



FORWARD TOGETHER PODCAST



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HOLYWELL
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The Forward Together Conversations

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Introduction

Northern Ireland and the border counties are mired in a swamp of multi-party distrust that has prevented progress for several years. That distrust is based on constant blame passing, with the history of the Troubles replayed as control of history as well as contemporary political power. It is almost as if the absence of conflict is sufficient, rather than enabling the peace process to continue in order to embrace and promote reconciliation and mutual respect.

Does it need to be like this? Clearly no. Other societies have moved beyond conflict into what is hopefully permanent peace. So can we.

There are many options facing society in Northern Ireland and the borders, that will determine how we move forward and how we learn to live together in a more harmonious, integrated and shared way. The first step, of course, is wanting to move in that direction. It is not always obvious that this is a shared objective. But for the health of society as a whole - not to mention the effective and efficient use of public resources - the setting of that direction is essential.

The Holywell Trust - a charity that focuses on peace and reconciliation - took the brave and ambitious step of asking leading opinion-formers across the society in Northern Ireland to ask how best we can make progress. Not only that, but we also took views from important sections of society within the Republic. Those conversations became the Forward Together podcasts - which are available on the Holywell Trust website.

These conversations were based on asking four questions: 'how do we strengthen civil society?'; 'how do we achieve a shared and integrated society?'; 'how do we deal with the legacy of the Troubles in ways that reconcile society and avoid re-running the conflict?'; and 'how do we have the necessary conversation about the constitutional arrangements for Northern Ireland?'.

We asked opinions across the community sector, talked with key professionals, authors who have written about the horrors of the Troubles and some of the best known politicians in Northern Ireland. We expected the usual responses - well meaning statements of commitment to integrated education and housing, plus urgings that we should all do better in living together,

What we actually heard were carefully considered suggestions of practical steps that could be taken to embed peace and strengthen society. These are important proposals that could fundamentally improve the way Northern Ireland works, as well as strengthen the social bonds.

The ideas are not a party political manifesto, nor do they represent the views of one narrow part of society. Northern Ireland is traditionally perceived through the prism of it containing two communities. That is no longer true - and was always a misleading narrative. Northern Ireland is an increasingly complex and diverse society. We have embraced many migrants, including those of no faith, or other faiths beyond Protestantism and Catholicism. Many people born into those two dominant religions now identify beyond those core identities, some choosing to regard themselves as agnostic or atheist, while others are more committed to inter-faith dialogue or a non-denominational outlook than to an allegiance to the religion of their parents.

We are an evolving society. That creates its own problems. The workings of the Good Friday Agreement have enabled us to move forward and it is a framework for mutual respect and also for possible constitutional change. It is based on an assumption of a two religion society that provides

an inadequate view of where Northern Ireland is today. So our conversations have not been restricted to voices from Catholicism and Protestantism, but go beyond that. Even more important than that, understanding the past needs to comprehend the similarity of experiences – what happened to people from whatever background was in many ways the same. It featured loss, mourning, injury, fear, loss of earnings, loss of homes, loss of dignity, loss of hope.

The 35 conversations are reproduced here. We thank all the interviewees for generously giving us their time and their dedication to treating the questions with great seriousness and thought. The nature of the conversations was such that our interviewees were thinking while they were talking - so we have 'tidied up' the transcripts to reduce the number of 'I thinks' and 'alsos' and 'sos', but in doing so we have tried to assist the views of the interviewees to come through more clearly. We have tried very hard not to misrepresent views, but in case of doubt the reader should listen to the original conversations via our podcasts. As far as possible, the interviews are reproduced verbatim. In the reproduced interviews that follow, the questions (and interviewer interjections) are in italics.

A number of organisations and individuals have been involved in enabling this work to reach publication. These include the Community Relations Council for Northern Ireland, the Irish government's Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as other funders of Holywell Trust, which include the Community Foundation Northern Ireland, The Ireland Funds, Northern Ireland's Executive Office (through T:BUC – Together Building a United Community) and Department for Communities and the European Union's Peace IV programme. This project was managed by Gerard Deane of Holywell Trust and enabled by the work of Audrey Magowan in doing the detailed transcriptions of interviews.

Above all, of course, we thank the interviewees.

The original podcasts are available on the [Holywell Trust website](#).

Paul Gosling / November, 2019

The interviews

Eames-Bradley

Lord Robin Eames (Interviewed 9th July, 2019)

Robin Eames was co-chair (with Denis Bradley) of the Consultative Group on the Past in Northern Ireland¹. From 1986 to 2006 he was the Church of Ireland's Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland from 1986 to 2006.

"We're at a very delicate stage where society is beginning to learn that the party political regime doesn't necessarily reflect their deepest concerns. I'm talking about health and education and social issues. And what I think is appearing in Northern Ireland is a gulf between the way in which elected politicians are trying to represent views in which they're not really in touch with the vast majority of society. And they're falling back all the time on party political issues. The Brexit pressure is bringing this to the surface. Added to that there is a vast wave of people in normal ordinary everyday society who are turning their backs on the party political input and beginning to say "You're playing your own games, but you're not either representing us, or reflecting what really concerns us at the ground level".

We need to do a lot more research into the 'People's Assembly' concept. We need to do a lot more in how the media reflects what people on the ground are saying. The people that talk to me have a tremendous degree of frustration for the lack of representation and understanding in the media of what really concerns them in everyday life.

When you talk about a 'People's Assembly' how would that be different from either the Civic Forum or the Citizens' Assembly in the south?

It's very similar. That happens to be just the title that I find comfortable. And the structure is probably more important even than those who take part in it.

But there is clearly a tension here which is both of the two major parties, by my understanding, have concerns about the legitimacy or the challenge that a different citizen's organisation, the Citizens' Assembly, People's Assembly would represent to themselves.

That's really an indication of feeling threatened. Threat is a wonderful motivation to push people on. Party politics feels threatened.

Presumably the objective, or one of the key objectives, is to achieve a more shared and integrated society.

I'm not playing with words, but it depends what we mean by 'shared'. Party politics after the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement had a wonderful opportunity of indicating what a shared responsibility was. The fact that it hasn't happened in the years since is an indication of how they have responded to that degree of threat. Time and again you get the old recourse to orange and green. Time and again you get questions of who was a victim? How do you define a victim of the Troubles? And immediately party politics slips into 'us and them'. A person who was an innocent bystander was blown to pieces, as opposed to the person who went out to bomb, to shoot, or again the person who wore a uniform and to a unionist point of view represented 'the right side'.

¹ [The Consultative Group on the Past in Northern Ireland](#) reviewed how to deal with the legacy of the Troubles

So, recognising the difficulties of dealing with the past, how do we look forward in ways that create a more integrated society?

We tried to bite the bullet on who was a victim. Do you say that we were *all* victims? Those of us who lived through and were involved in the years of the Troubles, we were all victims of a mass of disintegration of society. Is that the way to approach it? Victims are people who suffer irrespective of the label, irrespective of who they were or what they did. They suffered because of the enormity of what the Troubles did. Or, do we sit back into orange and green, which is only an innocent person is a genuine victim.

It's interesting you're making this point because you're not the only person to have said this, if this is what you're saying, which is that unless we deal honestly and openly with the past we can't actually have a basis for having an open and shared future.

That's exactly what I'm saying. You must remember that I'm speaking from my personal experience of ministering to many hundreds of people who suffered because of the Troubles. I'm speaking of families that were bereft of fathers, sons, wives, daughters. I'm speaking of people who felt they were the victims because they put on a uniform. They were given the power of the state to do things and as a result they became targets. I have no difficulty in defining them in a particular way, but I equally believe maturity demands that we take a wider view of what a victim was. A victim was someone who suffered physically, mentally, spiritually, materially because of the fact they lived in a certain place, they did a certain job, they had a certain political outlook and they were involved in a situation which was massively bigger than anything they'd ever been taught but they had to face.

So, recognising that we haven't achieved the level of progress on the Eames-Bradley report that you would have hoped, how do we today deal with the past?

It's interesting that you raise Eames-Bradley. While [the reason the report was acted upon] was a technicality where we proposed a particular figure for compensation, that was the watch word for those who tried to destroy the report, time and time again over the years since it, people have gone back to the terms of Eames-Bradley and even now, as government tries to look at a way of dealing with the past, people come to me and say, "What did that mean in the Eames-Bradley report?". "Would you change that if you were doing it today?".

In other words, it's not gathering dust on a bookcase somewhere. It's actually still in people's minds. I like to think that going from Stormont House² to the other attempts to deal with the past, there are still the seeds of Eames-Bradley and it's being talked about. So, if you were to ask me, "If you're doing it again, would you change it?", I would probably change the question of mentioning a figure. Yes. But the rest I would stand over because it's endured time.

One of the biggest [blind] spots was the membership of our committee. We didn't have a radical unionist and we didn't have a radical republican. The argument then and the argument now is that were they involved we probably wouldn't have got as far as we did get. On the other hand it would have added a little more sensitivity to what we were to recommend. The government was too involved, but we had to walk between two horses – one was civic society and the other was what was possible in government terms.

² The [Stormont House Agreement](#) was agreed in 2014 and contained measures to address the legacy of the conflict.

I think Stormont House is progress. I think also it owes a lot to Eames-Bradley. It again indicates that a lot of what we said is still in people's minds.

One of the things some loyalist political leaders have said is that they need, in order to make progress, a genuine apology from the Provisionals for their actions in the past in the way that other organisations have issued apologies. Do you think that is a necessity to make progress?

Apology raises the question of definition. It depends on what they would interpret as a wholehearted apology. In a sense, you're rewriting history. Does that mean that if you're a republican activist and you say, "I'm sorry for what I did", does that question your integrity and being involved in the first place? Does it mean if a loyalist paramilitary comes out and says, "I want to apologise for what I did, or what I was responsible for", that the degree of that apology is really the question of what does it say about your involvement in the first place?

It is also the issue about whether one person has the moral ability to apologise for the actions of somebody else. So does David Cameron's apology³ on behalf of Ted Heath actually mean anything?

That's right. Of course it's got to be an individual one because I can't apologise on behalf of my community. I have to say "I apologise for *my role*" in whatever it was and that is a genuine personal opinion. But you cannot speak on behalf of a society which says, "I apologise on behalf of the 'X' degree of my community for what we did", because that is coming very close to rewriting history and rewriting history is one of the greatest dangers of the position we're in at the moment.

And it does seem to be what's happening the whole time.

Oh absolutely. Every time I pick up a newspaper it confronts me and anytime I hear a speech it confronts me.

It's the parallel process of denial of current reality and rewriting past events.

Absolutely. You've put your finger on it and there is a link, a connection between those two which I believe takes you to the truth of the matter.

Is how we deal with the past and how do we deal with the future the same question? Maybe there's a parallel here with psycho-analysis of the individual, that you need to deal with the things you are trying to hide away, to confront them and talk about them honestly?

I think confronting them and talking about them honestly, provided there is openness and honesty and provided it doesn't slip back to the old conundrum of rewriting the past. People have said to me we need a completely independent history of what happened. And I say, "Yes, of course we do". But who is going to do that? What is independence and what is the reality of the evidence they would use? They talk about the Boston tapes⁴, they talk about confessions of the security forces, they talk about the fact that republican terrorism didn't keep a record, whereas the records were kept by and large with state forces. It does face modern Northern Ireland society because there is a yearning to move away from the history of the past and to find some way of saying that's history, that happened. We don't deny it, it happened, but we now say we have built a new society out of the ruins of the Troubles and we want that society to be somewhere we can feel free to live in.

³ David Cameron made an [apology](#) in the House of Commons in 2010 for the actions of troops in Derry on Bloody Sunday, 30 January, 1972, at which time Edward Heath was the prime minister.

⁴ The 'Boston Tapes' were recorded interviews with former paramilitaries, providing an oral history of aspects of the Troubles.

You have to look at the machinery that we have at the moment - historic inquiries. Inquiries that are ordered through coroner's courts, through reports of state involvement, it could be arguments about who did what, when they did it, why did they do it and the question of The Disappeared⁵ and the question which is confronting me and my work at the moment which is the definition of the victims, because there are many of them who suffered terrible injuries, mental, physical, as well as spiritual, who suffered those immense problems and are dying off one by one because society has not yet grasped a way of giving them some recognition for what they passed through.

So should there be some all encompassing truth commission to deal with these things?

When I was writing, making my contribution to Eames-Bradley, I had a lot of a conversation with Desmond Tutu in South Africa over the Truth and Reconciliation Tribunal⁶ that was happening in Cape Town. And the more I listened to him and the more we compared notes, the more I'm convinced that the real elephant [in the room] in looking at the past is honesty. Not honesty that would suit my party, my community, but honesty at a level where society has moved to say, "Yes, that happened. Yes, someone in my community caused it", but the truth is that has to be ticked off as part of the history and you want a totally independent body looking at that in terms of this is what happened and this is where we move on. That's not to say you put a camouflage over it. It's not to say you say, "Oh, that's irrelevant, that's in the past". You should face up to it and you say "Hurtful, dangerous though it is, this is what happened. This is why we caused it all. We had a role in it. Let's put it on the table and let's move on".

I suppose the criticism of that approach would be that we're not sufficiently mature to have that honest conversation, but on the other hand so many of the key actors whose truths we'd need to learn are now dead.

That's why the definition of an independent body is so desperately important. People that I worked with over the years during the Troubles, people who had a key role in how things unfolded, some of them are gone. They can't speak from the grave. We've got records of what they did, we have opinions of what they did and we've got comments by those who worked with them. But their voice is lost because history has moved on. A historian said to me, "This has always been truth about looking at the past". It's always been the historians' problem and we've just got to say this is the local definition of the same problem."

⁵ The 'Disappeared' were people murdered by paramilitary republicans and buried anonymously in unmarked graves.

⁶ The [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) was established in South Africa to consider human rights violations and crimes during the country's apartheid era. It was chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Many observers saw it as a model that could be copied in Northern Ireland.

Denis Bradley (Interviewed 12th April, 2019)

Denis Bradley was co-chair (with Robin Eames) of the Consultative Group on the Past in Northern Ireland. He is former vice chair of the Northern Ireland Policing Board and is a former Catholic priest.

Civic society to some degree or other depends on political society or political institutions, political engagement. Civic society is inclined to keep its head low until it sees where the river is running and the river at the moment is running in so many directions that civic society, I think, will opt, apart from those who are very committed to whatever position, whatever ideology they adopt, will be inclined to stand back, watch, observe.

That's no bad thing in itself and I think that the politics needs to take that into account and will take that into account. I think that we in the north of Ireland are in a peculiar situation in that we have become observers of so many things including a lack of government. I don't mean that just in the sense of the politicians being not engaged. It's almost as if many of the structures that we created were focused on actually bringing politics to a place where we all could live with, in other words, if they got 50%, somebody else would get 50%. But the outflow of that is that we have ended up with institutions in a civil service that don't function particularly well.

So it was more about an accommodation that satisfied everyone rather than actually a deep seated strategy and progress?

Yes. I don't completely blame them for that. There's many ways in which we stand on the shoulders of the Good Friday Agreement, but there's even a greater way in which we stand on the shoulders of Anglo-Irish relationships. And Anglo-Irish relationships have gone off kilter. And they went off kilter for a couple of reasons. First of all they went off it because their assessment was leave the north to mature. Let the politicians, even if they fight with each other, even if they don't do good governance, we will stand behind, we will stand slightly at a distance from that and we'll only come in at the last moment and we'll let them kind of grow in on themselves and learn to be amongst each other.

And then that was blown off for a couple of reasons obviously because of the walkout by Sinn Féin, the various situations that happened within the DUP, but then Brexit was an added unforeseen factor that blew the ship way out of the sea in which it was it was floating and into a different place. It's very difficult for civic society. It will end up frustrated watching education being very unattended to in policy terms, health being unattended to in policy terms, economic development being unattended to in political terms. All of those things are being unattended to. I don't think the civic society can persuade the powers that be, who are basically the civil servants and the senior civil servants, either individually or collectively, to engage in a way that one may desire or one might need for a particular time.

