irish Government to solve problems. It was precisely the interpretation made by the Irish Prime Minister, Garret FitzGerald, in the Irish House of Commons (Dáil Éireann, 19 Nov. 1985, vol. 361, cols 2562–3 par. 28). In my opinion, the AIA was not the joined authority the Irish Government sought in the New

Ireland Forum⁶³, but at the same time, it was more than a concession of a consultative role. In the Agreement, the position conceded to the Republic by Britain was obscure. However, it is essential to note that the Irish Government represented the interests of the minority, Nationalists, in Northern Ireland.

The abovementioned allows me to infer that the AIA signified that Britain accepted the dislocation of the Union in the future if the conditions were met and the Republic of Ireland recognised British presence in Ulster. It is important to note that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the fervent defender of sovereignty, signed the Agreement. Thatcher abhorred Britain's membership in the EEC because, in her perspective, it undermined British sovereignty. However, she agreed to grant the Government of Ireland a consultative role and even more within the United Kingdom.

Different reasons behind the signature of the AIA were suggested. One of these propositions found ground in international pressure. The AIA is believed to be agreed upon by the British under US pressure. Enoch Powell, a British Conservative politician, maintained that the AIA was signed because this was what the USA desired (O'Kane, *Britain, Ireland* 63-4). It is well established that good relations subsisted between Thatcher and President Ronald Reagan. On the contrary, Geoffrey Howe, the British Foreign Secretary at the time, contended any external pressure from the USA, which seldom happened, especially to change British policies (Dixon 199). It is also essential to note that Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister at the time, and she had concerns about British sovereignty. Thus, there is little chance that such a scenario would have occurred. However, not to discredit Enoch Powell, who occupied an important position in the state, his claims can be considered a minor factor that led to the British acceptance of the Agreement but never as the primary and only reason.

⁶³ The New Ireland Forum was a political initiative in the early 1980s in the Republic of Ireland. It aimed at addressing the conflict in Ulster, suggesting different options for future relationships between the North and the South as it proposed joint authority between the Republic and the UK over Northern Ireland. The Forum was not implemented for it faced rejection from the British Government, Margaret Thatcher, and the Unionists.

Another motive that was put forward as a reason behind the AIA signature was the country's security. Hugo Young ascertained that the AIA signature was primarily because of the terrorist threat (473-4). It implies that Thatcher was concerned with the country's security because of IRA activities in Northern Ireland and the mainland. Thus, signing the AIA would enhance security if the IRA was alienated by the Nationalists, deprived of international support, and the management of Anglo-Irish relations (Dixon 198); such was Thatcher's plan. There is some truth in such an assumption because the IRA was a real menace to the country; however, the aim was not to achieve security but rather to defeat the IRA, and security would be a consequence of their downfall. It is also important to state that media coverage of the bloody events perpetuated by the IRA tarnished Britain's image and pushed Thatcher to seek a solution. In conflict resolution, media coverage can put pressure on political leaders and decision-makers to take action to resolve conflicts. They can feel obliged to address the issues to maintain credibility.

In my opinion, defeating the IRA was the plan. It is worth noting that the IRA was considered the military wing of Sinn Fein. The latter was gaining more support in both the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Thus, if Sinn Fein acquired more power, the IRA would gain support and confidence, if not legitimacy. In January 1981, James Prior, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, stated that entailing the minority in Ulster was crucial to vanquishing terrorism (Dixon 190-91), and such was the British strategy. Electoral support for the Sinn Fein Party increased in the 1980s, especially after the Hunger strike of 1981⁶⁴. The latter was a seminal event for Sinn Fein's popular support and a turning point in the Party's strategies. On the 1st of March, which coincided with the fifth anniversary of the special category status ending⁶⁵, Bobby Sands, the IRA leader in the Maze Prison, started a new hunger strike, which other Republican prisoners joined. The strike aimed to regain the special category status. However, the British authorities, Margaret

⁶⁴ The Hunger Strike of 1981 was but an extension of the one which started on the 27th of October 1980 by Republican prisoners. The aim of the latter was to regain the special category status. After 53 days, the 1980 hunger strike was called off on the ground of some government hints for some movement toward political status, which was not true and seemed to be a misunderstanding. The Republican prisoners resumed their strike on the 1st of March 1981.

⁶⁵ The special category status ended on the 1st of March 1976.

Thatcher, ignored the strikers' requests. One of their demands was not met until October: wearing their clothes instead of prison uniforms.

The Hunger Strike's most significant result was Bobby Sands' election to the House of Commons. On the 26th of March, he was nominated for the Fermanagh-South Tyrone by-election, and on the 11th of April, he was proclaimed the House of Commons seat winner. As such, and especially after his death, he became a symbol. It made the IRA understand that popular support was crucial for their cause (Hannigan 33). Moreover, in the words of Mayer N. Zald and Roberta Ash, a movement and/or an organisation is affected by its environment if there is “an ebb and flow of supporting sentiments” (330). The least that can be said about Zald and Ash's perspective is that the condition was met when an increase in electoral support occurred. For such a reason, in November 1981, during the Sinn Fein annual conference, Danny Morrison asked: “Is there anyone here who objects to taking power in Ireland with a ballot paper in one hand and an Armalite in the other?” (qtd. in Coogan 282). His question was a clear move towards an interest in elections. Along with arms, elections were to be considered a means to achieve their aims. Bobby's success was but an incentive and encouragement for other elections and Sinn Fein's strategy change.

In the new Northern Ireland Assembly election held on the 20th of October 1982, Sinn Fein took five of the 78 seats. However, the SDLP won 14 seats. Then, in the 1983 General Election, Gerry Adams won the seat of West Belfast against Joe Hendron from the SDLP. Two years later, in the Local Government Elections (District Council Elections), which took place on the 15th of May, Sinn Fein won 59 seats. It is crucial to note that it was the first time that Sinn Fein contested Local Government Elections and decided to join their seats; even if it was only at the local level, it was a victory. Times of abstention seemed to be behind. In my opinion, such results hinted at Sinn Fein's rise as a major party and alluded to the population's growing support. It also meant that SDLP's popular support was waning. Moreover, it suggested a change in Sinn Fein's strategies. If, in the past, Sinn Fein relied on violence only, utilising its military wing, to achieve its aim, in the 1980s, it counted on

violence and politics, commonly known as “Armalite and ballot box.”⁶⁶ Such was the Party's modernisation, which was owed to Gerry Adams. The Armalite and ballot box was intended necessarily at the intention of overriding the SDLP.

Accordingly, the British feared the rise of Sinn Fein as the dominant nationalist party to the detriment of the SDLP. If such became, the situation would be more complicated, the IRA would be more robust, and the Ulster's conflict would not be settled because Sinn Fein and the IRA would not accept reforms. Thus, I believe that Thatcher seized the opportunity when a letter was sent to her in September 1985, written by Ian Paisley and Molyneux. They expressed their readiness to contemplate a reasonable suggestion to protect the interests of the minority, short of seats, in a newly established devolved administration and engage in discussion between Belfast and Dublin (Cochrane, *Unionist Politics* 15). That is, the Unionists were not prone to alter the composition of the Cabinet in terms of representation but were ready to protect the interests of the minority and to participate in the discussions between North and South, which is, in my belief, an implicit acceptance of the Republic meddling in Ulster's affairs. Moreover, the Republic of Ireland also shared fears about the rise of Sinn Fein and the IRA. FitzGerald could not hide his anxiety about the matter, believing that if the minority in Ulster could not be turned against the IRA, Sinn Fein would take control of the North, which would also harm the South (Thatcher 401). So, satisfying the said minority in the North through the Anglo-Irish Agreement was the best option.

Reactions to the Agreement varied between proponents and opponents. The Nationalists, the SDLP, greeted the AIA. For them, these reforms could lead to further improvement in the future, and I believe they were right. Notably, the AIA encompassed an Irish dimension epitomised in the prominent consultative role ceded by the British, which could soon become a joint authority. However, the opposition was fierce and

⁶⁶ "Armalite" is a rifle commonly used by the IRA members. The Armalite and the ballot box strategy finds ground in the belief that military action and political activism are not contradictory but, rather, may be pursued jointly with each reinforcing the other.

included Republicans and Unionists. The Republicans in the Republic of Ireland, Fianna Fail, who was no longer in office, believed that the Agreement was incompatible with the Irish constitution, Articles 2 and 3, for it negated the unity of Ireland and approved the North as part of Britain. Nevertheless, those of Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein, argued that the AIA did not meet their demands for a united Ireland and British withdrawal from the North. The most critical opposition emanated from the Unionists.

The Unionists mobilised themselves to counter the Anglo-Irish Agreement. In my opinion, in their view, Britain betrayed them when signing an agreement in which they had no say. The problem was the Unionists' marginalisation in the Accord and undermining the parties' leaders' authority in the eyes of their followers. Moreover, the Unionists considered themselves fully part of Britain and their affairs as British internal affairs, and consequently, only Britain could decide about Northern Irish matters. In their opinion, the Intergovernmental Conference, which was the core of the AIA, was the embryo of the future Government of Northern Ireland (Godson 84). In the words of the DUP's deputy leader, the Agreement was trundling towards the Irish Republic (House of Commons, 26 Nov. 1985, vol. 87, col. 775). Therefore, they went to the street to express their discontent. Protests, strikes, MPs' resignations and even violence were resorted to. The Unionists attacked Royal Ulster Constabulary houses. I believe that the Unionists' success in bringing down the Sunningdale Agreement gave them the faith to succeed in toppling the AIA. However, this time, they failed, for they did not succeed in bringing the Intergovernmental Conference to collapse.

British strategy suggests a Machiavellian thesis, that is, a calculated and strategic mindset characterised the British approach. Thatcher signed the Agreement for a specific reason, not for violence reduction or due to international pressure only. It must not be forgotten that in 1980, the Irish Government made claims over a say in Northern Irish affairs, and Thatcher rejected them (Dixon and O'Kane 53). Besides, in the House of Commons, she made it crystal clear that Northern Irish affairs were the competence of the people of Ulster, the British Government, and the British Parliament only (House of

Commons, 20 May 1980, vol. 985, col. 250). Moreover, violence in the second half of the 1980s was not as high as in the mid-1970s. In the mid-1980s, British forces were no longer used in Ulster, and the IRA changed its strategy, becoming less random in killing (Cochrane, *Unionist Politics* 20). Thus, the Agreement was not signed to diminish violence or stabilise the situation in Northern Ireland, at least not as a primary aim. In fact, the purpose was to bring the IRA to its knees, especially after they attempted to kill Thatcher in October 1984⁶⁷.

In the 1980s, the IRA was powerful; they were better organised than the previous years, and even, as stated by Feargal Cochrane, the British could no longer infiltrate them (*Unionist Politics* 21). Moreover, they had the support of Muammar Qaddafi. He supplied them with arms and allowed them to be trained in Libyan camps. In 1975, for instance, Gaddafi provided the IRA with \$3.5 million (Mumford 645); help also came from the Irish living in the United States of America. Consequently, the British believed them to be an important threat to them and their image on the international scene. Moreover, they were worried about what the Republicans could do with such support if their demands were not met. In my opinion, such opportunities permitted the IRA to mount operations against the British, inter alia, the one of Brighton's Grand Hotel.

It has been demonstrated that in her war against the IRA in the 1980s, Thatcher resorted to political means, such as internment, security measures, and marginalising extremist groups. I believe that she was aware that the use of violence would instead rally the people around the IRA and alienate the Government. Such a situation was to be avoided; in other words, the Government aimed to gain the people's sympathy and alienate the IRA. If the latter were to lose people's support, its power would wane and could consequently be defeated. Moreover, signing the Treaty with the South would prevent the IRA from having Ireland's support. It was well established that the South was a source of prominent

⁶⁷ Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet were attending a party conference in a hotel. The IRA seized the opportunity and detonated a bomb. The latter, which was placed at Brighton's Grand Hotel, left five dead and wounded thirty-four others. The IRA menace was still subsisting, for they stated that "Today we were unlucky, but remember we only have to be lucky once" (qtd. in Bingham), which suggests that other attempts will be made and such was the case.

IRA members. With an agreement, the Republic would have to honour its terms, among other things, extradition and security matters that were supposed to hinder the IRA's attempts to do wrong to Britain. Thus, IRA power would diminish, as well as its activity.

In the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the aim of each party, Britain and the Republic of Ireland, was different. Each of the two wanted to achieve a specific goal by signing the Accord. If peace was the primary reason for the Republic, such was not the case for Britain. For the latter, peace was but a consequence of its agenda. However, The Agreement was vital, for it was the start of good relations between the British and Irish governments. Their cooperation was not the solution to the Irish problem, but it was a new framework within which a solution could evolve. The Financial Times wrote regarding the Agreement that it was genuine and a step for the two affected governments, Britain and the Republic, to work together to solve the Northern Irish Problem (O'Kane, *Britain, Ireland* 70). If, in the Sunningdale Agreement, solutions were sought at the political party level, with the Anglo-Irish Agreement, way outs were hunted at the government level.

The solution at the government level, AIA, did not lead to the defeat of the IRA. The British General Election of May 1987 proved that Sinn Fein's electoral support did not decrease; it fell only from 11.8 per cent to 11.4 per cent (Bew 535). If, as presented, the Agreement aimed to reach peace in Northern Ireland, it failed because tensions did not decrease. On the contrary, violence increased throughout the coming years. The death toll was fifty-four in 1985, which augmented to reach sixty-two in 1986 and almost one hundred in 1987 (Bew 535). Nevertheless, even if it failed to ensure security in Northern Ireland, its impact was crucial, for it led to months of talks in 1988 between the SDLP and Sinn Fein.

Hume-Adams Talks were an unintended consequence of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and two decades of failure in achieving a settlement. The discussions started on the 11th of January 1988 and lasted for seven months, ending on the 30th of August. They remained secret until April 1993. In Ulster, since the Sunningdale Agreement, Republicans and Nationalists understood that a consensus had to be attained and, consequently, talks

between the two parties had to be initiated. I believe that Sinn Fein accepted such dialogues because the talks of the 1970s proved that an understanding could be possible.

During Hume-Adams Talks, John Hume attempted to convince the Sinn Feiners that the best way to solve the Northern Irish problem was through peaceful means. He maintained that self-determination was a prerequisite to solving the conflict in Ulster, believing Britain would not hamper such a decision. For the SDLP, the Anglo-Irish Agreement signature proved that Britain was neutral regarding the Northern Ireland conflict. Such a statement was included in Article 1 of the Agreement. Consequently, the problem laid in the approval of Unionists and not Britain. For the SDLP, Britain should play a role and assist both Sinn Fein and the SDLP in achieving their objective by convincing the Unionists of the importance and necessity of a united Ireland that would serve their interests better (“The Sinn Fein/SDLP Talks”); a naïve belief, I would describe it. Such a situation proved that the SDLP could not conduct talks and negotiate agreements for Northern Ireland's benefit.

Sinn Feiners were not foolish to believe that Britain was neutral; however, Gerry Adams accepted self-determination. It must be reiterated that already in the secret talks of 1971, Sinn Fein required self-determination. The latter was welcomed as a desirable solution and believed to be the best exit. In my opinion, if he had accepted self-determination, it was to seek international support. It is well established that self-determination is one of the core principles of the United Nations Charter. Additionally, requiring self-determination would convey the notion of colonialism, for self-determination was a response to colonialism in the aftermath of the First World War. Nevertheless, Adams tried to persuade Hume that British withdrawal was the only solution to achieve justice and peace. The AIA was the perfect example and an indicator that Britain had no intention to withdraw or accept the North and South reunion from the Republicans' perspective.

Moreover, during the Hume-Adams Talks, Adams accused the SDLP of attempting to destroy the Republican movement, which happened to be Britain's purpose by following

such a strategy (The Sinn Fein/SDLP Talks). That is, in Sinn Fein's view, the SDLP was indirectly Britain's ally against the Republican movement, which aimed at uniting Ireland without British interference in their self-determination. In fact, the situation emphasised the difference in both ideologies. Besides, Adams made it clear that no talks or agreements would be concluded without, at least, a British intent declaration to withdraw. Thus, according to the Hume-Adams Talks, a common point between Nationalists and Republicans subsisted: the conviction that self-determination was to be applied. However, the problem laid in how to attain it.

During Hume-Adams Talks, each side tried to convince the other that their perspective was the best without trying to find a middle ground. In fact, in Conflict Resolution theory, such is the aim of discussions. The SDLP maintained that non-violent means were the best option, while the Sinn Feiners, who in 1987 issued the "Scenario for Peace," claimed that violence was a right to be used against Britain. Additionally, during Hume-Adams Talks, the IRA did not renounce violence. For instance, an IRA attack took place in London on the 1st of August 1988, in which one soldier was killed, and nine others were injured (Bew and Gillespie 218). Another important assault was the one on the 20th of August, in which eight soldiers were killed and twenty-eight others injured (Bew and Gillespie 218). I believe that the attacks were a way to express the conviction that violence will lead to reunification. Moreover, suspending violence would have been interpreted as the Republicans giving up violence due to the Talks and endorsing the SDLP perspective of non-violent means' efficacy.

In my opinion, the Hume-Adams Talks alarmed the Unionists. The proof is that just after these discussions, they contacted the SDLP. UUP, DUP, and the Alliance Party's representatives met SDLP's representatives in Duisburg (Germany) for two days on the 14th of October 1988. The aim was to reach inter-party talks; however, disagreement about the AIA prevented it (Bew and Gillespie 219). To my mind, contacting the SDLP fourteen days after the failure of Hume-Adams Talks epitomised the Unionists' fear and panic. The Unionists feared the alliance between the Nationalists and the Republicans. The AIA, in

which the Unionists felt betrayed by Britain, and these Talks, which could unite the Nationalists of Ireland, were a dangerous threat to their future. Moreover, trust was not prevalent in the political arena, and the AIA proved it. The Unionists' reaction evidenced their rejection of Sinn Feiners and, consequently, the idea of self-determination and an all-Ireland settlement.

Hume-Adams Talks foundered, and no document was signed. They failed to establish the peace and justice desired by both parties because of their different strategies and ideologies. However, it instituted a novel approach to trying to solve the Northern Irish problem: dialogue, which is a constructive and, more importantly, transformative process in conflict resolution. Since Sinn Fein advocated dialogue, it means that a change took place in its ideology; it was an implicit one. Besides, both sides agreed that national self-determination was the only way of resolving the Northern Irish problem. That was true, but not for the ways of achieving it. Talks between John Hume and Gerry Adams resumed in 1993. Meanwhile, others were conducted between Peter Brooke⁶⁸ and Patrick Mayhew⁶⁹.

The Brooke/Mayhew Talks⁷⁰ were conducted from April 1991 to November 1992. They entailed Northern Ireland political parties (excluding SF) and the British and Irish Governments; the Mayhew Talks aimed to attain a settlement for Northern Ireland. The prospect of the discussions started to take shape in 1990 when several meetings took place between the Secretaries of Northern Ireland, Brooke, then Mayhew, with the Unionists (James Molyneaux and Ian Paisley), the Nationalists (John Hume) and the Irish Government represented by Charles Haughey. It is important to note that during the meeting between Brooke and the Unionists, it had been agreed that there would be an interruption in the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference meetings (McEvoy 82). It is

⁶⁸ Peter Brooke (1934- 2023) started his political career in 1977 as an MP. He held the position of chairman of the Conservative Party in 1987 to become Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in 1989. famous for his declaration of Britain having "no selfish strategic or economic interest" in Northern Ireland.

⁶⁹ Patrick Mayhew (1929- 2016) started his political life in 1974 as an MP. He was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland between 1992 and 1997. He held record for the longest tenure in that position that anyone has ever had.

⁷⁰ These Talks were named after the two successive Secretaries of State who conducted them, Peter Brooke and Patrick Mayhew.

essential to state that the Unionists maintained their view regarding the AIA, which was its suspension. They insisted on the fact that no talks and agreements could be achieved unless the Agreement was suspended. The interruption, referred to by Brooke, implied that Britain ceded to the Unionists' demand. This set of meetings with the conflicting parties aimed at testing the water for real talks.

According to Brooke's statement in the House of Commons on the 26th of March 1991, the Talks were to focus on three strands. He stipulated that:

It is accepted that discussions must focus on the three main relationships: those within Northern Ireland, including the relationship between any new institutions there and the Westminster parliament; among the people of the island of Ireland; and between the two governments. (House of Commons, 26 March 1991, vol. 188, col. 765).

It implies that the Talks would encompass a three-strand plan: discussions within Northern Ireland, including its different constitutional political parties, to achieve a devolved government; then discussions between North and South to end the plan with discussions between Irish and British Governments. I believe that this viewpoint was interesting because it involved all the conflicting parties. The conflict's different dimensions were looked at and attempted to be solved. In previous efforts, attempts to resolve the Irish conflict involved only some dimensions, not the three altogether.

It must be highlighted that the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC)⁷¹ announced a ceasefire⁷², beginning on the 30th of April 1991, as long as the discussions were in process to facilitate the Talks. However, such a declaration was not made on behalf of the IRA. In my opinion, such an initiative proved that the Loyalists and Unionists were all in the Talks and approved the process. Their condition regarding the AIA suspension was met on the 9th of April 1991 when Gerry Collins, the then-Irish Foreign Minister, declared a ten-week suspension of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference meetings.

⁷¹ The Combined Loyalist Military Command was acting on behalf of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), and the Red Hand Commandos (RHC).

⁷² The ceasefire was ended on the 4th of July 1991.

Moreover, the Sinn Feiners were excluded, which suited both the Loyalists and the Unionists, especially after the Hume-Adams Talks threatened their future. Thus, they had to seize the day.

The Anglo-Irish conference resumption, which took place on the 16th of July, led to the end of the discussions held between April and July of 1991 between Peter Brooke and the different political parties in Ulster. Besides, the CLMC resumed violence. It meant that the condition of the Unionists for talks no longer existed. The Talks did not even reach the second strand, for the first one could not be concluded. Nevertheless, according to public opinion surveys conducted on the 12th of July 1991, many people in Northern Ireland, the Republic, and Britain wanted to see the talks resumed (Melaugh). The discussions gave hope to people to end the conflict and reflected their aspiration for peace. People were disenchanted with bloodshed, loss of lives, and bombing. However, Brooke left office. His departure opened the door for Patrick Mayhew to become the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in April 1992 and coincided with Charles Haughey's resignation as prime minister and leader of Fianna Fail in January 1992, whom Albert Reynolds succeeded.

It is essential to highlight that after the General Election of 9th of April 1992, the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference decided to suspend its meetings for three months this time. Of course, the aim was to allow the Unionists to start talks. The British Government understood that without such a decision, the Unionists would not accept interparty discussions. In this context, it is crucial to emphasise that the Conservatives' victory in the 1992 General Election could but be an advantage to the Unionists and a disadvantage to the Nationalists. On the contrary, a Labour Government would have been advantageous to Nationalists instead.

The said suspension allowed the talks to resume on the 29th of April at Stormont. To avoid the misfortune of the first talks, the parties agreed to work in parallel on the two other strands. In my perspective, the most important event of these talks was the departure of the DUP leader and the deputy leader from the second strand discussions a few days after the

talks' resumption because Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution were not the first points to be dealt with. Evidently, for the DUP, these Articles threatened the Union with Great Britain. However, not all the representatives left the meeting, for two of them remained, not as participants but rather as observers. I believe that the latter hints at the DUP's interest in these talks. Their withdrawal from the discussions was to manifest their discontent and pressure the other parties to accept their demands; this was not the case for the UUP members who attended. Of course, pressure is a common practice when it comes to dialogue in conflict resolution.

The aim of the Unionists in accepting to participate in these talks was, according to Paul Dixon, to "limit the impact of the AIA and the role of the Republic in Northern Ireland's affairs" and to "devolve power to Northern Ireland" (230). Such a perspective was plausible because the Brooke/Mayhew Talks were a direct consequence of the AIA. By signing the said Accord, Britain's purpose was to strengthen relations with the Republic. During Brooke/Mayhew Talks, the UUP's proposals regarding the 'meaningful role' of the Nationalists in the Northern Irish administration displayed openness to explore proportionality within a new political framework but not willingness to embrace complete executive power-sharing (McEvoy 83). It is important to note that these proposals came at the end of the Talks, which implies that the Unionists tried to play their last card. They wanted to save the discussions before the resumption of the Intergovernmental Conference meetings.

Another event characterising Brooke/Mayhew Talks was the May leaks; they concerned an SDLP document. The document suggested a Northern Ireland Executive Commission consisting of three members elected within Northern Ireland and three others appointed by London, Dublin, and the Economic Community (EC) to govern Ulster (Arthur, "Mayhew Talks" 139). This meant not only an Irish dimension but also a European one, which was sufficient to bring about the unhappiness of the Unionists. Another leak occurred in September when the Belfast newspaper wrote about a supposed Irish Government paper stipulating Articles 2 and 3 would not be amended unless Unionists took

the initiative (Melaugh and Lynn). Such a paper proved that trust between the Unionists and the Republic was not prevalent. It is worth noting that leaks during discussions occur for numerous reasons.

Leaks can target public perception. In this case, the leak can emanate from one of the conflicting parties to gain their constituencies' support or influence public sentiment in a manner that aligns with their preferred outcome. It means that the leak is used as a strategy. The different sides can also resort to leaks to put pressure on one of the conflicting parties. By publicising a given information, the leaker can oblige one of the conflicting sides to reconsider their approach or consider other alternatives. Or by undertaking this action, they test the waters before any official decision or document. This way, they can assess the potential repercussions of their suggestions without committing to them. Discrediting opponents can also be one of the aims of using leaks as a strategy. As such, the opponent would be portrayed negatively to weaken their position.

In the context of Ulster, I would say that the leak originated from the Unionists. It is no coincidence that only the Nationalist and Irish government's proposals were subject to leaks. Both the Nationalists and the Irish Government were perceived as the Unionists' enemies. The Unionists hoped to thwart both plans by engaging in such a course. By exposing these plans prematurely, the Unionists aimed at undermining their effectiveness to prevent their implementation, a preemptive strategy, I would say. Any suggestion put forward by the Nationalists and the Irish Government met with resistance from the Unionists. In discussions, each side attempts to impose its proposals and take advantage of the situation, utilising all the available means; the end justifies the means. And evidently, the Unionists used the leak strategy to attain their objective. It is worth noting that the DUP resumed attendance as active participants in the talks when the time to discuss Articles 2 and 3 came, which suggests the importance of the issue for them.

Although different meetings took place regarding the three strands and myriad proposals were made, the Brooke/Mayhew Talks came to an end on 10th November 1992

and were marked by failure. Divergence concerned mainly the internal arrangements for governing Northern Ireland (McEvoy 83), which culminated in a deadlock. It means that, again, power-sharing was the obstacle to conflict resolution. I believe that the Unionists, at this juncture, were not yet ready to embrace the concept of power-sharing and losing power in Northern Ireland. In my opinion, even if the Unionists were willing to share power with the Nationalists, the Republicans would have rebelled. For the latter, the objective was self-determination without British interference, British withdrawal from Ulster, and, ultimately, a reunion with the South. Additionally, Sinn Fein's ideology did not change at the time, even if it was on the verge of being the case. Moreover, Sinn Fein was excluded from the Talk, and it is evident that they would not accept a settlement without being part of it.

Nevertheless, Sinn Fein's moves in 1992 held significant importance. Violence indeed escalated in 1992, but at the same time, Sinn Fein issued a document entitled "Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland." In my opinion, the document's timing suggested Sinn Fein's discontent with its marginalisation, for only constitutional parties attended the Talks. It was the first time that all parties participated. Such a move might be explained as Sinn Fein attempting to secure an invitation to the Brooke/Mayhew Talks. In "Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland," Sinn Fein changed its perspective toward the British. They attempted to convince them to play the role of persuaders, which meant influencing the Unionists to accept the right of self-determination and an all-Ireland settlement. That is, ending the Unionists' veto. Moreover, consent was introduced in this document when it stated that "The elements needed to bring about the conditions for peace are: ...cooperation between the London and Dublin governments to bring this about...with the greatest possible consent." ("Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland"). In my view, Sinn Fein was ready to discuss, and consent indicated willingness to make concessions. They understood that the concession asked was to renounce violence.

Two reasons can explain the change in Sinn Fein's attitude. The first one is the influence of the SDLP following Hume-Adams talks of 1988. The second one is that Sinn Fein understood that they had to change their strategy to be part of the game and have a say

in the affairs, specifically Ireland's future. Changing the policy encompassed blaming Unionists rather than Britain. They attempted to have Britain as an ally instead of as an enemy. It was the second time that Sinn Fein, at least, tried to adapt itself to the situation. The first time was when they adopted the ballot, and the second time was when they turned their attention to the Unionists instead of Britain. This shift in beliefs was not to be the last one; Sinn Fein was going to adopt new ideas.

It is true that no agreement was reached during the Brooke/Mayhew Talks. However, the three strands developed during these Talks were to become the basis of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. During the Brook/Mayhew Talks, the waters were tested. At least, conflicting parties agreed to meet, attractive proposals were made, and some concessions could have been achieved if trust had prevailed. The failure of the Talks reflected the degree of willingness to make concessions, which can be described as almost non-existent. At this juncture, I believe that it was entirely conventional to witness the failure of the different attempts to solve the conflict. In fact, the first attempts to settle the conflict represented the first steps to the peace process. They portrayed the first clashes between the conflicting parties. Furthermore, the Brooke/Mayhew Talks were not inclusive since the Republicans were excluded from the discussions. Inclusiveness in conflict resolution holds paramount importance since it suggests considering all perspectives. No agreement was concluded, but the Brooke/Mayhew Talks were a step forward; Ulster was on the verge of the peace process.

2.4 On the Verge of the Peace Process:

As stated above, the Hume- Adams Talks of 1988 were resumed in 1993, encompassing John Hume and Gerry Adams. They were held on the 10th of April 1993. This date marked the first encounter between the two representatives. Because it was the first one, emphasis will not be put upon it, primarily because no document was issued following the discussion. Their second meeting, held on the 24th of April, resulted in a joint declaration. The most crucial point discussed and agreed upon in their statement was the right to national self-determination (“First joint statement”).

Clearly, the 1993 Talks were the continuation of those of 1988. I believe that Hume, especially after Sinn Fein published “Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland,” was optimistic about making Sinn Fein renounce violence. The First Joint Statement read, “In the circumstances the onus is on those who condemn the option of armed struggle to advance a credible alternative.” In my view, it implies that Sinn Fein was ready to discuss and accept alternatives from those who believed that armed struggle was not productive and to find a settlement to the Irish problem. These words also suggest that they were ready to talk to any party able to suggest a solution, namely the British Government. Thus, this document not only stated the change in Sinn Fein's ideology but was also an invitation to discussion. Moreover, it supports the abovementioned assumption regarding Sinn Fein attempting to secure a place in Talks when they issued “Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland.

In my viewpoint, the detected change in Sinn Fein's ideology prompted Hume to reopen talks with Adams; as talks were resumed, hope subsisted. The right of self-determination was already dealt with in 1988. The means of achieving it were to be the concentration of the SDLP and Sinn Fein's Talks. The Joint Statement added: “We have told each other that we see the task of reaching agreement on a peaceful and democratic accord for all on this island as our primary challenge” (“First Joint Statement”). This statement implies that Sinn Fein was to consider peaceful means to attain their objectives. Concretely, it meant that the IRA had to cease violence. It is crucial to note that in the 1990s, some of the senior Republicans believed that the armed struggle was instead a hindrance to Irish unity (Hennessey, *Northern Ireland Peace*, 78). It is not wrong because hostility towards Protestants and the RUC will not improve the situation or persuade them to become allies against Britain. Ceasing violence would allow the Sinn Feiners to participate in the diverse talks and attempts to reach an agreement amongst the conflicting parties. However, no promise of a permanent ceasefire was made during these talks, and violence continued.

In an interview given to the *Sunday Tribute* on the 4th of July, Gerry Adams said that Sinn Fein were ready to accept joint authority (British and Irish) to achieve the end of

partition (Bew and Gillespie 275). It must be noted, in this context, that the Labour Party proposed joint sovereignty in June 1992; however, the Unionists rejected it. Of course, a joint authority could bring Irish unity in the Unionists' minds, which led to its rebuff from Unionists, even when changes in Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution were being considered. In reality, the Unionists overlooked that the union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland was constitutional.

A critical aspect in this context, the First Joint Statement, which cannot be ignored, is the agreement of both Sinn Fein and SDLP on the importance of the Unionists' consent. It means that the Unionists also had a say in the decision and agreement – self-determination– leading to resolving this conflict, unlike in the past when Sinn Feiners denied them this right. Accordingly, a change can be detected in Sinn Fein's and IRA's standpoint regarding ways to solve the conflict in Northern Ireland and, more importantly, towards the Unionists.

Even though the Hume-Adams Talks of 1993 did not result in a conclusive resolution or substantial talks amongst the different conflicting parties since they were specific to the Nationalists and the Republicans, their significance laid in the transformative impact they had on ideologies, particularly within the Republican group. The transformation in ideology was prominent in “Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland” and Hume-Adams Talks. It must be highlighted that the shift was not sudden, as demonstrated, for it was gradual through different meetings and discussions. That is, the concepts and principles encompassed in the said talks and document remodelled the long-held views, especially for the Republicans, and laid the seeds of the IRA's 1994 ceasefire. In fact, such is the aim of dialogue in conflict resolution attempts.

The Brook/Mayhew Talks, along with Hume Adams', did not provide a solution to the Irish question; however, endeavours were not halted. Those discussions were to be substituted with another alternative between the British and Irish Governments, which found its roots in the previous joint declaration drafts of John Hume and Gerry Adams in

1988. The desire for such a joint statement, the Downing Street Declaration, stemmed from the unsuccessfulness of the interparty talks. Such failure allowed the cooperation between the British (John Major) and the Irish (Albert Reynolds) Governments and led to the Downing Street Declaration on 15th December 1993. In fact, John Major underwent pressure from Bill Clinton to seek a peaceful solution to the conflict in Ulster. Additionally, the post-Cold War period led to an emphasis on resolving conflicts peacefully and emphasising human rights. Nevertheless, such an attempt was not the first of its kind because the 1985 AIA preceded it.

The Downing Street Declaration's roots (The Joint Declaration) rested on John Hume's idea that a joint declaration written by both the British and Irish Governments could make the Republicans cease violence (Hennessey, *Northern Ireland Peace* 75). It is true that "A Strategy for Peace and Justice in Ireland" was Hume's first attempt to write a joint declaration, and some elements found in this document became part of the Downing Street Declaration of 1993. The most crucial component of these features was self-determination and the British claim that Britain had no selfish interest in Ulster. Nevertheless, tribute must also be paid to Gerry Adams, who wrote a different version of Hume's document and to which some modifications were made. The one written by Gerry Adams became known as Hume Adams' document. It must be pointed out that that was not the document refined to attain the Downing Street Declaration's latest version. Adams' version emphasised British withdrawal within a specific period and reunification as the negotiations' outcome.

On the one hand, the Declaration stipulated that reunification of the North and South was possible and that Britain had no objection to it. The latter is encompassed under the fact that self-determination was an absolute right of Ireland's people as a whole. The Declaration was explicit regarding this point when it stipulated, "The British Government agree that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent." This part of the paragraph gave hope for a future united Ireland. However, the condition was consent, which was a commitment to democratic decision-making and subject to the

consent of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland. It is worth noting that Britain, in this way, fulfilled its political obligations towards Ulster in accordance with international laws.

Consent was already a principle stipulated in the Anglo-Irish Agreement in Article 1: The two Governments “affirm that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.” While the DSD and AIA converged regarding self-determination and consent, they diverged in their aims. The purpose of the AIA was to establish a relationship with the Republic of Ireland and cooperation in terms of cross-border relations and security matters, in addition to providing the Republic with a role in Ulster’s affairs. However, the DSD aimed to address the concerns of the two communities in Northern Ireland and present a future potential for inclusive party negotiations. In fact, in conflict resolution, such is the aim of a declaration. It communicates the readiness to engage in the resolution process, implying a longing to work together – multi-party talks. It displays an interest in finding common ground through discussions. Furthermore, a declaration sets the agenda; it sketches the principles and objectives crucial to the dispute settlement. It needs to be stated that both the AIA and DSD intended to solve the conflict in Ulster. Such was Britain's card to keep Ulster within the UK, for the majority in the North was Unionist, and the Unionists would never accept being part of Ireland.

On the other hand, in paragraph 4 of the same Declaration, Britain maintained that it had "no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland." Thomas Hennessey provided an interesting reading of this phrase, stating that if Britain insisted that it had no selfish economic and strategic interests, it acknowledged that it had unselfish economic and strategic interests in Northern Ireland (*Northern Ireland Peace* 70). Nevertheless, a critical reading of the phrase implies that Britain had political interests in the area, such as keeping the integrity of its territory, maintaining security on its soil, and reflecting a positive image on the international scene. However, it also had political obligations towards Northern Ireland since, constitutionally, it was and is still part of the UK. Amongst her political

obligations, she must provide peace and stability to the region and promote equality and justice. Furthermore, the British Government had to internationally honour international agreements regarding protecting human rights in the region.

The Declaration also dealt with the issue of violence. The latter must end permanently to achieve peace. That is, any paramilitary activity had to cease to exist. I believe that the Declaration did not only target the Republican violence but also the Loyalists'. The democratic and, more importantly, peaceful means to achieve the desired goals concerned both sides. Yet, since some Loyalists had already renounced violence in the past and the Unionists participated in the dialogue, the Declaration seems to address instead the Republicans. It was a clear invitation for Sein Fein to join the talks, in due time, held between the British and Irish Governments and even among Ulster's different political parties.