But civic society's interests are also going to be taken up by the whole Brexit situation in that that's where the focus of attention is presently and has been for the last year, and probably will be for the next year or two. So, can civic society be strengthened at the moment? It could be

If you take the learnings from the peace situation, there are two. First of all, I'm not too sure that civic society brings about peace on its own. You need the high politics, but then again high politics, I'm not too sure it brings about peace on its own in that you need civic society. At least you need the buy in of a fair number or a fair amount of civic society to make the peace achievable or to make it perhaps a little bit more constructive, a little bit more imaginative that it might have been. If you're

actually going against civic society, it's very, very difficult. Even before Brexit happened, politics was finding it difficult to remain within the narrow lines of the Good Friday Agreement.

When Sinn Féin were very unsure of themselves about [being in government with] the DUP, they engaged civic society in about four meetings and I was *amazed* the numbers of people who turned out and the people who turned out at that. You could hardly identify a Shinner in the room - it was mostly the doctors and the teachers and the nurses and all the people who might be Sinn Féin voters, but they certainly weren't Sinn Féin activists. Now getting people into the room is a very important thing, a very difficult thing, and not everybody's particularly good at it. Sinn Féin worked it, they worked the phones.

A very good example was the policing issue for Sinn Féin. They just didn't jump into policing, they went round and had meetings all over the place, and some of those meetings were pretty shouty and they were certainly hot and bothered but at least the meetings took place and people felt they had their say. Now, could Sinn Féin have done that without going and consulting and having those meetings? My answer to that is yes, they could have - because people follow their leadership more than any other party I've ever seen in my lifetime.

But there is a wit there that knows that it is the right thing to do to consult and to hear it and to get the feedback and to bring people with them. I think that it would be a good and a healthy thing if people were given forums, but I wouldn't expect them to be the changers that people might expect.

Our problem at the moment is we don't know where we're going. Well, we don't know where we're going at the moment, we may have very strong ideas of where we may go in the future and where we should go in the future. Just in this moment in time, it's not very clear. There is a time in politics to sit back and engage in a conversation knowing that it is not the time to strike, not the time to make anything really happen, that you just have to be patient, that you have to realise that this is a change. If you were to try to force that situation at this moment in time, it's incredibly difficult and maybe even impossible because all of the politics will say, "Ah yes, but..." and that 'but' will keep you outside that door or outside that engagement for a period of time at least. How long that period is, is questionable.

But all of my answers are subject to the fact that I think that Brexit is such a revolutionary thing that it's in the throes of its dynamics and until its dynamics at least comes to earth somewhere and settles down and there's a greater clarity, it is going to be nigh impossible to construct anything else in any of the countries that we're talking about and what I mean by that is Ireland, Scotland, not so much Wales, and England itself. Those things are so disrupted and are going to be for the next period of time that it is very hard to know what we can do except I suppose observe to a degree, engage to a degree in which is practical and realise that it is going to be very frustrating for a period of time.

You and Robin Eames put together a proposal which is widely supported, but has not moved on because it didn't get [official UK government] approval. Do you look back and think you should have done anything different? Do you stand over all the recommendations within it?

Yeah I do actually. I think the report in itself is an extremely good report and one of the worries when you do a report is that you think will time show up big weaknesses, was there a big pothole that we didn't see coming down and all that. That hasn't happened. The report has been incredibly good in that sense.

The difficulty with the report in my mind looking back, is that there was only one government involved and I think that was a major mistake and I blame myself to some degree for that . I pleaded

with the Irish to be involved, as much a part of it as the British were. But the Celtic Tiger was beginning to explode. But even without the Celtic Tiger exploding they were so cynical around it, they were *very* reluctant to engage. Perhaps I should have walked away and said, "I'm not getting involved in this unless the Irish government will". My whole political understanding is that nothing changes in Northern Ireland unless the two governments are engaged. So when the report came to its fruition and when the British government were faced with the possibility that unionism was kicking at this thing and saying "We're not going to have this because this looks as if across the board we're going to be giving money to the family of people who were terrorists" and so forth and "We're going to have no hierarchy", and so forth and "We're going to have moral equivalence", which was their big thing, basically the British government ran away. And they may not have ran away and I don't think they would have ran away had the Irish been there to say, "We can't run away from this thing". When one government only is engaged you do not get the roundness, the maturity and the strength that you have if you have the two governments engaged.

It was the payments [to victims]⁷ that seemed to kill it off.

Not at all. That's not true. There was five things within the report that could have been quite explosive. People saw the payment one because it was the most explosive. But there were four others that had they ever got to the table were quite explosive.

Could we go back to the report and move it forward now?

We made a skeleton. Haass⁸ came and said, "Could we not move incrementally rather than this big kind of thing? Let's do this incrementally", and I said, "Well, if you can do that, fair to you, you're a better man than me. I just think that this is like a forest out there and you have to walk through it. There's no paths around it and you have to get in to it". And he said, "Well maybe let me look at it". By the time he had looked and been here for six months he said, "Can't get through that forest, so you have to deal with the past". Then we got into the Stormont House Agreement and they not so much watered it down, but they put scaffolding around it. And some of the scaffolding is atrocious. They divided it up in a way that it shouldn't have been divided. They took [out] the thematic stuff which is in many ways the real core of it. It's not that every individual case is important, but they're only part of a bigger thematic, whether it's internment, whether it's shoot to kill policies, whether it's the British Army thing, whether it's genocide on the borders, whether it's whatever it might be, there are themes there that inform the individual cases and they were kind of putting that at the end, when in fact that should have been where they were going.

But they took some of the themes though, for example, reconciliation stuff, and they were putting 15 to 20 people in charge of it. The management of it, the corporate governance of it, is if you look at the Stormont House Agreement – I was afraid that the three people we were recommending were too many and they were putting thirteen people in it at one place and fourteen people in – now that's perhaps what you have to live with and that's perhaps what you get on with and that might work and that might be okay, but among those thirteen people will be members of political parties. So you're actually trying to deal with something and the participants who don't want to deal with it are in the room managing it. It's a difficulty.

⁷ The Eames-Bradley report proposed a 'recognition payment' of £12,000 to the nearest relative of a person who died as a result of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. This caused controversy as it did not distinguish between what were regarded as 'innocent victims' and those who died as a result of their own actions.

⁸ Richard Haass was the United States Special Envoy for Northern Ireland from 2001 to 2003, who also chaired inter-party talks in Northern Ireland in 2013 and 2014.

So, that's the difficulty with the Stormont House Agreement, in that it has been sectioned off to a degree that it shouldn't have been, but it's alright, you can deal with it. At least it has some of the key issues in it and it has a timeframe in it which is important, because society – people keep talking about the rights of individuals and the rights of victims and the rights of all kinds of things. They seldom talk about the rights of society. Society also has rights to deal with something in a perhaps incomplete but at least with some integrity, and then move on and that is less highlighted. But anyway, I don't think that in itself at the moment would stop things because at least the Stormont House Agreement is there so people can fall back on that, they can highlight whatever difficulties they have in that direction.

Now you've made clear repeatedly that the thing that you really want to talk about is how we with the constitutional question without it inflaming situations across the north.

Well that's the one that intrigues me because I don't know the answer to it. Something very important happened and has not received the attention it should have. And that is that the Europeans and the Irish, but particularly the Europeans, have said if there a no deal [Brexit] we will still have to deal with the Northern Ireland situation. That's a *massive* movement from where situations were at. My argument was that I didn't think that they're ever, ever, ever could be a border in Ireland again.

And anyway all the border structures would be within green territory. What I mean by 'green territory' is from here [in Derry] to Dundalk is basically, with a few exceptions, a few pockets, it's basically a nationalist homeland. So to think that you could do that is thinking that you can put the cavalry of the old western films out into a fort somewhere and think that the Apaches will stand off. The Apaches won't have to stand off because the locals just won't let it happen. I also think it's an understanding that we're different from Scotland, who will have their own fight. I think they will start calling for their second referendum. The fascinating thing about Brexit is that it was an English construct and it is going to leave England incredibly unsettled for a long period of time. Now whether that's five years or 10 years or a generation, I do not know.

The real question for us is, can we move beyond that unsettlement in England? To actually engage at a real and honest and radical engagement in this island. I have thrown out little things about what we need is an all-island forum. What we need is conversations to start, what we need is engagement from all the different parts of this island. But I do that almost out of desperation. In that I could equally see unionism - I do see unionism's propensity to go back in on itself and at difficult moments not to engage - I can understand why this is. They come from a position that nationalism can lose 20 times or 40 times. Unionism can only lose once. They will become incredibly defensive.

My contact with loyalism over the last 20 years has been substantial and they have been very angry with the DUP because they feel betrayed by the DUP and they feel that the DUP looks down their nose at them. And they are much less willing to be radicalised into, "We will create havoc on the streets if we lose the precious Union or the precious Union's under threat". But then again, the people I'm talking to are kind of a bit like myself, getting old.

And loyalism, of course, is very split as well.

Very split. I've worked with a lot of unionist people and I've worked with the DUP. And sometimes the wrong thing to do is to bow the knee to their intransigence, because sometimes I think they don't like people who bow the knee to their intransigence.

Sinn Féin are the strong party on the nationalist / republican side in Ireland around the referendum, around the border poll. And they're the ones who are calling for it. The southern government and the southern parties are saying this is crazy, it's not the right time, not the right way to go about it. So there's tension in there. Of course it's the wrong time and it's simplistic and crude and wrong to have a border poll now which would say if there's one more voter for a united Ireland than that is it. That's as crude as you can get. The difficulty is that if you take that off the table I'm not convinced unionism will move at all, it will stay within its own narrow ground. It won't move out into engagement. So in fact I think that the border poll, or the possibility of a border poll, at least challenges unionism. Peter Robinson was prepared to look at that and trying to make his people ready for that. One of my disappointments is that that hasn't been followed through much by many people within unionism. Robinson seemed to be this lone voice.

I think it was Colum Eastwood⁹ who said it's very hard to have a conversation with people who don't want to talk to you. Is there anybody, are there institutions, is there civic society within unionism, which is prepared to talk? Until that happens it's very hard to judge which would be the best type of forum, would it be better at a local level, would it be better at an all Ireland level, would it be better if the two governments agreed to it, would it be better..?

Are there any church people saying anything? Are there any non-politicians saying anything? The Ulster Unionists may talk about Brexit, but will they talk about anything beyond that? The commercial people, the industrial people will talk about Brexit, but that's safe because what they're saying is, "This is bad for our economy". I have friends who say the politicians need to be taken out of this. What we really need to do here is work on the economics and the social change and I can see that argument and I can understand it and I'm caught between is that the best place to go into safe territory. Or does unionism need challenged, really challenged to say you have a responsibility here too.

It comes back also to a point which you mentioned a few minutes ago, which is that the European Union recognises that Northern Ireland is different. But the whole point about the unionist position on Brexit, the hardline DUP position and also ostensibly the European Research Group¹⁰ position is that Northern Ireland isn't different. How does one deal with that tension about the fact that nationalists and the European Union would see Northern Ireland as being different from Great Britain, whereas unionists would say it isn't?

That's what I'm struggling with. Will we get those 20% or 30% who were anti-Brexit within the unionist community to begin to speak into this chaos that we're now living with, or will they retrench and not speak and just hold schtum? I don't know and I'm fascinated by that. I had one very interesting conversation with four elderly members of Presbyterian congregations within the heartlands of unionism. I pressed them on this and the initial thing was, "A lot of our people don't talk about it", but the most hardline of the four said, "I would say that there is a lessening of attachment to the Union". There is not a lot of discussion around the future, but they would recognise the lessening of attachment to the Union.

So perhaps we end where we began and say that what we need then is the civic conversations including within unionism that go beyond the political party system.

Yes.

⁹ Colum Eastwood is leader of the SDLP

¹⁰ The European Research Group is a right wing, pro-Brexit, faction of the Conservative Party

The victims' campaigner

Alan McBride (Interviewed 7th March, 2019)

Alan McBride is a victims' campaigner and a former member of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Civic Forum.

For me, one of the big things that's missing in civil society is grassroots leadership, particularly within loyalist working class areas. We need to put a lot of investment into areas the likes of east Belfast and the Shankill to try to improve the leadership potential, community development potential of young leaders there. When I think of civil society at the minute and I listen to some of the debates on the radio, I think there's a very marked inequality of debate on the issues that people cover and the way that it's brought across. As a grassroots working class Protestant loyalist myself, I have a real feel for that community. I don't think that they're always best served by the spokespeople they put forward at this moment in time. I would like to see other voices, voices that perhaps we haven't heard yet in that community.

I was a member of the Civic Forum. It was a great idea. It had great potential. I don't think it was particularly well run or well managed. But I would like to see that idea come back and I would like our politicians not to see any form of Civic Forum or 'People's Parliament', call it what you will, as a threat to democracy. It's absolutely not. If politicians really tapped into it it's an invaluable resource for them, even as a sounding board, to get some ideas, to have a proper interface with the community, with civil society. I think the first pilot Civic Forum in the early 2000s didn't achieve a lot, but not because of the people that were doing it. I just don't think it was particularly well chaired or well managed.

And are you implying that the political parties wouldn't leave it alone?

The political parties never really tapped into it. The DUP were anti it from day one. When the whole thing collapsed and it failed, none of the political parties went out on a limb to say, "Look, let's bring back the Civic Forum". That's incredible to me because there were a lot of good people within it and we got involved in some very good debates and produced some excellent papers around things like educational underachievement, poverty, integrated education, but none of those reports ever saw the light of day.

Politics here isn't working. So there has to be a space created for civil society to come in and occupy some of that space to get things up and running and bring forward good ideas. I believe in Northern Ireland, I believe in the potential of Northern Ireland. I believe that we could be an absolutely fantastic country. The whole Brexit debate has poisoned the attitudes of the political parties here and also in relation between north and south and east and west. So we've gone backwards in the last couple of years. But I hope that doesn't mean that it has to always be like that. We can go forward better in the future.

You're suggesting we need to empower working class loyalist communities better. How can we achieve that?

Working class republican, nationalist areas are quite well represented by Sinn Féin. I don't think the DUP and the UUP represent unionist communities. I think they use loyalist communities for votes, but I don't think they really deliver for loyalist communities. There's room for improvement if you look at the reports that have come out in the last few years around educational underachievement, particularly among working class loyalist boys.

It's also about inspiring kids while they're still at school isn't it?

Yes, and again that goes back to the educational underachievement amongst working class males. I would be an example of that. I left school when I was 16 with no qualifications, well I did CSEs at the time but they were considered to be worth less than an O Level. We, not just Protestants but Catholic kids as well, were let down by the education system. I've heard people championing our education system as the best in Europe and the best in the world. Maybe for some people that's true, but for a lot of people, certainly people in communities that I would have lived in, that's not at all the case.

We have to encourage young people and give them proper role models to aspire to. Within loyalist communities there's a real shortage of them, because the role models in some communities are the local UDA brigadier or whatever and they're really bad role models. There needs to be somebody within those communities that can stand up and people could follow and they could inspire. But if that doesn't happen we're looking at generation after generation of educational failure, of unemployment, of poverty, of sectarianism, of all the things that blight those inner city working class loyalist communities.

So how do we move forward towards a genuinely shared and integrated society?

I believe that the only thing that's keeping us apart at the minute, certainly politically, is to do with attitude. To be honest with you, the DUP do not want parity of esteem with republicans. They want to live in a very British Northern Ireland, flying the Union flag, where there's no real rights for Irish language speakers. On the other side of the coin, Sinn Féin appear to be on this anti-British, anti-unionist, anti-loyalist journey: if you talk to grassroots loyalists they'll say that they're trying to strip every vicissitude of Britishness away from local government and from the public spaces. To what extent that's true, I don't know.

But I do think those attitudes need to be reconciled in some way. I talk about the notion of what it means to be a good neighbour. This was inspired by a neighbour of mine when I lived in a mixed area. My daughter got to be friends with a couple of little Catholic girls across the street and one Eleventh [of July] night their father came over and invited me to a barbeque at their house. I explained that I was going to the bonfires that night because that's what I always did as a Protestant and a unionist, but he said, "Look, we'll have the barbeque earlier and why don't you come over anyway and sure you can leave early". And when I went over to the house they had a bonfire built in their back garden for me. These are Catholic neighbours of mine in this mixed area and I said to myself, "Why can't we get to the place where we can share in each other's culture and each other's traditions where they're not offensive, we're not burning Irish tricolours or putting effigies of the Pope or any of this".