The Unionists' reaction was not unanimous. On the one hand, the DUP rejected the DSD. For them, the British Government held talks with the PIRA, and the Declaration was not an agreement between the British and Irish Governments only, and there laid the betrayal. The latter was evident in Paisley's letter, which was addressed to the media:

As you and your secretary of State lied about your communication with the IRA men of blood, so you have deceived the Ulster people in your talks with Dublin. The Declaration which you and Albert Reynolds sign and make public today, is not between you and him alone. It is a tripartite agreement- Reynolds, the IRA and you. You have sold Ulster to buy of the fiendish republican scum... In the name of those who have fallen in the battle to save our beloved Province, WE PROTEST! (qtd. in Cochrane, *Unionist Politics* 318)

The DUP objected overtly to the said Declaration. The letter displays that trust was not prevalent. I believe that the reason behind their objection rested upon its nationalist language. It is important to highlight that even if the Declaration was not the same document written by Hume and Adams, it kept its essence. It bore Hume's idea and Adams' touch. Besides, it was not that different from the AIA, for it accepted self-determination. In the Joint Statement, the British did not explicitly side with the Unionists, which

constituted a threat to them. For the DUP, it meant that the British opened the door for reunification. However, what they overlooked was 'consent.' Apparently, such assurance was not enough for them, nor was the promise made by the Irish Government to change its constitution to cope with the new changes. On the other hand, the UUP was neutral. They did not endorse the Declaration, nor did they rebuff it. Such a stance could but be interpreted as a betrayal to the DUP, for it diminished Unionists' position as one entity against the DSD.

A poll conducted in the period revealed the gap between Unionists and Nationalists in Northern Ireland. 57% of the former in Ulster rejected the DSD; however, 87% of the latter embraced it. (Dixon 240). It is my belief that such an outcome was not unexpected in a society as complex as Ulster. It must be reiterated that it was a region plagued by a centuries-old conflict. That is, the divergence between the Nationalists and the Unionists evolved to become a cultural facet of the society. In reality, these percentages reflect precisely the orientation of the two communities since their cohabitation. They also suggest alignment in thinking between the parties and followers, which can be interpreted as a matter of support. However, it must be noted that the UUP made an exception.

If the Nationalists endorsed the Declaration, the Republicans were not satisfied with it. It was understandable because it did not meet their demands. Gerry Adams said, "We note that the Downing Street Declaration is not a solution... A solution can only be found as a result of inclusive negotiations." ("Irish Republican Army Ceasefire Statement" par. 4). By negotiations, he probably meant a compromise that would encompass ceasing violence and British withdrawal from Ulster. Adams also stated that the Declaration "does not set any timetable for a united Ireland. It does not commit the people of Northern Ireland to join a united Ireland against their wishes, and it does not establish any arrangement for joint authority" (qtd. in McEvoy 85). The Republicans expected the Declaration to set a date for North and South reunification, commit itself to persuading the Unionists to accept reunion with the Republic of Ireland, or plan for British and Irish joint authority. However,

none of the said expectations were met. The British only committed themselves to "encourage" and "facilitate" an agreement's achievement.

Though rejecting the Declaration, Adams considered it a step forward in the peace process (Hennessey, *Northern Ireland Peace* 84). Indeed, that was a step forward, however, not in the peace process but rather to the peace process. The latter can only be referred to if two elements are present: a significant decline in paramilitary activity and negotiations. Before the ceasefire, the former was absent since in 1994, 348 shots were fired, 222 bombs were planted, and 192 casualties arose from paramilitary attacks (Bew and Gillespie 302). Consequently, the peace process did not start yet. Nevertheless, the ceasing violence statement led to advances in the Irish question and the beginning of a peace process.

Even after rebuffing the Downing Street Declaration, a statement was issued by the PIRA to cease violence. This statement confirms the above assumption, stating that the Provisionals wanted to secure a place in talks. However, I believe that was not the only aim, for they also wanted to be accepted by the non-violent Nationalists in Northern Ireland. A document circulating in 1994 summer, the "Tactical Use of Armed Struggle document" ('TUAS'), read:

To construct an Irish nationalist consensus with international support on the basis of the dynamic contained in the Irish peace initiative. This should aim for: The strongest possible political consensus between the Dublin government, Sinn Féin and the SDLP... and an international dimension in aid of the consensus (mostly U.S.A. and E.U.). (Mallie and McKittrick 686)

It was evident that the Republicans attempted to create a pan-Nationalist alliance, including Belfast, Dublin, Washington, and the EU, which would break British resistance. It is important to highlight that the Irish Americans constituted an essential lobby in the United States of America and could change the game in the Republicans' favour. It is also important to note that the Republicans believed such a lobby could substantially influence the US president, Bill Clinton. Such a powerful alliance would be an alternative to violence. It is worth noting that such a decision did not mean the Republicans surrendered because

their aim was still a United Ireland. In the TUAS, they emphasised that the Republicans' goal did not change when stipulating: "Our goals have not changed. A united 32-county democratic socialist Republic" (Mallie and McKittrick 686). However, the strategy altered since they renounced violence, which means espousing peaceful means.

Sinn Feiners sought international support, mainly from the USA and the EU, to sustain the strong consensus that would entail the Dublin Government, Sinn Fein, and SDLP. In my opinion, the Republicans concluded that they could not attain their objective on their own at the time. The sentence in the document is clear: "Republicans at this time and on their own do not have the strength to achieve the end goal" (Mallie and McKittrick 686). The sentence reiterates that the end goal was still a united Ireland and that they were still pursuing the said objective as it implies that in the future, if ever able to rely again on themselves, they will chase their ultimate aim without the help of the others. From my standpoint, it hinted at a possible return to violence in the future, especially if the ceasefire does not lead to inclusive negotiations as they expected.

The opportunity was seized, and the Republicans issued a statement to cease violence on the 31st of August 1994. However, the declaration did not stipulate that violence would cease permanently. In other words, it suggested that the Republicans would temporally abandon violence to assess what concessions they might obtain in return from the British. However, what the Republicans aspired for in return was stipulated explicitly in their declaration. The statement read, "We reiterate our commitment to our republican objectives" (Mallie and McKittrick 686). One of these objectives has always been an all-united Ireland.

The IRA cease-fire was followed by the Loyalists' abandonment of violence on the 13th of October 1994. A thorough reading of the CLMC ceasefire statement implies that it was an answer to the Republicans' renunciation of violence. The Loyalists committed themselves to renounce violence as long as the Republicans did not resume their attacks. Besides, they emphasised their Union with Britain, stating that the Union with Britain was

safe (“Combined Loyalist Military Command”). Such an affirmation came after an assurance from Britain that the Union with her was secure within the Constitution. The Loyalists’ move was an acceptance of the Republicans’ conduct, an approval, and an embrace of the beginning of a peace process. The least that can be said is that the Loyalists’ declaration facilitated the initiation of a peace process. It is worth noting that not only the Republican violence hindered the start of the process but also the violence perpetuated by the Loyalists.

Though the Loyalists paramilitaries welcomed the IRA ceasefire, the Unionists were suspicious. They could not believe the IRA would maintain its ceasefire for long; their abandonment of violence was interpreted as a ruse. A quite understandable stance for the Unionists expected the British to provide the Republicans with concessions in return, and any concession would be an advantage to the Republicans and a loss to the Unionists. Such a situation would threaten Unionists, and Reverend Ian Paisley expressed it overtly when he said that in all of Northern Ireland’s history since the state establishment, that was the worst crisis to face Protestants (McKittrick and Mcvea 201).

The British were also suspicious at the beginning; the IRA statement was not explicit regarding the permanence of IRA fire cessation. So, they asked the Republicans to include the word “permanent” as they insisted on decommissioning, which is the process of handing over weapons of the paramilitaries. I believe that decommissioning was intended to be a proof of good faith. Decommissioning was made as a demand in October, then in December 1993 by Patrick Mayhew on behalf of the British Government, stating that it would be dealt with after the IRA declaration of ceasefire to allow negotiations to start (Dixon 249). In the end, the British accepted the IRA declaration as it stood, assuming that the ceasefire would last in time. Nevertheless, decommissioning was not an option for the Republicans. It is clear that handing over arms would have meant surrender and not having a defence if the British did not honour their word. As aforementioned, the weapons were the Republicans’ joker, which would be used in the future if needed.

Ceasing violence on both sides, Republicans and Loyalists, was a massive step towards starting the peace process in Northern Ireland. The efforts of John Hume and Gerry Adams culminated in 1994. The ceasefire represented an alignment in dealing with Ulster's conflict but not an alignment in thinking. The IRA statement did not stipulate a permanent cease-fire, hinting that they could resume their campaign of violence at any time if demands were not met. Thus, violence was still a means to achieve an all-united Ireland. The cease-fire broke after two years in 1996. After all, the Unionists were not wrong in thinking that the fire cessation was a ruse.

To conclude the chapter, it can be stated that the escalation of violence at the beginning of the 1970s weighed on the British Government and conflicting parties. The British needed resources to wage war against the Provisionals, which exhausted them, and had obligations towards Ulster. The Provos also needed to have supplies and train their recruits, which was not easy and had an aim to attain. Moreover, the Unionists feared a change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. The bombs and the killings perpetrated in Northern Ireland and Britain made life difficult for people because not only police officers and Provos were targeted, but also the Protestants and Catholics. Moreover, Ireland found itself amid all this chaos, especially since it was part of the UK at a given time and had constitutional claims over Ulster.

Under such circumstances, a solution had to be sought to find an exit from the conflict. With the failure of repression and internment to face the situation, the British Government attempted instead to listen to the Provisionals. As such, secret talks were attempted. Encounters took place between Sinn Fein and British Representatives in 1972. However, the demands of the Provisionals were unacceptable to the British Government. Accordingly, the latter engaged in Accords. Secret talks gave birth to two subsequent accords, the Sunningdale and the Anglo-Irish Agreements. If the former encompassed the British and Irish Governments and the constitutional political parties, the latter concentrated on both Governments. On the one hand, in the Sunningdale Agreement, power-sharing and an Irish dimension were adopted. On the other hand, in the Anglo-Irish Agreement,

cooperation between the two Governments was strengthened. Nevertheless, both foundered to bring an acceptable solution to the conflict mainly due to the Unionists' resistance.

The failure of the Agreements led to initiating dialogue, such as the Hume/Adams Talks –1988, then 1993– and the Brooke/Mayhew Talks. While the Hume/Adams Talks, in which Hume tried to persuade Gerry Adams to espouse self-determination and peaceful means to achieve stability, peace and a reunion with the South, were conducted between the Nationalists and the Republicans, the Brooke/ Mayhew Talks were more inclusive. The latter entailed the British and Irish Governments together with the constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland. During these discussions, the three-strand plan was developed, meaning talks between the British Government and the different political parties in Ulster representing the Nationalists and the Unionists; discussions between the Irish Government and the Nationalists and the Unionists in Ulster to conclude with talks between the two Governments. Unfortunately, these Talks faced the same fate as the previous endeavours.

Nevertheless, the obligations of the British Government towards Northern Ireland made them continue their endeavours to establish peace in the region, especially with the pressure exerted by the United States of America. The British Government issued the Downing Street Declaration with the Irish Government in 1993, which emphasised self-determination, which would be subject to the approval of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland. It called for a ceasefire for more inclusive talks. Even if the Declaration did not have an immediate result on peace in Northern Ireland, it led to the first IRA ceasefire in 1994.

In retrospect, the secret Talks of 1972 were significant, for they allowed exchange between the disputing sides, the British and the Provos, together with the knowledge of each party's demands. They did not result in tangible outcomes in the context that no solution was provided to the conflict; however, they represented the British and Republicans' desire, intention, and willingness to seek solutions. In fact, the secret talks were a means to test the waters. Accordingly, the Sunningdale Agreement was the first

concrete attempt involving the different conflicting parties to solve the dispute in the region. However, the conflicting entities were groping in darkness. The Accord was only an attempt which foundered. The latter resulted from the Unionists' resistance and lack of trust, for they were not ready to share power with the Nationalists. Moreover, the agreement was not inclusive, for it alienated the Republicans. The subsequent Accord, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, was also exclusive because it marginalised not only the Republicans but also the Unionists; it included only the Nationalists. Unlike the Unionists, the latter were eager to cooperate with the Irish Government. In fact, the Anglo-Irish Agreement concerned the cooperation between the British and Irish Governments.

Both fear and desire led to initiating discussions. The former was the outcome of achieving a settlement without being part of it, and the latter resulted from an eagerness to solve the conflict and secure the sought-after result. The Hume/Adams discussions of 1988 and 1993 epitomised both the worry and longing of the Republicans regarding the conflict. The Republicans met the Nationalists to discuss a way out and secure a place in the talks. Such was also the case for the Unionists when attending the Brooke/Mayhew Talks. They feared a settlement would be imposed on them, as in the Sunningdale Agreement, and endeavoured to keep the Union safe. While both talks, Hume/Adams and Brook/ Mayhew, failed to establish peace and justice in Northern Ireland and erase the existing animosities, they shook the Republican ideology, especially those of 1993, and established a framework for the Good Friday Agreement. However, their failure indicated that the Nationalists and the Unionists were not yet ready to cooperate.

The pressure on the Republicans was felt when the Downing Street Declaration was issued. A declaration means commitment, and the latter prompted the Republicans to finally cease violence in 1994, allowing the peace process to start. In fact, the Declaration encompassed the concerns of the Nationalists and Unionists without those of the Republicans, as it included an invitation to join the peaceful talks that would be held shortly. Such an opportunity could not be missed, and the Republicans seized it. In other words, the

Downing Street Declaration and the 1994 ceasefire represented the verge of the peace process; they paved the way for initiating the peace process in Northern Ireland.

3 Chapter Three: Initiating the Peace Process in Northern Ireland

Secret talks and endeavours between 1971 and 1994 did not generate favourable results. The inability to reach a compromise amongst the conflicting parties and, consequently, an agreement reflected the depth of the conflict and polarisation in Northern Ireland. It is well established that the “Troubles” in Ulster accentuated the division between the two co-existing communities, making their reconciliation difficult. In fact, the different dimensions of the dispute made the conflict more complicated. However, even if the various attempts undertaken prior to 1994 did not bear fruit, they established a solid foundation for initiating the peace process in Northern Ireland.

In this context, it is essential to look at the Republicans’ ceasefire and the manner in which it was attained after decades of violence. It is noteworthy that without the 1994 fire cessation, no peace process would have seen the dawn. Moreover, no agreement would have been reached without the US mediation. Accordingly, the chapter looks at the US involvement in the Irish peace process and the consequences of their intervention. As a matter of fact, greater efforts had to be undertaken to make the process jumpstart and move forward. Help was more desirable during this critical period, and it came from the US. The Irish Americans living in the States played an essential role in involving the US as a mediator in the Irish conflict.

The launch of the peace process in Ulster needed a shove. Mediation was an essential component of its thrust. In Conflict Resolution theory, mediation is defined as “the intervention of a third party; it is a voluntary process in which the parties retain control over the outcome (pure mediation), although it is sometimes combined with positive and negative inducements” (Ramsbotham et al. 32). The definition suggests the involvement of a party which is unrelated to the conflict. Besides, according to the said description, the third party cannot impose any outcome on the conflicting parties. Mediation aims to assist these parties in finding a mutual understanding and a settlement to the persistent conflict and, most importantly, to counteract the parties’ tendency towards lose-win approaches to

conflict resolution. Additionally, enticements can be used to propel the parties to an arrangement. The chapter also considers the outcome of the IRA ceasefire. Did it succeed in permitting the inclusive talks to take place? If not, what were the suggested solutions to overcome the hurdles and make the parties convene to discuss a settlement?

3.1 The First IRA Ceasefire (1994):

As stipulated in the previous chapter, the IRA announced a cease-fire in 1994. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that this announcement came without previous secret negotiations. It is also dubious that the Republicans agreed to renounce violence without having obtained compensation in return. Gerry Adams would have never accepted relinquishing violence without some guarantees as suspicious of the British as he was. In fact, what was astonishing in the 1994 ceasefire was that the supposed negotiations did not occur between the Republicans and the British Government but instead between the former and the Irish Americans. The latter played an important role in shaping American policy toward the Irish conflict by intervening in the 1992 election. Some authors, such as Tim Pat Coogan, suggested that the Irish Americans were not behind Bill Clinton's⁷³ involvement in the Irish dispute (401).

Coogan alluded that Clinton appealed to such a strategy, intervening⁷⁴ in Northern Ireland as part of his foreign policy to win over "angry white males" who voted for George Bush in the 1992 election using the Irish Americans (401). His assertions indicate that Clinton was the one who appealed to the Irish Americans and used them. It was not entirely wrong, but not entirely true either. The Irish Americans sought to avail themselves of Clinton, and of course, in return, Clinton exploited the opportunity, using it for personal gain. In such a situation, two objectives were simultaneously attained: Clinton's use of

⁷³ Bill Clinton (1946-) was born in Arkansas and developed an interest in Northern Ireland affairs while being a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford in 1968. In 1976 he was elected attorney general of Arkansas and in 1978 governor of the state to become the Democratic Party leader then the president of the United States of America in 1992. Clinton played an important role in the Irish peace process, especially when he granted Gerry Adams a visa and appointed George Mitchell as the American economic envoy in December 1994. He supported Belfast Agreement and encouraged the parties to implement it.

⁷⁴ The word intervention in this context does not bear the definition of coercive intervention in the internal affairs of a state.

Ulster in foreign policy and the Irish Americans' use of him to seek support for Northern Ireland through involving him. The Irish Americans played a role in the 1994 IRA ceasefire and subsequent involvement.

In fact, the Irish Americans were behind President Bill Clinton's involvement in the Northern Ireland conflict resolution and the ceasefire declared by the Republicans in August 1994. Their interest in Clinton as a candidate for the 1992 US election was in New York the same year. At the time, Bush was the US president and intended to run for another term. Nevertheless, Bush had not to be reelected for the Irish Americans because he would not be of great help in the Irish dispute. Besides, good relations connected him to the Prime Minister, John Major, and I believe there was little chance he would accept to compromise this special relationship. For this reason, another candidate had to be sought to serve their interests. The choice fell on Bill Clinton, especially since the latter had excellent knowledge regarding Northern Ireland. It must be highlighted that Clinton was a student at Oxford when the Troubles emerged. It meant that he was an eyewitness to the violence at the time, explaining his knowledge. In my opinion, this could make him more susceptible to interfering in the Irish conflict. Thus, the Irish Americans' selection of the candidate was carefully made.

Bill Clinton would be a suitable candidate for the Irish Americans to achieve their aim of involving the US in the Irish dispute. Paul O'Dwyer, the then Boston mayor, when he met Clinton in September 1992, commented that "If this man is elected he'll turn the Irish issue upside down" (qtd. in O'Dowd 73). I cannot agree more with O'Dowd because so was the outcome. Clinton played a crucial role in the Irish dispute resolution through his successive terms, especially the first and second. O'Dwyer's words reflected the Irish Americans' faith in Bill Clinton, and they were not wrong. However, Andrew J. Wilson, in his "The Clinton Administration, Sinn Féin, and the Northern Ireland Peace Process," exaggerated in idealising the Americans when he claimed that US intervention in the Irish conflict stemmed from their belief that the United States could fulfil a catalytic role in resolving the dispute (24). As such, Wilson considered the USA an altruistic country and

suggested that Clinton did not intend to exploit the opportunity. It cannot be imagined that US intervention was motivated by pure altruism, and history proves it.

Establishing a strategy to involve Clinton in Ulster's conflict took shape in a group labelled the Irish Americans for Clinton. The latter saw its birth in January 1992 in New York, and, as its name indicates, it aimed to support Clinton's election. Evidently, New York was not randomly chosen because it happened that Jerry Brown defeated Bill Clinton in Connecticut and had to win the New York primary. Under such defeat, the Irish Americans seized the opportunity. It proves that their choice was not random. So, from my perspective, it was at that moment that a deal was made between the Irish Americans and Bill Clinton. If ever the Irish Americans would support him, he would include the Irish conflict in his agenda, and so was it. The proof is that in October 1992, Bill Clinton stated his position on Ireland. Accordingly, he supported the MacBride Principles⁷⁵ and promised the appointment of a special envoy. Nevertheless, the latter took time to materialise. It can be concluded that the US was to be officially involved in the Irish conflict.

As noted, the Irish Americans were behind Clinton's involvement in the Irish conflict. A deal was indeed made between the two sides, but I believe that Clinton had more to win. In addition to Irish-America's support in the elections, his involvement would have

⁷⁵ The MacBride Principles were launched on 4th October 1984, regarding fair employment in Northern Ireland. These Principles encompass the following:

1. Increasing the representation of individuals from under-represented religious groups in the workforce including managerial, supervisory, administrative, clerical and technical jobs.
2. Adequate security for the protection of minority employees both at the workplace and while travelling to and from work.
3. The banning of provocative religious or political emblems from the workplace.
4. All job openings should be advertised publicly, and special recruitment efforts made to attract applicants from under-represented religious groups.
5. Layoff, recall and determination procedures should not in practice favour a particular religious group.
6. Job reservations, apprenticeship restrictions and differential employment criteria that discriminate on the basis of religion should be abolished.
7. The development of training programmes that will prepare substantial numbers of current minority employees for skilled jobs, including the expansion of existing programmes and the creation of new programmes to train, upgrade and improve the skills of minority employees.
8. The establishment of procedures to assess, identify and actively recruit minority employees with potential for further advancement.
9. The appointment of a senior management staff member to oversee the company's affirmative action efforts and the setting up of timetables to carry out affirmative action principles.

made him popular. It is essential to note that more than forty million Irish Americans lived in the US. Moreover, foreign policy and economy could be used to enhance the number of his electors. Evidently, if Clinton succeeds in resolving the conflict, that will increase his popularity and augment his reelection chances. Of course, the aim of any candidate is to be elected and reelected. For the latter reason, the economy was also important. From the perspective of the Americans, Ireland could be used for investment.

The proof is that an inter-department committee chaired by Nancy Soderberg⁷⁶ was set up to consider economic initiatives, and by the end of 1994, a delegation of US business interests was led to an Ulster Investment Conference by US Commerce Secretary Ron Brown. Evidently, both the Committee and the delegation reflected US economic interest in Northern Ireland. The US already had investments in North and South Ireland, but, in my perspective, a stable Ulster would provide better opportunities for more investment. If ever peace prevailed, the economy would flourish, especially since the UK and the Republic of Ireland were European Union members. It meant that the US could benefit from the prosperity and economic growth engendered by EU membership. In 1966, when the violence began to resume, the White House issued a warning, indicating that the anticipated economic benefits arising from the peace process in Northern Ireland were about to be jeopardised (“White House warns”), proving the above assumption.

It is worth noting that Irish America’s influence on the Irish conflict and US policy was not a novel phenomenon. Already in the 1970s, the Irish Americans were active and organised themselves to support the Nationalists in Northern Ireland. For instance, in 1970, the Irish Northern Aid Committee, known as Noraid, was established and supported the armed struggle of the Republicans in Northern Ireland. Another organisation was the National Caucus (INC), founded in 1974, which had a significant influence on adopting the McBride principles despite the British Government and Unionists' opposition. Such success

⁷⁶ Nancy Soderberg (1958-) was born in the US. An American foreign policy strategist who has served on four presidential campaigns. She has a deep understanding of policy-making and negotiations at the highest levels of government and the United Nations. She has promoted democracy and conflict resolution worldwide. Ambassador Soderberg has participated in the promotion of peace in Northern Ireland during Clinton’s presidency.

reflected the impact of Irish American civil society on Ulster, which even shaped US policy towards the conflict.

The Americans for a New Irish Agenda (ANIA), which happened to be another organisation supporting the Republicans, played an essential role in the IRA ceasefire. It must be noted that delegations from ANIA travelled twice to Ireland (Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland) in May and then September 1993, and on both occasions, the IRA ceased fire without announcing it. In reality, Niall O'Dowd⁷⁷ was the originator of the symbolic ceasefire idea in Northern Ireland as an incentive to prompt the US to intervene, and his vision was welcomed by the Republicans (O'Dowd 74). Obviously, the said fire cessation was simmered between the IRA and the Irish Americans in the previous months, for it could not be a coincidence.

Accordingly, I regard it as accurate that a connection between the Irish Americans and the Republicans existed. I contend that the latter wanted to convey to the US through these unannounced cessations of fire that renouncing violence was possible and wanted to give ANIA weight in the eyes of Clinton. Moreover, contact would be made through it. According to Feargal Cochrane, the delegation's purpose was to discuss the feasibility of an eventual ceasefire (*Northern Ireland: Fragile Peace* 159).

It must be noted that US involvement was not always under Irish American pressure. These Irish Americans could not influence the American decision to become involved in Northern Ireland affairs prior to the 1990s because they were not united. Disagreement prevailed between a fraction believing that Sinn Fein was to be supported and a section thinking that the conflict should be left to the British and Irish Governments (O'Dowd 68). Disagreement within the same group always culminates in its failure and impacts the causes they defend, influencing the objectives set to attain. Moreover, US intervention in Northern

⁷⁷ Niall O'Dowd (1953-) was born in Ireland. An Irish American journalist and author who participated in the negotiations leading to the signature of the Good Friday Agreement. He is the founder of the Irish Voice newspaper and the Irish America magazine in New York along with the Irish Central, which is a global Irish internet website.

Ireland was not novel. Before Bill Clinton, the different administrations showed some interest in the Northern Irish conflict.

The most obvious one was the Reagan administration. It is well established that an excellent relationship subsisted between Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and that he exercised influence in the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the previous governments' interest in Northern Ireland was not as crucial as Clinton's, as it must be highlighted that Clinton's interest in Northern Ireland was not personal. During the Troubles' first years, his stay at Oxford permeated him but not to the extent of intervening in the Irish conflict. Simply put, even if Bill Clinton had some good reasons to be involved in the Irish conflict, the most crucial motive for his intervention was the Irish Americans.

Nevertheless, Bill Clinton failed to fulfil his commitments when he became the US president in 1992. The envoy question was shelved at the Irish Government's demand (O'Dowd 74). If the Americans yielded to the Irish request, it signified good relations between them. I believe that the impetus behind such a request was the ongoing discussions between Irish MP Albert Reynolds and John Major to find a solution to the conflict, especially since the Downing Street Declaration⁷⁸ was issued shortly after. In fact, the negotiations between the two Prime Ministers led to the joint Downing Street Declaration. Nonetheless, Clinton's conduct towards the Northern Irish conflict, shelving the envoy issue, prompted the Irish Americans to seek an alternative. They could have either lobbied for a visa to Adams or the American envoy to Northern Ireland, and of course, the choice fell on the former, which was an American concession to the Republicans.

A concession necessitates a reciprocation; the Americans' compromises materialised in the form of a visa acceptance to Gerry Adams. As a matter of fact, the Irish Americans successfully arranged his entry into the US. Some influential Irish American politicians,

⁷⁸ The Downing Street Declaration was issued in 1993 and strengthened the relationship between the English and Irish Governments. It emphasised the status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom and made any change subject to the consent of the majority in Northern Ireland. Moreover, it hinted at future talks with Sinn Féin if they renounce violence.

such as Edward Kennedy and Bruce Morrison, lobbied for Adams' visa; however, providing him with a visa was difficult. Adams was even bestowed with a legitimate reason to set foot on American soil when Bill Flynn⁷⁹, the Irish American chairman of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, invited him (Arthur, *Special Relationships* 157) together with the other Unionist political leaders in Northern Ireland to address the Committee. That would be a neutral soil on which the conflicting political parties would meet to appease the existing tensions.

It is essential to state that the visa was issued to Adams despite British and Unionists' opposition. At first glance, both seemed to disagree with the Americans' decision. However, from my perspective, they disagreed most with Adams in the States. For the Unionists, such an eventuality would potentially usher in new opportunities within the context of the peace process, which was not in their best interest. From my point of view, it would be seen by the British as an internationalisation of the dispute. It must also be noted that even the Irish Government, the Taoiseach Albert Reynolds, was favourable to US interference in the Northern Irish conflict (MacGinty 32). Granting Adams entry to the United States suggested a shift in the American perception of him. In other words, he was no longer considered a terrorist by the Americans. Providing Adams with a visa altered the Republicans' image in the eyes of the world. Of course, it could only be beneficial for the Party. Moreover, accepting Adams' visit meant that the US, Bill Clinton, was about to be deeply engaged in Northern Ireland's affairs and, most importantly, in British matters.

In my view, Adams' visit to the United States impacted the ceasefire decision. His entry to American soil mobilised the efforts of many people at the government level, who used their influence to issue him the visa. For this reason, Adams had to offer a concession in return to make the peace process jumpstart; otherwise, these people's efforts would have

⁷⁹ Bill Flynn with the real name as William J Flynn (1926- 2018) was born in New York. He studied for the priesthood after leaving school but then left to graduate from Fordham University in economics. An Irish American businessman who was a "giant of Irish America and a key figure in US support for peace on the island of Ireland." Along with Niall O'Dowd and Bruce Morrison, he persuaded the State Department to grant a visa to Gerry Adams. He was selected by Irish America magazine as one of the greatest Irish Americans of the century.

been in vain. The proof is that seven months later, the IRA announced the ceasefire. Adams' acceptance to relinquish violence found ground in the Republicans' belief that Bill Clinton could secure a settlement with Britain favourable to the Republicans through the Irish Americans' power (Wilson 32). Wilson's opinion was accurate, especially with the international events, the end of the Cold War. That is, the Republicans endeavoured to exert pressure on Britain through international channels, and who could be more effective than the United States? In fact, after the Cold War, the US was perceived as the supreme power; besides, it has always had good relations with the British Government. For Adams and the Republicans, the US could pressure Britain diplomatically for concessions and an eventual settlement for the Irish conflict in their favour.

In reality, the entry of Adams to the States was very significant to the peace process in Northern Ireland. I can assert that the conflict attained an international dimension. Internationalising a dispute is a common practice. The aim is to bring global attention to the conflict, which would prompt the international community to intervene to facilitate negotiations, exert pressure on one of the conflicting parties, obtain the support of the international community, build alliances, and establish mechanisms for accountability to take advantage of international agreements and declarations, such as the European Convention of Human Rights. It must be highlighted that it was not the first time internationalising the conflict was attempted in Northern Ireland.

During the Troubles, the issue was taken to the streets to attract international attention and why not support. The Republicans considered themselves victims of the British colonisation and, as such, could gain the sympathy of the US. Thus, the internationalisation of the conflict was an efficient weapon to put pressure on Britain. Moreover, in my view, Adams' visit strengthened his position in the eyes of his supporters, especially the IRA. Consequently, the Republicans would abide by his decisions regarding a permanent ceasefire.

It must be highlighted that, for the Irish Americans, Adams' visa to the US was the first test of Clinton's willingness to engage concretely in the Irish conflict (MacGinty 36). However, while the Irish Americans' support emanated from their cultural ties, this was not the driving force for Bill Clinton. The latter saw the Irish conflict as an opportunity to seize while being thoughtless about the British reaction.

The decision of the United States to intervene in British affairs was essentially ascribed to the friendly relationship between the two Governments (Wilson 36). It must be noted that Northern Ireland was and is still constitutionally part of the UK, and US involvement would have been interpreted as an intrusion into British internal concerns. Wilson's opinion was not erroneous if allusion was made to the pre-Cold War period. It was true that pre-Clinton presidents avoided meddling in British matters because of the special relationship between them and common interests that could have been jeopardised. However, I believe that the US President, Bill Clinton, was careless about the damage such interference could engender in Anglo-American relations. In reality, the end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a new era where the US did not need allies. During the Second World War, alliances were essential to fight Germany and contain Communism. With Germany's defeat and the USSR's dissolution, the USA was no longer under danger or threat. It explained the States' lack of interest in strengthening relations with the UK and its disregard concerning the British reaction in case of interference. Exceptions encompassed domains where both countries had to cooperate for their interests, like defence policy, security, and terrorism (Renwick 276).

I believe that the post-Cold War era was not the only reason behind the deterioration of the relations between the US and the UK. In fact, the relationship between the two Governments went from a strong 'special relationship,' as during Thatcher and Reagan, to a less special or limited one because of Britain's conduct during the 1992 election. Throughout the 1992 US presidential election, two British Conservatives, Sir John Lacy and Mark Fullbrook, had assisted Bush's reelection. Moreover, the Home Office dug into Clinton's past when he was an Oxford student. They hoped to unearth some evidence of

Clinton's avoidance of conscription in the Vietnam War (Wilson 34). Such behaviour suggested clear support for Bush and an attempt to tarnish Clinton's image in the eyes of the electors. In other words, it was evident that the British Government did not want Clinton in office. Thus, the abovementioned behaviours explained the deteriorating relationship between Clinton and Major. Nevertheless, it did not mean that both Governments became enemies. Furthermore, after the US involvement, John Major's participation in the peace process was an implicit acceptance of US interference in the conflict resolution, which had reached a stagnant point.

The United States' interference was not exclusive; it did not exclude Britain from the conflict resolution nor condemn it. Condemning it would have been the straw that would have broken the camel's back for Britain. On the contrary, the US approach was inclusive, for it embraced Britain and the Republicans. Inclusiveness aims to consider the various perspectives and concerns to achieve a more equitable peace agreement. It needs to be highlighted that a successful conflict resolution process must include stakeholders in the conflict and marginalised groups. Moreover, the United States had a history of successful mediation before the Irish conflict resolution, such as the Central America Peace Process⁸⁰ and the Camp David Accords⁸¹. However, it must be highlighted that the US was not a causal factor. The peace process in Northern Ireland was already in the making, and the US intervention was only propitious, especially after the Hume-Adams Talks and the Downing Street Declaration. The peace process foundations were already laid, and the US played a pivotal role in its development and even success. US mediation continued until the Good Friday Agreement signature and even during its implementation.

American involvement in the Northern Ireland conflict was explicit and desired by the Irish and the Republicans. In conflict resolution, one of the conflicting parties can be interested in mediation and work to attain it, and the Republicans exemplify it. However,

⁸⁰ The Central America Peace Process which took place in the 1980s in central America. The mediation of the US facilitated the ending of the conflict particularly between El Salvador and Nicaragua.

⁸¹ The Camp David Accords took place in 1976 Between Egypt and Israel in which President Jimmy Carter played a pivotal role in mediating the peace talks, resulting in a peace agreement.

as mentioned above, the Nationalists, SDLP, also wanted to include the European Union when they suggested a representative from the EU, which did not happen, of course. Nevertheless, it makes one think of the EU's impact on the process. In fact, its influence was evident since the EU injected £400 million into the peace process in Ulster (Harris 203), which directly impacted the process. The European Union also indirectly impacted the process since the Republic's membership in the Organisation transformed it.

In this context, the notion of sovereignty must be dealt with, especially after the signature of the Maastricht Treaty. The latter was signed in 1992 and made EU members closer since it paved the way for the eurozone; it introduced European citizenship. Jonathan Stevenson described such closeness as the erosion and the dilution of sovereignty (41). Accordingly, with the closeness engendered by the Maastricht Treaty, the member states had to cede more of their sovereignty to Brussels, and the idea was more or less accepted. Hence, the definition of sovereignty changed to become looser.

The EEC/EU integration had an essential impact on the Republic of Ireland. As a colonised country, Ireland suffered from a sovereignty complex even after its independence (Harris 211). Harris meant that the Republic felt inferior to Britain, for it had been under its authority for centuries. Thus, deprived of their sovereignty, the Irish waged war to win their independence. In 1921, the 26 counties became the Free State to adopt then the name of the Republic of Ireland in 1949. A republic implied adopting a different political system from that of the coloniser. Embracing another political system embodied the sovereignty complex. Moreover, even with the 26 countries' independence, the Free State remained dependent on the British Government, especially in terms of economy. In fact, it relied heavily on trade with the UK, and most of its exports, including agricultural products, went to the UK.

From my standpoint, EEC membership for the Republic of Ireland expressed full sovereignty. Besides, it suggested that the Irish Government was equal to the British Government since it could join the European organisation on conditions and terms identical

to those of the United Kingdom. Moreover, the Irish benefited from the Organisation by entering the EEC, indicating that economic reliance on Britain diminished. Within two years of membership, Ireland made a net profit of about £106 million (Browne 425). The economic development culminated in the Celtic Tiger⁸² as a member of the EU. Thus, I believe that the Republic's membership in the EEC/EU allowed it to overcome the British economic dependence and the sovereignty complex, leading to an acquisition of confidence. Basically, the most crucial point was that the Organisations' membership changed the Republic's viewpoint on sovereignty, loosening it. The new constitutional Articles 2 and 3 epitomised the latter, which defined Irishness not in terms of geography but rather of nationality. Therefore, the EU impacted the peace process when it prompted the Republic of Ireland to cooperate with the UK and cede claims over Ulster. However, it must be noted that the EU did not play the role of the mediator, unlike the USA.

Fen Osler Hampson believes that the success or failure of a peace process is related to the international community when he wrote that: "... external third-party involvement in all phases of the peace process does indeed matter to political outcomes, and that success and failure are indeed linked to the quality and level of support given by third parties to the peace process" (210). At some point, that must be true; however, it must be highlighted that no peace process can be started without the conflicting parties' willingness to engage in peace. This motivation is a foundational element in Conflict Resolution theory. Accepting to come to negotiations, engage in dialogues, and seek acceptable solutions is a prerequisite for the success of conflict resolution. Nevertheless, depending on interests and grievances, the degree of willingness can vary among the disputing parties. In the case of the Irish conflict, the conflicting parties sought a settlement for various reasons. Be it temporary or permanent, peace was a prerequisite after years of war. At least, this appeared to be the prevailing situation, for peace indeed was sought but not as a primary objective for all the

⁸² The nickname for Ireland during the economic boom between 1995 and 2007. The Irish economy grew at an average annual rate of 9.4% between 1995 and 2000, and between 1987 and 2007, Ireland's GDP grew by 229%.

parties. However, the least that could be said about the US involvement was that it was of quality.

Hampson went even further and condemned the peace processes that lacked international intervention, maintaining that they were bound to fail. Indeed, the Northern Ireland peace process would have never seen success without US intervention throughout the whole process. Nevertheless, some conflicts could not be resolved even with international interference, and the best example is the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. The latter puts Hampson's assertion into question. It is crucial to note that in the Northern Ireland conflict, the role of the international actor, which happened to be the United States, was to facilitate dialogue, convene discussions, chair talks, suggest ideas, interpret statements, and investigate compromises.

The Irish Americans succeeded in bringing the United States into the Irish conflict, which was the missing element toward resolving it. As a result of US intervention, Bill Clinton appointed George Mitchell⁸³ as the American envoy to Northern Ireland in December 1994. His appointment, George Mitchell, and establishment of the International Committee reflected the depth of the United States' involvement in the Irish conflict. Clinton's promise had just been honoured. His interest in the Irish dispute went further when he visited Northern Ireland in November 1995. That is, the Irish Americans were not only behind the IRA ceasefire but also behind the US mediation in the Northern Ireland conflict.

⁸³ George Mitchell (1933-) was a United States Democratic party politician. From a working-class background, he went to university and graduated as a lawyer. He was appointed to the Senate as a replacement for Senator Edmund Muskie but was later elected to the U.S. Senate for Maine in 1980. He served as a senator for 15 years. Bill Clinton, the then US president made of him the American economic envoy to Ireland in 1994 to chair one year later the international body established to deal with the issue of the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. Mitchell played an important role in the Northern Irish peace process and for that reason, in 1998, he was awarded an honorary knighthood. His fruitful work in Ulster and experience led him to be appointed as the chairman of a United Nations commission aimed at making progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

3.2 The First Test of the Peace Process (1994-1996):

With the 1994 paramilitaries, the IRA, and the Combined Loyalist Military Command, ceasefire, a new political situation saw the dawn. Violence renunciation suggested that the IRA would no longer be excluded from the forthcoming talks. For this reason, both the British and Irish governments, on the 17th of February 1995, established the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation and published Frameworks for the future. The Forum of Peace and Reconciliation was intended to occur in October 1994. It aimed to welcome the Republicans into politics. However, a crisis happened when the IRA was suspected of killing Frank Kerr⁸⁴ during this period. Fortunately, it did not impact the Forum, which suggested the Irish willingness and commitment to the process. In reality, the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation was considered the first attempt to welcome the IRA into a peace process where peaceful means were prerequisites.

In fact, it was the Taoiseach Albert Reynolds who established the Forum. I believe that he aspired to facilitate the Republicans' involvement in democratic politics, especially when a ceasefire was espoused. The Forum opened in Dublin Castle on the 28th of October 1994, just after the IRA Declaration. Thus, it was a direct consequence of IRA violence renunciation and the first attempt to welcome the Republicans to politics. It received submissions from different political parties and organisations. Nevertheless, it was boycotted by the Unionist parties. From my perspective, the boycott can be attributed to Sinn Fein's participation in the Forum. It can be explained as the Unionists' unreadiness to engage in dialogue with their enemy, along with exerting pressure on the Republicans for decommissioning.

I can state that the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation start was not promising. Genuinely, the IRA ceasefire did not have the aspired consequence, for the British and the Unionists were still hostile to the Republicans. Their conduct indicated that the path toward attaining an accord would be protracted. Not attending the Forum was an explicit message of a refusal to deal or discuss with the Republicans. It suggested that the Unionists had other

⁸⁴ A postal worker who was shot in the neck.

demands apart from the ceasefire. If the latter was enough, they would have joined the Forum and welcomed the Republicans. In fact, the attention of the Forum was directed toward the Republicans, for its objective was to drive them away from violence and entice them to espouse peaceful and democratic means. It indicated that emphasis was not drawn towards the Unionists and Loyalists, suggesting that the Irish Government took the British and the Unionists' participation in the Forum for granted. It obviously was not the case.

The Framework Documents encompassed, in reality, two official papers. The first was British, entitled “A Framework for Accountable Government in Northern Ireland,” and the second was Anglo-Irish under the name of “New Framework for Agreement.” The British paper introduced the British Government's proposals for internal political structures. The suggestions included a ninety-member assembly elected by proportional representation and an executive Panel as a kind of collective presidency of ‘probably’ three members. Moreover, in Annex A, the Document emphasised Northern Ireland’s status as part of the United Kingdom and the majority’s consent in Ulster regarding union with the Republic of Ireland (“The Framework Documents - A Framework for Accountable Government” par. 5), together with Britain's role, as confined in “facilitating” and “encouraging” a settlement (par.1). The Framework also mentioned a new Intergovernmental Conference establishment under a new agreement (par. 10).

That is, the British Framework highlighted the importance of dealing with the different dimensions of the conflict and with the constitutional political parties. The former referred to the relationship within Northern Ireland, the one between North and South (Northern Ireland and the Republic), along with the connection between Britain and the Republic of Ireland. The latter made reference to the participation of constitutional parties in the forthcoming talks to attain an agreement. Accordingly, those who adopted peaceful means to achieve their aims were welcomed to contribute to future discussions. It implied that the Republicans were allowed to participate in future talks related to the Northern Irish settlement since they ceased violence in August 1994. In reality, the suggestions made by the British in the Framework were but a reiteration of precedent propositions. The

aforementioned proposals were already made in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Brooke/Mayhew Talks, and the Downing Street Declaration.

The second Framework Document, representing both governments, referred to a set of issues. It insisted on self-determination and majority consent in Ulster. It suggested that the decision to remain part of the UK or join the Republic of Ireland was left to Northern Ireland's majority. This paper also emphasised the relations between North and South (Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland) and East/West (British and Irish Governments). For the former, the Document proposed a North-South body to which no name was given and which would perform consultative, harmonising, and executive functions. For the latter, it proposed an Intergovernmental Conference. Moreover, in the said paper, the Irish Government agreed to make constitutional changes regarding Articles 2 and 3.

I believe that the Anglo-Irish Framework Document was based on the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The essential point regarding East/West relations was that the Intergovernmental Conference would not cease to exist if ever devolved government did not succeed and a return to Home Rule was decided ("The Framework Documents - A New Framework for Agreement" par. 47). Maintaining the Intergovernmental Conference was obviously a clear threat to the Unionists. In the case of the collapse of Northern Ireland institutions and devolution failure, the Intergovernmental Conference would not founder. It would subsist regardless of the situation. Such a scenario meant the subsistence of the vehicle towards an all-Ireland settlement from the Unionists' perspective.

The above Document provided the North/South body with various functions in some areas, inter alia, culture and heritage. When, in 1974, crossborder bodies regarding an all-Ireland were discussed, a senior official of the Northern Ireland civil service stated that "For a government to hand over its functions in respect to arts and culture to some international authority would be to abdicate its basic responsibility" (qtd. in O'Toole par. 11). What has been noted by the senior official can be applied to the North/South body

suggested by both the British and Irish Governments. In this Framework, the British Government agreed to hand over some of its functions regarding culture to an international authority, the Republic of Ireland, which was deemed a refusal to perform its primary responsibility since Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom as it could be considered as a softening position regarding the future of Ulster, which goes hand in hand with the consent principle. Such an interpretation could but enhance the Unionists' fears.

In the joint Framework addressing the North/South relations, the suggested body was not named, a detail that captures the reader's attention. This body could only be the Council of Ireland, according to O'Leary (868). In reality, his appellation of the body could but be genuine. The body concerned North/South relations, that is, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with executive and harmonising or consultative functions. It reminds one of the already established Council of Ireland in the Sunningdale Agreement, which the Unionists criticised and rebuffed, believing it to be the way to a united Ireland. For such a reason, I think that both Governments refrained from assigning a name to it so as not to arouse Unionists' suspicion and avert' having it rejected.

The Framework Documents were described as rather green in tone by G. K. Peatling (60). It is for this reason that I believe that John Major attempted to reassure the Unionists when, in the House of Commons, he stipulated that a triple safeguard protected the Unionists in Northern Ireland because political support of parties would be needed in case of any proposal; majority approval would be applied through a referendum, and legislation would go through Westminster Parliament (House of Commons, 22 Feb 1995, vol. 255, col. 358). Accordingly, Major endeavoured to bestow guarantees to both sides, the Nationalists and the Unionists. He tried to safeguard the minority's rights, the Nationalists, in Northern Ireland and, at the same time, to protect the position of the Unionists. Such a balance was not evidently achieved in divided societies.

I consider the British and Anglo-Irish Documents a fresh beginning in a new era where peaceful methods were adopted. However, a thorough reading of the documents

permitted me to state that they favoured the Nationalists, mainly when the British document referred to the Panel. This Panel would “probably” consist of three members, unlike the proposition made by the SDLP, which recommended three representatives from the British and Irish governments together with the European Union and three representatives from Ulster as elected members. British proposal suggested a refusal of external interference because the Northern Irish conflict was deemed an internal affair, a British struggle. Besides, external intrusion would lead to Unionists’ rebuff of the proposal.

As mentioned above, I believe that the British Framework Document alleviated the concerns of the Nationalists. On the one hand, it referred to a “Panel” of three members only. According to Brendan O’Leary, one would be from the DUP, the second from UUP, and the third one from the SDLP, for it would be based on the then-present electoral strength (864). It indicated that Sinn Fein would be excluded from the “Panel,” though they had declared a ceasefire in August 1994. However, the word “probably” in the text stated the possibility of changing the number (864), favouring the Republicans. Moreover, in the suggested “Panel,” decisions would be unanimous according to the Framework. If ever so, it meant that the SDLP, as Nationalists’ representatives in Northern Ireland, would have the right to veto any decision. On the other hand, the checks and balances regarding the Assembly’s job and its relationship with the Panel proposed in the Framework aimed to protect the Nationalist minority in Northern Ireland (866). The conflicting parties, Unionists and Nationalists, could interpret this point differently. The issue of the Panel was ambiguous.

In reality, reactions to the Frameworks were predictable. The Nationalists, embodied in the SDLP, endorsed the Framework Documents and agreed to seek peace according to their terms. That was also the case with the Republicans. They welcomed the Framework Documents. In his book, *A Farther Shore*, Gerry Adams wrote, “I welcomed the Document” (196). From my perspective, such a proposal could not be rebuffed. Indeed, it did not offer an all-united Ireland, but its prospect loomed on the horizon, especially with the North/South body and the Intergovernmental Conference, which were assets to them.

To stabilise the situation in Northern Ireland and wean the Republicans away from violence, the British had to employ such a strategy. They sought a settlement for the conflict in Ulster by satisfying both sides, Unionists and Republicans. The task was not easy, however.

In February 1995, a leaked draft of the Joint Framework Document was published in *The Times*. Since the leak concerned only the Anglo-Irish Framework and not the British one, I believe that it was destined to warn the Unionists before the Document's publication. As such, it can be concluded that some Conservatives in the British Government were not in favour of the Joint Document since they attempted to erect hurdles in its path. The leak prompted John Major to address himself to the Unionists to counter the leak quickly and appease any possible tensions. However, the hurry with which the Prime Minister appeared to reassure the Unionists makes one believe that some members of his own party betrayed him, as it insinuates that agreement was lacking within the Conservative Party. Ultimately, the leak achieved the desired outcome, for the Unionists reacted immediately.

The Unionists, especially the DUP and UUP, rejected the Framework (Cash 209). As a reaction to John Major's reassurance after the Document leak, Ian Paisley, the DUP leader, declared, "You can't expect any self-respecting Unionists to sit down at a table if that is going to be on the agenda" (qtd. in Cash 209). Molyneaux, the head of the UUP, also noted, "People in Northern Ireland have already made up their minds, and don't like what they see" (209). The rebuff was apparent, and if the Framework Documents were ever to be on the agenda, no talks and agreements would result because the Unionists would refuse discussions. It implied that if the Unionists were to discuss a settlement with the Nationalists, the Irish dimension should not have room. Nevertheless, the most crucial point was that the Unionists envisaged discussions with the Nationalists. Such a reaction was foreseeable and could but find ground in the Intergovernmental Conference, leading to a united Ireland and a North/South body paving the way for a joint authority between Belfast and Dublin.

In my view, the Unionists perceived a potential threat in the possibility of the Belfast and Dublin Governments merging to form one government ruling Ireland. The UUP likewise stated that “the government believes it can create a divide between the greater number of people in Northern Ireland and the Unionist leadership, and hopes to use a referendum to deliver Northern Ireland’s affairs into the hands of all-Ireland political institutions” (qtd. in Cash 210). The UUP’s response alluded to two crucial concerns. The first one concerned the referenda mentioned by Major. That is, even the referenda, encompassed in the Framework Documents to guarantee the Unionists’ veto, were interpreted as a British ruse to divide the Unionist grassroots from their leaders since the former could vote against the wish of their leaders. The second point was an all-Ireland settlement. Thus, the Unionists perceived the referenda as a strategic manoeuvre by the British Government to achieve an all-united Ireland settlement.

I consider that the Unionists’ interpretation of the Joint Framework and the forthcoming referenda mirrored the Unionists’ mistrust towards the British Government and the Irish one. However, their scepticism was understandable, particularly since the Sunningdale Agreement signature and the Unionists’ exclusion from the Anglo-Irish Agreement negotiations. In other words, the British betrayal of the Unionists still haunted the Unionists’ memory. Nevertheless, I contend that the referenda leading to the breach between grassroots and leaders coupled with the potential realisation of a united Ireland had limited prospects for success, for there had always been an alignment in the parties’ goals in Northern Ireland and the Unionist majority opinion to safeguard the Union with Britain. The proof was that 58 per cent of Protestants believed that the Framework Documents would lead to a united Ireland (Dixon 252). Thus, such fear had no room in the current circumstances.

I argue that the British Government felt compelled to make concessions to the Nationalists in Northern Ireland. The Republicans’ ceasefire would have been interpreted as ineffectual if it had not provided the Nationalists in Ulster with tangible benefits in return. Moreover, with a ceasefire, no excuses could be provided. Edwina McMahon suggested

that John Major's acceptance of such Documents stemmed from his fear of being blamed by history for missing the opportunity to establish peace in Northern Ireland (6). It is indisputably accurate; if history were to record him as the one who resolved the conflict in Ulster, he could be proud of that, and the opposite scenario would hold true as well. However, the paramount issue for the British Government was settling the dispute and establishing peace with the least possible damage and, more importantly, the least loss. Such concessions on the British side would testify to their good faith and willingness to take a further step in the peace process. Consequently, it would, above all, encourage the Republicans to maintain their non-violent means to attain their objectives and to decommission, particularly since, at that juncture, decommissioning was a thorny issue.

The Irish Government also made concessions but not to the Nationalists. It promised to amend its 1937 Constitution to guarantee no territorial claims over Ulster. Simply put, The Irish Government accepted the constitutional status of Ulster as part of the UK. It is essential to highlight that John Bruton⁸⁵ was the Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland when the Framework Documents were issued. As a Fine Gael member and leader, he was sympathetic to Unionists and insensitive to Republicans to the extent that his foes labelled him “Unionist John” (T. Mitchell 113). That is, his approval to amend the Constitution was an explicit endorsement of majority consent in Northern Ireland and an end to decades of claims over the North. Basically, constitutional ties with the North were definitely about to be changed. Thus, the Irish aligned with the British when accepting consent in Northern Ireland and amending their Irish Constitution.

In assessing the Framework Documents, I can note that they did not introduce new elements. Many of the encompassed issues in these documents had already been proposed in the endeavours made between 1972 and 1994. For instance, the Intergovernmental Conference was introduced in the Anglo-Irish Agreement along with the consent approach,

⁸⁵ John Bruton (1947-) was born in Ireland. The leader of Fine Gael and Taoiseach of Ireland. At the age of 22, he was at that time the youngest person ever to be elected to the Dail as he was the youngest ever Taoiseach at the age of 47. Bruton was sympathetic to Unionists and unsympathetic to Republicans but it did not stop him from developing a working relationship with Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams.

which was brought with the Downing Street Declaration. Nevertheless, what distinguishes the Framework Documents is their timing. Post-August 1994 was a new era characterised by non-violence, an espousal of peaceful means to achieve objectives. It was an atmosphere conducive to the development of the peace process. It is imperative to highlight that the Framework Documents favoured the Nationalists. As such, it was evident that the Unionists would feel threatened and rebuff both official papers. Thus, some assurance had to be, at least, provided to these Unionists.

Meanwhile, decommissioning prevailed, and Major made it a concern. Usually, decommissioning is an issue in armed conflicts. It must be highlighted that it plays a significant role in attaining peace and resolving the conflict. The objective of decommissioning is building trust, for when the paramilitaries surrender their arms, it points to their commitment to peaceful negotiations and their readiness to espouse a political process. Moreover, handing over arms leads to legitimacy and recognition. In other words, once they decommission, armed groups are perceived as legitimate political actors, permitting them participation in the political process. Additionally, surrendering arms is crucial for the long-term stability of the post-conflict society because it allows the re-establishment of law and order, along with a peaceful political environment.

Major's insistence on handing over arms stemmed from the Unionists' pressure. Ulster Unionists needed a guarantee from the Republicans, which was embodied in decommissioning. In fact, Thomas Mitchell considered the Unionists' request to hand over arms as a ruse not to negotiate with the Republicans (112). That could be true if the Unionists, UUP, or DUP showed no intention to discuss. It needs to be reiterated that Paisley's words concerning the leak implied their readiness to seek a settlement but, subject to conditions, decommissioning. The latter was a means to usher them into political life after 25 years of violence. Horrified by the past and violence against them, the Unionists wanted an assurance that Republican guns would no longer be used against them. I would instead state that the Unionists elaborated a scheme to attain handing over weapons. The

UUP agreed to support Major in the House of Commons, but he had to assure some decommissioning of IRA weapons in return.

Nevertheless, all-party talks, including Sinn Fein, were subject to preconditions. Curiously, the said requirements were absent from the Framework Documents. It was only on the 7th of March 1995 in the US that Mayhew introduced what became known as Washington “Principles” Or “Washington 3”. It is worth noting that such preconditions were not included in the Downing Street Declaration either. Nonetheless, on the 16th of January 1995, according to Gerry Adams, a British Government paper emphasised that progress in decommissioning was necessary before Sinn Fein’s participation in dialogues (195), which indicated that the notion of preconditions was already announced. Washington 3 encompassed the following:

1. Republicans must demonstrate willingness in principle to disarm progressively.
2. There should be agreement on the practical modalities of decommissioning.
3. There should be actual decommissioning of some arms as a tangible confidence-building measure and to signal the start of a process (McKittrick par. 2).

According to *The Irish Times*, the above three principles aimed to marginalise the Republicans and prevent their participation in talks (“The Deadlock Over Arms” par. 7). Given the enmity subsisting between the two parties, it is likely to interpret these preconditions as a hindrance to the Republicans’ participation in discussions. Nevertheless, exhausted from war with the IRA and weighted with political obligation, the British hunted for peace, undermining the assumption of preventing Sinn Fein from attending talks. Additionally, John Major was under Unionists' control in the Commons, and the Unionists wanted decommissioning. However, it must not be overlooked that this long hostility created an environment that enticed the disputing sides to endeavour at least to find a settlement. If the British imposed such preconditions, it was not to exclude the Republicans but to satisfy the Unionists.

It is worth noting that the Republicans accepted the aforementioned preconditions. Nevertheless, it would be so after negotiations and not before. In my view, for Gerry Adams, decommissioning at this stage was unrealistic. In fact, in conflict resolution and international laws, the decommissioning body is not set up before talks (MacGinty 38). If a body to deal with handing over arms is not established before discussions, it indicates that decommissioning itself is even less likely to occur prior to any talks. However, John Major insisted on handing over weapons before meetings. Consequently, the British Government's request was unfounded. Neither the British Government nor the Republicans ceded, which led to a stalemate and the sterility of the peace process. The situation suggested that Major found himself ensnared in the Unionists' ruse, not to mention that trust was not prevalent.

When the IRA announced its ceasefire in the autumn of 1994, decommissioning became a deadlock in the peace process development in Northern Ireland. It must be highlighted that the handing over of arms matter did not emerge with the fire cessation but long before, according to Paul Dixon (256). The latter probably referred to Mayhew's appearance on TV in 1993 and reference to decommissioning. Nevertheless, Gerry Adams denied such assumptions and could even prove it to George Mitchell. The latter was a speech of Fianna Fail's leader, Bertie Ahern, in London on the 20th of June 1995, where he explicitly stated that decommissioning had never been a precondition before the IRA ceasefire in 1994 (Adams 228). Besides, Albert Reynolds affirmed it when he declared that the 1994 IRA ceasefire's purpose was to assure a place in talks, and decommissioning had never been a precondition for the discussions (Tonge, *Northern Ireland: Conflict and Change* 170). It is worth reiterating that handing over arms was not mentioned in the Downing Street Declaration of 1993. It was evident that the two Governments had different viewpoints regarding the issue.

Thus, a middle ground had to be sought. For that reason, a twin-track approach was suggested by the British and Irish Governments in a communiqué on the 28th of November 1995. It submitted that discussions on decommissioning would occur simultaneously as

talks with all parties, including Sinn Fein. I believe that the joint communiqué emphasised the firm commitment of both Governments to achieve all-party talks. Political discussions were to start in February 1996, while an independent commission under Senator George Mitchell would examine the weapons issue to solve the decommissioning problem. That is, the Commission would assess the handing over of arms problem and provide recommendations. However, the British Government had the freedom to adopt or reject them. And so was it; the Commission chaired by George Mitchell was established. It must be reiterated in this context that the involvement of the Americans was of great help. A third party would reduce tension between the conflicting parties and mediate between them. The Republicans would feel less constrained to accept the British blackmail regarding a disarming start to participate in talks if suggested or supported by the Americans.

George Mitchell, in his book *Making Peace*, penned an interesting remark. He wrote regarding the decommissioning issue that “The British government had gotten itself on the hook of prior decommissioning, we were told, and we had been brought in to get them off” (29-31). It can be inferred that the British Government found itself entrapped in the decommissioning issue when it required it before talks. From my perspective, that was the outcome of Major’s lack of majority in the House of Commons. Moreover, establishing an International Commission was an endeavour to remove the British Government from this situation. It indicated that the British had already anticipated the Commission’s recommendations regarding the decommissioning. I believe such a manoeuvre was a way to overcome the Unionists’ pressure; consequently, the British Government deceived the Unionists.

Even if the British seized the opportunity to begin a peace process after the 1994 IRA ceasefire, it was not carefully managed. The preconditions and how they were dealt with prevented the peace process development in Northern Ireland. On the one hand, mistrust and the horror of the 25 past years averted the British, together with the Unionists, from offering enough to make the process move forward. On the other hand, the Republicans could not make more concessions than a ceasefire, for handing over their

weapons meant surrender. In fact, the peace process in Northern Ireland needed unaccustomed efforts and a political ripeness, which Major failed to demonstrate because of the different dimensions of the conflict and internal Government manoeuvring. Decommissioning was the first test of the peace process, and obviously, it failed, for two years later, the IRA broke its ceasefire. Instead of being a solution to the problem, decommissioning became the roadblock to the peace process in Northern Ireland. In such circumstances, the Mitchell Report was published, encompassing the Mitchell Principles.

3.3 Mitchell Principles:

With the stalemate regarding decommissioning, solutions had to be sought. Accordingly, an international commission was established under George Mitchell's presidency. The International Body issued its much-anticipated report on the 23rd of January 1996. The Commission rejected paramilitary decommissioning before talks when it stated:

We have concluded that there is a clear commitment on the part of those in possession of such arms to work constructively to achieve full and verifiable decommissioning as part of the process of all-party negotiations; but that commitment does not include decommissioning prior to such negotiations. ("Report of the International Body")

Mitchell's statement was twofold: that the paramilitaries, including, of course, both the Republicans and the Loyalists, initially accepted the decommissioning idea and their arms to be inspected and that handing over weapons would not take place before the said discussion. It is clear that the Commission opted for decommissioning in parallel with talks. Consequently, it rebuffed the demand of the British and Unionists to surrender arms before any meeting. It implied that the paramilitaries encompassing Republicans and Loyalists could still hold their weapons but committed to working constructively to reach complete decommissioning. The Report's outcome was predictable since the British demand was not admissible and went against what was internationally accepted.

In fact, arms have been silent for 17 months, which should have been considered as the IRA's good intention to permanently relinquish violence to participate in the talks scheduled in the coming months. However, the British and, more importantly, the

Unionists doubted the Republicans' commitment. Thus, to ease tensions and provide an alternative, the Commission suggested a commitment to six principles, which became known as Mitchell Principles, as a condition for participating in negotiations. Mitchell Principles requested adherence to:

1. Democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues.
2. The total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations.
3. Agreeing that such disarmament must be verifiable to the satisfaction of an independent commission.
4. Renouncing violence and opposing any effort by others to use force, or threaten to use force, to influence the course or the outcome of all-party negotiations.
5. Agreeing to abide by the terms of any agreement reached in all-party negotiations and resorting to democratic and exclusively peaceful methods in trying to alter any aspect of that outcome with which they may disagree.
6. Urging that 'punishment' killings and beatings stop and to take effective steps to prevent such actions (*Northern Ireland: Conflict and Change* Tonge 171).

It is evident that Mitchell Principles focused on non-violence. The political parties that wanted to take part in the forthcoming talks had to abide by the above principles. The least that can be said is that Mitchell Principles made party talks possible, especially since Gerry Adams expressed his party's willingness to adhere to these principles: peaceful and democratic means. On the one hand, the latter was an assurance to those advocating prior decommissioning, for they emphasised non-violent means even if an agreement is reached. Their position was understandable given the horrific IRA violent past epitomised in the attacks perpetrated against the British army and the Unionists.

On the other hand, those asked to decommission needed to be reassured that a process would take place in which they would take part. In other words, the Commission decision was a middle ground between decommissioning demand before talks and handing over arms requests after discussions when it stated that "The parties should consider an approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of all-

party negotiations, rather than before or after as the parties now urge” (“Report of the International Body”). The Commission’s compromise was not a full decommissioning during talks. Guarantees were provided to the paramilitaries, especially the IRA, when the Commission opted to decommission some arms. I believe that the understanding was an opportunity not to overlook for both parties, the British/Unionists and the Republicans.

The Report read, “The decommissioning process should suggest neither victory nor defeat” (Report of the International Body). From my perspective, the Commission attempted to alter the decommissioning interpretation. In fact, the Report captured the kind of relationship between the Unionists and the Nationalists. Victory and defeat were essential components of the conflict in the eyes of both communities. Accordingly, the purpose of the Commission was to eliminate the zero-sum game notion. If ever the IRA would accept decommissioning, it should not be considered a defeat to them and a triumph to the British and Unionists. Instead, it should be deemed a needed compromise to move the peace process forward and obtain a British concession in return, for peace requires understanding. However, if the beginning was to hand over some arms during the multi-party talks, it must end up with the complete destruction of the weapons.

It must be noted that the principles stipulated that the parties that would be unhappy with the agreement resulting from the multi-party talks could not use violence to alter the outcome. Hence, the only means permitted were democratic and peaceful ways. If the IRA accepted such a principle, it indicated that it agreed implicitly to renounce violence permanently, especially after attaining an agreement. The fire cessation permanence was a missing point in the 1994 IRA ceasefire, and the said point disturbed the British, especially the Unionists. In its ceasefire announcement, the IRA specified to silence arms without precision, whether lasting or temporary. Was the IRA ready for such a condition? Of course not, and violence resumed in 1996 and even after the signing of the Belfast Agreement.

The Mitchell Commission also made suggestions regarding confidence-building measures. Paragraph 56 read:

Several oral and written submissions raised the idea of an elected body. We note the reference in paragraph three of the Communiqué to 'whether and how an elected body could play a part'. Elections held in accordance with democratic principles express and reflect the popular will. If it were broadly acceptable, with an appropriate mandate, and within the three-strand structure, an elective process could contribute to the building of confidence. ("Report of the International Body")

In this case, it must be noted that the Commission received suggestions from different parties and organisations and studied them before issuing its report. According to this paragraph, one of these parties suggested the idea of an elected body. Of course, it could only be presented by the British Government or the Unionists. Through such a body, the Unionists would probably reaffirm the majority. If such a scenario ever happened, the situation in Northern Ireland would worsen, and instead of moving forward, they would move back to the period where Stormont ruled.

The Nationalists were enraged with the elected body (Cochrane, *Unionist Politics* 352). If the Nationalists were incensed regarding the said body, one could imagine the Republicans' response. I believe that their discontentment found ground in the events' direction in the future. The body could become the new Stormont and, subsequently, take Northern Ireland back to the years when justice and equality were a dream for the Nationalists. It needs to be reiterated that the latter was the cause of the Troubles in Ulster. As such, prospects of attaining a settlement would completely fade, and the efforts made during the previous years would have been in vain. In fact, such circumstances could reinforce hatred and polarisation between the two communities in Northern Ireland, leading to more violence and widening the existing gap as they could lead to the collapse of the IRA ceasefire.

3.4 The Collapse of the IRA Ceasefire (1996):

As stipulated above, Mitchell Report provided suggestions. Nevertheless, the solution to decommissioning and participating in talks did not bring the conflicting parties to the discussions. According to Gerry Adams, the British Government rebuffed Mitchell's Report (230). However, the British never stated that they declined it. In reality, the Prime

Minister neither accepted nor rejected it, and such could not be a rejection. It suggests that Adams misinterpreted Major's reaction to the Commission account. From my perspective, his misinterpretation stemmed from what John Major stated during his acceptance of the establishment of the Mitchell Commission: "We haven't changed our position on Washington 3. We won't be asking the international body to question that position" (Millar and Boril par. 5). It indicates that the British Government's position regarding decommissioning before multi-party talks would not change regardless of the Report outcome.

Nonetheless, if such was the case, why did Major accept to establish the Commission? Eamonn O'Kane provided an interesting answer to the question when he wrote that the British Government agreed to the Commission's establishment, for they expected the Report to side with their standpoint for prior decommissioning (*Britain, Ireland* 137). I believe that the deteriorating relationship between the American and the British Governments could not make Major think that the Commission would side with them. Not to mention that the British could not ignore the laws governing international relations and conflict resolution. It must be reiterated that decommissioning could not take place before talks. In my view, if the British accepted the Commission, it was to reassure the Unionists and keep them on Major's side in the House of Commons. It must be highlighted that the British used the Commission precisely to discard the decommissioning issue.

From my point of view, Goerge Mitchell's decision not to endorse the British stance was well-founded. In his book *Making Peace*, he wrote, "Since any weapons handed in could be quickly replaced, prior decommissioning was a political policy and was not related to genuine security needs" (32). Indeed, if handing over arms was requested by one of the conflicting parties, the aim would not have been for security reasons but rather for political reasons. Such was the case with the British Government. Consequently, if Mitchell decided not to request handing over arms before multi-party talks, it was based on the prevailing needs of the situation at the time. Since the IRA renounced violence, security prevailed, and it was more urgent to find a political solution to the problem.

I contend that after the Mitchell Report's publication, the British endeavoured to be more diplomatic. Accordingly, they suggested an alternative already existing in the said Report by announcing the elected body's adoption ("John Major's Commons"). It must be reiterated that the Report recommended an elective body to build confidence, not as a solution to decommissioning or all-party talks. Thus, the British took the body out of its context when they referred to it as a solution to multi-party discussions. Simply put, the latter would take place after the said election. Such conduct prompted Adams to oppose Major's decision firmly. He went further and urged the Prime Minister, John Major, to issue a public statement in which he would cancel his precondition of IRA decommissioning prior to talks and his decision to hold the election (Elliott 111-2). Evidently, the elected body was the lifebuoy to which the British held to dispose of the decommissioning issue.

The Unionists, UUP, seized the opportunity and reaffirmed their position in late February 1996 not to restart discussions. They went further and announced their decision not to talk to the Irish Government before creating an assembly in Northern Ireland. Clearly, the UUP attempted publicly to support Major regarding the body election. However, such conduct could undermine the chances of launching multi-party talks, including Sinn Fein (O'Kane, *Britain, Ireland* 124). It must be noted that the said statement was a reiteration of the DUP's previous declaration. It indicates that the Unionists were not yet ready to accept the idea of talking to the Republicans, at least without some other guarantees.

The Irish were angry after the British; the Irish Government felt that the British had stepped on their foot when Major decided that an election would occur before any talks and without any prior consultation. Dick Spring, an Irish politician, said on Irish radio, "The British know full well how we feel after the last few days. We have made it very clear, and we will not be treated in this manner for the future" (qtd. in O'Kane, *Britain, Ireland* 139). Even if the Irish commented on the situation, they accepted it since they refused to be treated as such in the future but not in the present time. The words of Spring

bore anger at the British and alluded to some animosities between the two Governments. John Bruton, the Taoiseach, stated clearly that the British had no right to make such a decision without prior consultation and the approval of the concerned parties, especially the Irish Government.

Consequently, the route to all-party talks became the new stalemate between the Unionists and the Republicans and between London and Dublin. On the one hand, the British were under Unionist pressure and wanted more guarantees for the IRA to relinquish violence. On the other hand, the Irish were under Republican and Nationalist pressure and were fearful of IRA resumption of violence, so they wanted and went for inclusive talks; both viewpoints were reasonable. Nevertheless, the British pushed the IRA too far by asking for so much. Ultimately, the peace process took another path when the IRA resumed violence in the winter of 1996.

In conflict resolution processes, the ceasefire collapses for different reasons. Lack of trust is a prevailing one. One of the different disputing parties can lose trust in the other side's commitment to peace or in the peace process itself, leading to a return to violence. The collapse can also stem from the failure of negotiations. In other words, the conflicting parties fail to attain a peace agreement. It is evident that the IRA's resumption of violence was the result of the failure of negotiations to achieve all-party talks and, consequently, a peace agreement. The solution for them was a return to violence to exert pressure.

The Ceasefire collapsed when the IRA detonated a bomb in Canary Wharf in London on 9th February 1996, at 7 p.m. Shortly before this, a statement emanating from the IRA read:

It is with great reluctance that the leadership of Oglagh nah Eireaann announces that the complete cessation of military operation will end at 6 p.m. on February 9th, this evening. As we stated on August 31st, 1994, the basis for the cessation was to enhance the democratic peace process and to underline our definitive commitment to its success. We also made it clear that we believed that an opportunity to create a just and lasting settlement had been created. The cessation presented a historic challenge for everyone, and Oglagh nah Eireann commends the leaderships of

nationalists Ireland at home and abroad. They rose to the challenge. The British Prime Minister did not. Instead of embracing the peace process, the British government acted in bad faith, with Mr Major and the Unionist leaders squandering this unprecedented opportunity to resolve the conflict. (Bew and Gillespie 321)

The IRA declaration emphasised two points. The first one was that their ceasefire aimed to engage in democratic and peaceful means to settle the conflict. The second was that the fire cessation provided a favourable environment for the peace process to prosper. However, the British prevented its realisation. In other words, the Republicans blamed the British Government for the failure of the peace process development. Accordingly, the IRA put an end to its 1994 declaration of silencing arms. Smashing the ceasefire was far from being unpredictable. It is worth mentioning that the 1994 declaration never stipulated a permanent cessation of violence. Therefore, if the IRA ever resumed violence in case their demands were not met, no one would condemn their actions. Consequently, to end the seventeen months of non-violence, a bomb was detonated in a building near Canary Wharf Tower, London, where two people were killed, and more than 100 were injured (“10 February 1996”).

It is essential to clarify that the collapse of the ceasefire seemed to be a setback in the peace process. According to Paul Dixon, the IRA planned the attack months ago, even before establishing the Mitchell Commission (261). It was a severe accusation of the IRA's willingness to abide by democratic and peaceful means to achieve a settlement. It must be noted that the IRA relinquished violence for months, creating the opportunity to start multi-party talks, which the British stalled. Silencing arms was a sign of good faith but led to nothing. In my opinion, the Republicans wanted these talks, for they had an aim to achieve, and without these discussions, no objective would be attained. The British also wanted to seize this opportunity but could not overcome the Unionists' opposition, especially the UUP, for John Major needed their support in the Commons. The UUP, indeed, could bring the Government down along with the right-wingers in the Tory Party, who supported the Unionists. Consequently, the problem laid in convincing the Unionists.

The Unionists' reluctance to engage in negotiations with the Republicans without decommissioning could hinder years of work and avert reaching an agreement. Such conduct could take the Northern Ireland conflict back to the 1980s, before Hume-Adams Talks. It could also affect the US intervention's impact on the conflict because if the willingness of the conflicting parties to engage in discussions to attain a settlement is absent, third-party intervention would be in vain. At this stage, the Unionists were influential and successfully manipulated John Major as Prime Minister. The latter endeavoured to find alternatives to escape the Unionists' influence but to no avail. It suggested the weakness of John Major's Government in front of the Unionists, though it was not the will that was missing to resolve the conflict.