Arlene Foster and Michelle O'Neill could pave the way. I've invited them both to come and debate with me on television. They've both declined. If they would just get over themselves and say, "Look, Arlene Foster I want to show Michelle that we want to welcome republicans and nationalists into Northern Ireland. They are a part of our community, we want them to be a part of our community. We want to throw out an olive branch. We want to show them that they're equal with us". And so, yes, let's have an Irish Language Act, it doesn't have to cost the earth. We could have something which means a lot to them and we could put in place protections for certain things around the Irish Language.

And for the same token, Sinn Féin, Michelle O'Neill might be able to say, "We're not after your bonfires or after your Twelfth Day of July parades. In fact, we want to come and share those things with you, so why don't we put these things together?"

If people went at it with that type of attitude, about how can they please their neighbour, rather than how can they please themselves, well then I think we would probably get on further. But it's easier in politics to simply state your case and go to your people and to be voted in in your large numbers.

But when people vote in the way that they do, they are not voting for government, they're not voting for a Northern Ireland that's going to work, they are actually voting for those political parties to hold the line. And those parties are holding the line. You couldn't fault them for that. [But] they're not only failing their own people, they're failing everybody in this society.

The other big issue is how you deal with the past. How do you think one can do that and how can we reconcile societies in doing so?

We have quite a comprehensive suite of proposals that were out for consultation in relation to how we do all these things. My own preferred way forward would have been to go back to the 2009 and the Consultative Group on the Past report, Robin Eames' and Denis Bradley's report. I think it was the best and every time we've gone out for consultation since that, we have come back with something which is considerably less than what we had before.

This latest, the Stormont House Agreement and the legacy aspects of that, are probably the last time that we'd go to the people. So the issues are there around historical investigations, around truth recovery, around storytelling, around all of these things, around relationships with Northern Ireland and also within the island of Ireland. So no matter whether you talk for another 20 years, those are the issues that people need to have resolved. What they're trying to do is draw a line in the sand under this. We don't want to be going on investigating the past and raking up the past forever and a day. But to do that, you can't just collectively forget about the past. You have to have a mechanism that you are able to hang the past on. It's happened in South Africa, the Balkans, Chile, Argentina and Rwanda. Some were more successful than others. We need in Northern Ireland one tailor made for our situation. I believe what we have with the Stormont House Agreement is tailor made for our situation.

You clearly believe that part of the process of dealing with the past is to inform young people, young adults, about the past so that they don't repeat the mistakes.

Yes. We need to learn from our past. I was in conversation with [disabled victims' campaigner] Peter Heathwood and he said that in Ireland every 10 years there seems to be some sort of a break out of violence and then it explodes into something bigger. We want to stop that pattern happening. The way we stop that from happening is to teach people what happened in the past. There'll always be a role for people like ourselves to come into schools and colleges and share stories about what happened and help people to see that violence is not the way forward. Dialogue, communication, negotiation, reaching out the hand of friendship, being good neighbours. If we could get to that place, I believe Northern Ireland would be one of the most remarkable countries in Europe.

The other big challenge is how we have the constitutional conversation and do that in ways that don't threaten existing relationships.

The Good Friday Agreement has addressed that and dealt with that. Whenever there seems to be a groundswell of opinion that has changed and a united Ireland becomes something that is considered that people might want, then we should go to the country. I don't think now's the time. There's too many other issues with Brexit. But I do say this: depending on what type of Brexit we have, it might well be that that becomes a realisable thing that we have to consider within the next few years. If people in the south of Ireland are living better than people in the north because of the fact that they're in the European Union, so we have a bad Brexit and all the dreams and ambitions of the Brexiteers don't come to pass and we're actually really rueing the day that we ever left the European Union and we look across at our neighbours across in the south and they're living better than we are, I think people would probably want to be part of a country which was attached to Europe and so that would question it being a united Ireland and will come to the fore. I think that would be the worst nightmare for the DUP, but they've only themselves to blame. They've opened the door for it and let's see what happens.

How can that conversation take place in a friendly way which doesn't feel threatening in particular to loyalist working class communities?

Those who are proposing an all Ireland have to demonstrate and show people in the unionist community what life would be like living in an all Ireland. They, more than ever, have to throw out the olive branch, take the hand of friendship. I don't vote unionist because I'm a proud member of the Alliance Party, but my favoured position is to stay within the Union. But only if it's working financially and economically because at the end of the day, I'm more concerned with my quality of life than I am with the flag that flies over my country. If there's a better lifestyle being part of an all Ireland, then I would absolutely vote for that.

The professionals:

Professor Jim Dornan (Interviewed 19th February, 2019)

Jim Dornan is a former director of fetal medicine at the Royal Maternity Hospital in Belfast and holds professorships with both Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

We've always got to look at the materials we're given and the moment there is a political vacuum in Northern Ireland and that has helped civic society get its act together. There are a lot of willing people in all parts of society that weren't seen as being political - with a small 'p' or a big 'P' - in the past, who now want to come together. So I am welcoming civic nationalism, I'm welcoming civic unionism, but I'm even more welcoming a combination of both. And there's a great opportunity for the middle ground which is becoming a very interesting part of politics to look at, to come together and advise the wings on either side as we have in this part of the world and try to de-sectarianise politics in Northern Ireland once and for all.

So you think that the void within party politics needs to be filled by civic voice?

That's right. I think it's happening and I think it's wonderful. It's a great opportunity. You get the feeling at this moment that there is a yearning and that the people are searching for a middle ground and people don't want to be labelled.

But do we need structures? I mean the Civic Forum ceased to exist. So how do we make sure that we have the right voices to be heard rather than simply that people put their own voices forward and that the most assertive person is heard or else that the political parties don't subvert civic voices so that it becomes a de facto party political debate under another name?

That's exactly the danger. But I think a Civic Forum would be wonderful. But the two groups of people that we need to look to are young people and women. A lot of people are fed up with men in grey suits.

So specific civic events focused around women and young people?

Starting off with that way, yes. I'm working with Conor Houston¹¹ at the moment and we are working on coming forward and trying to regenerate a re-avowing of the people of Northern Ireland to the Good Friday Agreement. Let's have conversations in the community and use vehicles that are already present - community groups etc, etc, who have got funding over the years. Let's give *them* a template to start discussions in their own communities.

Now the objective needs to be that we achieve a shared, integrated society.

Yes.

How do we make progress towards that?

We look at every tenant of our society, everything – culture, health, education, agriculture, fisheries, digital age - everything. We need to look at the experts in our society and bring them together so

¹¹ Conor Houston, Jim Dornan and actor James Nesbitt are leading the Connected Citizens initiative

that they can give us honest views of what the future holds for this island on whatever dispensation we all go for at the end of the day.

Are we as a people happy to continue to have a subvention for the next 50 years? Does that make us proud? Is that good? Is that the best way to use our resources? I very much would like to see the Secretary of State set-up or support a Civic Forum and also support a movement that would actually produce an independent dossier, but I would like to see her coming in behind it and see everybody, all the political parties saying, "Yes, let's have facts as we move forward" to when we eventually do get to the situation where we can address what dispensation is best for this island.

When we talk about a shared and integrated society one of the things we should consider is the health service on both sides of the border. You were one of the originators of cross-border health sector collaboration through the opening up of the opportunities in Dublin for children's heart surgery being provided on a cross-border basis. What can we learn from that experience?

Everything. Ireland is a Goldilocks-sized country for health provision. We can cherry pick the best of health provision throughout the world and introduce it to Ireland. The health service is a wonderful concept. Prevention is important and treatments are important. Big decisions have to be made. Our society has to take more responsibility for its health. We can't just keep abusing everything and expect an NHS to collect us at the end of the day. So somewhere between Norway and New Zealand would be my perfect health service. In New Zealand, they have a no-blame culture, so you don't have to prove that somebody's done something wrong to get help to look after your child if it's got a genetic or an acquired problem.

Now if I understand the logic correctly for what you did, it's broadly that we have a population of about 6,000,000 across the island, 1,800,000 in Northern Ireland. With those population numbers if you look at how to provide an effective health service you're better doing it by sharing the specialisms. Is that broadly what you're saying?

Absolutely, although we need to work on the infrastructure. In the west of Ireland better roads are required, linking us all up because those are the things that have the biggest influence on the health of society: access to health services. It's easy for people in Belfast and Dublin and maybe Cork but those cities in the west of our island need to be connected. You know Derry, Galway, Limerick. But I totally agree that it is very, very manageable. The two health services *are* increasingly working together and they're full of men and women with vision. I'm positive about health going forward, but I would like to see everybody having equal access to the same health standards.

And of course providing Brexit doesn't disrupt things then you can still achieve a single all-island health service provision system without dealing with the constitutional question.

Absolutely. If we look at sport - football is the only sport that isn't all Ireland, everything else is. We didn't have to have constitutional change for sport to work, so you're absolutely right. Health is a perfect example of something that we can get on with now rather than wait for a potential possible change in the dispensation.

But dealing with the present and the future is made difficult by the failure to deal effectively with the past. How do we deal with the legacy of what happened during the Troubles?

I would encourage the powers that be to brush down Eames-Bradley. Eames-Bradley was a wonderful document. Parts of the media focused in on the compensation and that became the

whole news: one or two lines out of the whole thing. If it was properly done, Eames-Bradley has got a lot of life left in it. It's just over 10 years since it was published and why reinvent the wheel?

Dealing with the legacy needs to be seen not simply in terms of restitution or justice, but also how to deal with the health of those affected and about reconciliation.

Absolutely. And a learning experience for us all so that everybody realises what the consequences were. Let's learn from it and be a beacon for other societies to look at and learn from.

The other big challenge is to have the constitutional conversation. How do we have that in ways that don't inflame the present, don't create new traumas?

For a start, everybody learns how to stop grabbing a microphone. It's written in the Good Friday Agreement that when the Secretary of State feels that it's appropriate there will be a referendum. Starting to call for it now is just not very savvy and it's only annoying people. I'd say it's a fact that there's going to be a border referendum. What are we voting on? We're voting on facts. So we need to have a conversation as a people to see what are the best ways forward. Politics has never been as volatile. When we're ready let's have a quiet, sensible adult vote on the subject. I don't mind sticking my neck out saying that I would love to see the border disappear, because it just is divisive. But whether the border of any new dispensation would just be around our shoreline or might include other areas, that is really up for grabs. I wouldn't have said it five years ago, but I'm saying it now.

So it sounds as if what you're saying is firstly, let's not have inflammatory language.

Yes.

And secondly, let's try and get an evidence base around what the different options are for the future of Northern Ireland.

Yes. It would be wonderful if we can have mutual respect, so that everybody realises that everybody's got a part to play. Ireland has got great people and great friends throughout the world. The US, the EU, the UK would all I'm sure love to be part of the debate going forward and see how best we can help these six million people. Let's get excited about what a lasting peace could bring to this island.

Sophie Long (Interviewed 14th March, 2019)

Sophie Long oversees a sustainable development grants programme in Northern Ireland for a major charity and has been an election candidate for the Progressive Unionist Party, for which she has also been a press officer. She holds a PhD in politics from Queen's University Belfast.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

The first way to do it would be to give recognition and appropriate resources to the civic society projects that are already doing interesting things, like the women's sector in Northern Ireland. If you're interested in how to build peace or how to overcome communal division or just do a really interesting piece of work, the women's sector are doing it. But it tends not to be discussed as peace building work - it gets categorised as women making friends, or women coming together for an afternoon or whatever. But women are doing the most interesting peace building work in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

When you don't adequately recognise or resource those things it's hard for new ventures to find space and to link up with other forms of power. Periodically we'll have attempts to do stuff, for example with the Citizens' Assemblies, but if they're not part of a well-funded, secure, healthy, community and voluntary sector they're going to be a brief periodic intervention - an interesting project. If we want to strengthen civic society it has to be properly funded and it has to be given the recognition it deserves. At the minute, we don't take things seriously unless they're done through formal political mechanisms.

To what extent are the women's groups that you are referring to good practice and cross community?

I don't know any women's sector work that isn't cross community. They were doing that from the '70s, when they started doing their own community projects because they saw a need and responded to it before community work was professionalised. Around the time of the flag protest there were women from east Belfast and Short Strand who produced a really interesting book together. They had built friendships over the years and had been trying to do things around the interface. That got drowned out because media outlets here focus on stuff that's related to conflict. Bomb scares get headlines. The old digital editor of the *Belfast Telegraph* said at an event a couple of years ago, the only time he'd ever sold out of a paper when it wasn't to do with violence was when he had Rory McIlroy on the cover. So you have to understand how the media operate.

Most of the work that women's groups are doing is cross community, because most of the work women's groups are doing is about addressing everyday problems: people are dealing with loss or social isolation or health concerns or trying to keep their kids out of trouble. And those things aren't unique to any particular religious group. That's why that type of slow ongoing constant connection works so well and why traditional cross community work where you bring some kids together once or twice doesn't have the same impact.

What can learn from the failure of the Civic Forum compared with the success of the Citizens' Assembly in the south?

I don't think you could pin the blame for the Civic Forum not working on the members of the Civic Forum. It's clear there was one political party that didn't like it and didn't want it to have proper consultation powers. It was squeezed out. The Civic Forum failed because power became more and more concentrated, until it was just in the hands of the two parties. The reason it worked in the south was because it had the blessing of government. If we had appetite here from the two big

political parties to reach out and look for creative solutions and redistribute power a little bit, we could come up with some really good solutions. If you talk to 10 people in a day in Belfast, most of them will have an idea about what to do or how to do things better. We have concentrated decision-making in the hands of people who don't look for creative solutions. Everybody that's suffering has the good ideas, but they don't have the decision-making powers.

There is that disconnect between where the ideas are, the energy is within the community sector and what's happening politically.

Yeah. I wouldn't argue that the councillors and MLAs of the DUP, or the councillors and MLAs of Sinn Féin, don't care about what's happening to the people that voted for them. I think they do care. The way we structured things means they are rewarded for behaving in a particular way. The incentives you give people to appeal to just one ethnic block shape some of their behaviours. The reason Sinn Féin pulled out in 2017 is because they consulted with some of their voters and reflected on what is the point of a Stormont Assembly and where are we going - and they knew the voters had put them there. I don't know if the same is true of the DUP. I know periodically they'll consult with some of the loyalist groups, or sometimes speak to the Orange Order, and they'll pull things back if it seems they're not happy. So they're in touch with their own voters. We need some way to get people to appeal for public support other than debating with people exactly like them.

Another way of saying that is perhaps that the hard liners on both sides have a veto, whereas people who want to make progress don't have the same level of influence as those who hold the veto.

Yeah that's true. What we're doing is just reproducing conflict. Are we all suffering from collective unresolved trauma? Are we unwilling to let go of all those things? If you really want to change Belfast, you could vote for Alliance or the Greens, and sometimes people do, but not in the numbers that are going to make a major difference. I don't encounter people on a daily basis that I think are irrational or make bad decisions, but when it really, really comes down to it and they're on their own with a piece of paper, they aren't willing to give that power to somebody else, somebody that's not going to defend their side. There's a reason people are voting that way. I don't think it's because they're stupid or that they're deeply sectarian, it's to do with what happened here.

Is there an implication from what you're saying that perhaps there's a higher proportion of the politicians that have been affected by the trauma of the Troubles than the population as a whole?

No. Most people here, either inter-generationally or directly, understand the conflict in a way that means they ascribe. There are a set of people who either don't want to talk about the conflict or understand the nature of ethnic conflict and understand that there are different forces at play. But then there are big, big chunks of people who kind of think, "Look, my family suffered", or "My family were in the security services and we didn't want this to happen to us". And no matter what the other arguments are, they can't bear the idea of somebody that visited harm on them enjoying political power. They're hearing stories passed down and it resonated with them and then it's much more difficult to get people to vote in cross-sectarian ways.

And that again feeds into this point about the veto doesn't it? Because in a sense it's attempting to veto another tribe or individuals within that tribe who are having power rather than actually focusing on what is positive and what could make progress.

Yeah, but that's another form of struggle, it's another form of conflict because you want somebody else to lose out. But the only reason we want somebody else to lose out is because you think they've done something bad to you, or that you can't trust them. And I've said this when I've been asked to

Speak at Sinn Féin oriented events. Some of the policies that Sinn Féin have are fine, I wouldn't mind them implementing them. Some of the people in the party are really dead on, really progressive, really good thinkers and I like them. But I still don't know if I would trust them, if this was going to be a unitary state and they were the largest political party, I don't know if I would feel comfortable. And nobody in the Provisional IRA or in Sinn Féin as the local party has ever done anything bad to me, but there's still that broad suspicion, that some of the offers they're making about representing Britishness in a new Ireland don't tally up with their behaviour in Northern Ireland as it is.

And I fully understand people who are Irish or Irish nationalist or Irish Catholic wouldn't want to be in a state that was run by parties like the DUP because of the way they talk about those citizens. So some of the veto stuff is about trust, you're just thinking, "What would you do to me if you were able to?"

So how, given where we are now, can we move towards a more shared and integrated society?

We could have a shared integrated society if we had a proper collective discussion about what went on in the past and that would involve recognising the role of the British state as an actor in the conflict and it would involve having proper inquiries into what happened in the past and their role in using informers and letting those state agents do terrible things that they could have prevented, apologising to people.

I know in 1994 the loyalist paramilitaries gave an apology. But it would be really significant if all of the armed groups publicly reflected on why they did what they did. They do it in some small setting sometimes and say, "This is why I became involved and I regret it", but if they did it publicly and said that violence didn't work and everyone's loss matters and they are willing to live in peace with one another, that would make the British state do it as well. If we had that conversation, looked properly at the past instead of protecting some people and protecting others, and then started to desegregate the whole of society so that we could go to school together, we could live together, we could do all sorts of things together. But without doing those big significant things, the tiny little initiatives, they won't change things.

So you feel there needs to be a process of healing, of reconciliation first, before we can move towards sharing and integrating and that that involves significant apologies by armed groups.

Yeah. And armed groups including the British state. If you look at the attitudinal stuff: would you be comfortable living in the same community, or even the mad question, "Would you trust somebody from the other community to hold a ladder for you?". Those little things, they're all tied to memories of what they did and in the sense that they're not sorry. They might periodically act like they're sorry, they might give a sort of apology in that "Sorry people were harmed", but not "I am sorry that I did those things and I won't do it again".

And that's an important point - "I won't do it again" isn't it? The key perhaps here is a fear that things could return unless people say "I'm sorry for what we did and we will not do it again because we were wrong".

Yes. You could look at that from both sides. You could say the people who support Sinn Féin or some of the smaller republican parties, do they reject violence not just because it's not strategically useful, but they reject violence on moral grounds? And you could ask people from a unionist persuasion, "Do you recognise the structural violence visited upon the Catholic population was wrong and can you explain why you recognise that?". I suppose it's the same as in an intimate relationship with somebody who just says to you, "I'm sorry". You need to know why they're sorry, that they've

actually reflected on what they've done and that they've made steps to change their behaviour, so they're not going to do it again because we haven't really had any of that if you think about it.

And the other thing which you touched on there in terms of the role of the state is, I'm always surprised that we had the Stevens Inquiry¹². The Stevens Inquiry reported on the extent of collusion, the extent to which there were state agents and yet I don't feel as if that's ever been recognised. It's mentioned sometimes in Northern Ireland. I don't think Northern Ireland society has ever recognised the extent to which there was collusion in terms of the detail and extent.

Yeah. A couple of organisations we support are looking into the past. One of them a while ago said, "The Finucane result¹³ is great. This has given us great hope and the ball's now in the court of the British government". I said, "Yeah, but if they start to examine that one case given what the Stevens Inquiry found, what does that mean for Omagh¹⁴? Suddenly they [the UK government] are not neutral actors trying to broker peace among two warring tribes. They were a very active part of a conflict that went on for far longer than it should have. So yes, the Stevens Inquiry was massive, the findings of it were under-recognised and yet the action that you would assume would be taken then hasn't been taken and there's a very inconsistent approach to all of those deaths.

Is there more institutionally we can do in terms of dealing with the past? How should we get those stories out about what people did in the past and the continuing trauma that that's caused?

A lot of the Stormont House Agreement was really good. The idea of an oral history archive is brilliant. People involved in local projects say, "Oh, I haven't told my story before and it's been 30 years". To me that's insane. Imagine carrying that round with you. There was a couple of things the families weren't happy with about the cut-off date for the start of investigations, but if you're looking for solutions, both the victim sector and the academics working in that field, they have put forward proposals saying, "Look victims are a diverse group, they want different things, but here are the range of things which they need in order to feel some sort of peace". And those are the things that we need to do.

We need to remember that we tend to look into killings from a masculine position. We don't think thoroughly about gender and about the gendered impact of what went on. Sometimes people will say, "Okay so a man was killed and we don't know how he was killed, so we've got to find out what time he was killed and where was he, who else was in the house.". But they won't ask if his partner saw it, if his mum saw it, if they were pulled out of the way beforehand and all that kind of cumulative impact of that violence on women who might not have been killed, but who suffered for years and years and years.

And the Unheard Voices¹⁵ project over in Derry was very important as part of that.

¹² Sir John Stevens led a series of inquiries into state collusion in murders and violence committed during the Troubles. He reported that of 210 individuals that his team arrested, 208 were found to be state agents. Sir John went on to become commissioner of the Metropolitan Police – the most senior policing position in the UK.

¹³ State collusion in the murder of the lawyer Pat Finucane by loyalist paramilitaries was [reviewed](#) by Sir Desmond de Silva on behalf of the UK government.

¹⁴ A car bomb planted by the Real IRA exploded in Omagh in 1998, killing 29 people and two unborn babies. It has been alleged, without proof, that UK security forces were aware of the bomb, but failed to prevent the explosion to protect state agents.

¹⁵ The [Unheard Voices](#) project heard the stories of women during the Troubles. It was initiated by the Rathmor Centre in Derry, with stories published as [Beyond the Silence](#).

They've been doing really difficult work on a tiny budget, with women showing real grace towards each other when nobody's showing them that. If you read all the accounts where they look at the UDR perspectives or whatever, or women in the security services, or just women who haven't told their stories before, they're only telling them to a small audience. The type of people that show up to see those books launched, people working in the field, or friends or relatives, it's not all of society. I think that because what happened here was so bad, because it's been so long, all of the victims have a right for everybody to hear what they have to say, if that's what they want, instead of tiny little projects that only a few people know about.

*I was touched by going to see *The Crack in Everything* by Jo Egan¹⁶, where one of the participants was a relative of someone that was killed in the Troubles. She said that personally she learnt much more as a result of that participation, she learned things that she didn't know about and it unlocked parts of her family history and trauma.*

I suppose there's a therapeutic element to that. You can start to understand all the little connections around their life and what led to that. Instead of it being that one act that you read, you start to understand that they just loved somebody, or they were scared, or for whatever reason that they did what they did.

Bringing those types of groups into contact with each other when it's done in an appropriate way with the right supports in place, can be really, really, good as long as there's aftercare. The last thing you want to do is just lift stories from people and then send them on.

And re-traumatise them.

Yeah, it's really delicate work. That's why it was good to see the guidelines for the media when reporting on victims, to tell people on certain anniversaries, "Don't phone up people and ask for a photo of them looking distressed". They are not these bank accounts full of stories that you can tap whenever you need something. And victims have loads of other aspects to their identity and sometimes they're happy to share their story for a certain purpose and sometimes they maybe just want to be left alone, but the media here, some of them have a bit of a weird obsession with sadness and trauma. I suppose it sells papers.

I suppose the positive thing about that is that it's a different way of looking at the Troubles from the way politics is taught in school where it's about the political movements rather than the individual stories. But perhaps if the focus is more on the individual stories it will help the next generation to understand how bad the Troubles were and how important it is to avoid them being repeated.

Yeah. That's why some of the social history projects - some of the books like Gareth Mulvenna's book on the Tartans¹⁷ - are so interesting. If I read about the Northern Ireland conflict from outside Northern Ireland, you could maybe read 10, 20 books and suss out, "Right, who were the main groups involved? What are the key dates? What sort of numbers were involved in the paramilitaries?". But you wouldn't know the madness, that if the Troubles hadn't kicked off here 90% of people in prison would never have went to prison. They would never have felt the urge to be violent towards anybody and then we probably wouldn't have all the mental health issues we have and all the prescription medication issues that we have.

¹⁶ Jo Egan is interviewed in this collection.

¹⁷ [Tartan Gangs and Paramilitaries](#), by Gareth Mulvenna.

All those social history aspects are important, because people don't respond very well to statistics. That's why *Lost Lives*¹⁸ is so moving and such an amazing project, because 3,700 is just 3,700 until you hear what somebody was doing the day they were blown up and who was waiting for them to come home and all those sorts of things. Humanising people is very necessary because once you know all the other aspects to somebody, and once you know this was a kind man who had seen two of his friends killed and cracked, it's much easier to empathise. People think that it's a psychopath with a shotgun.

Is there a danger while going through that process that it makes things worse rather than better and it inflames antagonisms again? Instead of empathising with someone who did things, empathising with a victim in ways that go the other way.

We should probably be more comfortable with people being angry. You don't always want victims to be sad and forgiving and these unreal characters who saw one thing happen to them and now they carry this trauma with them. They can be pissed off. They should be pissed off.

Yet there is a collective sense of fear of anger isn't there. It feels to me as an outsider who's come here, that we as a society here are tolerant of things that we should be intolerant of but intolerant of the things that we should be tolerant of. It's the wrong way round. The levels of deprivation and so on, we should be intolerant about that and there isn't enough spoken out about that, yet we are intolerant of backgrounds that are different to each other which we should tolerate.

Yeah, that's funny. It's become a bit of a joke. Like in the *Belfast Telegraph*, "Unionist outrage". maybe about one or two people who have lost the head that somebody has spoken Irish, or Poundland are selling Tricolour shopping bags. I meet loads of different types of people through my work and in my research, unionists and republicans. Loads of people are still really angry at the idea of sharing power with terrorists, or angry at the idea that the orange state was never held to account for what it did. And they were just expected to make friends.

In a sense there's a collective repression of certain emotions which are not regarded as being legitimate. So we can't be angry about the things we should be angry about, but instead are covering over the things in the past that should never have happened.

Yeah. As soon as peace happened a lot of money poured in and we got some nice stuff like the town centre got fixed up and there's been investment in different areas. And it was putting a shiny new face on Northern Ireland and that's kind of it. I know there was a lot of groundwork done in the background to get people to even sit around the table and talk about going into government and it took a long time. But after that, if you look from '98 to when Stormont collapsed in 2002. The spy rings were found up at Stormont. And then we had six years of no government. That was launched into power sharing with somebody that they really didn't like. That conversation could have been very helpful.

I can remember talking to one minister of one of the parties who was under pressure from the then Secretary of State and that politician said to me, "Well, we're in government with people we hate. What more does she want?"

And how was that ever going to work? Because you're just going to block them at every turn and think, "Right, what can I take off them or how can I thwart them?", or whatever. That's not surprising.

¹⁸ [Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles](#), by David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney and Chris Thornton, provides the most complete catalogue and report of Troubles' deaths.

If that's one set of difficult conversations, the other big difficult conversation is the future constitutionally. How do we have the constitutional conversation without it inflicting more tension and conflict?

I've heard a few examples of loyalists who've been talking about border polls with different republican groups. I suppose it's the spirit it's done in. From what I've seen most of the loyalists taking part in these initiatives are doing so with smaller republican groups, not with Sinn Féin. Part of that is to do with the residual suspicion that, "You might promise us a load of stuff but then you're really not going to be very nice to us". Whereas there's a bit of an affinity between some loyalist groups and some of the small republican parties because they're the ones that are getting pushed out by their own ethnic leaders.

So if you do it in a very open way which says, "I would like to collectively design a better society with you. What's important to you? What do you think it should look like?". That's not threatening. If you say, "I want a 32 counties socialist Republic, I don't really care what you want. Here, I'll tell you why it's so good.", obviously that's not going to be useful. Talking about those things is really good.

I remember raising this a couple of years ago and a couple of senior unionists disagreed and said, "No, because if you start to show any indication you would be willing to have a united Ireland that weakens us. Everything should be focused on protecting the Union.". There's actually a lot of strength to be found in advocating for what unionists like in a different constitutional setting, because it forces you to outline what you actually believe in and what you stand for and where your red lines are. If all you stand for is the Union, then you don't have any politics. What do you like about the Union? Do you just like being able to parade? Having parades is good, it's a good collective social activity, but do you want a certain healthcare system, do you care about how the schools are run? Do you care about the role of the church? Do you care about gender identity? So in a sense, everything's up for grabs. We would ask people to think about if you could start from scratch and build a new society, what would you do?

As Bernadette [McAliskey] has said, if we were to weld Northern Ireland and Ireland together, what a disaster that would be. Nobody wants that. All these little conversations, they're happening where people feel safe. They don't feel safe where they're going to be dominated by one of the two bigger parties.

We need to move to a point where it is a debate of ideas, about one group of people saying, "We are better off within the United Kingdom for this reason", another group of people saying, "We would be better off in a united Ireland for this reason.". To be able to have a civilized conversation in which people argue on the basis of merits and evidence.

Even within that, it doesn't need to be the old, "Oh, let's have a rational debate. I challenge you to debate me". It doesn't need to be like that. People can say openly, "I'm really worried about this. I'm really scared. I don't think if we do end up in an all Ireland that, for example, the British identity would be welcome anywhere". To be able to articulate those kinds of things is important, because what you don't want is us having a border poll and it passing by a little bit and a significant minority that didn't want it being unsure as to what's going to happen to them. Civilised debate's fine, but you can let people express their emotions about it too, because it is a very emotional thing.

Aideen McGinley (Interviewed 16th July, 2019)

Aideen McGinley is a trustee of Carnegie UK and Co-Chair of its Embedding Wellbeing Project in Northern Ireland. She is a former permanent secretary in the Northern Ireland Civil Service and was chief executive of Fermanagh District Council.

How do we strengthen civil society?

It's about going back to our roots, it's about the peace. We had almost the worst of times [but a] very strong community spirit prevailed in Northern Ireland. Reading *Milkman*¹⁹ reminded me of the depth of the impact in communities and at community level the political tensions. I was recently at an event honouring George Mitchell²⁰ and at that event there was a lovely tribute by Dawn Purvis²¹ where she quoted Billy Hutchinson²² saying he "listened us out of it". They'd taken five years to have George Mitchell listening and letting them hear each other speak. That's what we've lost. There was a common purpose through people starting to build, talk, discuss, listen, building trust. We've fallen off a cliff edge where we're nearly having to start to do that again.

But in the past, apart from all the other problems, those were very isolated communities and there weren't connections between those communities, across the traditional divide and weren't even connections between communities almost within the same tradition. So the question is how you build those insular communities into a broader community.

Absolutely. Organisations like Holywell Trust²³ throughout Northern Ireland created the space for people to come together and realise they had more in common than they had to divide them. City of Culture here in Derry went to the depths of the name issue, for example. If you look at the Bands Accord that came out of that, the common purpose was music. The respect and trust they had through music allowed them then to address some really fundamental issues.

There's also a groundswell of young people out there that don't remember. I talk to my grandchildren about our house at home - we lived beside the customs in Strabane and the house was blown up eight times, every time the customs was blown up. They think I'm telling stories. They're in a very different space. The context we're in is so different – digitally, globally. We're now a tiny problem on a huge world stage, whereas before we had disproportionate attention from the rest of the world.

The bottom line is, people do not want to go back. What are our beliefs? What are our sensitivities? What do we want for our future generation? There's an element of that that maybe is more individualistic now because of the world we're living in than it would have been even years ago because the women's movement for example, was a huge common denominator across Northern Ireland through the Troubles and women and matriarchs in those communities and societies were usually the ones quietly doing the community work but also coming together. I remember being associated very much on the margins with the Women's Coalition²⁴ being developed within six weeks

¹⁹ [Milkman](#) by Anna Burns is a novel about growing up in Belfast during the Troubles.

²⁰ George Mitchell was United States Special Envoy for Northern Ireland from 1995 to 2001, playing a key role in negotiating the Good Friday Agreement.

²¹ Dawn Purvis is a former Northern Ireland politician, who led the Progressive Unionist Party.

²² Billy Hutchinson is a Northern Ireland politician, the current leader of the Progressive Unionist Party.

²³ The Holywell Trust is a cross-community reconciliation charity, publishers of this work.

²⁴ The Women's Coalition was a registered political party, which played a central role in the Good Friday Agreement and the early operation of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

and it then doing itself out of business because it felt its aim was to get women into politics, not to be a political party.