Despite the Republicans' opposition to the body election referred to in the Mitchell Report, it ultimately took place. Both the SDLP and Sinn Fein participated in the Forum election. On the one hand, compared to the 1992 election, Sinn Fein had more electors in 1996, with 15.5 per cent of the votes compared to the previous 12.5, and secured seventeen seats in the Forum. On the other hand, the UUP obtained 24.2 per cent of the votes with thirty seats in the Forum and 18.8 per cent for the DUP with twenty-four seats, followed by the SDLP with 21.4 per cent of votes and twenty-one seats. Compared to the 1992 election, the UUP kept its position, and practically the same could be said for the SDLP, which displayed a decrease of only 0.6%. However, it needs to be noted that the SDLP accepted participation in the Forum but left it after one month (O'Kane, *Britain, Ireland* 144); Sinn Fein boycotted it.

While attempting to explain the Sinn Fein results in the election, Paul Bew and Gordon Gillespie penned that the outcome expressed support for the hard-line adopted by the Republicans (329). Moreover, the vote for parties supported by paramilitaries was striking in the said election. It mirrored the state of mind of the people in Northern Ireland. From my perspective, since they chose parties with paramilitaries, it meant that they felt insecure and needed to be protected. Hence, Northern Ireland citizens still felt fear, animosities, and violent tendencies. Not only did the election for the Forum reflect such

polarisation, but so did the Oranges' marches that resumed in Drumcree with confrontations and which deteriorated relations between Unionists and Nationalists in Ulster. One is reminded of the Troubles' emergence in 1969. The vehemence of the 1996 and 1997 Orange marchers portrayed Unionists' unhappiness towards Major concessions to the Republicans (Dixon 264).

The ceasefire smashing was condemned by the British and the Irish, along with the Americans. Regarding the ceasefire resumption, John Major, in Manchester city centre said:

This is an appalling outrage..... Sinn Fein had given assurances time and time again that they were committed to peaceful progress. I now call on the leadership of Sinn Fein and the IRA to condemn immediately and unequivocally those who planted this bomb and any suggestion that the ceasefire is now over... this atrocity confirms again the urgent need to remove illegal arms from the equation. (qtd. in Mullin et al. par. 22-3)

In his speech, Major emphasised three points. Firstly, the violence resumption was shocking, especially after seventeen months of non-brutality. Secondly, Sinn Fein's leaders should condemn the attack to prove that their commitment to democratic means was still valid. Thirdly, decommissioning should take place. In his condemnation of the IRA bombing, Major doubted Sinn Fein's commitment to peaceful and democratic means to attain a settlement. In the House of Commons, he stated: "We never lost sight of the fact that the IRA commitment had not been made for good... I regret to say that the events of last Friday showed that our caution about the IRA was only too justified" (qtd. in Bew and Gillespie 324). Simply put, violence resumption confirmed the British Government's doubts regarding the permanence of the ceasefire.

In reality, John Major could not be wrong in his doubts regarding IRA commitment. The Provos never stated that the ceasefire would be permanent in their 1994 declaration. At the time, the British assumed it was a lasting one. However, I believe that it was evident that John Major hinted at his desire to pursue the peace process when requesting the Sinn Fein leader to condemn the bombing. According to him, not doing so meant the end of the

ceasefire and, consequently, the collapse of the peace process. He even made encounters between British ministers and Sinn Fein unacceptable and impossible (Bew and Gillespie 324). Besides, in my opinion, that was an opportunity for him to bring the decommissioning issue back to the table, believing it was necessary to avert such obstacles to allow the peace process to restart. Again, the motives behind decommissioning were to satisfy the Unionists.

Not only did the Tory Party condemn the Canary Wharf bombing, but the US did as well. Clinton showed great concern towards it. ‘The terrorists who perpetrated today’s attack cannot be allowed to derail the effort to bring peace to the people of Northern Ireland – a peace they overwhelmingly support’ (qtd. in Carswell par. 10) were the words of Clinton in a public statement. They convey a sense of despair and commitment to the peace process in Northern Ireland. However, the most crucial point was that his reaction was not exclusive. When David Trimble⁸⁶ met President Clinton and Anthony Lake in Washington and asked them to ban visas for Sinn Fein members and end the party fund-raising, Clinton refused. I contend that his refusal to sentence Sinn Fein members was a well-thought reaction, for he wanted to maintain an open door.

Gerry Adams himself seemed to ignore the IRA decision to resume violence, according to John Mullin et al. (par. 7); that could not be possible. The IRA's trust in Adams could not allow such an event to occur, especially since Adams succeeded in obtaining the Americans' support and the peace process was set in motion. Clinton himself reported that in his meeting with Adams days before the Canary Wharf bombing, he felt Adams ill at ease (Carswell par. 15), suggesting he knew about the decision to end the ceasefire. Moreover, according to Carswell, two months before the bombing, Adams warned Boris

⁸⁶ David Trimble (1944-) was born and died in Northern Ireland. He graduated from Queen’s University where he worked as a lecturer in the Faculty of Law. In the early 1970s, Trimble was a member of the Vanguard Unionist Progressive Party (VUPP) and supported William Craig. During the Ulster Workers’ Council (UWC) strike, played an organizational role in support of the UWC strike committee to become in 1975 the Deputy leader of the VUPP party. However, when the VUPP did no more contest elections, he joined, in 1978, the UUP party of which he became the leader in 1995. He participated in the Hume-Mayhew Talks and in the Drumcree march of 1996. His most important achievement was to keep the UUP in the talks process after July 1997 while some other political parties withdrew. In April 1998, he signed the Belfast Agreement on the behalf of his party.

Morrison, a senior Democratic congressman, that the British precondition of IRA decommissioning before the talks threatened IRA cessation of violence (par. 1). It meant that the decision to resume violence was discussed amongst Sinn Fein leaders and the IRA. At that stage, more efforts had to be put into reviving the peace process in Northern Ireland.

3.5 Reviving the Peace Process in Northern Ireland:

Britain, the Republic of Ireland, and the US accepted the election and did not need Sinn Fein's approbation. It meant that Sinn Fein was excluded from deciding over it as they were excluded from all-party talks. In fact, the IRA had no intention to renounce violence for a second time, at least at that moment, as the bombing continued. For instance, bombs exploded on the 9th of March, 17th April, and 24th April 1996 (Bew and Gillespie 327- 28). The Republicans were faced with the 'fait accompli' regarding the vote. It is worth mentioning that even with the election issue and the Irish discontentment felt towards the British, both Governments had to cooperate for peace in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, a package – a timetable for talks and an election – was launched by the British and Irish Governments on the 28th of February 1996, that is, 20 days after the IRA resumption of violence.

The package aimed to restart the peace process. Hence, 10th June was set as the commencement of all-party talks, and May was when the election would be held. In fact, the Irish accepted the May 1996 election, but in return, a date for multi-party talks had to be set (Holmes 184). Of course, only democratic parties could attend the discussions; the participating parties had to abide by Mitchell Principles. It indicated that Sinn Fein was excluded from taking part in the June discussions. To my mind, deciding on a date for all-party talks had a two-fold purpose: to pressure the IRA to cease violence again to be allowed to the talks and make the peace process move forward instead of stagnating.

Everyone apart from Sinn Fein was happy with the said package. The Unionists had their awaited election, and the SDLP had a date for inter-party talks. It needs to be highlighted that the SDLP was a constitutional party supporting peaceful and democratic means to achieve its aim, which was reunification with Ireland. However, Sinn Fein did

obtain nothing; they were instead marginalised. It is worth mentioning that Bruton could convince the SDLP to accept the said vote (Carswell par. 32). On 27th March 1996, Bruton tried to appease Nationalists' fears by promising to insulate the Forum's role in the negotiation process (Bew and Gillespie 327). It must be reiterated that the Nationalists were apprehensive of a Unionist majority in the Forum after the said election.

In reality, the *Consultation Paper: Ground Rules for Substantive all-Party Negotiations* published on 15th March 1996 by the British Government, in its third clause, dealt with the issue of the power that would be conferred to the Forum. The clause explicitly stipulated that the role of the Forum would be to promote dialogue in Northern Ireland (Elliott 116). It also made crystal clear that the Forum would have no legislative, executive, or administrative powers. It indicated that the Forum's powers were limited in the peace process. The said clause was meant to assure that no abuses would be practised against the Nationalists. The promise made by the Irish Taoiseach to the Nationalists, SDLP, had just been materialised.

Notably, the most important consequence of the package, including the Forum election and the due date of all-party talks, was that Sinn Fein could join the talks at any time. The paper *Consultation Paper: Ground Rules for Substantive all-party Negotiations* read that "However, both Governments [have] also agreed that the resumption of Ministerial dialogue with Sinn Fein, and their participation in negotiations, requires the unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994" (par. 7). Accordingly, the only precondition to participation into talks was to restore the 1994 ceasefire. In fact, it was an implicit way to state that decommissioning was not a request anymore as a condition for joining the discussions. It is crucial to note that the document was implicit regarding the issue; no mention of the handing over of arms was introduced in the text. Not including it and mentioning only the ceasefire could be considered a victory to the Republicans, for another requirement had just been swept away.

To support the above assumption, I am making reference to Major's speech in the House of Commons. In November 1996, John Major, the Prime Minister, declared:

When Sinn Fein could join the talks depends on its own actions. We need to see an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire, we need to be able to make a credible judgment that it is lasting, and we need to know that Sinn Fein will sign up to the Mitchell principles. Those matters are in Sinn Fein's hands. We are not seeking delay; we wish to see inclusive talks involving all parties as soon as possible, but if Sinn Fein continues to exclude itself, the talks must and will go on without it. (House of Commons, 28 Nov. 1996, vol. 286, col. 461).

The speech referred to three crucial points. The first one was that a ceasefire was a requirement for Sinn Fein to join the talks. The second point was that violence renouncement should be permanent. The last one was the signature of Mitchell Principles. Hence, the speech left no ambiguity regarding the decommissioning issue. If the IRA wanted to participate in the multi-party discussions, a readoption of the 1994 ceasefire must take place.

The shift in John Major's decision concerning decommissioning must be tackled. In fact, I believe that two reasons led him to alter his stance. The first one was his awareness that he could not make the peace process advance anymore, and he had nothing more to offer; he reached a point of stagnation, especially since he lacked a majority in the House of Commons. Thus, it is better to give the process a last push before leaving office since he would no longer be in need of the Unionists. The second one was that the General Election was to take place in the coming months, May 1997. Major knew that he would not be reelected. The Conservatives held office for eighteen years, and it was apparent that a change in administration had to take place and was about to occur.

At this stage, handing over arms no longer hindered the talks. Private contact was held between the British and Sinn Fein; moreover, since the Canary Wharf bombing, seven Labour MPs met with Sinn Fein (Elliott 117). Of course, no peace would be achieved without Sinn Fein's participation in the talks, and no settlement would be attained. For that

reason, encounters were made to make the Republicans join the discussions. The Americans also pressured Sinn Fein and the IRA to renew the ceasefire. Clinton stated: ‘Violence has no place in this process, the ceasefire has got to be restored . . . We must speak with one voice on this issue. The future must belong to those who build, not to those who maim or destroy’ (qtd. in O’Clery par. 5). That was an explicit American call for renouncing violence, renewing the ceasefire, and the exclusion of those who make violence a means to achieve their aim. For Clinton, the future belonged to democratic political parties only.

The period post-IRA ceasefire was tumultuous. It witnessed the resumption of violence and the mutual blame for the degradation of the situation and the stagnation of the peace process. For this reason, the route to the election was complex and protracted. However, the said vote did not succeed in bringing Sinn Fein to all-party talks. The stagnation of the situation needed either compromise from the conflicting parties or a change in the current situation. Nevertheless, despite the IRA’s bombing persistence, efforts were made to include the Republicans in the talks. All eyes were on Sinn Fein and the IRA, waiting for a renewal of the ceasefire. If the Republicans missed the opportunity, they would be blamed for hindering the attempt to restart the peace process. Consequently, the Republicans were under pressure even from the Americans, who were considered their allies.

In concluding the chapter, I can say that the foundations of the peace process were laid before 1994. The latter marked the first IRA ceasefire. The Irish Americans interfered in facilitating the Republican paramilitary decision to renounce violence. They could organise themselves to appeal to the American President, Bill Clinton, to intervene in the Irish peace process. As such, the US took part in the dispute as a mediator, not as a conflicting party. It is noteworthy that Northern Ireland is constitutionally part of the United Kingdom. During Clinton’s presidency, Gerry Adams was provided with a visa to the United States of America. After a few months, the IRA announced its ceasefire. As a result, the Forum of Peace and Reconciliation was established, and the Framework

Documents were published in 1995. The papers highlighted Ulster's status as part of the UK, the consent principle, and an elected assembly and an executive panel. Not to mention institutions connected to British and Irish Government relations and Belfast/ Dublin relationships. Nevertheless, the most crucial point was the commitment to peaceful and democratic means. It needs to be noted that the Unionists rejected the Documents since they were green in tone – supportive of the Nationalists– and, consequently, welcomed by the Nationalists.

However, the decommissioning issue came to hinder the path of the peace process in Ulster. The British requested the IRA to hand over its weapons at the demand of the Unionists, which led to the process stagnation and the establishment of an international commission headed by George Mitchell to look into the decommissioning issue. Its Report stated decommissioning in parallel with talks and, most importantly, announced Mitchell Principles. The Report also encompassed an elected body as a confidence-building measure. The body was adopted by the British and Unionists, but not the Nationalists; however, an election took place in May 1996. Unfortunately, the conflict could not be resolved at this stage, for the decommissioning matter could not be overcome since no discussion could be held, and the IRA resumed violence in 1996. Thanks to the 1996 package, the peace process could be revived, especially when the British Government abandoned handing over arms as a precondition for Sinn Féin's participation in the multi-party talks.

The peace process in Northern Ireland took off with the IRA ceasefire declaration in 1994. Such an announcement was an outstanding achievement after decades of violence. However, the route to it was rocky, and assistance was a prerequisite. In fact, US intervention in the Irish conflict was a catalyst and gave the peace process the impetus needed. However, it is imperative to highlight that US interference was not the detonator of the Irish peace process. Hume-Adams's Talks and the Downing Street Declaration provided a propitious ground for US intervention. Thus, the foundations of the Irish peace

process were laid years before. The beginning of the process stemmed from the willingness to live in peace and harmony in Northern Ireland and, above all, attain objectives.

Adam's visit to the US significantly impacted the peace process by providing it with a new direction. It gave the process an international echo, importance, and credibility for Adams. Of course, US involvement was not altruistic, for Clinton benefited from his interference. He was elected as the US President in 1992 and gained more electors for his subsequent re-elections, especially the second one. Not to mention that the President also envisaged economic profits. The US' meddling with British affairs led to the deterioration of relations between the two Governments. That was the outcome, and the American Government remained untroubled by the issue. In a post-Cold War era, the US did not need allies, and the threat was inexistent. Thus, tribute must be paid to the American Government but not to the extent of making it a hero since their assistance was not the engine of the peace process.

Once the IRA declared its ceasefire, the doors to negotiations opened for the Republicans. The Irish and British Governments welcomed Sinn Fein as a constitutional party committed to peaceful and democratic means and issued the Framework Documents. The latter constituted the basis of the Good Friday Agreement. The three strands, together with regulating the relations between North/South and East/West, were essential components of both. However, the Framework Documents did not lead to at least the talks for an arrangement. The Unionists rejected them because they feared the established institutions would lead to Ireland's reunification. Of course, such could but lead to the Nationalists' and Republicans' happiness. The institutions made them closer to their objective.

The conflicting parties, especially the Unionists, were not yet ready to meet the enemy and attain a settlement. Making concessions to the Nationalists was not conceivable to them since the past still haunted them. Thus, decommissioning was requested. The British Government adopted the Unionists' position regarding handing over arms out of

weakness. John Major lacked a majority in the House of Commons and consequently could not anger the Unionists by opposing their stance. Still, the British made some concessions to the Nationalists in the Documents. The outcome was a logical consequence of a divided society where the minority was marginalised. Some rights had to be given back to them to establish justice and equality. The situation was unacceptable for the Unionists, who had always been favoured. It must not be forgotten that the Irish Government also compromised when it endorsed the consent principle. It was an explicit recognition that Northern Ireland was part of the UK and claims would not be made over it.

The above Frameworks opened doors to the Republicans, but the decommissioning issue closed them. Handing over arms was the primary reason which led to the collapse of the 1994 IRA ceasefire. Even if attempts to solve the problem were launched, such as the International Commission, they foundered to lead to the awaited talks. The British Government found itself unable to assert its position in the face of the Unionists' power and adopted Mitchell Report. Instead, they looked for an alternative. Such conduct was firstly not to reject the Report and secondly not to anger the Unionists by espousing it. However, for the Republicans, the British stalled the process, and as a result, the Republicans breached their 1994 ceasefire. It suggested that the peace process was on the verge of collapse. It was true that the IRA aimed to pressure the British for a settlement, but the most critical point was that the fire cessation was a strategy. Since the Provos were asked to decommission, attention had to be turned to the ceasefire, so they breached it to avoid the British request to hand over arms.

At the dawn of 1996, the peace process was revived. As the prime minister, John Major made a last good action to the peace process when he abandoned decommission as a precondition to Sinn Fein's participation in talks. It indicated that Sinn Fein could join the discussion if they espoused Mitchell Principles and declared a readoption of the 1994 ceasefire. At the end of John Major's premiership, he did not need to be supported by the Unionists since it was evident that the Conservative Party would not be reelected. Such a decision allowed a settlement for the Northern Ireland conflict.

4 Chapter Four: A Settlement for the Northern Ireland Conflict

The introduction of mediation in Northern Ireland was more than needed to prompt the peace process forward. The Irish Americans and President Bill Clinton's involvement played a significant role in the IRA's decision to ceasefire in 1994. The American interference culminated with the 1994 declaration of the ceasefire, which led to the initiation of the peace process in Ulster. With such a peaceful environment, the British and Irish Governments started their work on achieving lasting peace and materialising the Republicans' participation in the talks, leading to an agreement. Nevertheless, the atmosphere was not ripe enough to make an accord possible between the conflicting parties since the IRA resumed violence in February 1996 when a bomb exploded in South Quay Docklands Light Railway station in the London Docklands.

The current chapter will delve into the pre-talks period to determine the circumstances in which the Belfast Agreement was signed. Discussions provide the conflicting parties with the opportunity to communicate grievances, concerns, and, more importantly, aspirations to allow an accord. Moreover, an agreement is essential to resolving the conflict; it is an integral part of conflict resolution as it is the result of a process. In reality, conflict resolution cannot even be discussed without some form of agreement, which is why this chapter highlights the importance of emphasising it. As a matter of fact, the Ulster political parties, especially the Unionists, refused categorically to talk to the republicans, who were deemed as terrorists, so what made them agree to meet with their enemy? Light will be shed on the British and Irish Government's role in signing the Good Friday Agreement, as both were also part of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Thus, investigating their role is more than necessary, especially since a Union between Britain and Ireland was sealed in 1800.

It is essential to note that the South had always claimed the six counties of the North (Ulster), as part of the Republic of Ireland. With such different participants in the conflict, Northern Ireland's dispute is multifaceted because of its different dimensions.

Nevertheless, a compromise was agreed upon, seemingly satisfying even to the British and the Irish. Attention must also be drawn to the post-agreement period to know whether the Accord could solve the conflict in Northern Ireland. If that was not the case, it meant that challenges faced its implementation. What were these challenges? And most importantly, how were they overcome? Such questions are essential parts of conflict resolution in Ulster, especially since peace is prevailing in the region at present.

4.1 The Long Road to the Multi-Party Talks:

As agreed upon between the British and Irish Governments, all-party talks took place on the due date, 10 June 1996, without Sinn Fein's participation. However, they were suspended in March 1997. In reality, nothing was really discussed during the said discussions apart from procedural issues (Holmes 184). That was not surprising because, without Sinn Fein, nothing could be examined. The Republicans were an essential conflicting party in the Northern Irish conflict, and talks could come to nothing without their participation, mainly because they were adept at violence. I believe that if an agreement had been reached without Sinn Fein, violence would have subsisted, and peace would not have been attained. It was far from what the British Government wanted. It must be noted that the Unionists' attendance at the talks was also crucial since they also made use of violence to oppose the Republicans' brutality during the Troubles and the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Moreover, due regard must be given to the May 1997 election. It must be reiterated that Sinn Fein did not boycott the election and obtained 16 per cent of the votes (Bew and Gillespie "1997." 340). Participating proved that they represented some people. It meant that a considerable faction of Ulster electors supported Republicanism. Besides, since the June talks were supposed to be inclusive, it was impossible to envisage them without Sinn Fein's involvement. If so, it signified that a proportion of Ulster's population would not have a say in its affairs, which was the core of the problem in Northern Ireland. In reality, such a truth could not escape the minds of both the Irish and the British Governments. Thus, I contend that when the decision to start talks was made, the aim was to exert pressure

on Sinn Fein to renew the ceasefire and join the discussions. Consequently, the multi-party negotiations commenced on the prescribed date, the 10th of June 1996; the least that can be said about these talks is that they were not inclusive.

On the 1st of May 1997, the General Election in the United Kingdom took place. With Tony Blair⁸⁷ as its head, the Labour Party won the vote by a landslide. His party triumphed with 43.2 per cent of the votes and 418 seats (Thomas 48). It is crucial to note that the Sinn Fein Party obtained 16.1 per cent of the votes and two seats. Two weeks after the General Election, Tony Blair, the UK's new Prime Minister, addressed a speech at the Royal Agricultural Society Belfast. In the said speech, he stipulated that:

My message is simple. I am committed to Northern Ireland. I am committed to the principle of consent. And I am committed to peace. A settlement is to be negotiated between the parties based on consent. My agenda is not a united Ireland - and I wonder just how many see it as a realistic possibility in the foreseeable future. Northern Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom as long as a majority here wish. ("Address by Prime Minister Blair")

Tony Blair's speech focused on his position on the status of Northern Ireland. He made clear that he supported the Union and that union with the Republic of Ireland was far from being on his agenda. His words left no glimpse of hope for such a future unless the majority in Ulster voted for reunification with Ireland, which was improbable, at least at the time of the speech, since the majority in Northern Ireland was Unionist. In other words, consent was emphasised as a fundamental principle in the peace process. He also made explicit that his speech was a message. The latter was obviously meant for both the Nationalists/Republicans and the Unionists, but more importantly, for the latter. I believe that as a new Prime Minister, Tony Blair judged it essential to set his position. So, on the one hand, he

⁸⁷ Tony Blair (1953-) was born in Scotland. He was a Labour Party politician and Prime Minister for two terms. He joined the Labour Party in 1975 and played a modernising role in the Party. Eight years later, he was elected to Westminster to be elected leader of the Labour Party in 1994. Tony Blair with his Party introduced devolution in the UK which led to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, and the Northern Ireland Assembly. During the Peace Process, Tony Blair met SF leaders making of him the First Prime Minister to do so since 1921. Moreover, he played an important role in the negotiations leading to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

reassured the Unionists that the Union with Britain was safe as long as he was Britain's Prime Minister.

On the other hand, he drew limits to the Nationalists/ Republicans' hopes that no Union dissolution would occur during his premiership without majority consent. As such, he clearly defined the foundations of his future participation in the peace process. In reality, Ulster's Union with Britain was reiterated many times in his speech when he stipulated, "But none of us in this hall today, even the youngest, is likely to see Northern Ireland as anything but a part of the United Kingdom. That is the reality because the consent principle is now almost universally accepted" ("Address by Prime Minister Blair"). Such reiteration reflected the importance of the Union in his eyes but, more essentially, the importance of stating his position regarding the said point.

In reality, the insistence on his position regarding Ulster was to erase the Party's stance before its election. The Labour Party was neutral between those supporting the Union and those claiming a reunion and sometimes even becoming persuaders for reunification with the Republic (Holmes 187). Indeed, the left of the Labour Party supported reunification with the Republic of Ireland prior to the 1980s. However, after the said period, the Party espoused reunion by consent. From my perspective, such an ambiguous position could impact the hopes and the motives of the Nationalists/Republicans, on the one hand, and the Unionists/Loyalists, on the other hand. Each could see in the Party's declarations a position supporting their quest. Thus, Tony Blair's election was deemed as the new wind of change for both parties. The Unionists hoped to obtain more support for their aspiration of maintaining a lasting Union with Britain. On the other hand, the Nationalists and the Republicans had hoped for a more sympathetic government.

Besides, in his speech, Blair emphasised his commitment to peace. It suggested that he would either work for peace through a peace process or wage war against the troublemakers, the IRA, to attain this peace. The former was more probable than the latter

since he invited the IRA to consider a ceasefire in the same speech. Moreover, he mentioned negotiations to attain a settlement, which implied a more or less peaceful approach to conflict resolution. Accordingly, he intended to inherit the peace process and work for its success. However, he made it explicit that the political settlement aim was not a united Ireland and that the British Government would not play the role of the persuader for such a unity (“Address by Prime Minister Blair”). Blair’s position indicated the neutrality of the British Government as it suggested its attempt to prepare both sides, especially the IRA, for the unknown outcome of the negotiations. But would Britain be neutral? In reality, neutrality implies not supporting any conflicting party as it means not pressuring any side. Nevertheless, that was far from what happened. Since the initiation of the peace process in Northern Ireland, all the British did was pressure and deceive the opposing sides to fulfil British interests.

In fact, emphasis was put on the IRA when Tony Blair invited them to catch up on the train of peace when he stated:

I am ready to make one further effort to proceed with the inclusive talks process. My message to Sinn Fein is clear. The settlement train is leaving. I want you on that train. But it is leaving anyway, and I will not allow it to wait for you. You cannot hold the process to ransom any longer. So end the violence. Now. (“Address by Prime Minister Blair”)

His invitation to Sinn Fein was overt. He called them to participate in the negotiations, leading to a settlement. Additionally, if Sinn Fein did not catch the train, negotiations would resume without them. Nevertheless, to join the multi-party talks, Blair stated a condition: the end of violence. Again, the IRA is required to announce a ceasefire.

At first glance, Tony Blair inherited John Major’s policy towards the Northern Ireland conflict. The speech fragment implied that he adopted the consent principle, multi-party talks, and a ceasefire as a condition of the talks. However, a thorough reading of the Prime Minister’s speech suggested a hurry. It is essential to highlight that the speech was given two weeks after his election; he also made reference to the leaving train, the train

that would not wait for the Republicans. It can be explained as Tony Blair attempting to end this long-lasting exhaustive conflict quickly or that he desired to strike while the iron was hot. The latter was more probable than the former.

Tony Blair's Party won a landslide victory in the 1997 General Election, ending eighteen years of Conservative rule. Such a victory could not be missed as an opportunity to deal with the Irish conflict (Holmes 188). Holmes was right because Major suffered from the lack of majority in the Commons and the support of his own Party, especially at the end of his term. These circumstances made him a hostage of the Unionists and made him unable to make appropriate decisions. Nonetheless, with Tony Blair's victory, a notable change in circumstances took place. It was considered a new beginning with a new administration after 18 years of Conservative rule and great support for the Labour Party, which had to be exploited rapidly.

Consequently, I can contend that the Unionists could neither force the Prime Minister's hand nor blackmail him with such a majority. In reality, the opposite was to happen. It suggested that any decision made regarding the peace process would be free of Unionists' pressure. It could but be an advantage to the peace process since some decisions had been an outcome of some pressure. Besides, with such a majority, it would be difficult for these same Unionists to oppose the Prime Minister's decisions regarding the process, among other things, the conditions for Sinn Fein's participation in the negotiations leading to an agreement. It must be noted that conditions for Sinn Fein's involvement constituted an obstacle to the talks, especially since the Unionists insisted on the IRA decommissioning before any inclusion.

What stood out in Tony Blair's address was his approach to handing over arms. Blair did not make decommissioning a precondition in his speech. He referred to the endorsement of the Michell Report when he stated, "We continue to support the parallel approach proposed by George Mitchell" ("Address by Prime Minister Blair"), which was an overt adoption of the Report. It must be reiterated that the Mitchell Commission

suggested some decommissioning in parallel with the talks. It needs to be noted that the Talks were suspended before Blair's election, and the speech decided their resumption very soon, in two weeks' time, again implying Blair's urgency.

According to Tony Blair's speech at the Royal Agricultural Society Belfast, a renewed ceasefire was the only precondition for Sinn Fein to attend talks. Even for the latter, Tony Blair was not demanding. He required just an immediate ceasefire without conditions regarding its permanence. Likewise, the Aide-Memoire issued in June 1997 emphasised the conditions for Sinn Fein's participation in the talks. It emphasised that abandonment of violence was the only requirement to access the discussion for a settlement; however, handing over arms was to take place during the talks to allow substantive discussion ("British Spell out"); again, that was an espousal of Mitchell Report. The Aide-Memoire reiterated the preconditions in Tony Blair's speech to the Agricultural Society in 1997.

The talks resumed on the 3rd of June 1997. Once again, Sinn Fein was excluded. I believe the aim was to exert pressure on the Republicans to reannounce a ceasefire. Hence, a few days after the resumption of the talks, the IRA responded with brutality. However, not only was Sinn Fein proscribed, but even the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) and the Continuity Republican Army (CIRA) were banned from participating in the negotiations. They were excluded because they were considered illegal organisations. It must be noted that the Loyalists did not break their cessation of violence stated in 1994, which owed them a place in the discussions. The LVF perpetrated the incidents occurring against the Catholics since the CLMC declaration of ceasefire in 1994. The meetings' resumption was also a clear invitation to Sinn Fein and obviously not the last one.

The Document on decommissioning, released on the 23rd of June 1997, made explicit that joining the talks was subject to the endorsement of Mitchell Principles, end of violence, and working to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons as soon as possible ("Text of Document on Decommissioning"). However, the document stipulated

that “any party... would need to affirm its acceptance of the commitments set out below” ((“Text of Document on Decommissioning”), then it stated the commitments. In reality, nothing in the document indicated when decommissioning should occur, save that it should be as soon as possible, though it noted that the end of violence should be immediate. From my perspective, it designated that decommissioning could be at any time during the talks and not necessarily before joining them. The suggestions were accepted by the SDLP and UUP and rebuffed by the DUP and Sinn Fein (Bew and Gillespie “1997.” 343).

Sinn Fein's rejection of the 23 June document was based on no decommissioning during the talks. They rebuffed to hand over their arms, which was deemed a surrender. However, since the DUP mistrusted the Republicans, they required the IRA to decommission, stipulating that a ceasefire was not enough gesture for good intentions, especially since in 1994, the IRA announced a fire-cessation but resumed violence after seventeen months. In my view, decommissioning could not prevent the Republicans from continuing violence, for they could have supplies from outside. There was nothing that could indicate Sinn Fein's commitment and goodwill. In such a situation, two solutions were in sight: either not to negotiate with the Republicans since nothing could guarantee their long-lasting commitment and wage war against them, or to take the risk and assume that the Republicans would honour their commitment with a permanent ceasefire.

Waging war against the IRA was not an option for the British anymore. Actually, they had attempted it and failed. For over two decades, the British Government resorted to violence to tame and defeat the IRA. Nevertheless, it only worsened the situation, for the IRA retaliated. The war against the Provos was exhaustive in terms of lives and money. The second option was to run the risk of building the peace process on assumptions. However, the British and Irish Governments seemed unaware of the chance offered to them. At least, not at that moment, especially when Tony Blair reiterated his position in the House of Commons on the 25th of June 1997. In his speech, he made explicit that no concessions would be made regarding decommissioning and set early September as the resumption of substantive talks, adding that they would end in May (House of Commons,

25 June 1997, vol.296, col.849). Notably, Blair meant no decommissioning after discussions but rather during talks. Hence, the parties had eight months to negotiate and achieve an agreement. He invited Sinn Fein again to join the negotiations after adopting the abovementioned precondition.

In response to Tony Blair's address, the IRA carried out an attack entailing a rocket launch targeting an RUC vehicle in Belfast (Bew and Gillespie 343). That was an overt rejection of Blair's invitation to join the talks under such conditions. The IRA violence echoed their discontentment with the current situation, emphasising decommissioning refusal. On the one hand, the pressure that the Prime Minister attempted to exert on the Republicans once more did not pay. At this juncture, the British should have learned that exerting pressure was an ineffective means to bring an end to the IRA's violence. The past demonstrated that such an approach had not provided positive results. Nevertheless, Blair's insistence on Sinn Fein's participation in the talks mirrored his eagerness to see them as part of the discussions. His keenness was particularly evident when both the British and Irish Governments allowed a five-week period for the IRA to announce the renewal of their ceasefire and six weeks after the ceasefire before joining the negotiations ("A Chronology of Conflict").

On the other hand, the IRA's persistence with violence reflected their conviction to attend discussions without decommissioning until signing an agreement. It was apparent that without the Unionists and, more importantly, the Republicans' participation in the talks, the latter would not be fruitful, no agreement would be signed, and hence, no peace would be attained. The Republicans were also aware that the British Government was reluctant to pursue its war against the Provos. Evidently, they were exhausted by the fight, not to mention their political duty towards Northern Ireland to establish peace. Thus, I believe that the Republicans had a card up their sleeves, and they envisioned using it. The said card was probably their winning card, and not using it would be a missed opportunity to get closer to their objective.

Even with the IRA's persistence in brutality, the British sought an exit and did not use violence. According to an article published in *the Irish Times* on the 18th of July 1997, the British held regular secret contacts with the Republicans since the end of June (“No ceasefire”). It is noteworthy that Tony Blair and Marjorie Mo Mowlam,⁸⁸ the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, assured that no contact with the Republicans would take place after they killed two RUC members (Bew and Gillespie 344). At first glance, it would be thought that the British sought an alternative to achieve IRA decommissioning since the successive direct calls made foundered. However, I believe that if the British Government decided to contact the Republicans behind the scenes, it meant they had something else to offer to the Republicans and doing it in secret implied that it would not please the Unionists. The British once again betrayed the Unionists; another disloyalty added to those of the past which legitimised the Unionists' fear and suspicion of the British Government. From my perspective, the negotiations conducted between the British and the Republicans could only concern the Republicans' entry to talks without decommissioning while they were ongoing.

Engaging in talks with the Republicans behind the Unionists' backs could be construed as the British aligning with the Nationalists and Republicans. In reality, that was not the case; the British approach to the situation in Ulster was not simply favouring one party over the other; rather, it entailed exerting pressure on whomever possible as part of their strategy. The British Government previously behaved likewise with the Nationalists regarding the Orange march at the beginning of July. When questioned by the Nationalists about her stance on allowing the parade to proceed down the Garvaghy Road, Mowlam replied that no decision had been made. However, a leak of a confidential report dated the 20th of June suggested the opposite (Adams 285). Thus, the British Government lied to the Nationalists. The decision to permit the march was endorsed two weeks before. Therefore,

⁸⁸Marjorie Mo Mowlam (1949-2005) was born and died in England. She was a Labour Party politician and Northern Ireland Secretary of State. She started with the Labour Party in 1969 and became the Secretary of Northern Ireland in 1997 under Tony Blair's premiership, making of her the first woman to occupy such a position. Though she was the one who allowed an Orange march to take place along the Garvaghy Road in Portadown in July 1997, she was accused by the Unionists of being sympathetic to the Nationalists because she attempted to convince loyalist paramilitary prisoners to support the peace process.

the British misled both sides, the Unionists and the Nationalists. Such conduct could only result in eroding trust in the British Government.

Allowing such a parade to go through the said street, which was mainly Nationalist, could significantly impact the ongoing peace process. Such a decision could also affect the IRA's decision not to renew its ceasefire. From my perspective, it was not a thoughtful decision from the British. However, I believe that it was far from being deliberate, especially since they held secret talks with the Republicans, which would jeopardise their negotiations. The IRA did not react violently to what happened in the Garvaghy Road, probably to avoid jeopardising their potential participation in the talks without handing over weaponry. It indicated that the Republicans endeavoured to de-escalate the situation; otherwise, such would have been an excellent opportunity to retaliate and enhance violence. Therefore, they wanted discussions to take place and to be involved in.

In reality, a few days before the above-mentioned *Irish Times* article (18th July), the British Government published a letter sent to McGuinness, the Vice President of Sinn Fein, dated the 9th of July, stipulating that Sinn Fein could join the talks without any prior or parallel decommissioning of the IRA weaponry, save that they had to commit themselves to Mitchell Principles (T. Mitchell 120-21). The letter affirmed that the British and the Republicans held meetings and negotiations behind the Unionists' backs. Evidently, the latter were not consulted before deciding on handing over arms. It needs to be reiterated that, with Tony Blair's majority in the Commons, the Unionists could not pressure his decisions regarding decommissioning in the peace process. What was left to them was either to object to his decision or to withdraw from the negotiations. If so, the peace process was to witness another setback.

However, the most conspicuous point in the letter was that the British Government surrendered to the Republicans' demand of no prior or parallel decommissioning. The former was ceded to the Republicans by Major, then Blair in his 1997 speech at the Royal Agricultural Society Belfast, while the latter was conceded in the said letter. In fact, it was

not the first time that the British made concessions to Sinn Fein and IRA pressure. History proved that the Provos violence bore fruits. From being banned from participating in talks in default of legitimacy and adherence to British beliefs to taking part in them with ceasing fire as the only precondition was enough proof that the Republicans knew how to achieve their aims and that the British Government ceded to their stubbornness.

It took the Republicans only one day to announce their renewed ceasefire. It meant that it was already discussed amongst the leaders of Sinn Fein and the IRA, for it did not take them much to declare it. That was the fruit of the secret discussions conducted between the British and the Republicans. On the 19th of July 1997, the IRA announced its long-awaited restoration of the 1994 ceasefire. Its declaration stated that cessation of violence would occur starting from midday on the 20th of July 1997. The announcement encompassed two essential points. It stipulated that “The IRA is committed to ending British rule in Ireland. It is the root cause of divisions and conflict in our country” (“Irish Republican Army Ceasefire”). The IRA words implied that their objective did not change over the years and that they were determined to end British rule.

Hence, Sinn Fein's participation in the talks aimed to negotiate British withdrawal from Northern Ireland and reunification with the Republic of Ireland. In fact, it is precisely the aim behind the discussions prior to an agreement, which is to state the objectives. The IRA believed that the division subsisting in Northern Ireland was due to British presence, ignoring the wish of the Unionist majority to remain part of the Union. Such thinking could hinder the progress of the peace process in Ulster. Denying the fact that the other community had a say in its own affairs was fanaticism and would lead to a stalemate. It must be noted that the Unionists still refused to sit at the same table as Sinn Fein. On the 30th of May 1997, when all Northern Ireland political parties flew to South Africa to attend a conference, the Unionists refused to take part unless guarantees were provided for separate conference facilities not to be in contact with Sinn Fein representatives. Such behaviour on both sides indicated that reaching an agreement would be a considerable achievement, for beliefs did not change.

However, stating that “We want a permanent peace and therefore we are prepared to enhance the search for a democratic peace settlement through real and inclusive negotiations” (“Irish Republican Army Ceasefire”) meant that to achieve the said aim, they committed themselves to peaceful and democratic means, especially that the declaration of 1997, unlike the previous one, stipulated that the ceasefire would be permanent. I contend that it was a strategic way to avoid being asked to decommission as an alternative by turning the attention to the ceasefire. Nonetheless, refusing to hand over arms contradicted their willingness to use peaceful means. After such an unambiguous declaration regarding the ceasefire, the British could not deny Sinn Fein to participate in the discussions.

The risk of believing in Sinn Fein and the IRA’s commitment to Mitchell Principles and the permanence of their ceasefire was at last endorsed when the British Government adopted Sinn Fein’s participation without the IRA decommissioning as a precondition. It must be noted that the IRA declared a ceasefire in the autumn of 1994 but breached it seventeen months later, and that was likely to happen again. In fact, it represented the sole option left for the British, and its espousal was imperative if peace was to be attained. The British Government exhausted all the other options, and in the end, IRA violence paid. Without the Republicans’ pressure on the British Government, the latter would have never accepted them in the talks, especially since they knew their aspirations. The IRA limited the options available to the British and confined them to one: agreeing to their demand, which was attending the negotiations without decommissioning.

With the IRA's renewed ceasefire, the ajar door opened to Sinn Fein’s entry into talks, which were supposed to resume in September 1997. The adoption of Mitchell Principles was also a prerequisite to their participation. Thus, Sinn Fein officially signed the Mitchell Principles on the 9th of September 1997 and joined the said discussions. In return, decommissioning had been shelved as a condition and sidelined during these talks. However, that marked the beginning of a long journey to find a middle ground among Ulster’s conflicting parties, which would be crowned with the signature of an agreement endorsed by the majority in Ulster.

A middle ground would be to accept to relinquish some of the initial demands and preferences made by the conflicting parties to reach an agreement. It is the willingness to meet in the middle, seeking a settlement that would balance the interests and preferences of the disputing sides. In fact, the compromise aims to reach a win-win outcome. In other words, all the conflicting parties benefit to some extent, establishing a sense of fairness. With a compromise, no party obtains everything they desire; however, everyone obtains something. As such, more sustainable and harmonious relationships would develop between them. Effective communication is a prerequisite to the compromise, which requires parties to listen to one another's perspectives and concerns. In this process, trust is also essential. Trust implies that the different sides will honour the accord and fulfil their commitments.

Compromises can be a valuable instrument to avert disputes from mounting into a more destructive form, such as extreme violence. In fact, a compromise can find alternatives to the subsisting confrontations through discussion, and mediation can help. The third-party can reframe issues, suggest solutions, and ensure that the process remains balanced. However, if generally compromises are perceived as positive strategies, they may not be suitable for all conflicts, for in some instances, they are seen as a sign of weakness. Notably, the success of the compromise depends on the sustainability of the agreed-upon solutions. It implies that the resolution must not only deal with the immediate concerns but also be strong enough to stand the test of time. This point will be detailed in the last chapter of my dissertation.

Thus, even if Tony Blair had inherited the peace process under the same circumstances as his predecessor and seemed to adopt the same policy, I can detect a difference between the two Prime Ministers in dealing with the peace process. Blair's speech at the Royal Agricultural Society Belfast emitted enthusiasm and conviction that he could do something for the peace process along with the quickness he adopted, suggesting a firm determination to pressure the process for a settlement. Moreover, his speech also noticed softness, especially since the only precondition for Sinn Fein to attend the talks

was a renewed ceasefire. I contend that Blair's approach directly stemmed from his majority and freedom from Unionist pressure. However, tribute must be paid to John Major, who laid the foundations of the peace process and set it in motion with the IRA 1994 ceasefire. It is worth mentioning that 1997 not only witnessed the establishment of a new administration in the UK but also observed a change in the Republic of Ireland. A General Election occurred, resulting in a government headed by Bertie Ahern,⁸⁹ who had affinities with Blair. The closeness between Blair and Ahern was crucial to the development of the process, along with their shared belief in attaining peace by securing an agreement.

4.2 Securing the Good Friday Agreement:

The negotiations, leading to a satisfactory Accord between the conflicting parties, were inclusive. Simply put, the Republicans were welcomed to the talks after they had renewed their ceasefire. Indeed, with the grudge harboured against the Republicans, it was highly likely that the Unionists, especially the DUP, would vehemently object to Sinn Fein's participation without fail. I believe that the Party's entry into the multi-party talks was perceived as a defeat to the Unionists. It needs to be reiterated that between the Unionists and the Nationalists, it had always been a zero-sum game.

The concept of a zero-sum game is usually used in Conflict Resolution theory to portray a situation in which the gain or benefit of a given party is balanced by the loss of the other party. In other words, the involved parties perceive the interests or goals as opposed to one another. If the conflicting parties engage in a zero-sum game mindset and behaviour, it can lead to the escalation of the conflict. The disputing sides could become more entrenched in their stances, giving room to retaliation, which would deteriorate both relationships and outcomes. Accordingly, Sinn Fein's participation in the talks was discerned as a defeat by the Unionists. The latter's dissatisfaction was epitomised in their withdrawal from the negotiations; the UUP, PUP, and UDP withdrew (Bew and Gillespie

⁸⁹ Bertie Ahern (Patrick Bartholomew) (1951-) was born in Dublin. He was the leader of Fianna Fail and Taoiseach of Ireland. He held different positions in Government until he became Taoiseach in 1997. He took part in the talks leading to the signature of the Good Friday and the St Andrews Agreements.

347); decommissioning was the core of their anger. Of course, such conduct could only complicate the situation in Ulster and erect hurdles in the way of the peace process.

In practice, since the initiation of the peace process in Northern Ireland, the focus has consistently been on the Nationalists/Republicans. Their prominence in Ulster stemmed from their representation of the minority who had experienced oppression. They were also those who asked for justice and equality. Focusing on the Nationalists rather than the Unionists was a British implicit recognition that injustice and inequality prevailed. Moreover, and most importantly, the Republicans were waging war against the British, unlike the Loyalists, whose aim was to counter the Republicans and protect their kind. However, it does not mean that the Unionists/Loyalists were entirely marginalised. Both the Nationalists and the Unionists were part of the conflict, and relegating one of the two could hinder the conflict's resolution. The Unionists' party marginalisation enhanced with Tony Blair's election, for their power waned, but talks without them could not be envisaged.

Nevertheless, when the talks formally started on the 15th of September, headed by George Mitchell, the American Senator, the UUP, PUP, and UDP joined them. It must be noted that the Unionists attended the discussions without IRA decommissioning. In reality, failing to seize the opportunity presented by these negotiations would have been irresponsible on the Unionists' side. Moreover, it was evident that the British wanted the talks to lead to an agreement, especially after excluding decommissioning as a precondition. Had they maintained their stance, they would have been blamed for the failure of the discussions. The British support for the Unionists vanished, and the Unionists became aware of it. From my perspective, if the Unionists had decided to participate in the meetings without any confidence-building measures, it was because no other option was left. It was apparent that the British pressured the weakest party at the time.

Meanwhile, episodes of violence took place. However, they did not breach the Provisionals' announcement of its ceasefire renewal. The Continuity IRA (CIRA)

perpetrated the attacks and bombs. For instance, a plastic explosive bomb was planted in a motor tax office in Derry on the 30th of October 1997, and the bomb planted outside the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) office at Belfast City Hall on the 20th of November on the same day as Bertie Ahern had a meeting with David Trimble, the leader of the UUP. (Bew and Gillespie 350). Such brutality was not considered IRA return to violence, for the CIRA members were not Provisionals but splinters. The latter still operated even after the signature of the Good Friday Agreement.

Nevertheless, the murders committed against Brenden Campbell and Robert Dougan, two Loyalists, on the 9th and 10th of February led to Sinn Fein's temporary expulsion from the talks ten days later, for the PIRA proved to be involved ("Governments' Statement on the Suspension" pars. 17; 19). They re-joined the negotiations seventeen days later. Sinn Fein was punished because of the Republicans' deeds. The Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), known as Ulster Democratic Unionist Party (UDUP), was also expelled from the discussions one month before Sinn Fein, on the 26th of January, when the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) breached the Michell Principles after the Party withdrew from the talks the same day (Bew and Gillespie 354).

During the talks, the Republicans threatened to resume violence if the discussions failed. On the 7th of November 1997, Francie Molly, a Sinn Fein talks team member, stated in the Cullyhanna, Co. meeting that if the discussions founder, the Republicans will "simply go back to what we know best" (qtd. in Bew and Gillespie 350). It was blatant that what the Republicans knew best was violence. In fact, it was an explicit threat to return to brutality. That was sufficient to instil fear within the Unionists, contributing to their insistence on decommissioning during the said talks. I believe that the Republicans' refusal to decommission stemmed from their need for arms to resume violence, and Molly's words left no doubt about such an assumption. Thus, the threat emanated by the Republicans was enough to make the British consider securing an agreement.

Therefore, the sole means for the British Government to achieve their objectives was to exert pressure on the Unionists. The British were aware of the Unionists' position and lack of power in the House of Commons after the May 1997 General Election. Hence, they used it against them. The British Prime Minister made it explicit that the prospect of direct rule was an unrealistic aspiration at that juncture and that not reaching an accord would mean closer cooperation with the Republic for the future of Ulster (Wagner 22). There is no need to emphasise that the Unionists' greatest fear was closer relations with the Republic of Ireland, which would be a vehicle for a reunion. I believe that that was enough to prompt the Unionists to accept power-sharing with the Nationalists in Northern Ireland. Looking at the Accord exhaustively, it can be stated that the Unionists' demands were not all met. Their requests encompassed arms to be handed over and no involvement of the Irish Republic in Ulster's affairs for the moderate Unionists (UUP), while the radicals (DUP) went even further and refused to talk to the Republicans for a settlement. Nevertheless, Blair's reduced dependence on Unionists in the Commons undermined their position and compelled them to consider alternatives.

Moreover, Tony Blair promised the Unionists that Sinn Fein would not hold office until the IRA handed over arms to drive them to sign the Agreement. However, it was not stipulated in the Accord, and the Unionists were surprised not to find the link between decommissioning and holding office in the Agreement draft sent to them on the eve of its signature, which was about to jeopardise the peace process. (O'Kane "Decommissioning and the Peace Process" 95). Obviously, such a clause could not be introduced in the Compromise, for the British were aware that Sinn Fein would have never approved it. The Unionists were on the verge of not signing the Accord, but it was saved at the last minute.

Actually, such a clause would have prevented the Unionists from sharing power with the Republicans in the Government of Northern Ireland. Antony Alcock,⁹⁰ two days before the signature of the Belfast Agreement, commented about the linkage between Sinn

⁹⁰ Anthony Alcock (Antony Evelyn Alcock) (1936-2006) was born in Malta and died in Ulster. He was a historian and a Vanguard party UUP member before becoming an advisor to David Trimble.

Fein in the Northern Irish Government and decommissioning, saying: “Our only hope of excluding them - thereby reducing the risk of the Assembly being collapsed - would be under a clause not allowing them into the Assembly unless there was decommissioning,” (qtd. in Godson 330). Actually, Alcock emphasised two points. The first entailed the exclusion of Sinn Fein from the Assembly, while the second involved the use of the decommissioning issue. Hence, erecting obstacles was obviously the Unionists’ plan to evade sharing power with the Nationalists in Ulster since they could no longer exert influence on the British Prime Minister for anything after the 1997 Election.

Nevertheless, the Unionists approved and signed the Agreement. In my view, the only reason that propelled them to sign it was that if they refused to sign the Accord, they would have been blamed for missing such an opportunity and held responsible for failing to achieve peace in Northern Ireland. It must be noted that a deadline was set for the talks, and it was about to expire. Hence, they signed it believing in Tony Blair’s words. After all the betrayal the Party was subject to, they believed in the British Government. That was not naivety but rather a shortage of alternatives. The least that can be said about Tony Blair is that he exploited the situation. The conduct of the Prime Minister reflected his eagerness to sign an agreement to eliminate violence. He indeed succeeded in safeguarding the signature of the Accord by the Unionists without IRA decommissioning; however, it posed an enormous problem in the Agreement’s implementation.

If there was no link between decommissioning and the Assembly in the Belfast Agreement, an implicit linkage was made between decommissioning and the prisoners’ release. The Accord stipulated under the section “Prisoners” that the paramilitary prisoners’ release would be accelerated (par. 1) within two years, that is, in 2000, the year set for handing over weapons. The Unionists opposed the early release of prisoners during the talks. Nevertheless, they signed the Agreement for some reasons, which will be developed in the coming pages. It indicated that linking prisoners’ release to decommissioning was their lifebuoy to pressure not only the prisoners’ issue to obtain a delay but also the decommissioning problem to oblige the IRA to hand over their weapons.

Once again, this can be related to the ambiguity of the language used to deal with the said matter. It was evident that the Unionists attempted to have as many concessions from the Republicans as possible. Nonetheless, they foundered because the most important issue, decommissioning, was not included in the Belfast Agreement, not to mention that prisoners were set free without handing over arms. Conversely, the Republicans imposed their conditions on the Unionists.

I believe that the Accord was imposed on the Unionists but not the Republicans. From my standpoint, Sinn Fein had to be kept in the talks regardless of the cost. The Agreement suited both Governments, mainly the British, because it ended violence on the mainland. Troubles also would cease in the Republic of Ireland. The efforts made to secure the signature of the Good Friday Agreement were crowned. On the 10th of April 1998, all the political parties signed the Belfast Agreement. The latter had to be accepted by Ulster's people and those of the Republic. Such was the deal before initiating the talks leading to the Good Friday Agreement. Consequently, referenda were held in the North and the South on the 22nd of May 1998.

It is imperative to note that efforts were also made to secure the Accord's endorsement. The majority grassroots approved the Agreement in the referenda held on the 22nd of May 1998. In Ulster, 71 per cent backed the Accord, and in the Republic, 94 per cent supported it (Wagner 14). Therefore, the majority endorsed the Accord. Both the yes and no supporters campaigned for the referendum in Ulster. In fact, the British Government and the business community together spent practically four million pounds sterling on the yes campaign compared to the 87,000 pounds paid by the DUP, which supported the no vote (T. Mitchell 134). Moreover, on the 27th of March 1998, a leaked British Government document stated that the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) intended to use polls in favour of the Accord and not those disadvantaging it along with non-political figures to sell a settlement to the people of Ulster (Bew and Gillespie 356).

The above sums and the leak indicated that the British Government wanted the yes campaign to win over the no one. Money and cunning manoeuvres were employed to secure the Belfast Agreement's endorsement by the North and South. The least that can be said is that the British Government succeeded in its mission. It needs to be highlighted that, likewise, the Irish Government campaigned for the yes vote. Besides, the Americans assured to inject \$100 million into Ulster's economy to support the Agreement (T. Mitchell 134). All these efforts could but be crowned with victory. The three Governments' efforts considerably influenced the grassroots decision to espouse the Compromise. However, 58% of the Unionists in Ulster did not vote for the Accord (Dingley "Peace in Our Time?" 358). It was a notable proportion within the Unionist community. It could but reflect their discontentment with the Good Friday Agreement. It meant that more than half of the Unionists living in Ulster were unhappy with its provisions. Unfortunately for them, the vote concerned all the people of Northern Ireland, and the time came for the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

4.3 Unraveling the Achievements of the Good Friday Agreement:

The Good Friday Agreement was signed on the 10th of April 1998. The Accord worked on three strands. In Strand 1, the two Governments and Ulster's political parties agreed on establishing a democratically elected assembly in Northern Ireland, exercising executive and legislative powers and consisting of 108 members elected by proportional representation. It meant that the Agreement adopted power-sharing as it was espoused by the conflicting parties. It must be noted that power-sharing was already introduced in the Sunningdale Agreement; however, it was rebuffed by the Unionists. Power-sharing is a political arrangement that ensures the involvement of the representatives of significant community groups in political decision-making (Lijphart 97). This division of power prevents one side from becoming dominant and consequently averts them from threatening the rights of others. It can be argued that power-sharing is undemocratic, for it goes against the majority rule, that is, the party with the most votes governs. It can be true, but one must

not overlook the fact that power-sharing is inclusive, and this inclusivity goes hand in hand with the democratic principles of representation and participation.

I believe that if power-sharing can have a disadvantage, it would be the one of deadlocks. The latter may stem from distrust and veto. In the context of Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement did not explicitly provide any political party with such a right of veto; however, in some instances, such as important decisions (constitutional change or Ulster's governance), require the support of both the Nationalists and the Unionists, which can lead to a deadlock if one of the parties disagrees. Regarding trust, the least that can be said is that it was not prevalent between both sides and led to obstacles in the Accord's implementation. However, power-sharing proved to be an effective way of conflict resolution. Sudan (2005), Liberia (2003), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (2003) adopted power-sharing, and it has been a success.

Along with Strand I, Strand II dealt with North/South relations. The latter was to be addressed by a Ministerial Council, which would permit cooperation between Northern Ireland's devolved Parliament (Stormont) and the Irish Government. It must be noted that the Ministerial Council and the Assembly were interdependent; one cannot function without the other. The Strand III established a British-Irish Council in which members of the British and Irish Governments, together with members of the different devolved Governments, would deal with relations between the peoples of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Other issues, such as civil and religious liberties, were dealt with, coupled with economic matters.

Presented as it is, the Good Friday Agreement was balanced. In other words, it was constructed in a way that sought to create a fair and equitable compromise among the different sides. The political parties would have never signed Strand I without the two other Strands. The latter was considered as the guarantee for both Unionists/Loyalists and Nationalists/Republicans. The former wanted a link between East and West, and the latter looked for North/South bodies, and both were satisfied. Thus, on the one hand, the

British/Irish Council was founded to satisfy the Unionists' request concerning a connection between the UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) and the Republic.

On the other hand, the North/South Ministerial Council was established to meet the Nationalists' demand regarding strong cooperation between the Republic and Northern Ireland, with the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive as its members. Simply put, it was the Irish dimension suggested in the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973. It must be reiterated that the said Agreement collapsed and, with it, the Irish dimension. The North/South Ministerial Council was Ulster's link to the Republic of Ireland and, consequently, the vehicle toward reunification from the perspective of the Unionists.

In fact, signing the Belfast Agreement was an accomplishment in the Northern Irish conflict. However, reactions differed from one party to another. On the one hand, the DUP rejected the Agreement, while the UUP, the main Unionist Party at the time, accepted it. On the other hand, the SDLP was pleased to sign the Accord, while Sinn Féin saw it as a mere path to reunification (Mulholland, *Northern Ireland: Introduction* 145). That is, only the DUP rejected the Accord, for they were radicals and refused to talk to the Republicans. In fact, the UUP signed it, for Trimble imposed it on his party after being duped by the British in a letter sent to them. It must be noted that the UUP had reservations over some issues, mainly decommissioning.

Consequently, the various responses to the Agreement led to a tumultuous summer. Those unhappy with the Accord made use of violence. Moreover, the decommissioning issue continued to dominate the scene after the Good Friday Agreement, and violence continued. On the 15th of August 1998, during a civic festival, a bomb was detonated by IRA splinters in Armagh, where twenty-eight people were killed and 360 injured (Bew and Gillespie 373), making it one of the deadliest attacks since the Troubles' beginning. It is worth noting that no society can achieve 100 per cent of non-violence, especially a society that was subject to brutality for decades and sectarianism dominated it. The IRA immediately condemned the explosion.

I believe that if the Provisional IRA condemned the attack, it was to state that they did not breach their ceasefire. The Good Friday Agreement could be jeopardised and even annulled if such was the case, for non-violence was a prerequisite to its signature. In reality, the Real IRA (RIRA)⁹¹ planted the bomb four months after the Belfast Agreement's adoption, reflecting their discontentment with it. Even if the majority voted yes – under some influence – unanimity prevailed neither on the Republicans' nor the Unionists' side. It must be noted that achieving 100% for the yes vote was not possible. However, the most important point was that the bomb failed to break the Belfast consensus for a peaceful future.

Moreover, the language used in the Belfast Agreement satisfied all the parties, namely the Unionists and the Nationalists, for neither side was disadvantaged (Wagner 27). Hence, since the conflict in Ulster had always been a zero-sum game and applying Wagner's interpretation, it can be said that all parties, encompassing the Unionists and the Nationalists, considered themselves winners. In fact, the Unionists had to accept not being the dominant power they had enjoyed for decades in governing Northern Ireland when they agreed to share power with the Nationalists, but crucially, nothing could be imposed on them. However, as a majority in Ulster, it guaranteed the link with the United Kingdom since no change in Ulster's constitutional status would occur without their consent. The Unionists were aware that a return to the old days was no longer a viable option at this juncture, and thus, they had to consider new offers, and power-sharing was an acceptable deal.

On the other hand, the Nationalists could obtain power-sharing, which meant having a say in Northern Ireland's affairs. More importantly, nothing would be inflicted on them and make them second-class citizens. It needs to be reiterated that inequality and injustice prevailed over decades and even centuries. Nonetheless, the Nationalists were far from attaining their goal of a united Ireland, especially with the Unionists as a majority. At least

⁹¹ The Real IRA was a dissident Irish Republican paramilitary group. It was the result of a split within the Provisional IRA in 1997 with the ceasefire declaration. The Real IRA rejected the ceasefire.

not until demographics shift in their favour. In Northern Ireland, the Nationalist minority was not favoured when bestowed a say in its affairs; it was only a fundamental and legitimate right for any government's citizens to ensure their voices were heard and respected. It was a step towards redressing historical imbalances in terms of inequality and injustice, suggesting an inclusive political environment.

In reality, Wagner's reading of the Accord was superficial. His focus was but, on the language used in the Agreement, ignoring external factors influencing the language itself. In fact, the words of the text were carefully chosen to meet a specific purpose, which was to entice all the conflicting parties to endorse it. It is true that if the parties signed the Compromise, it was an explicit approval of it. However, what made the Unionists and the Nationalists embrace it was not only the fact of having the impression of being winners, especially for the Unionists, and the ambiguity that characterised the Agreement, but also the pressure exerted by the Irish, the British, and the American Governments. The coercion made by the Governments took various forms: threats, lies, secret meetings, and others.

The Nationalists' requests were not all met either. The prospect of reunion with the Republic of Ireland became distant with the signature of the Belfast Agreement. Nevertheless, they signed the Accord because the partially open door to reunification with the Republic was still acknowledged and existed and was accepted but subject to majority consent according to the Good Friday Agreement. According to Wagner, by approximately 2030, the Catholics will outnumber the Protestants in Northern Ireland (27). However, it must be noted that not all the Catholics/Nationalists favoured reunification with the Republic of Ireland, but most of them supported this aspiration. Nonetheless, in the post-Brexit era, the outcome of the May Northern Ireland Assembly's election in 2022, coupled with the electoral success of Sinn Féin, may introduce changes in Ulster's destiny. However, the sought balance did not avert the difficulties in implementing the Good Friday Agreement.

4.4 Difficulties in Implementing the Good Friday Agreement:

After the majority of the electorate in Ulster and the Republic of Ireland endorsed the Good Friday Agreement in May 1998, it had to be implemented. In fact, what makes implementing an agreement in Conflict Resolution theory easy is the accord's adoption by the public. When the general public supports the deal, it can create a favourable environment for its application. Such espousal can help politicians to remain committed to the agreement. Moreover, when the accord encompasses all stakeholders, it is more likely to succeed, suggesting that different perspectives and interests have been considered. The clarity and realism of the accord cannot be overlooked as one of the reasons making its implementation not difficult. Obviously, when the terms are clear and reasonable, the agreement is more likely to be carried out without significant complications. It suggests that ambiguity and unrealistic expectations can complicate the application. Trust can also make the implementation easier. In reality, high levels of trust between the conflicting parties means that they trust one another commitments to the agreement.

Given that an accord constitutes an agreement addressing concerns and issues among the conflicting parties, one might infer that its carrying out would be facilitated by the parties' consensus regarding the said matters. Nevertheless, implementing the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland proved to be strenuous and protracted. I believe that myriad reasons laid behind the said difficulty; inter alia, the Agreement did not tackle in detail important conflict resolution questions such as decommissioning, prisoners' release, and policing, which secured the support of all the parties. If such were the case, the conflicting sides would probably not have signed it. Moreover, each party understood the Accord differently. It is worth noting that not tackling the said issues was deliberate. Nonetheless, if vagueness characterised some matters in the Belfast Agreement, it was not the case for the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. It was made clear that Ulster was part of the United Kingdom until most people in Northern Ireland decided the opposite. Since the Irish Government signed the Accord, it meant that they accepted not to claim Ulster constitutionally, and changes were to be made to cope with the Agreement.

The language used in the Good Friday Agreement was ambiguous but constructive (Dingley “Constructive Ambiguity.”). Dingley’s description is accepted in the context of signing the Accord. Since the conflicting parties agreed to the terms of the Compromise, it meant that they were in agreement. However, since ambiguity prevailed in the text and implied understanding things differently, it meant that the Unionists and the Nationalists agreed on different things. Thus, in reality, they were far from agreeing. If ambiguity permitted the adoption of the Good Friday Agreement before its signing, that was not the case in the post-Accord context. From my standpoint, the prevailing constructiveness turned into destructiveness. Such disagreement was to haunt the coming years of the Belfast Agreement’s implementation, especially when regard is made to decommissioning.

It is worth noting that the British Government issued the Northern Ireland Act in 1998, according to which powers were to be devolved to the Assembly and the Executive in Northern Ireland, that is, implementing the Belfast Agreement. Moreover, the said Act repealed the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, which led to Ireland’s partition. Not to mention that the Assembly and the Executive were set up on the 2nd of December 1999. Thus, powers were devolved from Westminster to Stormont, but the IRA had not started the process of decommissioning, which was the UUP’s condition to participate in the Executive. Blair’s letter to Trimble regarding the link between decommissioning and Sinn Fein holding office in the Northern Irish Assembly (par. 2) led to a stalemate because the Sinn Fein Party did not recognise the letter’s status. Nothing was stipulated about the IRA’s decommissioning as a condition for devolving powers in the Good Friday Agreement. Paragraph three of the section Decommissioning in the Belfast Agreement read:

All participants accordingly reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. They also confirm their intention to continue to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent Commission, and to use any influence they may have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement.

Accordingly, paramilitaries had to abide by their commitment to non-violence. The IRA met the said condition when it announced its ceasefire in 1997. It needs to be highlighted that the Loyalists did not breach theirs either. Besides, decommissioning was expected to be completed within two years of the Agreement espousal by the people of the island of Ireland, that is, in May 2000. Meanwhile, the paramilitaries had to work with the Commission on decommissioning. Nonetheless, it is essential to clarify that handing over weapons was not a condition for Devolution. It was the stance to which the Republicans held, and they rebuffed to accept the agreement made between the Prime Minister and the Unionists stipulated in the above letter.

I believe that such an agreement between Tony Blair and David Trimble regarding the link between decommissioning and Sinn Féin's ability to assume office in the Assembly could not take place without the consent of the Republicans, for it went against the Accord itself and was not inclusive to all the conflicting parties, which was once again against the spirit of an inclusive accord. The letter dated 8th July 1997 sent from the Northern Ireland Office to McGuinness stipulated that all the issues would be resolved to the participants' satisfaction ("No Ceasefire Negotiations"), including Sinn Féin. Anything else outside the Agreement could not take place. Once again, it proved the British Government's craftiness and twisted manoeuvres to attain its objectives. It also evidenced that by attempting to secure the Belfast Agreement signature – by all means – the British Government wanted to drive the Republicans out of violence regardless of the associated costs, given the impact of violence on its economy and British lives.

After the signature of the Good Friday Agreement, David Trimble said that "there was a fair probability that Sinn Féin would reject the Agreement" (qtd. in O'Kane *Britain, Ireland* 158). His words explained the reason behind the Unionists' acceptance of signing the Accord. For them, Sinn Féin would not agree to endorse it. The suggestions made in it would not have enticed them to adopt it. The Unionists relied on the letter sent to them by the British Prime Minister two weeks before signing the Agreement and the assumption that Sinn Féin would be unlikely to sign it; accordingly, these Unionists agreed to approve

the Accord. However, to their great surprise and amazement, the Republicans accepted the terms of the Compromise, and the Unionists found themselves compelled to share power with the Republicans. They miscalculated the moves of both the British Government and the Republicans, which cost them a position they had defended for many years.

The conditions in which the Belfast Agreement was signed hampered its implementation. The way decommissioning –not only the issue of decommissioning– was dealt with in the GFA gave way to different interpretations on both sides. It was to bedevil its fulfilment for the years to come. On the one hand, the Unionists believed that the IRA was under the obligation of handing over arms for participation in the Northern Irish Government. On the other hand, and according to their interpretation of the Belfast Agreement, Sinn Féin thought that no decommissioning was required to hold office. Thus, much work was left to overcome the said stalemate.

The two Governments, the British and the Irish, intervened to solve the issue between the Nationalists and the Unionists after the signing of the Belfast Agreement. In 1999, Bertie Ahern stated that it was impossible to be in government without some decommissioning (Dixon and O’Kane 97). One month before Ahern's declaration, on the 3rd of March 1999, Tony Blair said that handing over arms must take place, for people have to know that the people with whom they are sharing power renounced violence for good (Bew and Gillespie 389). From my perspective, the Prime Minister implied that the IRA ceasefire was untrustworthy, and for such a reason, decommissioning was a prerequisite to devolving powers. It was explicit that both Governments endeavoured to pressure the IRA to decommission at the beginning of 1999 but to no avail. In the eyes of the British and the Irish, after the Unionists' concession regarding the GFA's signature without decommissioning, it was for the Republicans to concede and hand over weapons to hold office, which did not occur.

However, in June 1999, Ahern shifted his interest to the Unionists when he declared that handing over arms could only be attained if the established democratic institutions

were reliable (“Ahern stresses importance”), which suggested that institutions were to be established first and prove their efficiency regarding power-sharing and the minority’s protection. Their good functioning would be a guarantee to the Nationalists. Besides, the joint statement of the British and Irish named *The Way Forward* made explicit that decommissioning would take place in May 2000 as stipulated in the GFA, which made implicit that the Unionists had to start government with the Nationalists without the IRA handing over arms, emphasising that no one would miss such an opportunity. It indicated that the blame would be put on the Unionists if they rebuffed the offer. Consequently, one option was left to the British and Irish Governments: to pressure the Unionists to start government with Sinn Fein to bring the IRA to decommission.

Accordingly, both Governments attempted to exert pressure on the Unionists to cede to the Republicans’ demand. Therefore, the Unionists had to make another concession. It suggested that the Republicans won again, implying that both the British and Irish Governments lost against the Republicans’ determination. It also indicated that the Republicans were in a position of strength, permitting them to negotiate and impose, and used violence and decommissioning as a bargaining chip to avert all the conditions set to attend talks and participate in the Northern Irish Government. It must be noted that since the IRA did not decommission, a return to violence was not improbable, which explained the Irish and, more importantly, the British Government’s concern.

However, the Unionists refused to nominate their members for the Executive. Not doing so meant that the Institution could not be established since members of the two communities had to be designated. The issue was overcome when the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Mandelson,⁹² announced a return to direct rule from Westminster if decommissioning or devolution were not achieved (McInnes 162). Besides, David Trimble, the First Minister, threatened to resign. He aimed to convince the UUP’s

⁹² Peter Mandelson (1953-) was born and died in London. As a Labour party member, he played an important role in rebranding the Party. He held different position in Government before becoming the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in 1999 to be the one succeeding Mo Mowlam.

members to support him in forming a Government with Sinn Fein. It is worth mentioning that Trimble's resignation could have meant the GFA's end (Mullin) since Trimble was the one who negotiated the Accord. In reality, many members of the UUP did not favour the Agreement, but Trimble forced them into the Compromise. Notably, the DUP was displeased with the Belfast Agreement and did not endorse it.

In such difficult circumstances, the Executive was established on the 2nd of December 1999, devolving powers to Ulster for the first time since 1974. Once again, decommissioning did not occur, yet devolution was achieved primarily due to Trimble's efforts. Without pressure from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, powers would not have been devolved. Nevertheless, Tony Blair made it clear that after devolving power, the IRA had to decommission shortly after (McInnes 161). It needs to be reiterated that no IRA decommissioning took place after the establishment of the Executive. Again, the solution to the problem was to exert pressure on the conflicting parties, and the weakest one, the Unionists, ceded to the said pressure.

However, the Institution was suspended by the Secretary of State after the Independent International Committee on Decommissioning (IICD) reported that the Provos had to state when handing over arms would occur. The IRA had not provided any information about when decommissioning would start. It is worth mentioning that the Secretary of State signed the suspension before the Commission's report came to his knowledge. It meant that the decision was taken without considering the Commission's report. Consequently, the IRA broke relations with the IICD after it had nominated its representative to the Commission in November 1999. I contend that before severing ties with the IICD, the Republicans' appointment of representatives and the working with the International Commission was perceived as a step toward decommissioning by these same Republicans. However, the British did not appreciate such efforts, and the Institution was suspended. I believe that appointing representatives to the Commission and starting work with it should have been understood as the first sign of the IRA's willingness to decommission.

Glimmers of hope began glimpsing in May 2000 when a statement was issued. The announcement came on the 6th of May, in which the IRA delivered a critical declaration, stipulating that “In that context the IRA leadership will initiate a process that will completely and verifiably put IRA arms beyond use,” adding that they will restart contact with the IICD. Furthermore, they requested the British Government to implement the GFA immediately, as they accepted third parties to inspect the IRA arms (“Statement by the Irish Republican Army”). From my standpoint, the statement left no doubt that the IRA intended to hand over weaponry. Consequently, the British and Irish Governments made a declaration welcoming the move of the IRA and designated Mr. Martti Ahtisaari ⁹³ and Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa ⁹⁴ to lead the inspections.

The timing of the IRA’s declarations suggests that the Republicans’ announcement was a response to a statement made by the British and Irish Governments on the 5th of May 2000. Both Governments declared that the Assembly and the Executive would be restored by the 22nd of May if a positive response would meet their call for the paramilitaries to put their weapons beyond use. The British and Irish statement was another explicit invitation to the Republicans to begin decommissioning, as it was a condition for the restoration of Stormont. The Republicans could not miss such an opportunity at this juncture.

I believe that the brief interval between the joint statement and the IRA’s response implied that they were concocted by the British, the Irish, and Sinn Fein together. Negotiations behind the scenes probably took place between the British Government and the Sinn Fein Party. Nevertheless, the most crucial issue was the IRA's positive response. In their declaration, the Provos agreed to see their weapons inspected by the IICD; it was the first time in the IRA’s history. It suggested a first step towards accepting decommission for full implementation of the GFA. Their intention to start the process of handing over arms was unambiguous. As a matter of fact, either Sinn Fein understood that some

⁹³ Martti Ahtisaari (1937-) was born in Russia. A Finnish politician who served as president of Finland between 1994-2000. He is famous for his international peace work.

⁹⁴ Cyril Ramaphosa (1952-) born in South Africa. A businessman and a politician who holds presidency in South Africa since 2018.

concessions had to be made, or the British negotiated with them and made attractive proposals behind the scenes. The latter assumption is not to be excluded, given the conduct of the British during the whole peace process. The British Government was used to using twisted manoeuvres to achieve its objectives. Nonetheless, on the ground, nothing was done; decommissioning did not take place.

The peace process in Northern Ireland once more came to a standstill. Sinn Féin was reluctant to speed up decommissioning, and the Unionists saw propaganda in the IRA's statement. Thus, David Trimble threatened to resign as First Minister of the devolved government for a second time unless the IRA's handing over arms started, a resignation that he implemented on the 1st of July 2001 after violence escalated in Ulster. It is noteworthy that the IRA and CLMC did not breach their ceasefire. Violence was believed to have been perpetrated by the Real IRA (RIRA) and Loyalist splinters. Nevertheless, the IICD's report stated explicitly that it was satisfied with the proposals made by the IRA.

However, it did not halt Tony Blair from, once again, suspending the institutions in Northern Ireland for one day on the 11th of August 2001 on the demand of Trimble (Melaugh). The aim behind the suspension of Stormont for one day was to provide the political parties involved in the peace process with the opportunity to continue negotiations to attain a settlement to the ongoing challenges regarding decommissioning. The said suspension provided a six-week time before electing a new First Minister and Deputy First Minister; otherwise, elections would be called. A new election would have meant the possibility of the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin to access Stormont, which would endanger the peace process. At the time, the SDLP and the UUP held Stormont. It must be highlighted that power-sharing is more likely to succeed when political elites are moderate (Papagianni 29). It implies that if radicals would access Stormont, power-sharing would witness setbacks.