One of the things that came out of the Women's Coalition was the Civic Forum which isn't seen to have been successful and didn't continue. Is that something we should return to?

The Civic Forum was always seen by the politicians as a threat. It wasn't democratically elected. They were. What mandate, what right had they to second guess? If it had been handled differently, where the politicians with some sensitivity saw it as an important sounding board for them, not an undermining of.

The Good Friday Agreement is an international agreement that took five years to negotiate. It's multi-stranded, based on the principle of consent. In the current Brexit devolution situation it's something the rest of the UK should look at as a model of best practice. It is a solid framework, but then you overlay the relationships and you overlay the people and the leadership in particular, and what we're missing at the minute is the leadership.

We started on the wellbeing agenda back in 2013. It had been very successfully implemented by the Scottish government. We came to a conference in Belfast about measuring what matters. Out of that came the round table. The round table worked over a period of a year. A very interesting group of people, not the usual suspects, people from business, people from community, the whole system. That's what's been missing in Northern Ireland, a whole systems approach. Because Carnegie had a convening power that was neutral, we had cross-party support to get an outcomes-based Programme for Government, which is the current draft Programme for Government. It's an example of what can be done.

I don't see how that model would work as a basis for a new Civic Forum.

You would take the approach for the draft Programme for Government and the involvement from people. Who is in the room? People with authority, people with expertise, people with resources, people who are in need, who that need impacts on. When Carnegie finished that piece of work we were delighted. It's held up as a model of best practice. Wales have a legislative approach, Scotland is a framework approach. Ours was about creating a vision and a common ground.

What do we do with it when we've no politicians in there? Go to where democracy is - local government. Community planning has rationalised it down to the 11 [councils]²⁵. So it's manageable. All 11 of those community plans are aligned to the draft Programme for Government. What Carnegie did was come in and invite all 11 councils and all 11 applied and we're putting extra resource into three of them. In particular, we're looking at co-production, so that it is about working with people to determine what the plans will be and we're talking about shared leadership. And then there's common resourcing. That's an experiment that's happening as we speak. I've been very impressed with local government and I'm seeing central government almost viewing it with envy – and trying to be supportive in making community planning a vehicle.

Are you saying that some type of Civic Forum should emerge through community planning through local government?

I wouldn't call it a Civic Forum because that's tainted. It's about getting some sort of community voice, a whole systems piece that acts as a conduit. I witnessed in my working life - I worked in

²⁵ The reorganisation of local government in Northern Ireland led to the replacement of 26 district councils with 11 new district councils, which became fully operational in 2015.

central *and* local government for almost 40 years - the gap between the two. The arrogance at the top meeting totally under-resourced local government. It [doesn't have the] same powers as [in] other parts of the UK, but it's a real opportunity to touch community at the community level. They're getting community planning into place, they're now talking with authority because they're hearing the community voice.

Empowering community planning basically?

That way if you can get the voices coming up through the 11 [councils], there's a voice there that the politicians at the top won't see as a threat, but will see as organic. What's happening is the shared leadership and the co-production piece, people working together to prioritise, to get their plans, to articulate what's important to them locally and it's unique to each area. The leadership pieces are about all the different agencies, all the different bodies, not just the councils coming together, starting to pool resources, starting to say, "We can't do everything. So what is it we need to do in this area?". And that's very nascent, what's happening.

The community planning process isn't dominated by the major parties in each area?

No. When it's health, or education, or employment, or societal well-being, and even culture, you can get something at a local level. It's not easy. It takes a lot of leadership from the officers in local government that is underestimated. It takes a lot of trust at a political level.

The one thing that Carnegie found quite shocking was there was nobody else out there helping the councils with community planning. There were no resources going in. They were thrown the legislation and told to get on with it. We're trying to bring the best practice into community planning in Northern Ireland and I really have confidence in the councils.

And would it emerge as something similar to the Citizens' Assembly in the South?

It could do. That's a really interesting model and I was delighted to see there are attempts here in Northern Ireland to do something similar. It's difficult in the current climate to do it but I don't see why not. Carnegie were involved in The Wheel in the south on a number of the civic conversation pieces.

But there has to be a purpose behind it, doesn't there?

There has been and there should be.

How can we create more shared and integrated society in Northern Ireland?

I am a trustee of the Fermanagh Trust²⁶ and they've done a lot of the work around the shared education. Integrated education has been here a long time and it's really important, but it hasn't taken off in the way that everybody hoped it would. The complexity of our education system is ridiculous. Economic factors are now driving education in a direction that many of them were happy to sit in splendid isolation. For me, the shared education model was a really interesting one. I have grandchildren who've been beneficiaries of it. It allows people still in their space to be allowed to come out and see who else is in that space.

I've seen criticisms of shared education in Scotland where pupils look out of the windows at the pupils in other schools, rather than sharing their lives together at school.

²⁶ The [Fermanagh Trust](#) is a community foundation.

No, I've witnessed it. My grandchildren have been with the kids from the school down the street.

Should look much more at pre-school rather than simply leaving it to school?

Oh yes. You've got to invest from the beginning. There's still a lot of playgroups in Northern Ireland. I know of playgroups that have been around for 40 years, they're still going strong and they're cross community in nature and that cross community feeds back into the community hall, the fundraising, the parents knowing each other. The religious piece doesn't come into it.

Of course the demography is changing, so although the population's increasing, for some schools the feeder population is declining rapidly.

That's right. And when they get to secondary and grammar level the kids are not getting the choice of subjects. Things like the arts, languages – that's disappearing at A Level.

That's a very important point to stress, that when you get to sixth form, none of the schools is able to offer complete choice and even though they theoretically have arrangements often with other schools to partner, those partnership arrangements don't always work.

That's right.

It's very difficult to timetable of course for a school.

It's a nightmare. You've also got further education coming into play. A lot of young people want to do more technical oriented subjects.

Should we be looking towards sixth form colleges rather than sixth forms within the schools, where they don't offer enough exam choices?

Yeah absolutely. Then you start to get them back together before they go into a university setting where they're in a more neutral environment.

One of the other big challenges is how we deal with the past.

I quote John Paul Lederach²⁷. He's a wonderful writer. His parents would have worked on the peace line in Belfast in the early Troubles. He's based in Denver and he came over to do the first ever peace conference in Fermanagh in the '70s. John Paul spoke to that conference. He said: "It's not about forgive and forget. It's about remember and change". We can't ask people, "Look, just forgive people for doing that and forget about it". That's not human. But it's about remember it in a sustained, supported, targeted way and then change so that it doesn't happen someone else again.

How should we remember?

We're facing a crisis at the minute. One of the reasons we're in the chasm we're in is that a lot of people of my era who would have been involved in the early Troubles and right through it and worked through it now are coming to retirement age where all of a sudden people kept busy, people lived their lives. They created the opportunities for their kids and their grandkids and they got on with life and they were on a treadmill and it kept them going. Now people are getting time and space

²⁷ John Paul Lederach is a professor of peacebuilding and a recognised leader in the theory and practice of reconciliation and mediation.

to think. An awful lot of the trauma is coming back out again. I was talking to somebody recently who said there's a 22 year gap. It's been 22 years and all of a sudden people are coming and saying "I have a problem". Some of it's about we haven't let ourselves remember. We are coming to a point where some of the political chaos is making us remember and retract back to our [past] and working through it.

Surely that means we need to invest much more in therapy services, counselling services.

Totally! Mental health in Northern Ireland is abominable. I'm involved in a mental health charity and it is shocking the levels of suicide, particularly of young men. The waiting lists, the reliance on voluntary activity. I was at a conference recently in Whitehall around Embedding Wellbeing and they were using the example about Northern Ireland being the happiest place in the UK. And I said, "Yes and it has the highest number of people on anti-depressants".

A lot of these things depend on definitions, because if people are thinking "Well, I'm so pleased that people aren't killing each other around me and therefore I am happy", that doesn't necessarily mean that they're content, or that they've got strong mental wellbeing.

Absolutely. I think the biggest crisis in our health service in Northern Ireland is mental health.

But there's also another dimension to this, I suggest, which is class-based which is in the same way that typically it is parents who are well-off whose kids get into the grammar schools and do well from the schooling system. Similarly, it's the better-off people that can afford to pay for private counselling services, leaving large numbers of people from poorer families without access, because the waiting lists are too long to get access.

Totally. My kids did very well at university. My two sons are living away, one in the States and one in Scotland and they'll never be home. That's a real tragedy. I have a daughter who stayed and she's a GP. The stress she's under in coping with the people that you've just described.

There's very long waiting lists, very long waiting times, there's very restricted access, you won't get many hours of counselling which doesn't necessarily resolve problems, whereas if you can afford to pay, there's still a waiting list but you can access the service.

You can. The charity that I'm involved in buys counselling hours. The irony is we've been so successful that we're busier than we ever were, because people now know, the stigma has been removed and people now know where to come for help. The NHS mental health services are just... forget about it. The waiting lists there are just ridiculous. In fact people are under more stress if they're there. GPs are the core. There needs to be investment in GP services to support the GPs. The medical school in Derry has to happen.

That's going to take years before new trained doctors emerge from it.

It is. Five years from start to finish. There are brilliant counselling services here in Derry and all over Northern Ireland. There's a huge mass of people who are keeping people alive, literally.

We're short of GPs, we're short of consultants and we're losing significant numbers of senior staff through Brexit, returning to other EU countries. So we're possibly only replacing those we're losing, rather than increasing the supply.

Exactly. It's a perfect storm. One of the dangers of our political situation in Northern Ireland at the moment is the apathy, because people are so busy getting on with their daily lives and coping with things like mental health issues or elderly parents, getting their kids reared, keeping their jobs. We've all gone inwards and we've an individualistic focus.

'Apathy' is an interesting word. When I spoke to Martin Magill he suggested it wasn't really apathy, it was in a sense, perhaps to reinterpret what you're saying, people weren't voting. That didn't mean they were apathetic about the system or the process but perhaps they felt frustrated.

Absolutely. Apathy is too easy an excuse. It's that people feel, what are they voting for?

On the other hand, in European elections we had a much higher turnout than previous elections.

And that's because of Brexit - Northern Ireland does recognise the threat that Brexit brings.

Which leads us into the constitutional conversation about how we discuss the context of Northern Ireland, about whether we should continue to be within the United Kingdom or whether it should be part of a reunited Ireland. How do we have that conversation in ways that don't alienate people, don't create new tensions?

What's fascinating is that I wouldn't have believed even five years ago that we would be having a conversation about a potentially united Ireland so soon and being taken so seriously. This is something that I [thought I] may not live to see. I also didn't anticipate the complete break-up of the United Kingdom. The UK underestimated that word, 'united'. You see Wales increasingly becoming much stronger, it was always the least of the three nations in terms of wanting separatism. It's starting to go its own way, because it's getting a sense of what devolution brings and its own powers and they've done some brilliant work on future generations legislation and so on and leading edge environmental issues. Scotland is a case in point. Ironically, Northern Ireland's caught between the two because it's got this tug from the south and the physical separation from the rest of the UK and the rest the UK doesn't care anymore about Northern Ireland.

The other thing is that people in England typically will have been to Wales, will have been to Scotland, comparatively few from England have visited Northern Ireland - for any extended period anyway.

True. And quite a few of them would still think we are Ireland.

So how do we have that constitutional conversation within Northern Ireland in ways that are friendly, amicable...?

I don't know. And I usually do attempt and answer most things and I am an optimist by nature, but that is that's a really fundamental one. We've so much else to deal with first that that's the nub. Until Brexit is sorted and we know what it is we're dealing with. That's when you have to start to say, "Well, what is this conversation?". At the minute we don't know what that conversation is.

Avila Kilmurray (Interviewed 1st April, 2019)

Avila Kilmurray is working with the Social Change Initiative on peacebuilding work. She is a former director of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and was a founder member of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

Civil society needs to be strengthened to do more than just provide services. Civil society in many ways was the backbone of society in the '70s, '80s, '90s in Northern Ireland whenever we were in the midst of the Troubles, but a combination of Conservative government policies plus a feeling that "Oh, politicians are back so therefore what's the need for civil society?", has meant that a lot of the resources available for civil society, particularly from government departments, are very tied to discrete services and service provision.

And that has limited the space that civil society has to engage in broader discussion around the nature of democracy, or in the need for policy change, as well as acting as a disincentive because a lot of civil society organisations are now looking to see where the next contract is coming from government. If we are being critical, does that mean that we will not be considered on the same basis as an organisation that is not critical?

It always seemed to me one of the weaknesses of the government system in Northern Ireland is that when it came to cuts there's an automatic assumption that statutory services should be protected and non-statutory services were therefore the ones that bore the brunt of things.

That's true, I think that non-statutories were seen as an optional extra. Obviously they weren't part of the status quo as a mainstream provider. I always argued that the benefits of civil society organisations were that they were the R&D of social provision. Any far-sighted statutory service would regard them as being very useful because they could try and do things differently, whereas if you're a health provider or whatever, it's much more difficult for you to do that.

That's its role as a service provider. What about its role as giving a voice to the wider community?

That has been very important over the years and that's the bit to an extent that we have lost. I suppose there's a sense from local politicians "Hey, you did a great job, but back in your box because we're here". Back in 2000 I heard a politician say more or less that, because politicians obviously put their emphasis on representative democracy and feel, when it comes to participative democracy, which organisations like the Northern Ireland Council of Voluntary Action and many others actually argued very well over the years, they're much less comfortable about that. They're sort of saying, "Well, who are these people, is it the chattering classes? Is it people that have the luxury to be able to sort of engage in these sort of discussions whereas we're here under pressure from our voters and having to make the real decisions".

There is an issue there. It's particularly difficult where politicians are not that self-confident about their position and may be forced to share power with each other, a la Good Friday Agreement/Belfast Agreement, but they are not wildly enthusiastic about sharing power with anybody else.

In fairness, politicians will say "We have a vote behind us, who are you?". However, looking at something like the Citizens' Assembly in the Republic of Ireland, it proved useful for the political system because they were able to sound out difficult issues in a situation where the politicians didn't

have to take the up-front trial and error in terms of decision-making. There has been some small attempts to do that here with the deliberative assemblies from the Building Change Trust and with the Community Foundation.

The Citizens' Assembly has been successful in the South, creating space to discuss things which the party political system, couldn't deal with. On the other hand, the Civic Forum failed. It was not allowed to continue. What can we learn from those two examples?

First of all, it is about the self-confidence of the politicians. The Civic Forum was put forward by the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. It was never welcomed by the mainstream parties. The first thing they did in the regulations, they allowed the First Minister, then David Trimble, and the Deputy First Minister, SDLP, to have direct nominations. The nomination process prior to that had been worked out in detail between the Secretary of State's Office, Mo Mowlam, and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, who did a large consultation exercise around it and had various sectors nominating representatives. The Civic Forum, when it was allowed to sit, did some interesting reports on education and different social issues. It was a shame that it was put in abeyance and never brought back. It was really because there was no understanding that participative democracy doesn't replace representative democracy, it can add an element to it.

But perhaps there's also an element of fear that if Citizens' Assemblies were here, they might do the same as they did in the south and put forward something that for many northern politicians would be unacceptable or uncomfortable.

I think that's very true.

How do we move more broadly towards a more shared and integrated society here?

That's the six hundred dollar question isn't it? First of all, we have to have the ability to have conversations in a manner that people can buy into and relate to about what's the basic needs, the basic opportunities in any society that we want to live in and bring up our children in?

In Northern Ireland, we start with the constitutional border issue and work backwards. Then obviously people align behind political parties on that basis, whereas if we could start with talking about it in socio economic terms, what is the type of society we want to see, then we would have a much better chance of having a richer politics. Our politics has become so narrowed by the constitutional division that things like a Bill of Rights became a victim of the unionist/nationalist divide, without people actually getting a chance to sort of say, "Well, what does that mean for me and my community?". Listening to someone like Albie Sachs²⁸ talking about the Bill of Rights in South Africa, a Bill of Rights is a win-win situation potentially for everyone. But here it became "Oh, a Bill of Rights must be a republican demand, so therefore it's not for us".

When I was involved in social justice funding for the Community Foundation back in 2004/2005, when the Bill of Rights consultations were happening, we were funding the Evangelical Alliance²⁹ to look at a biblical analysis of human rights. We were funding a lot of loyalist communities who said "What we want to see is socio economic rights". And yet the unionist parties said, "Oh no, no, no, we can't have socio economic rights in it. This has to be purely on civil liberties or issues in relation to the Troubles".