Events on the international scene gave the peace process in Northern Ireland a new direction and a shove. In reality, the IRA did not announce its decommissioning – part of

its arsenal– until the 23rd of October 2001. That is three years after the Good Friday Agreement and one month after 9/11, the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Virginia. It is crucial to note that the IRA intended to hand over arms before the attack. Evidence of willingness to decommission was already discussed above, especially referring to the appointment of representatives to the International Commission, suggesting a readiness to work with it regarding decommissioning and inspection of weaponry. However, the actual beginning of handing over arms could but have a link to the 9/11 attack.

According to Sinn Fein and the Provos, the terrorist attack on the US had no impact on their decision to start decommissioning (Blackbourn 47). Moreover, Sean Farren, a member of the Social Democratic and Labour Party and member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, affirmed that handing over arms was only the result of the pressure made by some sources (par. 15). On the one hand, Ferren was not wrong because the British, the Irish, and the American Governments pressured the Republicans to decommission; however, ignoring the 9/11 incident would be neglecting its significance and looking at decommissioning from a narrow point of view. On the other hand, the allegations of Sinn Fein were not true. I believe that recognising the opposite would tarnish the Republicans' goodwill to decommission for the sake of the peace process. From my standpoint, 9/11 was not only a turning point in US history but also in the Republicans' decision to decommission. The terrorist attack marked the commencement of 'the war on terror' by the British and, more importantly, the Americans. If the US supported the Republicans previously, that would not be the case after 9/11.

The Irish Americans who used to fund and back the Sinn Fein Party and the IRA were to rethink their financial aid and support after the terrorist attack. It is worth reiterating that some Irish American politicians managed to provide Gerry Adams with a visa to the US. Of course, it would be inappropriate to do so in such circumstances, especially since many Irish Americans died in the 9/11 attack. Moreover, injecting their money to encourage people to make use of violence was no longer an attractive idea, even if it was

to achieve noble ends. The 9/11 attack condemned any type of violence. Not to mention that financing the Republicans in Northern Ireland for their cause would be frowned upon by the American Government. The latter had just been a victim of a terrorist attack, and those who were not with the Americans were against it. Thus, the stakes were high for the Irish Americans.

On the morning of the 11th of September, Richard Haass⁹⁵, the USA special envoy, organised a meeting with Gerry Adams, questioning the commitment of the IRA to the Irish peace process and making clear that the Americans' engagement with Sinn Fein, encompassing issuing visas for the Party's leaders could cease ("9/11 Attacks Believed"). It was evident that the Americans endeavoured to exert pressure on the Republicans to decommission. In reality, the FARC⁹⁶ in Columbia was supplied by the IRA, and at the Bogotá airport, three Irishmen, along with two IRA veterans, were arrested (Ruddock). Consequently, the arms delivered to the FARC could be used against the American civilians or service personnel in Columbia. The meeting between Richard Haass and Adams aimed to convince the latter to persuade the IRA to hand over arms.

Thus, decommissioning was not only required for the peace process in Northern Ireland but also for the security of the US. As a matter of fact, a meeting between Bill Clinton and Gerry Adams had already taken place on the 12th of January 2000, in which he asked Sinn Fein's leader to make progress on handing over arms (Melaugh). Thus, attempts to drive Republicans to decommission were made numerous times by the Americans. The latter, who stood by Adams and the Republicans a few years ago, started turning their back on them. It must be noted that the IRA and Gerry Adams were considered a terrorist organisation in the eyes of the world until Adams was provided with a visa to set foot on

⁹⁵ Richard Haass (Richard Nathan Haass) (1951-) was born in the US. An American diplomat and the Council on Foreign Relations president since 2003. He was George Mitchell successor as the United States special envoy to Northern Ireland to be succeeded in 2003 by Mitchell Reiss.

⁹⁶ FARC: an abbreviation of Spanish Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia which means the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia. It is the military wing of the Colombian Communist Party, which aim is to fight for the right of the poor in Columbia. In the latter and for the said purpose, the FARC perpetrates bombings and assassinations against political and economic targets in the country.

American soil, which bettered the Republicans' image. If that were the case before 9/11, how would it be after that?

With the World Trade Centre and Pentagon attacks, the Republicans realised that the US would be tough on terrorists. Consequently, accelerating the decommissioning as part of the peace process in Northern Ireland became a must. The Republicans already stated their willingness to decommission when they appointed representatives to the Independent International Committee on Decommissioning and when they cooperated with it. It needs to be noted that the document issued on the 6th of March 1999, which allowed the Provos' arms to be inspected by the IICD, left no doubt that the IRA accepted to hand over their arms prior to 9/11. Yet, it was no coincidence that decommissioning happened just after 9/11. With the absence of American support and the war fought against the terrorist organisations, the weapons by which the Republicans pressured the British became priceless. Simply put, the said attacks impacted the Republicans' decision to speed up decommission, but in no case was 9/11 the one and the only reason behind handing over arms.

The misfortune of some was the happiness of others. The Unionists could but be happy with the IRA handing over arms. As noted by a religious leader, the Dean of St Anne's Cathedral, perhaps the only beneficiary of 9/11 was the peace process in Northern Ireland ("9/11 attacks boosted"). The religious leader was not wrong, for accelerating decommissioning meant eliminating a thorny issue that existed between the Nationalists and the Unionists, as it meant facilitating the implementation of the Belfast Agreement. It is worth reiterating that one of the main difficulties leading to the implementation stagnation stemmed from ambiguity and lack of details in the 1998 Accord regarding decommissioning.

Decommissioning was not the only obstacle to implementing the Good Friday Agreement. The prisoners' issue hampered the Accord being carried out properly. However, it was not as crucial as the decommissioning problem. As mentioned above, the

Unionists opposed early prisoners' release during the discussions, but not for long because they ceded to the Republicans' determination. The British also conceded to Sinn Fein for the former requested release within three years, and the latter imposed two years. The Belfast Agreement was signed, stipulating that the prisoners would be released within two years. A triumph for Sinn Fein and a defeat to the Unionists. Since the Belfast Agreement stated their release under the given terms, the paramilitary prisoners were implicitly recognised as war prisoners; moreover, it justified the special methods of fighting the war (Tonge, *Northern Ireland* 101). The reading of Jonathan Tonge regarding the convicts' status was meticulous.

In fact, the prisoners' status was a Republican demand in the 1980s. It is worth mentioning that the Republicans' political work started in prison with Bobby Sands, from which the matter's importance. One can assume that the British ceded to the Republicans' request. However, the British were beneficiaries of the situation since, considering the conflict to be a war, the British Government would not be condemned for abusing power or oppressing its citizens. The special methods were to encounter the particular situation. Thus, the Belfast Agreement legitimised the British conduct toward the Republicans' violence. Besides, it explained the British cession to Sinn Fein and the ambiguity surrounding the issue to dupe the Unionists for the Accord signature. I should not forget to mention the pressure exerted on the Unionist grassroots to endorse the Accord even though it was an unpleasant issue for them. The Unionists had to cohabit with individuals considered criminals in the past and even today.

According to Michael Von Tangen Page, people in Ulster thought of the prisoners' release as repulsive (201). It could but be understandable. The release of paramilitary prisoners could only be psychological torture for the victims' families. To cohabit with the terrorists and the murderers of their relatives would not be easily accepted. Moreover, it would be considered a threat to both communities. Fortunately, the Accord stipulated that the released prisoners would be sentenced again if they resorted to violence after their release. From my standpoint, it was meant to reassure the Unionists.

Policing did not make an exception as an issue in the post-agreement signature. In any society, policing is an important matter, and it is a lot more in a divided one. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was the police force in Northern Ireland at the time of the Troubles. The matter was given room in the Belfast Agreement for such a reason. The latter attempted to regulate it to achieve equality and justice between the Northern Ireland communities as part of conflict resolution. Under Policing and Justice, the Accord stipulated the making of a “police service representative in terms of the make-up of the community as a whole” with the establishment of an independent commission that would “make recommendations for the future policing arrangements in Northern Ireland” (par. 1).

It is worth reiterating that the RUC represented the police force in Northern Ireland and was overwhelmingly Protestant. As such, it led to accusations of discrimination against the Catholic Nationalists. The RUC's composition and allegations regarding bias led to mistrust among the Nationalists. The RUC was perceived as hostile and unsympathetic to their problems. This could only enhance sectarian divisions. Simply put, the RUC was not seen as a source of protection. From my standpoint, discrimination and mistrust weakened the rule of law in Ulster, for it led to a lack of confidence in the legal system, and people could make use of alternatives, such as vigilantism. In other words, it was forming groups that would try to prevent crime or punish criminals because of the belief that the police were not doing this.

According to the Belfast Agreement, the RUC would include Protestants and Catholics to represent both communities as one entity. It was palpable that the language regarding the police service was vague. No details were provided apart from a future change. Moreover, establishing a commission to look into it implied postponing the issue to an upcoming time. Consequently, the policing problem was deliberately side-lined and rescheduled after the signature of the Compromise. The British and Irish Governments were aware that policing would lead to a stalemate if tackled in detail in the Accord. Thus, to avoid such disagreement, they deferred the issue. Such conduct enhanced the

Agreement's chance of acceptance by the conflicting parties, referring mainly to the Unionists and the Republicans.

The commission report entitled *A New Beginning*, also known as the Patten Report⁹⁷, was issued in September 1999. The Report horrified many Unionists (Dingley, "Peace in Our Times" 370). Indeed, it could but be frightening. Its most essential recommendations encompassed that future police recruits would be only Catholics, especially Nationalist Catholic Nationalists, until the balance would be attained between Protestants and Catholics (14.9). In fact, this is called positive discrimination or affirmative action, which implies giving preferential treatment to individuals or groups who are disadvantaged; in the context of Northern Ireland, the disadvantaged group was the Nationalist community. It can be traced back to the mid-20th century in the United States of America. It stemmed from the discrimination faced by minorities in the US, primarily African Americans. The objective of positive discrimination is to redress imbalances and establish equality.

The Patten Report also suggested renaming the RUC as Northern Ireland Police Service (17.6). It is worth mentioning that it was renamed in 2001. The RUC represented the identity of the Unionists, a strong bond between them and the British Government in Ulster. Significantly, such a name change would erode part of their identity. The RUC was also a symbol of protection against Republican terrorism. It must be reiterated that the Nationalists mistrusted the RUC and perceived it as a source of discrimination in Northern Ireland. The aim behind altering its name, from my perspective, was to regain the lost trust of the Nationalists, build confidence, and attain a more partial police force, thus serving the entire population in Northern Ireland.

⁹⁷ The Report was named after Lord Chris Patten, the chairman of the Commission which produce the report. As a politician, Patten held different post in British Government, such as Member of Parliament and a Cabinet Minister. He also held the position of Hong Kong Governor just before the territory was handed over to China in 1997. In fact, his mission as the chairman of the Commission ws to review and make recommendations to reform policing in Ulster. As a result the Patten Report was issued in 1999.

In my opinion, the Commission's proposals could but delight the Nationalists. However, if such was an advantage to the Nationalists, who were mostly Catholics and whose numbers would increase, it was not the case for the Unionists. The Report meant that the Nationalists would have a significant role in the Police of Ulster. It implied that they would no longer be intimidated or ill-treated by the RUC as in the past. In the eyes of the Nationalists/Catholics, the RUC was made to protect the Unionists/Protestants but not them. That was another concession to the Nationalists/Republicans. However, the said concession would weaken the link between the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. It was an issue that caused the Agreement's implementation difficulty.

In his decommissioning discussion, Dermot Gallagher, the Irish Ambassador in Washington, pointed to an interesting link between the police service and decommissioning. The idea was that if the Republicans/Nationalists became part of the new Police Service of Northern Ireland, they would not need arms, and handing over weapons would take place (Spencer 193-94). I believe that the connection between the two issues was well thought out and would help the British and the Irish secure the IRA decommissioning. Nevertheless, I contend that such would be fitting if the Republican arms were only used to protect the Nationalists against the RUC and the Loyalists. Notably, the Republicans' arms were primarily used to end British rule in Ulster, and the Republicans' objective has not changed.

In concluding the chapter, it must be pointed out that, at long last, the Unionists and the Nationalists participated in the negotiations leading to the Good Friday Agreement. Both parties ended violence to be eligible for the Talks. Attempts to bring them to such discussion were made several times in the past but to no avail until 1997. In 1997, after eighteen years in office, the Conservatives were defeated by the Labour Party in the General Election. Tony Blair, as the party leader and the British Prime Minister, along with Bertie Ahern, made tremendous efforts to make the conflicting parties sign the Agreement and secure its endorsement by the grassroots. Thus, the unbelievable materialised when the Good Friday Agreement was signed in April 1998.

Different methods and ways were deployed to make the Agreement seem equitable. The constitutional status of Northern Ireland was maintained. On the one hand, the British agreed on the consent principle. Ulster was to remain part of the UK with a possibility of change subject to majority approval. On the other hand, Ireland altered its 1937 Constitution, which claimed the territory of Northern Ireland. Moreover, power-sharing was adopted, and Devolution was decided. Matters such as decommissioning, prisoners' release, and policing were also discussed and seemed to be accepted by the conflicting parties. However, the Accord could not be implemented when its carrying out was due. The main reason behind this was Ulster's political parties' opposition to issues already agreed upon in the Good Friday Agreement, *inter alia*, decommissioning, prisoners' release, and policing. In fact, trust was not prevalent among Ulster's political parties, leading to inaction.

It is important to emphasise that the road leading to the signature of the Good Friday Agreement was long and arduous. Bringing the conflicting parties together and making them sign an agreement was complicated. Ulster's political parties, UUP, DUP, and SF, mistrusted and even rejected one another, especially the Unionists. For such a reason, tricking the parties and deceiving them was necessary to propel them to agree on the Compromise. The British and the Irish Governments played an essential role in the peace process when attempting to secure the Accord signature. In reality, a change was needed to advance the negotiations between the political parties, and the alteration was embodied in Blair's Administration. The New Labour Party was more flexible, softer, and less demanding regarding the preconditions leading to participation in the discussions. Tony Blair simply espoused the Mitchell Report, making the end of violence the only precondition. He learned from the previous Government's mistakes and was well aware that the Republicans' war was not to end. Twisted manoeuvres, side agreements, and, more importantly, many concessions were made to the political parties, especially Sinn Fein, to safeguard the Agreement's approval, not to mention the compromises made among the political parties themselves.

Nevertheless, the ways employed to secure the Belfast Agreement's signature led to its complex implementation. In fact, the Good Friday Agreement espoused power-sharing and Devolution in addition to matters related to decommissioning, early prisoner's release, along with, policing and justice. However, the language used to bring the parties together and the twisted manoeuvres that took place led to its stagnation in terms of application. An agreement seemed to be in place, but it was not the case in reality. When the time to carry out the Accord struck, a disagreement arose regarding the issues dealt with in the Good Friday Agreement, namely decommissioning, Devolution, early prisoners' release, and policing.

As a matter of fact, bringing the conflicting parties to the negotiating table proved to be complicated. The Unionists and the Nationalists held different beliefs and, more significantly, different demands, which led to erecting hurdles and refusing to make concessions to the other party. Consequently, at the stage of discussions, the political parties, especially the Unionists, were not fully prepared to seek a compromise. The zero-sum game, the difference in beliefs, and, more importantly, the past and historical grievances were brought into the talks with the political parties, which played a role in the dissonance prevailing during the discussions. The role played by the Irish and the British Governments was crucial along with the American administration since they attempted to make the conflicting parties' diverging roads converge.

Since the Governments could not impose anything on Ulster's political parties, the only means was to deceive them and exert pressure on them. The British played the Unionists by promising IRA decommissioning before establishing the Northern Ireland Government, which could not, of course, work. Besides, they put pressure on the Unionists to abandon the idea of decommissioning because their position weakened in the House of Commons. The New Labours used the 1997 election victory in favour of the peace process and against the Unionists, for they were the weakest party. However, they could not exert pressure on the Republicans because they were violence prone. For the Republicans, the said violence was the token permitting them to gain concessions. Thus, Sinn Fein

articulated the Republicans' demands in the talks, inter alia, equality and civil rights, the early release of prisoners, no decommissioning before a settlement, and most importantly, a united Ireland. The IRA put pressure on the British Government with violence to cede to the Republicans' requests.

Moreover, the Irish and British administrations deliberately used ambiguous language in the Belfast Agreement to make the Unionists and the Nationalists sign the Accord. For both Administrations, such was the only way to attain a compromise. They secured the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and bought time for the other issues with the plan of using more pressure on both sides to overcome disagreement about the Agreement. Tribute must also be paid to the international incidents taking place regarding 9/11, which also exercised pressure on the Republicans, leading to an acceleration in decommissioning. However, even if the Republicans decided to decommission after the Belfast Agreement, they dragged their heels into doing it, for they needed it to win more concessions directly from the Governments and indirectly from the Unionists. Their pressure was crowned with entering talks and negotiating. Not to mention that they won power-sharing and prisoners' release together with the change of the RUC within the peace agreement entitled the Good Friday Agreement. Nevertheless, since an agreement is not the end point of a peace process, it is a must to tackle the challenges to peace in the post-Good Friday era in Northern Ireland.

5 Chapter Five: Challenges to Peace: Examining the Post-Good Friday Era in Northern Ireland (2003-2023)

It is well established that Northern Ireland was a region torn by a conflict that lasted almost three decades. The dispute started as a religious one and escalated to become a political issue between two communities, the Nationalists and the Unionists. The road to “peace” in Ulster was long and arduous. However, it was crowned with the signature of the Good Friday Agreement as part of the peace process in Northern Ireland. Its aim was to find a solution to the conflict. In fact, it provided remedies that facilitated peaceful co-existence between the Nationalists and the Unionists by addressing their respective rights and duties. The Accord led to the establishment of new institutions as power was devolved to Northern Ireland, along with power-sharing between the two existing communities – the Nationalists and the Unionists. It is crucial to note that moderate political parties held office after the Belfast Agreement. On the one hand, the Social Democratic and Labour Party represented the Nationalists; on the other hand, the Ulster Unionist Party epitomised the Unionists. Notably, the Belfast Agreement was one of the main different elements of conflict resolution.

In Conflict Resolution theory, the peace accord aims to establish peace and not eradicate the conflict. Simply put, the peace accord is part of the whole process. As a matter of fact, in some instances, it might not be enough, and it needs reinforcement. As such, it is crucial to think about the long-term sustainability of conflict resolution after the signature of the peace agreement, which is precisely the aim of this chapter. It seeks to assess the situation in Northern Ireland after the signature of the Good Friday Agreement. Accordingly, it delves into the subsequent Accords, St Andrews, and the Hillsborough Agreements, signed to address anomalies and left issues in the Belfast Agreement. The latter provided the foundations for peace in the region; nevertheless, many issues were left unresolved between the communities and even with the British Government, without which peace would have been incomplete if not absent.

In addition, the impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland cannot be ignored. Brexit was the most crucial event in the United Kingdom in the last few decades and most significantly in the last few years and could likely negatively affect peace in Northern Ireland. It is unnecessary to mention that Brexit affected the borders between the UK and the Republic of Ireland, which disturbed the work of the Northern Ireland Assembly. In reality, any change taking place in the United Kingdom, which can be related directly or indirectly to Northern Ireland, can influence peace, among other things, the decision of the UK to repeal the 1998 Human Rights Act, not to mention their intention to withdraw from the Human Rights Convention. Protecting human rights is one of the most essential principles in the sustainability of stability in societies subject to conflicts.

The situation in Northern Ireland after Brexit must not be overlooked, considering the recent developments occurring there. All of the mentioned points can provide me with results and the path peace and consensus is taking in Northern Ireland always in light of the post-peace agreement signature and, most importantly, Conflict Resolution theory through long-term sustainability of peace in the area. In reality, the results predict ominous dark clouds forming on the horizon. With the contemporary events in Northern Ireland and the impact of the British Government's decisions, society is witnessing pressure. The outcome of the said pressure can be the re-emergence of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

5.1 Post- Good Friday Agreement (2003-2010):

The Good Friday Agreement was hailed worldwide as a breakthrough in the Northern Irish conflict. However, the least that can be said about the Accord's implementation is that it was far from being instant and easy. My aim is not to discredit the Accord but to assess its impact. Power-sharing in Ulster was not forthwith successful, nor was decommissioning. Moreover, some violence continued on both sides, Republicans and Loyalists. It took eight years to implement the Good Friday Agreement regarding the completion of decommissioning, the adoption of power-sharing, and the devolving of policing power to Northern Ireland.

Five years after the Agreement, radicals won over moderates in 2003 in the Assembly election. On the one hand, the Democratic Unionist Party, under Ian Paisley's leadership, wiped out the UUP, headed by David Trimble. On the other hand, Sinn Fein replaced the SDLP. Simply put, the DUP and SF became the two largest parties in Ulster. The vote suggested a shift in public opinion, namely for the Unionists. It needs to be reiterated that the DUP did not endorse the Belfast Agreement and campaigned for the “No” vote; however, the UUP signed it and supported the “Yes” campaign. If I combine the two parties' stances with the 2003 election results, I can conclude that the Unionists regretted endorsing the Accord. In reality, they already rebuffed it in the 1998 referendum. It was a logical consequence of deceiving them to get them to espouse the Compromise. The attention must be drawn to the fact that since the Unionists voted for the DUP, it meant that they voted against power-sharing. Consequently, the Belfast Agreement did not bring Northern Ireland's people to unanimity.

With the DUP's election to the Assembly, the journey to a government with Sinn Fein proved to be long and complicated, and the path towards power-sharing happened to be rocky. It was predictable because radical political elites are less likely to compromise. Unlike the UUP, the DUP was a radical party, challenging to manage, and less likely to cede to pressure if not the one exerting it. Thus, another round of negotiations took place after the Belfast Agreement. The fight was long and hard but was crowned with the IRA decommissioning in 2005 and policing and power-sharing issues resolved in 2006. It is worth noting that the DUP required decommissioning and the IRA dissolution to share power with Sinn Fein and work with them within the same government.

According to Jonathan Powell, the Provos' handing over arms came after two critical events: a robbery at the Northern Bank's⁹⁸ headquarters and Robert McCartney's murder⁹⁹

⁹⁸ The robbery at the Northern Bank occurred in Donegal Square on the 21st of December 2004. Up to £30 million had been stolen.

⁹⁹ Robert McCartney murder took place on 14 February 2005. He was stabbed by IRA members on the order of a local IRA capo while he attempted to rescue a friend in a bar-room. McCartney sisters and fiancé insisted on justice and the issue acquired an international dimension when McCartney family met President Bush on 17 March.

(267). It must be stated that the IRA was held responsible for both incidents. Powell was not wrong, but the said events could not be considered the only two reasons leading to IRA decommissioning. The handing over of arms was a long process that started in 2001. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was the outcome of internal and external pressure, international incidents –9/11– along with their already willingness to hand over weapons. A combination of factors led to the IRA's decision to put arms out of use and allow their inspection. However, it can be stated that the two events impacted the IRA's decision.

On the 28th of July 2005, the IRA announced its statement on decommissioning. It decided to end the armed struggle. The declaration stipulated that handing over arms would be under the auspices of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) and the verification of two witnesses (“Irish Republican (IRA) Statement Ending Armed Campaign”). It needs to be clarified that the said eyewitnesses were a compromise attained between the DUP and the SF after the DUP required photographs of the decommissioning. I believe that the latter would be degrading and belittling to the IRA. It would definitely be more than that; it would also be deemed a surrender. However, mistrust could justify the Unionists' demand. It was evident that the announcement reflected a definitive end to violence's use. The most crucial point was that no ambiguity characterised the declaration. Hence, the chapter on violence has just been closed in the book on conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, it did not mean that the book of conflict resolution in Ulster was over. Much work was left to be done regarding policing and power-sharing.

Power-sharing and policing took years to be fully implemented. The DUP refused to share power with the Republicans even after decommissioning by erecting more hurdles. Ian Paisley, the DUP leader, wanted Sinn Féin to support the police and cooperate with them to solve McCartney's murder (Powell 300). Again, negotiations had to be initiated

between the two conflicting parties. Peter Hain¹⁰⁰ threatened to introduce plan B, which was closer cooperation between the British and Irish governments, if the devolved government was not restored on the 26th of November 2006 (Dixon and O’Kane 107). It meant that pressure had to be exercised once more from and on both sides to reach an agreement. It was apparent that the threat was directed at the Unionists. The nightmare of the latter was a greater Irish government involvement that could lead to a joint authority over Ulster. Such was not the first time the Labour Party under Tony Blair, which facilitated the peace process in Northern Ireland, as demonstrated in the fourth chapter, used close relations with Ireland to achieve their aim. Apparently, the conflict in Northern Ireland could not be solved in any other way but by pressure.

Negotiations between the conflicting parties, the British and the Irish governments, were prolonged over weeks. Power-sharing was a contentious issue because the DUP was sceptical about it. As a radical political party, the DUP refused power-sharing in the Sunningdale Agreement and had been against it even in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. It even left the talks, which was not the case for the UUP. However, in these negotiations, Ian Paisley, the leader of the DUP, conceded to share power with Gerry Adams, the head of the Sinn Fein Party, the enemy. Needless to say, his stance was a significant shift and an essential step in the peace process in Northern Ireland. Concessions also concerned the reform of the police, the RUC, which was a symbol of Unionism and the means of its protection. In return, Ian Paisley could obtain complete decommissioning of the IRA. In fact, the latter had already begun before agreement was reached. It suggested that Sinn Fein accepted further commitment regarding the decommissioning issue, which was a stalemate in the peace process.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Hain (1950-) was born in Nairobi. A Labour party politician and Northern Ireland Secretary of State. Though born in Kenya, he received education in both South Africa and England. As a member of family opponent to apartheid regime in South Africa, he became a prominent campaigner against apartheid in England.

Thus, the above negotiations culminated with the signature of the St Andrews Agreement¹⁰¹ in October 2006 between the British and Irish Governments and the major parties in Northern Ireland, namely the DUP and SF. The Accord solved power-sharing and policing issues. It set a schedule for devolution restoration, which had been on suspension since 2002, together with the requirement of both parties to support the Police Service of Northern Ireland (the new police of Northern Ireland), in addition to clauses regarding human rights, the Irish language, and finance in Northern Ireland. The most important feature of the St Andrews Agreement is that it was clear, and no issue was left ambiguous, unlike the Belfast Agreement.

Concessions were made on both sides. Ian Paisley accepted power-sharing, and Gerry Adams supported the police to achieve a deal. However, it was not the only reason behind the Republicans' acceptance of the DUP requests. In fact, the Republicans' aim was attained with the Good Friday Agreement. The door towards a union with the Republic of Ireland was ajar. The Republicans were aware that the settlement represented in the Good Friday Agreement was not an all-united Ireland when stating after the signature of the GFA that:

Our view was transitional. We were seeking fundamental, political, and constitutional change. We knew from the parameters of the talks that Irish unity would not come out of this phase of the negotiations, but we set ourselves the task of weakening the British link while defending Irish national rights. (Adams 355).

The above statement leaves no doubt about Sinn Fein's strategy during the negotiations leading to the signature of the Belfast Agreement. That is, with the Agreement, the foundations for a future united Ireland were set. What came after the Belfast Agreement was just a detail, remarkably since, according to Sinn Fein, they succeeded in weakening the Union. Republicans achieved their aim to secure a constitutional status – majority

¹⁰¹ It was held in St Andrews in Fife, Scotland between 11-13 October.

consent – to a union with the Republic of Ireland. The pressure exercised on the UUP and the British and Irish Governments was to have as many advantages as possible.

Accordingly, a meeting was held between the leaders, Paisley and Adam, of the two radical parties in Northern Ireland, resulting in devolution and the Executive assuming its responsibility on the 8th of May 2007. With the restoration of devolution, a new chapter began in the history of Northern Ireland, a chapter without violence and with political work. Nonetheless, the complete transfer of policing and justice did not take place until the 12th of April 2010, with the signature of the Hillsborough Agreement. The latter was signed in Hillsborough during Gordon Brown's premiership. The British and Irish Governments endorsed it on the one hand, and Gerry Adams and Peter Robinson on the other hand, representing SF and the DUP, respectively. It is worth noting that Ian Paisley resigned as the DUP's leader and Northern Ireland's First Minister in 2008.

I can note that the two radical parties were more than needed in the government. If an agreement had to be made, it had to be between the extremists, for the UUP was too weak to stand up to SF. According to Paul Dixon and Eamonn O'Kane, what made the Republicans agree to concede to the DUP was their awareness that the DUP had a firm stance regarding some issues and that they would not accept making more concessions (113); it was more than evident. The moderate UUP conceded on many matters and was more likely to be deceived and pressurised. At this juncture, the UUP could not do more; its time was over. It had done its best during the negotiations of the Good Friday Agreement, but now it had to step down. Unlike the Belfast Accord, the St Andrews Agreement was not put to the espousal of the grassroots, which could weaken the position of the DUP if rejected. Nevertheless, despite the achievement of these Accords in Northern Ireland, there was a consensus without reconciliation.

5.2 A Consensus without Reconciliation:

Setting up institutions and designating their members to materialise the clauses of the Good Friday Agreement and the two subsequent Accords should have pacified Northern Ireland.

In fact, the scene of the two leaders, Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams, sitting together in April 2007, the handshake between Paisley and McGuinness, and the moment of laughter they shared (Ó Beacháin 250-1), in addition to the historic handshake between Queen Elizabeth II and McGuinness, and the one between Paisley and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, which were broadcast and seen by not only the Northern Irish, the British and the Irish but also by the whole world could but reinforce the idea that Northern Ireland had started a new era—one of peace and stability on both social and political levels.

The post-Good Friday Agreement was a tumultuous period. Politically, there had been a change in the population's support for parties. While the signature of the Belfast Agreement implied a coalition between moderate Nationalists and Unionists, SDLP and the UUP, respectively, the 2003 election in Northern Ireland suggested that any new deal would be between the two hard-liners instead, DUP and SF. Such a result indicated future clashes between the two parties. On the one hand, the DUP could barely accept the idea of sharing power with Sinn Féin. On the other hand, with its unchanged goal, Sinn Féin would block any decision, taking it far from its ultimate objective and seizing any opportunity to lead it or make it closer to its cherished target, namely, a reunion with the Republic of Ireland.

The SDLP's mission was completed with the signature of the Good Friday Agreement. The post-Good Friday Agreement era belonged to Sinn Féin, for the latter did not see an end in the Accord signature but a beginning instead. It did not mean that the SDLP disapproved of an all-united Ireland but exhausted all their means, especially since they failed to attain their objective. However, Sinn Féin, which pursued the same goal but employed different strategies, gave the impression that they were ardent, more akin to wanting reunification with the Republic of Ireland. It also suggested that people in Ulster were not against the Sinn Féin Party but instead opposed to their methods. Now that peace is achieved, the torch was given to them to carry on their work peacefully. Moreover, since both parties aimed to reunite with the Republic of Ireland, it was better to try another party than the SDLP, which failed in its mission.

When the DUP became the largest Unionist Party, it refused even to encounter Sinn Féin in talks (Ó Beacháin 247). In fact, the conduct of the DUP members suggested animosity towards Sinn Féin. Obviously, their concern was the decommissioning issue, which hindered power-sharing just after the institutions were set up. I believe that the DUP requested decommissioning not to aid the resolution of the conflict since it was easy to acquire arms but instead to display that they defeated republicanism. The Unionists, DUP, supported by the British Government, demanded photographs of the IRA decommissioning, making their request a dealbreaker. The intentions of the DUP were made explicit when the DUP's leader, Ian Paisley, in late November 2004, stated clearly, "The IRA need to be humiliated. And they need to wear their sackcloth and ashes, not in a backroom but openly" (Ó Beacháin 247). I consider that expressed this way, Paisley eliminated any chance of decommissioning under such conditions. The DUP's stubbornness hindered the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Power-sharing, which was the core of the Accords, experienced many downs and challenges. In February 2002, for instance, the Assembly was suspended to be restored in May of the same year but again suspended in October 2002 until 2007. In January 2017, the Northern Ireland Assembly collapsed for three years and, with it, power-sharing. Decommissioning and policing were the two most important reasons behind its suspension and collapse, not to mention mistrust between the two political parties, along with other factors, such as scandals. And once again, in 2022, the Assembly collapsed because of the collateral damage of Brexit. In reality, within 25 years of its establishment, the Northern Ireland Assembly has spent ten years in suspension. The aim of the Assembly is to get an effective government for the people of Northern Ireland, and each time the Assembly collapses, the interests of the people are disrupted.

It must be noted that the collapse of power-sharing between the Unionists and the Nationalists in the Northern Ireland Assembly did not consistently result from the Unionists' withdrawal or refusal to participate in the Assembly. In 2017, for instance, Sinn Féin withdrew from the Assembly because of the Renewable Heat Incentive scandal

(RHI)¹⁰². The conduct of both parties implies that they were not yet ready to work together, and the outcome is that the people of Northern Ireland are paying the price of such disagreement, for they are not taking advantage of their government. Blame should not be put only on the Unionists in the Assembly because even the Nationalists are part of the said government and are responsible for its collapse.

Apart from the repeated collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Ulster seemed to delve into less troubled water. The overall situation improved; violence plummeted considerably. With the exception of a few minor episodes, bombs, and guns fell silent. However, sectarianism survived in post-agreements. It must be noted that sectarianism in the twentieth century in Northern Ireland was political and no more religious as was the case in the past. It must be reiterated that religious sectarianism emerged with the plantations that took place in the sixteenth century and the lack of assimilation at the time between the two coexisting communities, the introduced English Protestants and the Native Irish Catholics. Nevertheless, it does not imply that religious hostility is non-existent; the focus was instead brought to political sectarianism, especially with the adoption of power-sharing.

In reality, beneath the visible iceberg laid a colossal block of unseen wounds, disagreements, and, most importantly, uneasiness and unreadiness not just to cooperate and share power. “Separation remained a basic fact of life in many areas... Issues of identity or challenges to existing structures both held the possibility they would reignite fears and reopen wounds” (“Addressing Sectarianism in Northern Ireland” 9). Indeed, sectarianism persisted, resulting from centuries of hostility and violence between the two communities. And since it is a fragile peace, any anomalies in institutions, decisions, or suspicion from any political parties in power would lead to what the article “Addressing Sectarianism in Northern Ireland” described as reopening wounds. The perfect example of such a situation

¹⁰² The Renewable Heat Incentive scandal (RHI) also known as RHIGate or Cash for Ash scandal was the failure of an energy scheme which cost the public purse £500 million. The aim of this project was to move from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

is the current issue, the Northern Ireland Protocol, which will be developed in the coming sections, or the older issue of the flags and emblems.

Unionist protests took place in late 2012 and at the dawn of 2013. The demonstrations were concerned with the changes in the days when the Union Jack flew from Belfast City Hall. The reduction in the number of days on which the flag was displayed angered the Unionists. The Union flag was and is still a symbol of belonging for the Unionists. Thus, decreasing the number of days it flew in City Hall was considered a breach of the Union. Even in 2012, and after the Good Friday Agreement and the establishment of Northern Ireland institutions, the zero-sum game still exists between the Unionists and the Nationalists. It indicates that mentalities have not yet changed. In fact, this is what George Mitchell meant when he talked about decommissioning mentalities and not only weapons (37).

In Northern Ireland, arms were decommissioned but not hearts and minds. It is important to note that Unionists in Ulster continue to hold demonstrations every Saturday (Hughes). To say that after ten years, some Unionists still have the same claim – to go back to what had been agreed about the Union Flag. At the time, the power-sharing system did not collapse; however, the relationship between the governing political parties deteriorated because of the riots of December and January. Additionally, paramilitary activity continued:

When the DUP and Sinn Féin emerged from the May 2016 election as the dominant partners, there were real hopes that the new deal, with its promises to address the residual presence of paramilitary organisations in communities, would indeed allow for fuller co-operation between the signatories. (“Addressing Sectarianism in Northern Ireland 16)

These words imply that paramilitary activity was sustained even after weapons were decommissioned in 2005 and power-sharing was implemented. It suggests that the situation in Northern Ireland was not as stable as thought or hoped after the Belfast Agreement; however, peace prevailed. Peace is not the total absence of violence; even in non-divided

societies, a certain threshold exists. Nevertheless, when paramilitary activity is present, we can talk about violence.

Furthermore, a significant gap emerged between the United Kingdom and Ireland regarding border issues after Brexit. In this regard, the EU played a significant role. It was an essential element in the signature of the Good Friday Agreement. It is important to reiterate that the EU was a neutral soil on which the UK and the Republic of Ireland's leaders met. The development of good relations between the two states can be attributed to the leaders' numerous meetings during EU summits and gatherings. Moreover, the organisation provided financial help to secure peace in Northern Ireland. Now that the UK is no longer an EU member, this had an impact on the nature of the relationship between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. In fact, the international scene contributed significantly to softening the conflict and opening doors for its resolution. It needs to be highlighted that the election of Donald Trump as the US president and his focus on domestic affairs would not help the situation in Northern Ireland. In other words, the support and help provided in the past by the global stage, the Americans and the EU, was lacking under Trump.