²⁸ Albie Sachs was an anti-apartheid activist who became a judge in post-apartheid South Africa.

²⁹ The [Evangelical Alliance](#) is a Christian pressure group.

You mentioned Albie Sachs. Is there an inference that Northern Ireland is too insular, too inward looking, not sufficiently learning from best practice around the world?

That is true. Northern Ireland - any society with a lengthy violent conflict - tends to feel they're unique. As David Ervine³⁰ said, 'the mope syndrome', the most oppressed people ever. There is an element of that in Northern Ireland. It's probably true of any society that has been in conflict, a sort of a defensiveness, the default mode is, "Right, they're out to get us, so what's the angle on this?", rather than saying if we're building some sort of shared society, we need to have a more open discussion about this and not take us as sort of zero sum game approach where if the republicans or if the loyalists are looking for that measure, automatically it must be bad for our community. Breaking down the situation and saying, "Could we agree some shared principles that would benefit everybody, irrespective of their identity and then work forward in terms of what policies then would flow from those principles".

To what extent is there a genuine commitment across the communities and political parties to achieve a shared and integrated society?

There is an allegation that people don't want Northern Ireland to work. I think it is actually that there is a growing block of people frustrated because the promise and enthusiasm around the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was not realised.

Are we having the conversation about what type of society we want, rather than just simply the constitutional arrangement?

One of the sad things is that even institutions like the trade unions have not been as effective and public in promoting that discussion as they were back in the '80s.

We seem scared of having a conversation about the past.

There was an inability and unwillingness to deal with the civil war from 1920, '21, '22, and the whole [southern] political system has been artificially formatted on those civil war alignments, which has distorted social and economic policies. I worry that is replicated in Northern Ireland. Unless we can talk about what happened - albeit there will be a kaleidoscope of experiences, a Protestant border farmer in west Fermanagh is totally different from a Catholic unemployed person in Ardoyne during the Troubles. But we need to create the space for those stories to be shared. We need to look at what happened in terms of the actual kills, with both the state and paramilitary organisations, loyalist and republican. Whether we will get to the truth as we move further away from the time period is more of an open question. Even if we got to the stage about individuals being held to account, as the intent was in South Africa, even if there was a degree of explanation from organisations about why they did certain things, for example, the IRA, their economic war and their targeting of contractors involved in building Police Stations as collaborators; the dirty war from the British government; to what extent there was collusion. That is the sort of thing there needs to be an open discussion around, otherwise history will be repeated.

If it is an explanation without apology, doesn't that sound like a justification rather than making progress?

I'm less hung up on an apology, because then there will be questions about how genuine was the apology. It's the explanation, then you look at the explanation and say even in your own terms that

³⁰ David Ervine was a Northern Ireland politician and leader of the Progressive Unionist Party.

didn't work, that might stop being repeated by somebody else in the future. It's the line in the sand approach that doesn't work.

When you talked about the lessons from the south and the fact that the divisions of the past are still shown today in terms of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, I thought you were going to go on to say that the healing that's been achieved in the south through the openness about what went on in terms of clerical abuse and whether there's things that can be learned from that experience, which actually the more people have learnt about what happened in terms of clerical abuse, the more fundamental change there's been in the Republic.

That is true. The political one though hasn't been dealt with and that will come up rapidly in the hundredth anniversary. In fairness, particularly over the way that the 1916 centenary was dealt with, there has been quite a bit of learning in the Republic. I'm old enough to remember the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 rebellion and it was a very different approach taken in the Republic.

The other big challenge is having the constitutional conversation in ways that don't inflame tensions and create negativity.

It has been wrong to say that the republican/nationalist call for a border poll and a United Ireland is at odds with reconciliation. That then is privileging one constitutional view over another. It is valid to have that conversation. There is a real need for a parallel discussion within unionism/loyalism, rather than just saying, "No surrender, ourselves alone" to saying, "Where would we be in 20 years time?". In order not to be in a situation where that broader community feel that they're being left with no alternatives, they start having internal conversations with a range of options so they can have an input into positively framing where they want to go.

In terms of a border poll, which clearly is in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, the worst thing is winners and losers syndrome. It may be hard to escape that, but if we use the time prior to fashioning questions, to again start talking to one another about a range of options that are not as stark as a United Ireland in the morning, run from Dublin, or remain in the UK, run from London.

[That] could be around regionalism, devolution. Commonwealth membership has been put on the table. Then there is the added complication of relations with the European Union. So you're moving towards a 'referendum'. Part of that conversation should be driven from the Republic, because they've got a 100 year old system that is operating - how satisfactory is another question, but it actually operates. Many from the Republic [might say], "That would be a headache bringing them in".

We can't assume what the outcome would be. Do you think we can have that conversation in a relaxed way?

It would be difficult if elected political parties, elected politicians, ramp up the divisiveness. There is a danger that politicians will dub anybody who tries to have the conversation as a traitor. However, we've seen people like Peter Robinson sort of saying, "Look, we need to start looking forward". So we have people who have long experience say, "We're in danger of digging ourselves into a hole here if we aren't prepared to engage in long term visioning".

And the related issue there is perhaps that some people want to unpick the Good Friday Agreement. Brexit has shown the limitations of the Good Friday Agreement because there was a level of constructive ambiguity around it which is now being unpicked because we now have to see that people with Irish citizenship in the north don't have full rights of Irish citizenship for example.

Yes. And that would be disastrous. They always say that the Irish have too long a historical memory and the English have none at all, but we've seen that played out because the conversation in terms of the referenda that agreed the Good Friday Agreement was in the south and the north and *not* in England. There is no historical memory, no historical *awareness*, of what was in the Agreement. That is a real issue.

I've always argued - particularly working with people from other conflict societies like Cyprus, Sri Lanka - that the genius of the Good Friday Agreement was disentangling national aspiration, national identity, citizenship, because that provided the room for both identities. If that became unpicked - like over the whole Brexit issue - then it does raise issues about the basis whereby people voted in the referenda. We also then have the issue that the DUP campaigned against the referenda, they were soundly beaten, but very often they will say their premise is the St Andrew's Agreement, rather than the Good Friday Agreement. But the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement was massively supported. There was an ambiguity around it - not so much on citizenship, because it was very much you can be an Irish and British citizen and both, so that really shouldn't be unpicked. The ambiguity was around how to deal with the legacy of the past and those issues.

We are in a system now which is, if you like, majoritarianism. Can we move towards an aspiration of a consensus outcome, or is that beyond us?

[Given] the disproportional pressure and influence the DUP [has] on the UK government, it's not surprising that our politicians haven't come back together in Stormont. If there was a different outcome of a general election, then it would be possible to go back to looking at a more consensual society. A lot of it is the way we frame that consensus. A lot of opinion polling coming up to the Good Friday Agreement was around, "What do you want?". There was one poll carried out by academics in Queen's, funded by the Rowntree Foundation, which said, "What are you prepared to settle for?", with totally different results. So how you frame that conversation in such a way that you're not pushing the 'all or nothing', which a lot of our politics do, then I think you'll have more of a chance of trying to look again at what would be a win-win situation.

Peter Sheridan (Interviewed 14th February, 2019)

Peter Sheridan is chief executive of Co-operation Ireland and a former assistant chief constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

There are a lot of good organisations who have come through the conflict and a lot of good community groups that are on the ground. If you take the events in Derry last year around the 11th of July rioting, and then there were five hundred people decided to march to stop [the riots] happening. After the murder of Ian Ogle³¹ in east Belfast, within days there were two thousand people who were out passionately against that type of activity.

How do we get round the existing groups, involve new people and new ideas. There are models out there. Some of the work I'm looking at in relation to building community capacity as part of the Fresh Start Agreement³². One of [those is what] happened in the Republic of Ireland around the abortion debate, Citizen Assembly type ideas. It works in Canada, it works in Iceland. There are examples all around the world: you pick an area and pick a problem, randomly select a group of people from the Electoral Register, and that could be depending on the size of the problem, it could be 30, 40, 50, 60 people, and you determine the size of the area. So it could be the size of the Creggan Estate, or the west bank of the Foyle. You identify a particular problem. Let's take as an example that it may be how do we stop young people joining paramilitarism in area X? You randomly select 30, 40, 50 people, maybe even 100 people. You bring in expert opinion, for example, in Colombia here's how they went about stopping young people joining groups, in Spain this is how they stopped young people... and so on. And that randomly selected group ask the experts questions. Then they need time to deliberate and debate among themselves, properly facilitated, but also properly written up. That could be over a period of two weekends, two days, each weekend: that group would really engage in the conversation. And they would be remunerated for being present. So it's not a case of select people and you expect them to give up their time. If we value people's time and we value people from the civic society's time, then we should remunerate them for it.

Once that conclusion or report are agreed then it goes into hopefully changed policy in the Executive and that would be the question as to where the policy makers see it fitting and how they take it on board. Then that group is dissolved and then you start with a new problem and a brand new group randomly selected. And that way you exclude nobody because it could include political parties, it can include existing groups and existing organisations, it could include people who are in illegal organisations. But what you do get is you reach that two thousand people who turned out in east Belfast recently [after the murder of Ian Ogle]. You reach the five hundred people who turned up in Derry [after the 11th July rioting], who desperately want to do something, want to make change, but are finding it difficult just to how they make that change.

The Citizens' Assembly worked brilliantly in dealing with abortion in the south. Gordon Brown has suggested it could have worked in terms of Brexit. What type of subjects are best dealt with by Citizens' Assemblies?

It can be social issues, the very challenging issues of flags. I don't think there are any problems that are off limits. Some of the best thinking and ideas come from people who live in a community. When I was in the police, I used to say if I wanted to know how the front gate operated, the best person to

³¹ Ian Ogle was murdered in Belfast in January 2019.

³² The Fresh Start Agreement was reached between Northern Ireland's major parties in 2015 in an attempt to strengthen and stabilise the institutions of government.

see is the guy who operated the front gate. It's the same, the best person to decide how you might change things in a particular community are the people who live in that community.

If it's very closely locally geographically placed, how do you persuade councils that their role is not going to be usurped?

This has to involve statutory agencies and to some extent all the statutory agencies. It could be an issue about education, health, but they have to engage in it and it is that disconnect that happens between statutory agencies and people on the ground because it doesn't necessarily get to all of the individuals who may have some of the best thinking. When I was in the police, some of the best ideas and thinking came out of officers who were on the ground, instead of people at the very top. It will require a thorough and genuine engagement by statutory agencies. But they shouldn't see it as a threat. This is meant to help and support, to improve a way of life for people in particular communities. It will be a challenge to statutory agencies.

And perhaps that answer moves towards the question, how do we move towards a genuinely shared and integrated society?

Some of that is a top down and some of it is bottom up. One of the frustrations I have is that our political system is such that even when they're in a shared Executive, they all champion their own side's rights. So they set about, "It's my right to parade", "It's my right to protest", and what we don't do is look at the other person's rights and good rights. Good rights are where you seek to protect your neighbour's rights, not just your own rights.

I would want to know from the DUP, "What is it you are going to do that protects the Catholic tradition, the nationalist tradition, the republican traditions, its cultures and its identity?". And from Sinn Féin, "What is it you're going to do that protects the Protestants, unionist, loyalist traditions, their culture and their identity?".

One of the weaknesses of the Good Friday Agreement was that we managed to get all of the political parties in Northern Ireland to concede to the British government of Tony Blair. We managed to get them all to concede to the Irish government of Bertie Ahern. We managed to get them all to concede to the American government, of Bill Clinton. But what they didn't concede to each other. They got into the Executive and we lost those three people all at the one time and the new Prime Ministers and Taoiseachs didn't own the baby the same and didn't adopt it to the same extent as the people who were there at the architecture of it. So then our local parties got in and they simply sat and fought for their own rights.

Until we mature, until political parties start to mature, to sit down and say "What would I legislate that would help protect that Catholic, nationalist, republican identity? What would I legislate that would help protect the Protestant traditions, its culture and identity?". That includes what would they legislate to protect their rights to parades and loyal orders and so on. It might be completely countercultural to somebody's viewpoint on it, but that's where we have to get to.

How would you persuade people in Sinn Féin to protect the interests of loyalists and how would you persuade members of the DUP to protect the interests of republicans?

Let's take two examples. The obvious answer is Irish language. If you understand the Catholic/nationalist/republican tradition, the Irish language is an important part of that identity and culture. If you're on the other side of the fence and maybe you don't have the same understanding but if you want to protect those rights of your neighbour, then you would set about legislating. And

similarly, loyal order parades and areas they can't march in are a big issue for loyalist and unionist communities. So it is the practical application of it, it's not about words.

One of the big political weaknesses we have in Northern Ireland is that the leadership of a political party can't necessarily speak for its own hardest line supporters. Does your suggestion deal with that concern?

This is how you start to condition people's mindsets to think differently. Despite the fact that we are 20 years after the Good Friday Agreement, we are still an immature political society. We still have very micro thinking in terms of how a government should work and the government should be there to protect all of the people's rights. Maybe it's not a surprise, coming out of conflict where people lived like enemies, they now have to learn to live together like citizens. We haven't matured to a place yet that we genuinely want to understand how you protect your neighbour's rights.

One of the other big challenges is how we deal with the past and how do we achieve reconciliation as part of that?

There has to be an honesty. That honesty is that we will never do justice to the scale of the injustice on any side. If I take the simplest of issues - somebody going to put a bomb under my car, 30 years ago. Is justice for me the person who's putting the bomb under the car? Is justice for me the person who made the bomb? Is justice for me the person who hijacked the car, took the house over? Or is it the person at the very top of the tree, who authorised it? Or indeed is justice for me the person who was sitting in the chapel on a Sunday, instead of saying their prayers was taking notes and passing information on about my movements? The reality is you're never going to get to all of those, even if you got to one of them. My experience in court is that once victims hear the full story they will naturally want to know, "Who was it was in the chapel? I would like to see the colour of their eyes." I think politicians have to be clear to everybody out there, we are not going to reach a stage of utopia where this will be justice for everybody and in every case and every aspect of it.

I have said it in previous discussions with people like Martin McGuinness that I was willing to accept that he had a story for the last 30 or 35 years. I wasn't going to say that I agreed with it, or agreed with all aspects of it, or that I accepted it in its totality, but I was willing to accept it was his story. On one condition. That he accepted that I had an understanding of the last 35 years and likewise he didn't have to agree with it, agree with all the sentiment, or accept it was right. But what he would do is accept that it was my story. I think once you can get people to think in that way then you have the possibility of being able to look to the future. The way we are doing it now - going back over 40 years, trying to decide who's right and who's wrong in every instance - and we will still not agree. People will still have a viewpoint of what they saw at a particular time and a lot of people's knowledge has now been coloured by what they've read, what they've seen since the event. I have examples in my last role where people thought they had seen something, but it turned out it was something they had read in more recent years. So what you do is you tell your story and then when you tell it again you add in something else you've learned and you continue at that stage. So I just think we are approaching this in a way we will never resolve it and it will continue to be an ongoing sore.

The words we use are incredibly important: you're talking about justice. I've interviewed a range of political leaders in recent months and some refer to justice meaning criminal sanction on those who have committed actions. Others talk about justice meaning fairness in society today. So although you might have a commonality around the words you have a difference in their meaning.

Absolutely. I sat in a legacy case where a police officer had been shot dead and he was 23 years of age. His wife was in hospital. She got remarried. But 35 years later they discover a piece of forensic evidence that actually leads to the person being brought to court. In court, the individual was convicted, but under the Good Friday Agreement the maximum they get is two years in jail. So the first question, how does that feel in terms of justice? But worse than that, she [the widow] learned things in court for the first time. She understood her husband had died right away. Turns out, he was alive for a number of minutes and he called her name during that last four or five minutes of his life. That's the first time she learned that. We just re-traumatised the individual and the notion that because that person was in court, and all of the complexity for his family as well, I don't think we did justice anywhere in the wider sense of what we mean by justice. I fear that that narrow view of justice of somebody being in court convicted and going to jail is not going to deliver what we think is justice.

That is an incredibly important challenge, isn't it? How we have the conversations in ways that don't re-traumatise, don't create a new conflict and not necessarily physical conflict, but conflict in terms of creating tensions in the way we've already seen the tensions rise over Brexit. How do we have the future constitutional conversation without increasing tensions?

Well the first thing we have to do is to not do what we're doing now at the minute, which is saying we have to have a border poll. A border poll now to me it's a bit like what people did in Brexit. Let's have a border poll, decide yes or no and then we'll decide what it looks like.

We have not had the conversation with people in Cork to say, "What might this mean for the Irish flag? What might this mean for the Irish national anthem?". Never mind all of the other arrangements in terms of how would you end up with a policing environment, a health environment, education environment... the notion that you have this simplistic position where you make a quick decision on something as complex as that and decide, "Now we'll fix it altogether". Is it the view that in that quick decision that the result is we simply bolt on? If the decision was we're moving to a united Ireland, to say that had happened at the border poll, that we simply bolt on 750,000 Protestants and we expect them to stand for the national anthem and the Irish flag? If you want to convince people that that's where we should go then let's tell everybody what it looks like. Let's thrash out those details. And if that takes five years, it takes 10 years, so be it. It is absolutely important to have that debate and that conversation but to test out all of those things now and not simply a yes or no vote, and then we'll decide how we get on with it.

John McKinney (Interviewed 8th March, 2019)

John McKinney was chief executive of the Special European Union Programmes Body and is also a former chief executive of Omagh District Council.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

I don't think we have a framework to do it. We had an opportunity, but that opportunity was missed after the Good Friday Agreement. We had a Civic Forum for this. The Civic Forum was set-up, but didn't operate. There are many reasons for that. I don't think the will was there from political parties to make it operate. That was a pity. Had that operated that would have given a framework and would never have rolled downwards. People in local communities like our own here [in Omagh] would have created other types of forums that would feed into that. There's no place for people to have a voice and that's been compounded by a reorganisation of local government where we have 11 [councils] rather than 26 where people living away from a centre don't have a mechanism to make any comment.

If we have an operating Assembly, then that's a good opportunity to look at a Civic Forum again and to see how that can be rolled down, because if people don't have somewhere to have a voice, if people don't have somewhere where we can dialogue and have a dialogue, if people don't have a place for engagement, then we're never going to go anywhere.

Is the Civic Forum the right structure?

Well it's a structure. There's nothing magical about the Civic Forum. You go to any country after a conflict and you need this type of structure. There's many different types of model. But you do need it. Let's have a debate about what the Civic Forum should look like. Every time we talk about citizen engagement here in Northern Ireland it's always afterwards, consultation comes after something has been decided. It is the wrong way around. Citizens should have input about making decisions and how they're made. Some of the countries coming out of conflict would put us in the shade in the year 2019.

Which are you thinking of in particular?

Eastern Europe - and Cyprus, which is not united yet but they're working at it. They are talking, they have dialogue forums involving a hundred different types of organisations, economic types of organisations, women's groups - everyone, but all within a framework. That's what I like about it. They give advice and work from both sides and then give advice to people who negotiate about what it would look like afterwards. I think that's the important thing. I don't think we thought about what's it going to look like after the Good Friday Agreement.

How can we achieve a genuinely shared and integrated society?

First of all [by] people like yourselves looking at it, or community relations looking at it. But I don't think it's a wide enough debate. It needs to be a wider debate and we should be looking now, what is a shared society going to be like when the Assembly [is working again], hopefully, and I'm hopeful and optimistic it will be up again. We should be having this debate now about how it's going to look like. You walk up any main street – Strabane, Omagh, Cookstown - you ask them, they are just fed up, they're fed up to their teeth with politics. They don't see how they can engage. They don't see how they can have any action or any sort of support.

What mechanisms will move us forward in terms of creating a more shared outlook?

It's about leadership. There is a complete lack of leadership. I'm not pointing the finger at any political party. We had a great opportunity with two parties, one from each side of the divide, working together. If both of them could come together and give some sort of leadership about this new horizon that we're going into, it must involve civic society, where we want to set up some sort of mechanisms for doing that and use people like yourselves in the community relationships to look at what that mechanism should be, I think that's where we have to start and sooner rather than later.

You refer to examples in other countries - have they benefited from external brokers to bring groups together?

Yes, a little but not as much as people would think. People will think that they had all this wonderful idea by bringing in someone. They might have maybe a key mentor as it were, maybe from South Africa or someone from the USA or someone from Northern Ireland. At this point, people from Northern Ireland are helping as well. It's a very good question because what you do when you start [is] getting local buy-in where people see that they want to get involved. Then they can see what's the benefit of getting involved. As organisations that are doing this start giving out information about how things are moving, people get more confident that here's an opportunity now, maybe we can get involved and get more serious about it.

But is that the difference between the stalemate we've got today with the progress compared to the progress made in the past, that we haven't got someone from outside sitting as a neutral broker bringing different groups together?

In a society like Northern Ireland, which is a well-developed society, I don't think we really need to do that. But I'm not saying let's not do it. Let's look first at the higher level of politics, maybe to get the Assembly up and going again. I think there is a need for some brokering at that particular point. I think that would help. But flowing from that then maybe society would then start to believe. We don't believe at the moment. I don't think we believe that we can have any influence. We don't believe it is going to work the way we thought it would work 20 years ago, because it hasn't worked in a particular way. I would say at some levels to bring in someone – but at community development level in Northern Ireland here which is strong and has had good leaders in the past, I don't think we need to do that. What we need to have is a vision of the top, we need to have support for that vision, we need faith in that vision, and we need to feel as if we're being wanted to be part of that.

Is there an implication from what you're saying, first get the Assembly running, that actually we shouldn't be dependent on getting the Executive in place in order to have the Assembly working anyway and meeting anyway?

I always thought that was something that should have happened. Then you talk to people about that, people have all the arguments, "Well what's the point in that?" and it just becomes a talking shop - but there's nothing wrong with talking if the talking is directed in the right sense and people are talking with an idea where that's going to take them. Unfortunately talking for talking's sake, as we all know, is just a waste of time. I think there are perhaps intermediary steps that could be taken as a move towards that.

One of the problems is that we have these really difficult conversations, one of which is about the past. How should we have that conversation in ways that don't inflame the present? And to what extent does reconciliation play a role within that?

Obviously reconciliation plays a major role. Whatever we do [about] the past, it has to be seen to be fair across all. I can see how people now are concerned when they see inquiries going on on one side and not going on on the other. We've had our own troubles here in Omagh and obviously everyone wants justice. How are we going to get to that justice? If I knew that it would be a miracle. It is going to be very difficult. You have one side of the spectrum saying "Draw a line in the sand", and then you have the other side that says "Let's have all these inquiries". I'm not prepared to say how that'll go because I don't know.

So you're saying we've got a polarisation about the fact that you've got one community demanding inquiries and you've got another community wanting to shut the door behind things.

Attempts have been made, and some good attempts have been made, to get to people who have suffered together. They have to be engaged, just the same as I am saying to you that we as citizens need to be engaged in the overall politics. I don't think they felt that they were engaged maybe to the extent that they expected. That might be something that we look at how we could engage the relatives of both sides together and get some common approach.

To what extent should that also involve counselling and therapeutic support to people as they go through that process?

There is support there. I'm not involved across all Northern Ireland, but there is support there. Whether that support is co-ordinated is another good question. And whether it's co-ordinated for a particular reason. If the co-ordination was for moving forward and getting a common approach [about] how to deal with that, that might be something that could be looked at.

And also sufficiently resourced.

Resourcing has been an issue for all these groups and for organisations willing and open to let people come together to have dialogue. There is no structure of funding that allows that to happen. It's all project based. A short project to do something, another short project to do that and you might have projects going on, but there's no overall vision as to how it can be done. And the way it is funded, the way that whole sector is funded, is another area that needs to be looked at very seriously and engaging the people who are actually at the coalface and doing it.

The other really big challenge is how we have the constitutional discussion. How can we do that in ways that don't upset too many people in too bad a way?

You are going to upset people. It's not possible to have it without upsetting someone. I think your question is how we can make progress on that anyway. At this point it's like a spectrum. You don't want to crowd one thing with another. At this point in time the focus should be on let's have our self-government here and get it going and let that self-government be supported, well supported, and well resourced by citizens in civil society, and then people can have that dialogue. That can become a mechanism for moving forward. I think to just jump in now is difficult and dangerous.

Perhaps we need to persuade the majority political groupings that to have a functioning Northern Ireland, a successful Northern Ireland, is a good place to start whether you want a united Ireland or a more successful United Kingdom as an outcome.

If you don't have a functioning Assembly and a government here, having that debate is a waste of time, because you're not in a solid place where you are comfortable. We have to get government back up again, where people are comfortable. We have two large blocks, they cover both sides of the

community, and if they can get together and have some common approach to most things and give leadership, then we have a chance. If we can get our own up and going then that's a place to start talking about the future.

If there was just one thing you could do to enable us to make progress towards a peaceful ongoing settlement, what would it be?

The Good Friday Agreement set it out very clearly - a lot of work went into that. The Good Friday Agreement is well worth reading. Everyone should take it down and have a read of it, because you'll see it was very well drafted, it set out a lot of things that should happen. They haven't all happened. If you look at some of the things that haven't happened, [they] are the things that's causing us trouble now. Mistakes were obviously made because of the pressure, the situation we were living in at that point in time. We didn't really look into how the legacy issues would have been dealt with at that time. That's a mistake. What I see happening in some other countries, they are talking about the legacy issues now before they have a unification. I think that's good. They are talking, both sides of a divide, about the legacy issues. That would mean that when we do eventually come together to have some sort of agreement then it'll not keep coming back and coming back and coming back.

When you say everyone should read the Good Friday Agreement there's been criticism that UK government ministers haven't been reading it and haven't altogether understood it. Is that what you're implying in particular?

Well it would be very easy to imply that in the recent situation and it's an absolute disgrace. Anyone who considers to have any role or influence in Northern Ireland [that they] don't even know exactly what's in it and don't really understand the culture in Northern Ireland and making no attempt to understand it.

Andrew McCracken (Interviewed 21st March, 2019)

Andrew McCracken is chief executive of The Community Foundation Northern Ireland.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways to enable us to make progress?

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland are about connecting people who care, to causes that matter. What that means for me in Northern Ireland is, whilst there's the really visible gap between orange and green, the more fundamental and more important gap is the gap between rich and poor and the bubbles of society that we live in. Very often I am working with people who have wealth and resources and who have a sense of "There's something I want to do, something I want to help... some bit of society that I want to affect", but recognise that they live in a bubble that is really isolated from the problems and issues that affect other people in society. So for me, the thing I really care about, that's part of the answer to that question about how we strengthen civic society, is how do we create meaningful bridges and relationships between those bubbles that we all live in?

I came into this job four years ago after working in London for 10 years and I really have noticed there's a very strong narrative here that splits the community sector from the voluntary sector, kind of along class lines.

Explain that bit.

The community sector is "it's complicated", with working class communities doing things, and the voluntary sector is middle class people doing things to or for working class people. Those are interesting divides that to me are more interesting than the traditional sectarian divides in those sectors. The question is about how do people with power and money and influence have a positive impact on and with people who are marginalised and vulnerable along the edges, those are the bits of stitching together in society that I'm really interested in. That's in everything from what good community development work looks like to the Stacey Dooley Comic Relief conversations about when is somebody helping and when is some saviour coming in to remove independence and create dependence.

What you're saying is that the civic society in Northern Ireland works best where there's a clear shared interest rather than a point of differentiation.

I couldn't argue with that. Our whole society's challenge is to try and articulate what that shared interest is, what that common vision is, that we too easily divide that up into being well it's either a united Ireland or remaining part of the United Kingdom and that becomes the bottom line of what our shared interest is. But there's meaning on one shared interest that we all have that are different from that constitutional issue. There's also something about democracy and voice that is really important. If we want to transform civic society, the current mechanisms for democracy that we have aren't all the tools that we need and that's true across the UK. We funded Northern Ireland's first independent Citizens' Assembly³³ in November [2018], where you get 80 people who are demographically representative of all of Northern Ireland and invite them to take two weekends to be briefed on experts and debate policy issues and recommendations on that policy issue. We were overwhelmed by the response, so we used a polling company to help us get our 80 people and make sure they were representative. The polling company wrote to 4000 people. Within two days, we had 300 volunteers, people saying, "Yes, I'll set aside two weekends of my time to do this".

³³ [The Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland](#)

It was a debate about healthcare. We're all getting older and there's not enough money to look after us. So really tricky things that we're wrestling with. We were able to have a meaningful conversation and come up with some recommendations together. And it was bloody hard work: it wasn't easy but we did it. For me there's a transformation of civic society there that's giving people the confidence that we're able to participate and make decisions together in a way that isn't about fighting the old political battles.

Citizens' Assemblies have been very helpful for the Irish state to work through really challenging issues and they've been resolved with apparently pretty well-mannered conversations, even though they're incredibly difficult ones. It's been suggested to me that in Northern Ireland the best approach for Citizens' Assemblies might be more of a micro level to deal with particular conflicts, perhaps around interface areas and so on, rather than necessarily on a big scale like social care. What's your feeling about that?

You could divide it a bunch of different ways. That's a tool that can be used locally as well as nationally to solve a problem. The model of Citizens' Assembly that we did is really expensive. And so it wouldn't necessarily be the most sustainable way to run a hundred of those across Northern Ireland.

And that was financed by yourselves?

We put money into it and we found other funders as well.

There is a perception that much of civic society is cowed by fearing to be critical of the major parties and there is a sense they are dependent on funding for approval by the big parties, so therefore can't be challenging. On a more micro level, there's a sense that the major parties seek to dominate and control some community groups. Is that perception reasonable?

Yes, partly because of malign intent, but probably more because Northern Ireland is a very public sector dependent economy. It was an absolute revelation to me coming here to realise that of the third sector, independent charities and community groups in Northern Ireland, between 75% and 80% of their money comes from the government. When I realised that it made sense to me of the typical conversations that I hear in meeting other charity chief executives, or meeting community groups, that were obsessed with the public sector, because that's where a lot of the money comes from. There may sometimes be that malign intent to try and oppress and control the community sector, but what there definitely is, is a sense of "Listen, these guys are the people who our money comes from". So we need to understand and influence and talk about where the latest package of funding is coming from. And if you believe, as I do, that the third sector is primarily civic society, independently, self organising to deal with problems whether the government thinks it's a problem or not, then there does seem to be a kind of grey oppressive overlay that so much of that is funded from public money. It's why I really care about getting independent money into that sector to allow people to say, "Okay, we're going to do this because we think it's a problem" or "We're not going to wait until the next round of funding from the..." whatever council is giving money away.

Which leads us on to the next challenge, which is how we create or move towards a more shared and integrated society.

Again, my gut reaction to that question is to say integrated, it's about mixing people from different backgrounds across wealth and class, as well as what we immediately think about integrated about being Protestant/Catholic mixing. The education system is a massive issue we need to solve. The

informal transfer test system sorts kids based on whether they're rich or poor and puts the richer kids in one set of schools and the poorer kids in another set of schools.

In other words, there's two sets of integration problems at school. One is the religious differentiation, the other is that broadly wealthy middle class families get their kids into the grammar schools and the poorer kids go to the non-selective schools.

And with all respect for the people working really hard on the Protestant/Catholic issue, if you give me a thousand pounds to do something about those problems, I put it onto the class issue, the rich and poor issue, because it gets even less of a time in the spotlight. But they're one of the biggest predictors. Choose a kid at random and say, I want to work out whether that kid's going to a grammar school or not. If they're on free school meals that's the biggest obvious thing that you can point at to say where they're going to go. And that is not right. I don't believe that if you happen to be on free school meals or not it makes you more or less intelligent. I grew up in brilliant, lovely, middle class Bangor and went to grammar school and went to a lovely university in England. I'm now faced with decisions about where I send my own kids, and the overlay of the individual complexity of navigating this terrible system with your own kids and the strategic perspective of this system is just wrong - and I'm endorsing it by even participating in it. I find it completely overwhelming that I don't know the answer to that, but that integration in education, integration of all sorts and education seem to me to be key.

Do you think integration in education is an immediate, necessary challenge for us to deal with, rather than with housing, for example?