Besides, I believe that the referendum on independence that took place in Scotland in 2014 caused an earthquake in the foundations of the United Kingdom. The demand of the Scottish meant that the unity of the four nations could vanish, especially if the referendum's result were in favour of leaving the Union. In fact, such a request could but have an impact on Northern Ireland. It meant that the British Government accepted the idea of dissolving the Union between England and a second nation. Until 2014, the principle of the majority in Northern Ireland deciding about its future was mere ink on paper for the Unionists. The Scottish referendum proved that materialising the idea was seriously feasible, especially in Northern Ireland, where the Good Friday Agreement stipulated it explicitly.

In reality, the fears of the Unionists concerning the Scottish referendum were echoed in the words of the UUP's leader, Tom Elliott, when he believed that the threat of the

Scottish National Party to the Union was more significant than the menace of IRA's violence (Peter Geoghegan). It displays the magnitude of the imminent danger facing the Unionists and their union with Great Britain. It is essential to highlight and reiterate that the Sinn Fein Party and the Nationalists in Ulster would seize any opportunity to strike for reunification with the Republic of Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement stipulated that a reunion with the Republic was feasible. In this case, the Secretary of the State for Northern Ireland should intervene to instruct a vote if it seems that the majority wants an all-united Ireland along with the agreement of the Republic of Ireland (Belfast Agreement, Annex A, par. 1). As demonstrated in the previous chapters, Gerry Adams, just after the signature of the Good Friday Agreement, made explicit that the Accord was just a step towards an all-united Ireland. Of course, it meant that the goal did not change, but the means did since resorting to violence was officially abandoned or almost deserted.

In 2019, Johnathon Stevenson wrote that the Provisional IRA could tolerate a level of violence to pressure both the British and Irish Governments to support the referendum about reunification with Ireland. It is more than probable that other splinters, such as the Continuity IRA (CIRA), would seize the occasion to conduct attacks. In fact, Stevenson was not wrong, for the Continuity IRA wanted to strike on the same day the UK left the EU. A bomb discovered on the Silverwood industrial estate was meant to explode on the day the UK would exit the EU, as declared by the CIRA in a statement issued to the Irish News (McDonald), not to mention what happened during the negotiations for the Brexit deal regarding the massive charges of terrorism against the New Irish Republican Army, which was formed in 2012 (Haverty).

It is essential to mention that the Continuity IRA and the New IRA were Republican splinters aiming at reunification with the Republic of Ireland. Since there were some attacks and charges against them for terrorism, this suggests that they sought to achieve their goals through violent means. The use of violence during these critical moments – Brexit – could degenerate. Needless to reiterate, the peace prevailing in Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement is fragile. Animosity still exists between the political parties, and

sectarianism still survives in the society and the best example is the peace walls in Belfast. These walls physically separate the two communities, the Catholic Nationalists and the Protestant Unionists, living in close proximity. They were erected in the 1960s and 1970s, that is, during the Troubles, and they still exist. From my standpoint, their existence is a reminder of the past and historical division, which persist until nowadays. Even if these walls aimed to establish peace, they referred to separation between the two communities, not to mention the political problem abiding between Sinn Fein and DUP regarding the Assembly election and the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Consequently, the situation in Northern Ireland is not as stable as it seems to be after the Good Friday, the St Andrews, and the Hillsborough Accords. The Northern Ireland Assembly has known many downs, which hampered the interests of the people in Northern Ireland. Moreover, violence is not totally absent, referring to the paramilitary activity, of course, and not violence as a form existing in any society regardless of the conflict. In fact, socially, unrest prevailed in the region not just because of the occasional paramilitary activity but also because of sectarianism. The latter epitomises the separation between the Unionists and the Nationalists in Northern Ireland. As such, the least that I can say about the situation in Northern Ireland is that it is unstable and worse than that, it is degrading, especially since Northern Ireland found itself at the crossroads of Brexit.

5.3 Northern Ireland at the Crossroads of Brexit:

The situation in Northern Ireland is not steady, and the 2016 referendum on Brexit did complicate the situation. In fact, the campaign for leaving or remaining within the EU made little impact on the situation in Northern Ireland. It was the decision to exit the Organisation which led to complications. A change was detected after the 2016 referendum because the 2017 election results in Northern Ireland were unpredictable. On the one hand, the Unionists, the Democratic Unionist Party, lost their overall majority. On the other hand, Sinn Fein won more seats and consequently came that close to winning the majority in the Assembly. It suggested that the Unionists lost the status – the majority – they had enjoyed.

In fact, the result of the 2016 referendum on Brexit profoundly impacted Northern Ireland, further widening the already existing gap between Nationalists and Unionists. The latter and the former had voted differently. The Nationalists predominantly supported the “No” campaign, and the Unionists largely favoured the “Yes” campaign. From my perspective, the divergence of opinion regarding Brexit is not only a matter of opinion as in any other society because Northern Ireland is not any society. It is a place where differences characterise the two communities. In reality, the difference in Ulster stands for opposition, and the least that I can state is that opposition and animosities are permanent features even after the signature of the Good Friday Agreement.

It needs to be stated that Sinn Fein asked for a “special status” (Sinn Fein 1) when 52% of the British voted to leave the EU. Their demand was based on the fact that 56% of the Northern Irish population voted to remain within the organisation (“Share of Votes”). If Britain decided to exit the EU, that was not the case for Northern Ireland, and the solution provided by Sinn Fein was to leave the EU without Ulster. However, if Britain left the EU but not Northern Ireland, it meant that the UK was not regarded as one country. Such a solution would have split the country into two different entities: Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Needless to mention that drift from the UK meant closeness to the Republic of Ireland. Gerry Adams seized the opportunity to widen the crack provided by the Belfast Agreement in Northern Ireland.

When presenting the suggestion of “the special status,” Gerry Adams made clear that the aim was to protect the peace process in Northern Ireland when he stated that leaving the EU against the will of Northern Ireland was “a major set-back for the political process in the north” (Sinn Fein 1). Nevertheless, the sentence “and for the whole island of Ireland to remain within the EU together” (Sinn Fein 1) clearly alluded to the idea of a reunification with the South. Simply put, somewhere – in the EU – the island of Ireland is one unit without any division between the North and the South. Then, the plan would be to have it done constitutionally within the United Kingdom. In fact, what confirms Sinn Fein’s intentions regarding seeking and working on reunification with the South was, “We are

seeking to initiate a genuine and inclusive debate about the reunification of Ireland” (Sinn Fein1). Their plans could not be expressed more explicitly than this.

In this context, it is essential to state that what Sinn Fein asked for was unusual. That is, it was not common practice for an EU member to leave the organisation without a territory under its jurisdiction. In fact, there is a precedent, and the case concerns Denmark. The latter was and is still part of the EU; however, a dependent territory, Greenland, voted in 1982 to leave the EU, and so was it in 1985. The case is not identical to Northern Ireland, but it makes Ulster’s stay in the EU with Great Britain leaving it feasible. Of course, it is up to the state to decide whether to accept or reject it. And it is widely recognised that the British Government disagreed with the fact that one of its four nations continues to be part of the European organisation while the majority voted to leave it.

The position of the British Government could but be justified and justifiable. If ever Great Britain had left the EU and not Northern Ireland, it would have led to a considerable destabilisation of the country. The Unionists who supported the “Yes” vote would have never accepted Northern Ireland to remain part of the European Union. From a Unionist point of view, it would be the beginning of the dissolution of the Union between Ulster and Great Britain. Even if it were not considered as such, it would bring an opportunity for a future reunification with the Republic of Ireland, especially with the political instability in Northern Ireland. From this angle, I can say that the anesthetised conflict would have taken a wider dimension. Thus, Brexit was an opportunity to bring back the issue of an all-Ireland to the political agenda. The Unionists rejected the Northern Ireland Protocol¹⁰³ because it created a border between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. As such, it makes it

¹⁰³ The Northern Ireland Protocol was a solution suggested to the fact that Northern Ireland is the only UK country having borders with an EU country, the Republic of Ireland. Before the Brexit, transporting goods across the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland was not a problem since both were subject to the same EU rules. Nevertheless, with Brexit, some goods coming from non-EU countries had to be checked. Accordingly, instead of examining goods at the Irish border, they would be checked between Ulster and Great Britain at Ulster’s ports with Northern Ireland following EU rules on product standards. Simply put, the goods would be checked at Ulster’s ports then transported to the Republic of Ireland. It prevented a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; however, it created a border between Ulster and Great Britain.

impossible to imagine the Unionists accepting the prospect of Great Britain leaving the EU and not Ulster.

I believe Brexit in the UK and Northern Ireland were two different issues. While the most critical concerns in Britain were immigration and sovereignty, in Ulster, the borders and future of Northern Ireland prevailed, especially on the Nationalists' side. It explains why the majority in Northern Ireland (56%) voted to remain in the EU. Moreover, 66% of the Unionists voted "Yes," while 90% of the Nationalists in Northern Ireland voted "No" (Murphy 3). The division is evident in this case. Brexit did not only divide the Unionists and the Nationalists; it also separated the Unionist parties themselves, with the DUP and TUV supporting "Leave" and the moderate UUP supporting "Remain." Thus, disagreement also prevailed among the Unionists. Consequently, Brexit was not an exception and again pointed to the division between the two communities in Northern Ireland since the Nationalists supported the Remain campaign and the Unionists the Leave one.

As previously mentioned, Sinn Féin was close to winning the majority in the Assembly in 2017. Five years later, they won this majority despite their manifesto clearly stipulating their intention to pursue an all-Ireland. In fact, the manifesto emphasised securing a referendum for a reunited Ireland from the British and Irish Governments, as noted in the Good Friday Agreement. The plan for a reunion was explicit and emphasised diversity. The latter implies the acceptance of Unionists within Ireland as citizens. Even the appellation of "Time for Real Change" – the title of their manifesto – bears, in my opinion, the notion of change from Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom to a new status, which is becoming part of the Republic of Ireland. That was a direct consequence of the UK leaving Brexit. For the Nationalists, the British Government displayed indifference towards Northern Ireland and its citizens, whether Unionists or Nationalists. Britain thought of its own interest without due consideration to the repercussions on Ulster and the fragile peace. Thus, the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election results reflect the people's disappointment with British conduct regarding Brexit.

Moreover, the outcomes of the 2022 election suggest either the Nationalists outnumbering the Unionists or some Unionists joining the cause of the Nationalists. It needs to be noted that the Sinn Fein Party is still remembered as the political wing of the IRA. In reality, Catholics have outnumbered Protestants in Ulster for the first time since its formation. The latest census released on the 22nd of September 2022 showed that Catholics constitute 42.31% of the population; however, 38.7% of Ulster's inhabitants are Protestants, including individuals of other Christian backgrounds, and the remaining 18.99% encompasses people without religion apart from 1.60% who did not state their faith ("Census 2021"). According to the said statistics, there are more Catholics than Protestants in Ulster; nevertheless, for the time being, neither Catholics nor Protestants constitute a simple majority (51%) in Northern Ireland; however, it is likely to change in the future. Notably, the 2011 census indicated 45% as Catholics, and 48% stated that they were Protestants (Sedghi par. 4). If change continues at such a pace, the majority will be Catholic.

Such statistics can be alarming to the Unionists, especially the DUP. In fact, the Unionists barely accepted the prospect of losing authority in Northern Ireland, which has traditionally been predominantly Protestant since its foundation. Now, they have to come to terms with the fact that the Catholic population outnumbers them. The Unionists have always relied on their majority to remain part of the United Kingdom. It is important to note that such statistics do not mean that the last battle has been fought in Northern Ireland between the Unionists and the Nationalists, for the margin between the two is not significant, along with the fact that not all Catholics identify as Nationalists or support reunification with the Republic of Ireland. Simply put, these statistics cannot impact the future of Northern Ireland for the time being. However, they would affect the minds and pressurise the Unionists.

The above statistics can complicate the situation for the Assembly, for it will hinder its working. If it is perceived as a threat – and certainly is the case – to the Democratic Unionists Party (DUP), they can hamper the functions of the Assembly. The best example is when the DUP refused to nominate the speaker and the Deputy First Minister for the

Stormont Assembly in 2022 because of the Northern Ireland Protocol, which will be the focus of the coming section. In fact, the deadline was set for the 28th of October 2022 to form a new Executive, and if the parties fail to form it, a Northern Ireland assembly election will be called. Was it the aim of the DUP? I believe that a new election might enable the Party to regain its position. Nonetheless, recuperating the lost votes would not solve the protocol problem; it would only loosen the chains on the Unionists in Northern Ireland regarding their aspiration to remain within the United Kingdom and work not to weaken such a link.

An issue of paramount importance is the shift in the 2021 census released in September 2022. The analysis of the census indicates a change in British identity. It is essential to highlight that it was the first census since Brexit. On the one hand, the proportion of Ulster's population declaring themselves as British stands at 31.86%, a decline from the 40% reported in the 2011 census. However, an increase in Irishness was detected in the region since 29.13% of the inhabitants identified themselves as Irish compared to 25% in 2011. On the other hand, a fall in Northern Irishness characterised Ulster with 19.78% in 2022 instead of 21% in 2011. The remaining 7.48% stated being rather English, Scottish, Welsh, and other. ("Census 2021" and "Statistics Bulletin").

Evidently, there has been a significant decrease in the expression of Britishness in Northern Ireland, particularly after the United Kingdom left the EU. The negotiations of the British Government for a suitable formula to withdraw from the EU seemed to prioritise British interests, which led to dissatisfaction amongst some segments of the population. Consequently, there has been a shift in how people identify themselves in Ulster, strongly embracing Irish and Northern Irish identities instead of Britishness. Additionally, comparing the 2011 and 2021 censuses, I can firmly state that the number of individuals considering themselves as Irish increased, alluding to a growing sense of Irishness, which goes hand in hand with the growth in the Catholic population. Nevertheless, the number of people feeling themselves as Northern Irish remained somewhat at a constant rate. This trend can be attributed to people's tendency to identify themselves primarily with the state,

which reduces the likelihood of Northern Ireland being recognised as an independent entity in the future. Additionally, it can be explained as more people in Ulster envisage a future with the Republic of Ireland.

In a normal society, religion and identity do not determine how people would vote. As a matter of fact, the electors consider different issues, such as public services (health), taxation, and the cost of living, to decide about their future. In opposition, the parties attempt to meet the population's demands through their manifesto to win as many votes as possible. Nevertheless, Northern Ireland is not any society; it is a region where two communities coexist. A society once ripped by a protracted conflict, an area where the past still haunts the memories. For such a reason, religion and identity are still two essential components of people's choice, at least for the time being. Such polarisation is reflected in the people's identification in Northern Ireland as either British or Irish rather than Northern Irish.

“Today ushers in a new era which I believe presents us all with an opportunity to reimagine relationships in this society on the basis of fairness, on the basis of equality and on the basis of social justice” (qtd. in Landler par. 3) were the words of the Nationalist Michelle O'Neill, Northern Ireland's First Minister to be should the Democratic Unionist Party nominates the Speaker and the Deputy First Minister to the Assembly. In fact, a deep reading of these words suggests a commitment to the principles of the Good Friday Agreement: fairness, equality, and justice in Northern Ireland. I believe that it was a means to appease the fears of the Unionists. It was also an invitation to the Unionists to espouse the Sinn Fein Party and the idea of reunification with the Republic of Ireland.

The least that can be said about Brexit is that it endangered the peace process in Northern Ireland. In reality, the polarisation that existed in Ulster has been accentuated since the two communities voted differently. Moreover, the British Government's stance was more than obvious because it left the Union against the will of Northern Ireland. It must be noted that the Conservative Party held office, and the Northern Irish people could

not have hoped otherwise: no exception for Ulster to remain within the EU. The consequences of Brexit were felt more with the impact of the Northern Ireland Protocol on Northern Ireland.

5.4 The Impact of the Northern Ireland Protocol on Northern Ireland:

Despite the progress made by the Good Friday Agreement, the situation changed dramatically after Brexit when the Northern Ireland Protocol was introduced. The Nationalists supported the Protocol, while the Unionists opposed it due to concerns about the potential separation of Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK. Before delving into the Protocol, it must be stated that Article 50, in its fourteenth paragraph of the *Negotiating Directives for Article 50 Negotiations*, stipulated that “Negotiations should in particular aim to avoid the creation of a hard border on the island of Ireland while respecting the integrity of the Union legal order.” The negotiations obviously imply that a solution was sought to the problem of the borders between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The paragraph was clear about these borders; no physical boundaries should exist. Notably, the membership of the British and Irish governments in the EU created an invisible barrier between the Republic of Ireland and Ulster. Hence, the aim was to maintain an open border between the UK and the Republic of Ireland while respecting the unity of the UK. I believe that such a solution addresses the concerns and interests of the British Government but not those of Northern Ireland, which voted to remain within the EU.

As far as the Protocol is concerned, Boris Johnson, in a speech at the DUP Annual Conference in Ulster in 2018, said, “No British Conservative government could or should sign up to any such arrangement [which places checks at the Irish Sea border]” (qtd. in Murphy 10). These words had significant implications for the Conservative Party and the Unionists in Northern Ireland. They obviously epitomised Boris’ promise to the hard Unionists not to sign a border – which would compromise the integrity of the United Kingdom – between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, mainly since Unionists, as mentioned above, supported the Leave campaign in Brexit. It is essential to state that the Conservative Party needed the Unionists’ support for the parliamentary majority. Simply

put, no such deal would be made as long as the Conservative Party was in office, which also implied the requirement of the Unionists' support for Boris's Government. Nevertheless, the Northern Ireland Protocol was signed in January 2020.

As a solution, the Protocol required that goods transported from the UK to the EU members, the Republic of Ireland, be checked in Northern Ireland. From my perspective, this situation can endanger the Good Friday Agreement and the peace prevailing in Ulster. It must be noted that the conflict in Northern Ireland was a disagreement between Nationalists and Unionists, and the current divergence over the Protocol could degenerate and lead to troubles between the two communities. For such a reason, things must be handled cautiously. On the one hand, the Nationalists, who have always aimed for reunification with the Republic, perceived the Protocol as a means to separate Northern Ireland from the UK. In the words of Gerry Adams, it is called the weakening of the Union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

On the other hand, the aim of the Unionists has always been to remain part of the UK, and the Protocol sets them away from the UK since Northern Ireland and the other three UK countries are not subject to the same rules when it comes to some goods. Simply put, EU laws are applied in Northern Ireland, so is it really a Brexit, especially since if the EU rules under the Protocol are subject to disputes, the European Court of Justice (Court of Justice of the European Union, CJEU)¹⁰⁴ would be the one that settles the conflict and not British courts. The Protocol led the Democratic Unionist Party to refuse to participate in power-sharing until reforms were applied regarding the Protocol. Concretely, Northern Ireland has no self-governing for the time being, which requires an immediate political solution. A compromise?

When the Good Friday Agreement was signed, finding a balance to satisfy both parties was difficult. I believe that the Protocol would imbalance the Accord and change it. In other words, the Protocol undermines the constitutional integrity enshrined by the Good

¹⁰⁴ Court of Justice of the European Union

Friday Agreement. The consequence could only be a rejection from the disadvantaged party, the Unionists. As a result, power-sharing collapsed. Since then, calls to restore it have failed until January 2024. According to Mark Landler, the Democratic Unionist Party accepted the Protocol at the beginning and then turned against it, and for such a reason, the Unionist electors did not vote for the Party as a punishment (par. 9). In fact, the results of the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election support his assumption. Voting for Sinn Féin, which obtained the majority of seats, implied that the electors turned against the DUP.

Moreover, there was an increase in the vote for the Alliance Party. It suggests that some electors voted for more moderate Unionists since the Alliance Party encompasses moderate Unionists and Nationalists, while others voted for Sinn Féin. But this does not explain why the Unionist electors voted for Sinn Féin, whose manifesto embodied an all-united Ireland; the latter is the nightmare of the Unionists. Besides, if the Unionist electors voted against the DUP, it indicates that they voted against maintaining the Union with Great Britain, which is hard to conceive. In my opinion, this confirms my assumption that the increase in the number of Catholics impacted the vote in Northern Ireland.

The above election shift, coupled with the Protocol, could but lead the Unionists, the Democratic Unionist Party, to blame the British Government. The latter created a border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland and consequently breached the Good Friday Agreement. However, the Unionists overlooked the fact that not participating in the Northern Ireland Assembly also broke the Belfast Agreement. In fact, by doing so, they are preventing the Unionist electors from being represented, not to mention that they are hampering the two communities' interests.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson agreed to the Protocol in 2019. Such conduct implied that the Protocol aligned with the UK's interests. However, his subsequent statement: "it is not working effectively" (Traynor), infers a shift in stance towards the Protocol. The change in position can be interpreted as Johnson joining the Unionists' voice or supporting them in their desire and claiming to override it. It needs to be stated that in

December 2020, the Internal Market Bill read that ministers could “prevent the application of, and unilaterally reinterpret and disapply parts of the Protocol, as well as ignore their legal obligations under both domestic and international law to enact the Protocol” (“United Kingdom Internal Market Bill”), which means that the ministers can hinder the implementation of the Protocol and also reinterpret and invalidate specific provisions of it. It was an explicit breach of an international agreement; nonetheless, this clause was deleted. What is remarkable in this Market Bill is the question of sovereignty. It was all about the supremacy of the British Parliament and British authority over EU laws, which again proves the objective of the British Government behind the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill¹⁰⁵, seeking greater distance from the European organisation. In reality, the idea encompassed and deleted in the Market Bill was materialised in the Protocol Bill¹⁰⁶.

In fact, Liz Truss, the then Foreign Secretary, commenting on the Protocol Bill, said that:

This is a reasonable, practical solution to the problems facing Northern Ireland. It will safeguard the EU single market and ensure there is no hard border on the island of Ireland. We are ready to deliver this through talks with the EU. But we can only make progress through negotiations if the EU are willing to change the Protocol itself – at the moment they aren’t. In the meantime the serious situation in Northern Ireland means we cannot afford to allow the situation to drift.

Adding: “in the face of EU intransigence I developed the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill. It breaks the deadlock in a legal way, upholding the Belfast Good Friday Agreement and preventing the tearing apart of our precious union” (qtd. in Government Introduces Bill). Truss’ comment on the Bill specified the UK priorities, which are two: no hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and the importance of safeguarding

¹⁰⁵ The Protocol Bill is a bill originating in the House of Commons in late June 2022 stipulating amendments to the Northern Ireland Protocol agreed on in 2019 between the UK and the EU.

¹⁰⁶ The difference between the Northern Ireland Protocol and the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill is that the latter is proposed act which came to modify the former by overriding parts of it.

the union of the United Kingdom. In other words, it emphasises the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the UK so that the Nationalists would make no interpretations.

As mentioned earlier, Boris Johnson approved the Northern Ireland Protocol in 2019 but has since changed his position. So, why such a change in stance? In its article of June 13th, 2022, the Irish Times accused the Eurosceptic Conservative backbenchers of being behind Boris Johnson's change of view concerning the Northern Ireland Protocol (Staunton and Jones par. 3). This might be true because the Eurosceptics saw in the EU and its institutions referring to the European Court of Justice a loss of sovereignty. However, in my opinion, the Government's allegations regarding the best interests of Northern Ireland and the peace prevailing in the region cannot be questioned, for the stakes are high for Britain, Ireland, and Ulster if the conflict between the two communities reemerges in Northern Ireland. I believe that Boris Johnson wanted to leave the EU peacefully when he accepted the Northern Ireland Protocol, then found himself entangled with another problem: the Unionists' refusal of the Protocol.

The Protocol Bill introduced modifications to the Northern Ireland Protocol, mentioning the necessity of facilitating the flow of goods between Britain and EU members. Despite these alterations, a deep examination of the Bill displays limited differences. The most critical issue with the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill was the integrity of the UK because of the checks imposed on the exported goods from Great Britain to EU members in Northern Ireland. However, these checks have not fully considered the concerns of the Nationalists and the Unionists since they are still applied. The goods are still checked in Ulster with some modified conditions. In my opinion, the Bill eased the economic situation in Northern Ireland but did not look into the significance of the checks for the Nationalists and, more importantly, for the Unionists. The most crucial point in the Protocol, which undertook a change, was the removal of competency from the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in case of conflict. In fact, this aligns with the mindset of the British Government in its desire to cut ties with the EU and regain its sovereignty.

As part of the Good Friday Agreement, the Republic of Ireland had to take a stance regarding the Protocol, especially since it is an EU member. The Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, stated: “The natural expectation of democratic countries like ourselves, the UK and all across Europe is that we honour international agreements that we enter into. The British Parliament ratified this agreement; it was approved by the British prime minister” (Traynor). Through these few words, the Taoiseach made the Republic’s position explicit. According to him, the UK must abide by the Northern Ireland Protocol, considering it an international agreement. As such, he attempted to involve the international scene to pressurise the British Government. Moreover, the Republic has always claimed the North as part of it, which changed constitutionally with the Good Friday Agreement.

It is noteworthy that as an EU member, the Republic of Ireland is in a position to judge the deeds of the UK. It confirms the assumption stipulated in the previous chapters about the sovereignty exercised by the Irish and the impact that the EU had on it. Additionally, the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney, noted that the British Government's conduct does not ensure Ulster's interest (Loughlin par.6). It is important to reiterate that Northern Ireland voted to remain within the EU. It must be highlighted that my concern is not the economic consequences of the Protocol on the EU, UK, the Republic, and the Northern Ireland economy; my concern is its costs to the peace process.

Nevertheless, the question should be whether the Democratic Unionist Party would accept the new legislation, the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill, to nominate the Assembly Speaker and Deputy First Minister; the said Party has made no comments. Despite the pressure exerted by the Conservative Party to select them, no responses were made. Obviously, their conduct signals their reluctance and refusal to do so. Simply put, the DUP does not intend to appoint the Speaker and the Deputy First Minister even in light of the new legislation, which could have significant repercussions for the functioning of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Overall, the British government's decision to abandon the Northern Ireland Protocol carries substantial risks, as it could have considerable consequences for the region's stability and relationship with the EU.

If the Northern Ireland Protocol is ever deleted, the gap between the UK and the Republic will widen in political culture and economy. Needless to reiterate, the EU was a neutral ground for Irish and British leaders to meet and improve their relationships on different levels. Additionally, the EU made the border between the North and the South invisible. The cooperation between the two countries regarding the peace process in Northern Ireland resulted from the EU membership of both Governments. Of course, such a situation can be an advantage for the Unionists, who would not only succeed in averting an imminent threat towards reunification with Ireland but also in making it improbable that it would occur.

The fact that pro-Brexit politicians – including Boris Johnson, who campaigned for the UK to leave the EU – did not have concerns regarding the future of Northern Ireland can be interpreted as British sovereignty, in their eyes, was more important than the peace process in Northern Ireland. Ruadhan Mac Cormaic provided an interesting explanation of the decisions taking place in No 10 when writing that some British politicians are using Northern Ireland to keep Boris Johnson in power (par.3). In fact, it is an assumption that might be true for those who want to keep him in office. It must be noted that Boris Johnson was a fervent defender of Brexit, and if he were ever replaced by another candidate, a centrist one, for instance, Brexit would be in danger, especially since alternative candidates lacked.

In reality, when this section was written, the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill was still under reading in Westminster Parliament. However, things evolved. It needs to be stated that the British Government no longer proceeded with the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill since negotiations between the UK and the EU resulted in the Windsor Framework. The latter was a solution. An agreement was reached on the 27th of February 2023 under Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Ursula der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, to change how the Northern Ireland Protocol operates. That is, to permit Ulster to remain within the single market of the EU and customs union to ease the checks imposed on the goods coming from Great Britain to Ulster. However, the DUP voted against the agreement

and still refuses to restore power-sharing. The Windsor Framework provided the Northern Ireland Assembly with significant powers to implement EU laws in Ulster and permitted the British Government to veto new EU laws regarding trade in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, the DUP, under the leadership of Jeffrey Donaldson, rejected the Framework, requesting more privileges.

The situation in Northern Ireland is deteriorating. The population's interests are being suspended due to the absence of a devolved government in Ulster. On the one hand, the DUP is trying to pressure the British Government to change the Northern Ireland Protocol and the Windsor Framework. On the other hand, Sinn Féin, always eager to call for a referendum on the future of Northern Ireland, accuses the DUP of creating a political deadlock by refusing to participate in a power-sharing government. Simply put, tension is escalating in Ulster, and in all likelihood, an explosion will take place. During the 2023 Bloody Sunday commemoration, Sinn Féin's president, Mary Lou McDonald, stated that a united Ireland is within 'touching distance' (qtd. in Crisp). This statement alludes to the possibility of a future referendum, which is a real threat to the Unionists. The situation in Northern Ireland may deteriorate further if there are breaches of the Good Friday Agreement and human rights.

5.5 The Good Friday Agreement and the Human Rights:

The Human Rights Convention, also known as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), is an international agreement signed by the members of the Council of Europe in 1950. It should be noted that the Convention applies only to its signatories. It came as a response to the horrors of the Second World War. The Convention sets out some fundamental civil and political rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and security, the prohibition of torture, and freedom of thought and expression. So that these rights can be protected, the Convention established the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 1953. The latter's role is to ensure that the rights and freedoms encompassed in the said document are respected by the states that ratified it. Individuals who believe their states

have violated their protected rights can appeal to the ECtHR after exhausting all available domestic remedies.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is one of the signatories of the above Convention. In fact, it was one of the first countries to sign it in 1951. This means that theoretically, the UK has been bound by the European Convention since 1951, although some rights have been breached. In 1998, when the Good Friday Agreement was signed, which established peace in Northern Ireland, the European Convention was made part of it. Moreover, the British Government introduced the European Convention in British law. In reality, in the same year, 1998, the British Parliament enacted the Human Rights Act¹⁰⁷. Accordingly, Northern Ireland's rights were more than protected when the Convention became part of the said Agreement and the Human Rights Act came into effect in 2000.

In a society like Northern Ireland, the introduction of such an initiative was aimed at protecting human rights. It is crucial to reiterate that it was and remains a divided society, where rights, particularly those of the Nationalists, had been violated at various points in time. However, power-sharing has been embraced since the adoption of the Belfast Agreement. Introducing the Convention to the Northern Irish law intended to protect both the Nationalists and Unionists. Nevertheless, an important question arises: if the Nationalists' rights are ever breached by the British Government, particularly after the adoption of the Human Rights Act in 1998, and an individual files a case in the European Court since the British Government adopted the Human Rights Convention, can the European Court oblige the British Government to reconsider its decision?

The European Court cannot oblige the British Government. In fact, neither the European Court nor the European Council can impose any decision on the British Government. It is essential to highlight that the UK is among the countries against which

¹⁰⁷ The Human Rights Act of 1998 incorporated the Human Convention on Human Rights to the UK law. It came into force in 2000.

many cases were issued to the European Court for Human Rights violations. Between 1975 and 2021, 563 judgments were issued by the European Court regarding claims brought before it; out of the 563 cases, 327 judgments found at least one violation of the Human Rights Convention (Dawson and Joe).

Moreover, since the creation of the Human Rights Convention, no state, except for Russia, has been expelled from the Council of Europe as a punishment for its deeds. Russia was banished following its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, despite warnings from other countries. Thus, no effective pressure can be exerted on governments to prevent human rights violations. In fact, the United Kingdom can be motivated to abide by the judgments of the European Court either due to concerns about its reputation or the potential diplomatic and political isolation it may face. This isolation can include other European Council members and Convention signatories refusing to cooperate with the country. It is evident that such conduct would have significant repercussions for the country, particularly in terms of the economy.

The British Government hinted at withdrawing from the European Convention on Human Rights already in 2022. Prime Minister Boris Johnson alluded to the possibility of the UK leaving the Convention when he stated, “Will it be necessary to change some laws to help us as we go along? It may very well be, and all these options are under constant review” (Sparrow). In fact, he made these remarks as a response to judges interfering in the asylum seekers' deportation to Rwanda¹⁰⁸. It was a straightforward way of expressing discontent regarding the European Court’s interference in the British Government's affairs.

As a matter of fact, the Convention aimed to avoid tyranny and oppression, suggesting that it was issued against governments, including the British Government. It can be said that the Convention limits the actions of governments within their jurisdictions. It is worth noting that when the UK initially signed the Convention in 1951, it refused the

¹⁰⁸ The British Government in a plan called Rwanda Asylum Plan decided to deport illegal asylum seekers to Rwanda. The High court in the UK stated that the Government’s decision was legal; however, the European Court of Human Rights interfered with the deportation and the plan has been halted until the legal action, in the UK, has been completed.

jurisdiction of the European Court and did not accept it until 1966, when the British Government approved the right of individual petition and the jurisdiction of the European Court. It must be reiterated that the UK ratified the Convention in 1951. I believe that incorporating the Convention into British law was a way to prevent British subjects from appealing to the European Court of Human Rights, ensuring that the authority of British courts and tribunals would not be overridden. Consequently, the UK could partially find a way to escape the jurisdiction of the European Court, at least not as a first step for the complainant.

It must be stated that human rights are one of the essential and critical pillars of the peace process in Northern Ireland, *inter alia*, the Good Friday Agreement. It is unsurprising since one of the communities, the Nationalist group, believed to be a victim of deprivation of the different rights enjoyed by the other community, leading to the Civil Rights movement in the late 1960s. In fact, a whole section was included within the Agreement under the title of “Human Rights,” which emphasises the importance of such rights in conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. Under the said section, the Accord stipulates that:

The British Government will complete incorporation into Northern Ireland law of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), with direct access to the courts, and remedies for breach of the Convention, including power for the courts to overrule Assembly legislation on grounds of inconsistency. (The Belfast Agreement)

The aim of the above statement was threefold. The first one was to hold the British Government responsible for the changes that had to take place regarding resolving the conflict in Northern Ireland. It could not be otherwise since Ulster is part of the United Kingdom. The second objective was to integrate the Human Rights Convention into Ulster’s law. The consequence of the latter was the Human Rights Act of 1998 (HRA). Since Northern Ireland is constitutionally an integral part of the United Kingdom, the Act was also applied to it. That is, any breach of the rights encompassed in the Convention could be brought before the domestic courts and then the Court in Strasbourg. Moreover, it assures the accountability of public authorities and Northern Ireland institutions. The third

and most important aim was to make any legislation passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly subject to the Human Rights Convention and, more importantly, to courts. It suggests that the courts have the power to overrule the laws enacted by the Northern Ireland Assembly. As such, people in Ulster who believe their rights have been violated are assured that the European Convention, which is an international law, protects them.

The third point is significant. In fact, it does not only state that the Northern Ireland Assembly has to abide by the laws of the European Convention on Human Rights but also that in case the Assembly issues laws that do not respect the rights protected in the said Convention, the European Court of Human Rights can indirectly override the acts passed by the Assembly since it can signal its incompatibility with rights protected in the Convention. It implies that the European Court has authority over the Northern Ireland Assembly, which also suggests that it has power over the United Kingdom. The latter is a signatory of the Convention. It is worth noting that the United Kingdom left the European Union to regain control. Thus, it is not excluded that the UK will effectively exit from the European Convention, especially since hints were made in 2022 and repeated recently by the Conservative Party under Rishi Sunak. It means that rights might be breached.

It is unnecessary to mention that the Nationalists were those who believed that the Northern Ireland Government could breach their rights. The said belief can be subjective. As a historically oppressed group, it is understandable to display such a reaction. When the Good Friday Agreement was signed, the Nationalists were still a minority compared to the Unionists. However, the new institutions representing both communities should have appeased their fears. With the signature of the Belfast Agreement, power was shared between the Nationalists and the Unionists. This way, both communities' rights were protected by the political parties. Moreover, the Good Friday Agreement reinforced their rights by including sections such as the human rights part. Thus, the Nationalists' fears have no place to be.

However, the assurances provided to the Nationalists have been partly threatened. The United Kingdom is changing the guarantees encompassed in the Good Friday Agreement because it left the EU and now threatens to exit the Convention and, more importantly, to repeal the 1998 Human Rights Act. Regarding the latter, the alternative suggested by the British Government was a Bill of Rights, which would repeal the 1998 Human Rights Act. In this regard, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) recommended in March 2022 that the Human Rights Act must be retained because altering it would be divisive (“Proposed Changes to the Human Rights”). The least that can be said about the suggestion made by the NIHRC is that it was well thought out, particularly in recent months. The problems, Unionism vs Nationalism, symbols, and inability to reach consensus on critical matters, leading to deadlocks, which subsist at the Assembly level between the Sinn Féin Party and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), not to mention the latter's stubbornness regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol, can but aggravate the situation in Northern Ireland. Hence, repealing the Human Rights Act of 1998 and replacing it with the Bill of Rights will not help the situation in Northern Ireland.

In my opinion, with the current circumstances in Ulster, the protection of Human rights should be consolidated, not weakened. A letter written by the British Institute of Human Rights¹⁰⁹, Amnesty International UK¹¹⁰, and other groups was a pertinent interpretation and warning of the dramatic consequences of ditching the Human Rights Act. It was sent to Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister, and stipulated that incorporating the Human Rights Convention through the Human Rights Act of 1998 was also a commitment to the Belfast Agreement (Siddique). It indicates that, and of course, according to the said groups, the Good Friday Agreement with the Human Rights Act enactment became part of British law, which explains the British Government's commitment to the said Accord. I believe that their view is consistent even if a Bill of Rights has been suggested.

¹⁰⁹ The British Institute of Human Rights (BIHR) is a non-governmental organisation located in the UK with the aim of protecting human rights.

¹¹⁰ Amnesty International UK is a branch of the global human rights organisation Amnesty International. It is a non-governmental organisation with the purpose of protecting the human rights in the UK and around the World.

From my standpoint, the problem is not the amendment or repeal of the Human Rights Act itself. The issue lies in the idea of compromising the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process because the 1998 Human Rights Act is perceived rather as a symbol of protection. The British Government ensured that with the repeal of the Human Rights Act, their proposals “will strengthen quintessentially British human rights, such as freedom of expression, while staying a party to the ECHR. They will also prevent abuses of the system” (Siddique). It is clear that the British Government intends to protect the essential rights included in the Human Rights Act. Nevertheless, as stipulated above, the 1998 Human Rights Act symbolised protection. In reality, it was not only that but also related to the established peace, for it came as a consequence of the Good Friday Agreement.

In this context, it is worth noting that the British Government's intention in repealing the Human Rights Act of 1998 is not to undermine the Good Friday Agreement. In fact, the objective of the Government was to avoid the control of the European Court of Human Rights. The said aim was specified explicitly when a British Government spokesperson said that the Government’s proposals aim to “restore parliament’s rightful role as the ultimate decision-maker on laws impacting the UK population” (Siddique).

The changes included in the Bill of the Bill of Rights concern mainly the matter of interpretation. According to the Bill, the British courts are no longer required to interpret the rights like the European Court of Human Rights¹¹¹. It indicates explicitly that the UK wants to establish a gap between the human rights system in Britain and the one in Strasbourg. Simply put, it attempts to diverge from the Strasbourg system. In addition, the said courts would no longer be obligated to interpret British legislation in compatibility with the Convention’s rights, not to mention that the Bill limited the interpretation of rights to a literal reading of the Convention, which is again an attempt to create one's own human rights regime.

¹¹¹ Under the Human Rights Act of 1998, interpreting laws to make them accordant with the rights encompassed in the Human rights Convention was required from the British courts.

Moreover, the Bill introduced the “permission stage,” which means that proving a great disadvantage is the responsibility of the individual claiming the breach of right. That is, the claimants must display that they have been victims of a breached right and will suffer a significant disadvantage. Last but not least, the Bill grants more importance to Parliament as the courts are instructed to prioritise the opinion of Parliament when it comes to balancing rights matters¹¹² (United Kingdom). The latter refers to taking back control from the European Court of Human Rights, which was suggested earlier. Hence, the Bill of Rights of 2022 goes in line with reinforcing Parliamentary supremacy, as was the case with Brexit¹¹³.

It can be inferred that under the Bill of Rights Bill, the courts are no longer under the obligation to interpret the laws issued by the Northern Ireland Assembly in line with the European Convention on Human Rights, which was considered as an element of protection for the rights of the people in Northern Ireland, especially the Nationalists. Moreover, individuals under this Bill are required to prove that they face a significant disadvantage when bringing their case to court, which poses a burden in terms of time and money. Such a deduction can be frightening to someone living in Northern Ireland, especially the Nationalists who suffered marginalisation and inequality. In fact, it explains the rejection the Bill has faced from the people and the different groups in Northern Ireland, as exemplified above.

In reality, those rejecting the 2022 Bill of Rights have overlooked two essential points. The first one is that two political parties (Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party), representing the Nationalists and the Unionists, hold office in the Northern Ireland Assembly. It means that the interests of both communities, Nationalists and Unionists, are guarded by the two said political parties. It is unlikely that the Democratic Unionist Party

¹¹² Under the Human Rights Act of 1998, neither the courts nor the European Court of Human Rights could strike down an act issued by Westminster. However, they could signal to Westminster to consider altering an act which is not in line with the Convention. It means that the British Parliament had to abide by the European Convention.

¹¹³ The above-stated changes are not, of course, the only ones. If the emphasis was brought on a few of them, it is because of the topic. Only the changes that could breach the rights of the people in regard to the conflict in Northern Ireland were mentioned.

or Sinn Fein would allow legislation to pass that goes against the interests of the communities they represent. The second significant point is that even with repealing the 1998 Human Rights Act and adopting the 2022 Bill of Rights Bill, the individual in Northern Ireland or the other three nations would retain the right to bring the case to the European Court of Human Rights. The latter is still possible since the United Kingdom remains a member, particularly because the Bill does not include any clause that would prohibit such action. Moreover, and again, since the UK is a signatory of the European Convention, it is under the obligation to safeguard the rights encompassed in the said Convention.

Indeed, filing the case before the British courts is easier. It takes less time and less money. I believe that the people in Northern Ireland lost luxury when reference is made to the conflict. Naturally, this applies to all residents of the United Kingdom. If the Human Rights Act of 1998 is repealed and the 2022 Bill of Rights Bill is adopted, individuals in the UK, particularly those in Northern Ireland, would need to turn to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg if they think that the British courts did not provide them with justice. This scenario becomes more probable with the changes introduced in the Bill, potentially impacting societal equality. As such, it is more difficult to obtain rights and justice, and some might even renounce it. Thus, a class of disadvantaged people would emerge in Northern Ireland, and it is unnecessary to mention that a deprived class would rebel, especially in a divided society like Northern Ireland.

In reality, a more dangerous issue is on the verge: If the UK decides to exit the Convention, it will explicitly breach the Good Friday Agreement. People would be subject to British laws and issue cases before the British courts regarding the rights protected by British regulations. The privilege of taking cases to a higher court would be lost. It needs to be noted that if the UK decides to leave the European Convention, it would not be obliged to provide protection for the rights encompassed in the Convention. Nevertheless, the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) stipulates in its article 763 under the section Basis for Cooperation that “The Parties shall...uphold... the rule of law, and respect for

human rights, ... the Parties reaffirm their respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international human rights treaties to which they are parties.” The clause implies that the UK, which is a signatory of this Agreement, has to respect human rights and the international laws regarding human rights, including the European Convention, among other things. It means the EU can breach the Agreement if the UK does not respect them. Nonetheless, if such a scenario takes place, I believe that agreements will be sought to achieve solutions, as was the case with Brexit, but no one can predict the fallouts of such a decision or the accord that would be pursued.

The idea of withdrawing from the European Convention on Human Rights can have significant outcomes on the situation in Northern Ireland, especially with the already fragile peace and disagreement at the Northern Ireland Assembly level at the present day. The potential decision to leave the European Convention could accentuate Ulster's existing tension, especially when it comes to the Good Friday Agreement. The latter is deemed as the cornerstone of stability, peace, and justice in Northern Ireland. As such, breaching it as a result of exiting the Convention could reignite historical grievances and the conflict between Ulster's political parties and the communities, the Nationalists and Unionists, for whom the Accord is a symbol of justice.

To conclude the chapter, it is essential to highlight that the institutions set up under the auspices of the Belfast Accord faced many challenges. Decommissioning was one of the most contentious issues, which became a roadblock on the path of power-sharing, leading to the latter's collapse between the Unionists and the Nationalists in the Northern Ireland Assembly. After years of intense efforts, a significant milestone was attained: decommissioning was completed in 2005. Nevertheless, instead of permitting power-sharing to be established, the DUP erected more hurdles, particularly in matters of policing, resulting once more in averting the Assembly's functioning. Fortunately, the commitment of various stakeholders, such as the British and Irish Governments, to the peace process was crowned with the resolution of the aforementioned issues through the signature of the St Andrews Agreement in October 2006 and the Hillsborough Accord in 2010.

Nevertheless, violence was not utterly absent, sectarianism persisted, and power-sharing was inconsistent. The latter stemmed from disagreements and scandals plaguing the peace process. It must be emphasised that the 2003 Northern Ireland Assembly election witnessed the rise of two radical parties: the Democratic Unionists Party and Sinn Fein. The former rebuffed even to encounter the latter and requested more conditions to accept sharing power. The years 2000, 2017, and 2022 epitomised the collapse of power-sharing in Northern Ireland. Moreover, sectarianism remained a permanent feature of Northern Irish society. Walls were erected to separate the two communities in Ulster. Additionally, symbols and emblems continued to be quarrelsome concerns and a source of tension. Violence must not be overlooked. It was not non-existent, and the threat to use it was alluded to, especially during the Brexit referendum.

The Brexit referendum held in 2016 displayed distinct voting patterns between the Nationalists and the Unionists. Nevertheless, the most important result of the referendum was that Northern Ireland voted to remain within the European Union, while the overall result of the United Kingdom was in favour of leaving it. Moreover, a few years later, in 2022, Northern Ireland, for the first time, voted for Sinn Fein in the Assembly; this election is of paramount significance. It is well-recognised that Sinn Fein was associated with the IRA in the past. After the Belfast Agreement and their espousal of peaceful means in their quest for a United Ireland, the Republicans joined the Nationalists' side. The latter welcomed the solution, the Northern Ireland Protocol, provided to the problem posed by the UK's withdrawal from the EU, while the Unionists did not share the same sentiment. To address the situation, the then Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, introduced the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill (2022-2023), which did not reach the stage of the act because an agreement was signed between the British Government and the European Union, the Windsor Framework, rendering the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill unnecessary.

The Good Friday Agreement did not overlook the essence of human rights as an element of sustaining the peace process in Northern Ireland. It must be highlighted that the United Kingdom is a signatory of the European Human Rights Convention starting from

1951. The latter has been integrated into the Belfast Accord. However, the problem that arises is that no authority can obligate the British Government to abide by the Convention. The latter was incorporated into British law in 1998 through the Human Rights Act. According to the Good Friday Agreement, the Northern Ireland Assembly was bound to respect the rights encompassed in the Convention, and the latter could override the acts issued by the Assembly. Nevertheless, the British Government introduced the Bill of Rights Bill to repeal the 1998 Human Rights Act and threatened to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights.

From the above data, I can infer that the achievement of the St Andrews Agreement encountered myriad obstacles erected specifically by the Unionists. These Unionists were sceptical about the Republicans, whom they perceived as the enemy and mistrusted. The Unionists could not accept the idea of sharing power with the said enemy, especially since its formation, Northern Ireland, had been ruled by the Unionists. The least that can be said is that if the St Andrews Accord was signed, it resulted from many efforts of stakeholders (British and Irish Governments), pressure, and, more importantly, compromises regarding decommissioning and policing. Moreover, if a subsequent accord was a prerequisite, it was due to the Belfast Accord's loopholes and the delay in dealing with some issues. In fact, the signature of the St Andrews Agreement tested the resilience and commitment to the peace process.

Nonetheless, even with the above Accords, politics and society were unstable. Power-sharing encounters challenges; the best example is the collapse of 2022. The repeated failures of power-sharing indicate the unreadiness and unwillingness of the Unionists and the Nationalists to cooperate and work together. The aim of a government in Northern Ireland is to serve the interests of the people and address their concerns; however, a contrary situation is occurring. The interests of the people are ignored since the Assembly is not functioning. Consequently, it can erode the people's trust in their government and provide Westminster with more governance, affecting Devolution. Additionally, sectarianism remains a permanent characteristic of Northern Irish society, hinting at the

separation in Ulster and the unpreparedness of the people to live in harmony. Sectarianism is a deep-rooted attitude, a mentality that makes its erosion difficult. Sectarianism, most of the time, leads to violence. However, other factors can also generate the latter as a change in situations. Brexit epitomised such circumstances when the threat of using violence became probable and even materialised with the IRA dissidents.

Brexit emphasised the fact that the Nationalists and the Unionists were still two different camps. The difference in voting patterns points to separation and political sectarianism in Ulster. Moreover, Brexit indicates the distinctness of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom since it voted to remain within the European Union, along with Scotland. Such division was accentuated by the Northern Ireland Protocol. The latter was subject to different interpretations. The Nationalists perceived it as a positive solution to avoiding a hard border between the UK and the Republic, while the Unionists saw it as a negative resolution. Each group interpreted it according to its affiliation and past experiences.

For the Nationalists, the Protocol was a step towards reunification with the Republic of Ireland, while for the Unionists, it was a threat to their union with Great Britain. Consequently, the Democratic Unionist Party refused to nominate a Speaker to the Assembly, hindering its functioning. The Northern Ireland Protocol Bill faced the same fate as the Protocol, for the Unionists rebuffed it. Even the Windsor Framework did not escape such a destiny. It was predictable since no significant changes were brought with the Protocol Bill or the Framework. The Unionists hoped that pressure would give them more privileges regarding authority over EU laws in Ulster. If the Unionists felt that they were and are at a disadvantage regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol, the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill, and the Windsor Framework, it was not the case concerning human rights.

The Good Friday Agreement made the human rights question of utmost value in establishing peace in Northern Ireland. The inclusion of the human rights section in the Belfast Accord aimed to protect the disadvantaged class, the Nationalists. Furthermore, the

fact that the UK is a signatory of the Human Rights Convention provides more assurance regarding safeguarding rights. Individuals can appeal to the European Court of Human Rights if deemed necessary. Moreover, making the Convention part of British law through the 1998 Human Rights Act enhanced the British Government's commitment to protecting these rights, but at the same time, it was a means to escape the European Court's authority. Repealing the Human Rights Act would impact the peace process because it is a symbol and represents the pledge of the Government and not necessarily because some rights would not be respected anymore. The Government plans to replace it with the 2022 Bill of Rights Bill. However, the latter would make things more difficult for those whose rights have been breached.

When the elements of peace sustainability are scrutinised, it is evident that they are not stable. Power-sharing fails each time; social and political sectarianism is prevalent; the threat of violence is looming on the horizon, and the changes undertaken by the British Government regarding Brexit, the repeal of the Human Rights Act, and the menace of withdrawing from the European Convention on Human Rights, did little to improve the situation in Northern Ireland. In Ulster, it is a non-violent confrontation either between the two communities or within the Assembly among the political parties. The Northern Irish society is boiling; tensions are accumulating, and the people are deprived of their right to be represented due to the Assembly dysfunction.

The consequence can be an explosion. The already fragile peace has never been as threatened as it is this time. The stakes are high, and the tensions need to be appeased. Otherwise, the Northern Irish society is at risk of plunging into trouble. The path towards lasting peace is uncertain due to the myriad challenges facing it. The situation needs to be addressed, especially the underlying issues that are deemed as the foundations of peace in Northern Ireland. The doors for dialogue should be opened for more cooperation between the different political parties, namely the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin. Another factor that proved its effectiveness is the support of the international community. I believe that the European Union can provide such help even after the United Kingdom withdrew

from it. The US can also be of great help, as was the case in the past. Unlike Donald Trump, Joe Biden seems willing to intervene in the conflict that is arising in Northern Ireland. His visit to Ulster to mark the 25th anniversary of US involvement in the Good Friday Agreement proved his interest in the region. His words regarding the visit left no doubt when he said that the objective was “to make sure that the Brits didn’t screw around” (Pogatchnik).

Conclusion

Palestine, South Africa, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, along with North and South Korea, are just a few examples of countries where conflicts took place in contemporary history. Some have been resolved, while others still subsist. For instance, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of these unresolved disputes, which can be traced back to the 1917 Balfour Declaration, supporting the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people. It is this Declaration that gave worldwide support to Zionism and, thirty years later, permitted the establishment of a Jewish State, resulting in a conflict that survives until the present day. Northern Ireland was also one of these regions torn by many years of bloody conflict. Finally, realising the importance of living in peace, the warring factions sought a settlement signed in 1998. The Northern Ireland conflict, characterised as a complicated and protracted one, was described as a conflict devoid of solutions; nevertheless, it ultimately attained resolution.

In retrospect, while the Civil Rights movement of the late 1960s and the “Troubles” in Ulster might suggest a relatively recent conflict, its genesis traces back centuries. More accurately, it dates back to the plantations undertaken by the English Government in the sixteenth century. These plantations led to the coexistence of two different communities, not only in religion but also in culture, and parallels can be drawn with the case of Palestine. In Ireland, the English Protestants became the favoured and spoiled class, the Protestant ascendancy. The latter divested the Irish Catholics of their political rights. The situation enticed the Irish, Catholics and Protestants to work against the British Government, ultimately leading to the emergence of republicanism. However, the fight against the English Protestants' hegemony and the British Government led to a constitutional union between Great Britain and Ireland. The various attempts to dissolve the Union foundered. Nevertheless, they ignited the pursuit of Home Rule in Ireland, resulting in the birth of Northern Ireland. The conflict in Ireland between the English Protestants and Irish

Catholics transcended time since the Catholics once again found themselves a deprived class in Ulster, leading to the Civil Rights movement and the “Troubles.”

Since bloodshed stemmed from the situation in Ulster and political obligations weighed on the British Government, moves were undertaken to find solutions. Initial assessments were conducted during secret talks, and the Sunningdale Agreement was signed, but to no avail. The latter encompassed power-sharing and an Irish dimension, resulting in its failure. It is worth noting that Sinn Fein was excluded from the talks since they were not considered a constitutional party. Another attempt saw the dawn but was different from its predecessor since it was at the Governments – British and Irish – level, excluding all Northern Ireland political parties, making it a non-inclusive agreement. The Accord emphasised the status quo of Northern Ireland unless the majority in Ulster decided otherwise, an Irish Government role in Ulster’s Government, and constitutional means to achieve the requested objectives. As important as it was, the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985) could not overshadow the importance of the Hume-Adams Talks in initiating the peace process. If there was one point of consensus between Hume and Adams, it pertained to the principle of self-determination. However, they diverged regarding the means used to attain their objective. Meanwhile, Brooke/Mayhew Talks were convened. In fact, during these discussions, British officials encountered the Nationalists, the Unionists, and the Irish to discuss the diverse dimensions of the dispute. It was the first attempt to conceptualise the idea of the three strands. These discussions were followed by the 1993 Downing Street Declaration, strengthening cooperation between the UK and the Republic of Ireland and alluding to eventual talks, resulting in the IRA 1994 ceasefire.

The 1994 ceasefire was not the result of the Downing Street Declaration only. In fact, the Irish Americans and Bill Clinton played a crucial role in the Republicans’ Declaration. The importance of the fire cessation statement lies in initiating the peace process in Northern Ireland since violence ceased. Accordingly, the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation was launched, and the Framework Documents were issued, marking the beginning of a long-awaited peace process based on peaceful and democratic means to

pursue objectives. Nevertheless, the IRA's refusal to decommission hindered the process, leading to Mitchell Principles' announcement. In fact, the Unionists supported by the British requested the IRA's handing over arms, which the IRA rebuffed, pointing at decommissioning after a settlement. From the Republican perspective, the British attempted to stall the process, which led them to end their seventeen-month ceasefire. Nonetheless, the peace process took another turn after the resumption of violence in 1996, since the only condition for Sinn Fein's participation in the talks altered to become ceasing violence without decommissioning. As such, the process had a chance to be revived; John Major, the then-prime minister, changed his position on decommissioning at the close of his term, providing an opportunity to resolve it. Accordingly, an IRA ceasefire had to be reannounced, which required pressure to be exercised.

The road to the multi-party talks leading to the Good Friday Agreement and subsequently to conflict resolution was long and challenging. It started with the IRA's second ceasefire in 1997, consequently adhering to peaceful and democratic means, which permitted Sinn Fein to attend the all-party talks. The IRA accepted to renounce violence because of various reasons. It must be reiterated that decommissioning was no longer a precondition to Sinn Fein's participation in the said negotiations by neither the Conservative Party nor the New Labour Party, which came to office in 1997. However, this time, the British announcement for offsetting decommissioning from the process' path was explicitly made through a declaration, leaving no glimpse of doubt about it. Once the Accord was signed, it emphasised Northern Ireland as part of Great Britain unless the majority in Northern Ireland decided otherwise, and it encompassed a change in the 1937 Irish Constitution. Additionally, power-sharing was espoused coupled with Devolution. Other issues were dealt with, such as decommissioning, the prisoners' release, and policing. The Irish, British, and American Governments made incredible efforts to encourage the parties, especially the Unionists, to endorse it. Such energy was also applied to make the grassroots vote for it. However, when it came time for implementation, various challenges

emerged. Important conflict resolution issues were hazily tackled, which hampered its implementation.

Hence, two other agreements were signed, the St Andrews and the Hillsborough Accords, to remediate the Belfast Agreement. Policing and, most importantly, decommissioning were successfully dealt with amid the stubbornness of Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams. Nevertheless, if weapons were decommissioned, the mentalities were not. Sectarianism permeated the daily lives of the Northern Irish people. It is true that violence plummeted but was not totally absent due to dissidents, especially during Brexit. During the latter, the situation started to deteriorate, especially politically. The vote of the Nationalists and the Unionists did only confirm that polarisation is still a facet of Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the aftermath of Brexit, the Northern Ireland Protocol, and the Windsor Framework increased the vigilance of the Unionists from where their decision not to nominate the Speaker and the Deputy First Minister of Stormont. Additionally, the intention of the British Government to espouse a Bill of Rights instead of the 1998 Human Rights Act and the speculations about withdrawing from the European Convention on Human Rights reignited the fears of the Nationalists and brought back memories. Consequently, Northern Irish society is experiencing heightened tensions.

The peace process in Northern Ireland suggests moving from a state of conflict to resolving the dispute, proceeding through different steps. In fact, the presence of disagreement is a prerequisite to its resolution. The conflict has existed since the sixteenth century and was inherited with the formation of Northern Ireland. However, if the Irish, prior to Ulster's creation, asked for their independence in the post-Northern Ireland establishment, the Catholic minority asked to be assimilated into the society before Republicans' reemergence redirected the demands to reunification with the Republic of Ireland. Since the British and the Irish were concerned, for, on the one hand, Ulster is constitutionally part of the United Kingdom, and on the other hand, the 1937 Irish Constitution had claims over Northern Ireland, endeavours to resolve the conflict were undertaken. Interparty talks, intergovernmental discussions, mediation, and negotiation

ultimately led to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, followed by its long and challenging implementation. The conflict in Northern Ireland has not been eliminated, yet peace prevails, though a fragile peace. The latter is under pressure, especially since the UK has left the European Union. The political arena in Northern Ireland is boiling due to the British Government's latest decisions regarding solutions to its exit from the EU, the replacement of the Human Rights Act, and the possibility of leaving the European Convention on Human Rights.

My study concludes that conflict resolution in Northern Ireland stemmed from internal and external factors. However, the most important one was violence. In fact, it was the driving force toward resolving the dispute. Violence was crucial in seeking an accord, the Belfast Agreement of 1998, which led to the prevalent peace. In reality, brutality used led Sinn Fein to the multi-party talks. Since Thatcher's administration, the aim was to find a solution to violence in Ulster through different means, but to no avail. The Republicans' determination was more potent than the British Government. Violence weighed on the Irish and, more importantly, the British Government, leading to myriad concessions to the Republicans, among other things, not to decommission before or during the multi-party talks and to participate in the Northern Ireland Government without prior decommissioning.

Basically, violence proved advantageous for the Republicans even though the British and Irish Governments have never acknowledged it. Moreover, very few scholars in the field paid tribute to Republican violence. The only explanation for such denigration is probably not to promote and glorify the use of violence. It must be noted that brutality played a significant role in establishing Northern Ireland, and paradoxically, this same brutality opened doors to its eventual pacification. Violence prepared the foundation for a subsequent political process. The inclusion of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, in the multi-party talks can be attributed to their adoption of brutality. However, if the Good Friday Agreement was an opportunity for the British to enjoy peace, it was also a means to keep Northern Ireland within the Union, at least for the time being.

In fact, the situation in the Republic of Ireland differed from Britain's during the “Troubles.” The degree of violence was not as noticeable as in England. However, its borders were not secure because of the “Troubles” in the North. Brutality impeded a peaceful life in the Republic and disturbed relations with the United Kingdom, which led them to seek a solution to the conflict and accept concessions. Nonetheless, it must be noted that the Republican violence was not the sole factor leading the Irish Government to pursue peace, for the Republic underwent an ideological transformation. These ideological changes impacted the Republic’s approach to the conflict. Their membership in the European Organisations played a pivotal role in their decision to seek peace and accept constitutional amendments, notably to alter the 1937 Constitution, Articles 2 and 3.

The Unionists, as one of the principal conflicting parties, found themselves compelled to approve the Belfast Agreement because of the absence of other alternatives. Aligned and supportive to the Conservative Party, these Unionists constituted the privileged group. However, their position altered once the New Labour party held office in 1997. Under British Government influence, which made unfulfilled promises, the Unionists ultimately agreed to sign the Belfast Agreement, not to mention that the Irish Government exerted significant pressure on them to make concessions to the Republicans. In fact, throughout the course of the peace process, the Unionists made several concessions. These Unionists could no longer use pressure to attain their objectives. Additionally, New Labour maintained a position that did not favour Unionist or Nationalist interests.

In contrast to the Unionists, the Republicans were enticed to renounce violence to engage in the multi-party talks and sign an agreement. Nevertheless, what brought the Republicans to all-party discussions was their conviction that a potential and valuable accomplishment could be achieved at this stage. In the context of these negotiations, the Republicans’ objective was not a reunification with the Republic of Ireland. They were aware that such an outcome was not possible at that particular juncture. The number of Nationalists within the Northern Irish population, coupled with the conflict's complexity and past, would have stood against attaining an all-united Ireland. In truth, Sinn Fein shot

for the moon to land among the stars. That is, they asked for reunification to have at least justice and equality, along with institutions putting them on the way to reunification. It is worth mentioning that the Union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland was weakened when the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 was repealed in 1998. Accordingly, power-sharing, Devolution, the majority's consent, and the various North/South institutions were but a step in Sinn Fein's fight for an all-Ireland. The conflict shifted from an armed conflict to a political struggle following the implementation of the 1998 Agreement.

As such, peace was not the participating parties' first concern. The objective of the Unionists was to keep a strong connection with Britain, regardless of the cost. The Republicans wanted reunification with the Republic of Ireland using violence and were ready to continue their fight if the surrounding environment did not avert them. Therefore, for both Unionists and Republicans, peace emerged as a result of their strategic pursuits aimed at securing their objectives. Nevertheless, that was not the case for the Republic of Ireland and, more importantly, the British government. Losses weighed on the British in terms of lives and money. Their economy suffered, not to mention their international image, which could be tarnished by their inability to defeat the Republicans, who were seen as terrorists. It must be reiterated that the Republican violence prompted the British to seek an exit from the conflict and to cede to their demands throughout the peace process. The British also faced pressure exerted by the Americans. All the concessions made to the Republicans were to lead them to talks and keep them within the discussions. Of course, British duties towards Northern Ireland should not be neglected in this context. It permits me to assert that the Republicans were the guiding force behind the trajectory of the process from its inception. In their attempt to drive the Republicans out of violence to attain peace, the British Government gave them the key to an all-Ireland.

Considering the context of terrorism and given the events that took place on the 7th of October of this year regarding Palestine, it is impossible to remain indifferent to these occurrences; however, it must be noted that Palestine is not my topic. Sinn Fein was considered a terrorist organisation, which is also the case for Hamas in Palestine.

Nevertheless, Sinn Fein could be drawn to peaceful means in its quest for reunification with the Republic of Ireland with the assistance of the international scene, and it led to peace in Northern Ireland. The same can be achieved with increased efforts and further endeavours from the global arena, especially if humanity prevails, not interests. Additionally, pressure on Israel can be exerted by world powers to make concessions, and why not impose sanctions against its deeds in Palestine? The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and resolution are more complicated than I can say in these few lines, and they deserve an entire dissertation. However, as I already penned as a Muslim and, more importantly, a human, I had to make reference to it.

Regarding the decision of Sinn Fein to renounce violence and their decision to decommission, the international events, namely the 9/11 attacks and the war on terror, greatly impacted the IRA's decision to decommission and abide by the 1998 Agreement. Transformations in the international landscape were crucial to the shift of strategic priorities. Besides, the 9/11 dissuaded the IRA from returning to violence. Their decision to abide by the ceasefire was motivated by the risk of losing American support and, therefore, their ability to defeat the British Government. This strategic shift was crucial in safeguarding the gains the Republicans attained after renouncing brutality. In other words, the international circumstances pressured the Republicans for a positive outcome. In reality, pressure is not to be neglected in the positive result of the peace process, whether internal or external. The latter is encompassed in the American Government intervention and the events taking place at the time, 9/11 and the war on terror. The internal one consists of the pressure exerted by the British and Irish Governments on the Republicans and, more importantly, on the Unionists, the weakest link, not to mention the one applied by the Republicans on the Unionists and Britain or by the Unionists on the British Government.

In fact, the reunification of Ulster with the Republic of Ireland is not out of reach. It means that the Republicans' plan worked. It is important to reiterate that the Belfast Agreement was only a step for the Republicans to attain their ultimate objective. Their patience yielded results. Sinn Fein is already pushing for a referendum regarding

reunification in the few coming years, especially since the Nationalist population is no longer considered a minority in Northern Ireland and Sinn Fein won the majority seats in the 2022 Assembly Election. This indicates that the people in Northern Ireland support the Nationalist Party. Such a request, coupled with the aftermath of Brexit, threatens the already fragile peace. It is worth highlighting that the situation in Ulster is not stable. Sectarian tensions are widespread in the region, and some Republicans issued threats of using violence during Brexit. They even materialised these threats when the bomb found on the Silverwood industrial estate, on the day the UK was due to exit the EU, was claimed by the Continuity Republican Army. It implies that republicanism has not been eradicated. Moreover, repealing the 1998 Human Rights Act and the speculations about withdrawing from the European Convention of Human Rights clearly breach the Good Friday Agreement. The decisions made by the British Government have not helped the situation in Northern Ireland. It is unnecessary to emphasise further that the Good Friday Agreement is the cornerstone of the prevailing peace in Ulster.

In fact, conflict resolution in Northern Ireland has resulted from various factors. It is unreasonable to deem one cause as leading to its settlement, though they vary in consideration. The dispute resolution resembled a jigsaw game, where the overall picture would remain incomplete if a piece were missing. As such, all the factors were essential to its settlement. It must be seen as a jigsaw not only in the picture's completion but also in its building. In other words, if I can affirm that the conflict resolution resulted from internal and external factors, I can also confirm that the peace process was built stone by stone. The different attempts and failures while establishing the foundations of the peace process and its actual start and end led to its final version as the prevailing peace. In fact, it rose from the ashes of its unsuccessful challenges. In two years of talks, within 30 years of conflict, there were seven attempts to restore self-government to Ulster but to no avail and seven hundred days of failure but one day of success. Talks and, more importantly, agreements foundered before the Belfast Accord, though some had the same provisions but were not identical. Attention must be brought to the fact that there were some differences among the

signed Agreements between 1973 and 2010, which permits me to acknowledge that the conflicting parties built upon the suggestions and the models that had been proposed previously and updated and adapted them to the existing circumstances, conditions, and objectives. Simply put, such failure led to the possibility of exploring other channels and building upon what did not succeed.

Portrayed in this manner, the dispute resolution was complicated and improbable since it was the amalgamation of numerous factors, with some being unpredictable, like 9/11. Nevertheless, the success of its settlement provides hope for other long-lasting conflicts, such as the one between North and South Korea or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, although it should be noted that the peace process in Northern Ireland was one of a kind. At the heart of any success of a peace process lies dialogue, which mediation can facilitate. Nevertheless, the willingness of the conflicting parties to engage in these discussions is also crucial. Negotiation is a promising step in conflict resolution, paving the way for combinations and compromises to be explored and ultimately achieved. In this sense, Ulster's experience underlines the effectiveness of constructive dialogue in addressing the most intractable conflicts.

It is noteworthy that the Good Friday Agreement did not end the conflict in Northern Ireland or the peace process. It established “peace” and made the Unionists and the Nationalists accept their differences and live with their incompatibilities within a frame, and most importantly, using politics, which is precisely the aim of Conflict Resolution theory. In fact, after the Accord’s signature and implementation, working for peace continued epitomised, for instance, in peace education. In Northern Irish schools, the curriculum encompasses the history of the conflict, the Belfast Agreement and, most importantly, tolerance and respect for diversity. The Belfast Agreement provided a solution to the conflict. It permitted the British and Irish Governments, along with Northern Ireland, to enjoy peace now and as long as change does not occur. Nevertheless, because of the alteration taking place, the conflict might reignite in Northern Ireland.

Completing this dissertation contributes considerably to conflict resolution and peace studies, especially within long-lasting conflicts such as Ulster. One of the essential contributions of this research lies in the role of violence in resolving the conflict. This work highlights how violence, which had been used strategically by different parties, ultimately prompted stakeholders to seek a negotiated solution. This viewpoint challenges conventional ideas and sheds light on the interaction between violence, objectives, and the peace process. The research also emphasises the impact of international events in shaping strategies and priorities in conflicts and their resolution. Things must be said as they are; the violence of the Republicans brought them to the negotiations. Furthermore, this dissertation points to the fragility of peace in Northern Ireland. It is a reminder of the long and rocky road to attain peace and stability so that the newer generations understand its value and attempt to maintain it. Its significance assumed substantial importance with Sinn Féin's majority in the Assembly, the vehemence around the Northern Ireland Protocol, and the Windsor Framework, not to mention the decisions regarding the Human Rights Convention. Such a conclusion will be applied to Northern Ireland and other nations facing circumstances similar to Ulster's, for societies must learn from the historical events. Humanity ought to draw lessons from history. Humanity must know that human rights are being violated in Palestine, and no human mind can accept the idea that nothing can be done against a state and that no international law can condemn the atrocities of Israel against the Palestinians.

Further research needs to be conducted in the area of the peace process and conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. Research regarding the secret talks before the signature of the Good Friday Agreement and non-written compromises need to be further explored, especially in light of new archival releases, for they are essential to shaping the Accord leading to peace. Moreover, interviews should be conducted with seminal actors in the peace process to dig into the parties' intentions to unearth hidden stories and manoeuvres.

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Appendix

Under the Conflict Resolution Theory, some terms and concepts have to be defined:

1. **Conflict:** According to *A Glossary of Terms and Concepts in Peace and Conflict Studies*, is taken from Latin the meaning ‘to clash or to engage in a fight,’ which suggests hostility between at least two sides having different views and aiming at different ends. Conflict manifests itself through actions or can be “dormant” with inarticulate incompatibilities (Miller 22).
2. **Peace:** “A political condition that ensures justice and social stability through formal and informal institutions, practices, and norms” (Miller 55). However, to reach peace and sustain it, some conditions are a prerequisite, inter alia a balanced political power in the society, the legitimacy of the decision-makers, reliable and trusted institutions, equality within the society, and mutual understanding in terms of rights and interests despite the differences. Simply put, peace goes beyond the absence of violence in a given environment (55).
3. **Peace Process:** is a cluster of activities considered political and diplomatic; its main focus is on political interests and inter-groups' rights (Bush and Houston 8). It is also defined as the paramilitary activity reduction and the move toward negotiations by the conflicting parties (Gillespie 203-6).
4. **Negotiations:** are the process in which the conflicting parties seek a solution to their subsisting conflict (24).
5. **Power-sharing:** is less known under the name of **Consociationalism**, a governing system in which the communities in a divided society are represented in the governing executive to preserve political stability (Gillespie 62-3).
6. **Decommissioning:** is handing over conventional arms during or after an armed conflict or war (Miller 29).

Abstract in Arabic

الصراع في شمال أيرلندا يُعد واحدًا من أكثر النزاعات الطويلة في التاريخ المعاصر. وقد وُصف النزاع على أنه نزاع لا حل له. في أواخر ستينيات القرن العشرين، انغمرت شمال أيرلندا في حرب دامية، "المشاكل"، لمدة ثلاثة عقود متتالية. ورُغم المحاولات العديدة لحل النزاع، لم تُحقّق النجاح إلى حين اتفاقية الجمعة العظيمة في عام 1998. على الرغم من ذلك، فإن السلام الذي أقره هذا الاتفاق مهدد بالخطر بسبب نتائج خروج بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوروبي، حيث صوتت شمال أيرلندا بالبقاء في الاتحاد الأوروبي، ولكن لم يكن الأمر كذلك بالنسبة للمملكة المتحدة، مما أدى إلى التوترات والمناقشات بشأن إيجاد حلول للحدود مع جمهورية أيرلندا. ولهذا السبب، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فهم كيف تم حل هذا النزاع الطويل وفي مجتمع متشطي وذو أطراف مختلفة. الهدف أيضًا هو التأكيد على أهمية السلام الحالي في شمال أيرلندا وإبراز المسيرة الشاقة التي أدت لتحقيقه لرفع الوعي لدى الأجيال الجديدة. إذ لم تشهد هذه الأجيال مرحلة "المشاكل" أو العنف في تلك الفترة، ما يجعلها تغفل عن قيمة السلام الحالي. وسيتم تحليل البيانات المجموعة المراجع الأولية والثانوية من خلال عدسات التاريخية والماركسية، ولكن قبل كل شيء نظرية حل النزاع. من ناحية، توفر التاريخية والماركسية خلفية للنزاع في شمال أيرلندا وتفسره. ومن ناحية أخرى، تقدم نظرية حل النزاع رؤية حول كيفية حل النزاعات. ويمكن الاستنتاج أن حل النزاع في شمال أيرلندا نشأ من مجموعة من العوامل: الضغط الخارجي والمحاولات الداخلية، مثل المحادثات السرية والعلنية والاتفاقات والتحركات الاستراتيجية لتسوية النزاع. وتجدر الإشارة أن العنف من طرف الجيش الجمهوري الإيرلندي ومؤيديه أثر بشكل كبير على القرارات وبالتالي على عملية التسوية. ويجدر الذكر أن تدخل الأطراف الثالثة لا يقل أهمية في تسوية النزاع. فقد لعبت الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية دور الوسيط في النزاع وكذلك دوراً للضغط. في الواقع، يُعد حل النزاع في شمال أيرلندا أملاً في حل النزاعات الأخرى المعقدة والمستمرة منذ فترة طويلة، مثل النزاع الفلسطيني الإسرائيلي أو النزاع بين شمال وجنوب كوريا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إيرلندا الشمالية، نزاع، عنف، حل النزاع، عملية السلام، وساطة.