My feeling is viscerally at the moment about education, because of my personal experience and my own kids. When I think about housing, it immediately makes me think about just how we manage where money flows, for social housing, how we decide what doctors surgeries to have, how we decide what leisure centres to have, the decision making that is naturally sectarian because our politics is naturally sectarian tends to mitigate all those decisions to be about one community winning and one community losing and that goes to the heart of integration. So yes, housing, but then yes to those systems that we current manage as being about orange and green and how can we get more normal politics, whether that's local council or whatever Stormont-related government we have to try to get to the root of that.

We're sitting in Belfast, I live in Derry, so my understanding of the residential areas of Belfast isn't great, but my perception is that there's much more mixing within the middle class areas and so that plays into your view that a lot of this is actually a class issue because the areas that are most segregated would be the lower income working class areas. So that's the challenge, in your view, as much as anything else?

Poverty - issues of poverty, marginalisation, people who don't have a fair chance in life - those issues are hugely important and, personally to me, much more important than issues about identity and constitution and there's a strong argument that they're a big chunk of the root causes of issues about conflict.

One of the other challenges, if we are going to have a society which is working better together, is to how we deal with the past and whether we can achieve reconciliation by dealing with the past.

I want people being able to have the humility to say "I have a really strong opinion, but I know other people have really strong opinions too". We support groups who try and create space for those sorts of dialogues, where people come together and tell their stories and share. We finance groups who

have very strong opinions about their own identity, about issues they faced in the past that they want resolution of. Those groups would say "If this issue can't be resolved, I don't see how we can move forward". It's hard to argue with that, but when you have a conflicting group saying that and the only resolution is saying, "Well, if it goes in my favour, then we can move forward", then we quite quickly become paralysed about what we do.

It's a zero sum game even when we're dealing with the past?

Yes. I don't know what the hopeful message is to bring them.

That perhaps touches on whether the only way we can deal with the past effectively is if people see the shared nature of their experience, rather than the differences, or causes of particular events.

It's hard to argue with that, but also hard to see how to make it happen.

The other difficulty is how we have the constitutional conversation in ways that don't cause new tensions.

My view has been "Let's get Brexit out of the way and then work out how we have these conversations". I've got no idea what getting Brexit out of the way now means. I and the Community Foundation are neutral on the political and constitutional issues. Creating space for the conversations and having some kind of shared picture of the society we want seems to me to be key. We allow people to come together and say, "Okay, this is the type of education I want for my kids. This is the type of healthcare that I want to access. This is the type of leisure centres that I want to go to. This is the level of poverty I'm prepared to accept in society". How do we move towards a society that's like that? Where we can create those conversations, we can create something that can transcend the constitutional question, but that can give us some common values and aspirations to go into it.

So let's have a vision of the type of society we want to create rather than focusing on the particular community identities, whatever that is?

You said it even better than me.

Peter Osborne (Interviewed 20th March, 2019)

At the time of the interview Peter Osborne was chair of the Community Relations Council. He is a former chair of the Parades Commission.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

If you look at civil society today, there is a real issue about the independence of civil society, of the voluntary and community sector. There is a sense that the need for funding, which is increasingly tight, particularly the last five or 10 years as we've seen the impact of austerity, as funding is increasingly tight to those voluntary and community organisations in a way that do the most work with civil society are chasing funds and therefore are really reluctant in some cases to get involved in some of the political issues and the social justice issues that are really important in this society. So there is an issue about the independence of the sector and how that sector really relates into political society, the political structures and government itself.

It's really important we find a mechanism for civil society to have its voice heard. If you looked at some of the issues that are problematic in politics in Northern Ireland today, I suspect if you handed some of those issues over to civil society they'd find an answer very quickly. Some people would say that's an argument for bringing back the Civic Forum, which was part of the Good Friday Agreement. I'm not overly in favour of bringing back a Civic Forum in that way. I think there were limitations to that. Part of the limitation in a practical sense was around the commitment to it by government, but also the funding it received. But also who was *on* that Civic Forum was a real issue and would continue to be a real issue.

I am a fan of things like Citizens' Assemblies that we've seen working in the Republic of Ireland very, very successfully. And I was down at the Citizens' Assembly that dealt with the environment and what I saw there was a hundred people drawn from civil society, randomly sampled, geographically spread, different genders, different age ranges, different socio-economic backgrounds, no political baggage. And they were *really* intensely exploring issues from the perspective of the evidence, not from the perspective of anything around political politics or around what constituency they would have to represent or who might have more influence on who gives them votes. And they explored the evidence and they came up with conclusions that were just logical that therefore would be good policy based on good evidence.

And when you look at the two big successes of the Citizens' Assembly in the south around same sex marriage and reproductive rights, you have essentially politicians devolving, making recommendations to a Citizens' Assembly who look at the evidence, come up with recommendations, and then it's endorsed at a referendum. And in those two cases, you had change on major social issues that caused the political parties difficulty, but the process itself allowed the political parties to engage in a process where they weren't then taking decisions. They were allowing the Citizens' Assembly to look at options based on evidence and then [for] people in the whole country to take the decision at the end of the day.

So there are mechanisms that work. In Northern Ireland we need to find mechanisms to allow civil society to have the voice. When you look at some of the big successes of the peace process over the last 20 years, two of the big successes, I would argue, are policing and parading. What do they have in common? When policing reform was mooted and then processed, you had a panel from civil society led by Chris Patten, with people from Northern Ireland who came up with that report and shaped policing and the change in policing. I think anybody from any political party or any political

persuasion would say [that] has been a big success. Confidence in policing has increased substantially, albeit there still challenges.

On parading, you had a Parades Commission that was established *from civil society*. You had seven people drawn from across the community. I chaired it for a number of years and was a member of it for a number of years. In the nine years that I was involved in the Parades Commission we never took a single vote. It was based on discussion and consensus of people coming from across the community and while we didn't get everything right, we got most things right in a really contentious, sensitive area of peace building here around parades. Civil society coming together, they can take decisions and they can take good decisions.

Part of this is about understanding that when you build a peace here, and we're less than halfway through our peace process, it is about relationships and that is about relationships within civil society. That leads to all sorts of issues around structural change, but it also means that we cannot afford another 10 or 20 years of focusing exclusively on political institutions as the way forward for this peace process. Yes, they're important, but it's relationship building that is at the heart of peace building.

You mention your concern about the lack of independence. And let me just tease this out a bit more, because on the one hand, I suspect what you mean is that community groups don't feel that they can have an independent voice when they're putting their funding at risk. And secondly, there is a perception that in many grassroots areas, neighbourhood based organisations, the political parties try to control those organisations. Is that is that the type of thing you mean by the threat to independence?

Both of those are valid issues. I was talking more about the first. We have a culture that has developed, it's common in other countries as well, where there is a tighter funding environment, which means it is a lot more competitive, there's less money around and the voluntary community groups are in a real competitive process. We have seen over the last few years a number of voluntary and community organisations going to the wall because of money. To some extent that's natural, organisations come and go. But you also see a weakening of that sector and therefore a weakening of what's delivered on the ground by the reduction in the number of organisations and number of people doing that work on the ground. When they're dependent on government money, it does mean that their voice or their ability or their perception, or their perceived ability from within themselves, to comment critically, positively or negatively, on government policy, on how politics is working is then limited. We have a voluntary and community sector that wouldn't have been the same as it was 50 years ago, where 50 years ago it would have played an active part. It would have had a voice. It would have spoken for communities. You could argue in the 1970s it was the voluntary and community sector in the darkest days that held a lot of stuff together and started to create the thinking about cross community work and took some very courageous initiatives within the voluntary and community sector to do cross community work. That's been curtailed.

I would argue as a chair of an arm's length body, it's really important that government uses its arm's length bodies to distribute funds so that there is no clear political direction in terms of specific funding and therefore the more money can be allocated through really robust processes through arm's length bodies. That is something government needs to reflect on in terms of the last five or 10 years. I don't have an issue with the politicians, I just wish they'd take more policy decisions, because they get involved for the right reasons and they get elected and they have that mandate, which means that they should be determining policy. But it is different when you're looking at people making applications for funding. They should be treated fairly and the way to do that is through strengthening arm's length bodies.

It's also the issue of whether sufficiently in Northern Ireland we have evidence-based policy making. But to move this into a different context, how do we achieve a more shared and integrated society?

We need to be real about what this peace process is about. First of all, we are in a process that will last at least 50 years. Some people think when the Agreement was signed we had peace. We don't. Some people think it would take 10 or 20 years. It won't. It will take generations and it will be at least 50 years. So 20 years on from the Good Friday Agreement, we are less than halfway through this process. I say that because we need to have the context right of this is a time slow, there are no quick fixes, but we also need to understand that it can go backwards as well as forwards. There is no inevitable forward flow to the peace in Northern Ireland and we are in a very serious situation. At the minute, at best, we are standing still. We need to understand that because we need to understand that we really do have to re-apply ourselves to the essentials and the principles of what peace building here is about. We need to get this place moving forward again. Politics is really important in that, but it's about more than politics.

How do we transform? I think in 20 years since the Agreement, we haven't taken the transformational decisions that are necessary. We still have a society that is as segregated as it ever was. We still have new people coming through, young people reaching maturity, becoming adults, that are living in segregated housing, that go to segregated education. Because of those things, they are socialised in a way that is segregated. Our system has the greatest degree of social engineering that there's ever been. I am a strong advocate for young people learning and developing together. I'm told - because I would be a supporter of that - I want to socially engineer. It's not me that socially engineers, it's the people who created a system a hundred or more years ago that segregate our children when they're four or five years old. That's the greatest degree of social engineering you could get.

We need to start taking the decisions that break that down. In the 20 years since the Agreement, we haven't done that. Shared education is good, it's important, it can lead to some positive results. But my fear is that shared education, while it's driven by the money, will be like throwing a bucket of water over a rock. When the water dries up, you wouldn't know what had happened to start with.

We need to seriously look at things like the teacher training system, which is segregated. Can you believe it? That people who are 18 years and older, in their 20s, if you want to teach in a state or a Protestant school, you have to go to a college which is largely 90% or so Protestant. And the same on the Catholic side. You wouldn't do that in any other walk of life. How ridiculous would it be if you said, "If you want to become a doctor, you have to go to a college where you'll be trained to be a doctor with other Protestants" and the same, "Go to a different college if you're a Catholic, to train to be a GP as a Catholic, and you can only treat Catholics and Protestants". It's a lot of nonsense. And yet that's what we do with teachers.

We need to take a serious look at how structurally education is managed through area planning. We need to come up with initiatives that encourage local areas where there are two, three or four schools when there should be one or two to reduce the number of schools in that area. That will save millions of pounds and how our education needs that saving to go into things around teachers assistants and the infrastructure of the schools. My son is at a school where one of the classes has to put a pot down to catch the water coming off the roof when it's raining. Yet we're wasting millions of pounds in a segregated education system. It needs really courageous big political policy decisions.

The same is true in housing. We have a shared housing policy. But over two terms of an Assembly, 10 years, the policy around shared housing, its aim is to build 487 houses in 10 years in shared housing

schemes. In that same 10 years, we will build over 60,000 units. So our shared housing policy has an ambition which equates to less than 1% of total housing. I could make an argument that that is going to reinforce the segregation in housing because they're replacing houses in areas that were less segregated in the 1940s and '50s and '60s than it is today. There's just not enough.

And then in one of those shared housing units two years ago, UVF flags go up and two families are intimidated out. We allow those flags to continue to fly and people move out of shared housing. That area will not be a shared housing area in a year or two unless we really defend the policy that is supposed to be there. We'll abandon it as somewhere that people don't want to live in if, in this case, they're from a Catholic background.

We need to take dramatic, bold policy decisions that are going to structurally change this society. Managing conflict and managing division is one thing, it's what the Community Relations Council does with the relatively small amount of funding that it gives out, it promotes cross community activity. What we need to do is tackle the causes of segregation and we haven't done that yet.

I wouldn't be completely negative about shared education. Shared education has some valuable parts. It does bring young people together. It is more robust than just looking out windows at each other. There are activities happening that can shape and change people's perspectives. The issues I have with it are, first of all there needs to be a robust continuum of where you expect the schools and the pupils to get to, so it's not just about, "Here's £100,000. Let's do some of these activities." Then the money runs out and we stop doing them. They have to be moving onto a continuum where there's no going back in terms of the contact and the relationships. Otherwise, you wouldn't know what had happened when the next cadre of young people come through the education system.

We need to take robust policy decisions about not just the continuum, but how schools move from where two become one in certain areas. We need to incentivise that. I have talked to a lot of politicians across the divide and they'll tell me they're supporters of integrated education, and that's good. But you don't see many of those politicians being public advocates for it. For many of them, they don't see the benefit to their interests or their views about life and how things should develop. We need to incentivise the schools, politicians and others to become greater advocates of changing the segregated nature of our education system. There's two villages a mile apart along a part of the coast in Northern Ireland. Those two villages have fewer than 250 children of primary school age. Yet those two villages a mile apart are served by four separate schools. That wouldn't happen anywhere else in these islands. How much money is spent on four schools compared to one or two? I'm sure there's hundreds of thousands of pounds of savings to be made. How do we get us a policy that says, "If those areas reduce the number of schools from four to two, we'll keep that budget as it is." So the total spending in those two villages on education will not change, but it will have two schools. And the £200,000 a year that the area saves will go into the now two schools. The local community could spend that money however they want. So there's educational underachievement? There's two or three teachers that can specifically tackle educational underachievement in those areas. There's issues around rural transport? Well, they can hire a mini bus to work in those two schools with a permanent driver. There's issues around diversity? Well, let's run a programme out of that £200,000 a year that can take P7s to places that teach them about diversity. They are worried about the transfer test, which is a problem in itself, but let's employ two teachers to work with the P6s and P7s in those two schools additional to what they would currently have to help them all through their transfer test.

If we were would do something like that over, say, a 10 year period, suddenly that incentivises the local community and the politicians to reduce the number of schools. By reducing the number of

schools, it is inevitably going to increase the sharing, but also end the segregation in education in those villages.

You mentioned one of the problems about shared housing being the erection of flags. How should we deal with that? Apart from all the other issues, they are identifiers of ownership of different physical areas and that is a barrier towards social integration. How should the police or other organisations deal with the erection of flags which demark territory?

A very difficult issue. I think the law and legal guidance is very clear. You cannot erect things on lampposts. There are a number of laws that make it clear that they should not be there. I don't think it's about *what* flags are up. It is unlawful to put material like that on a lamppost. I understand how difficult that is. It's not just a policing issue, it's for other agencies, too.

And can you take those flags down everywhere? That would be a huge challenge because of the number of flags that are up. But when you come to a shared housing area, you need to implement the law. When the law says you cannot put flags up, it is even stronger when it comes to flags that are related to a proscribed illegal organisation, especially to intimidate. Those flags should be coming down in shared housing areas. We should be zero tolerant in that, when the flags go up give it a day or two to see if people would take them down themselves. If they don't, they should come down.

A couple of years ago, they went up in June. In one street they came down in September. On another street, more of a shared housing area, it took Santa Claus to come in December for people dressed as Santa to go up to put Christmas decorations up and while they were doing that, they took the UVF flags down, six months later. That's just not acceptable and it's certainly not acceptable in one of the flagship shared housing areas. There needs to be courage and decision making in those areas to say it's just zero tolerance. There will be no symbols like that go up in shared housing areas.

There's something we need to reflect on, how we encourage more people to want to live in shared housing areas because we need to increase the numbers. I think 487 over 10 years is too little. I keep coming back to financial incentives for people living in those shared housing areas. I'd be open to other ideas, but it's certainly something that's there that may well help to increase the number of people living in those areas. But when they're there, they need to be protected [including] around flags and emblems.

In Northern Ireland there are very few council areas that are exclusively unionist or nationalist. Most council areas will be very close in make-up - 60/70% Protestant, unionist, 30% Catholic, nationalist, republican. Think of what it says when you say for two or three months of the year, it's okay to put flags up that identify an area as one particular side of the community or other. What you're actually saying is to that minority community, "Keep your head down for those number of months. Put up with it. Tolerate being intimidated. Don't go into certain areas. Just keep your head down and don't show yourself to be from that minority community". That's not acceptable in any society, and it certainly should be the aim to be building a society where we don't accept that.

One of the other causes of division is dealing with the past. How should we deal with the past and to what extent can we achieve reconciliation through dealing with the past?

It's a hugely complex area. Acknowledgement is critically important. Unfortunately, acknowledgement disappeared from some of the proposals produced by Fresh Start when it came to the draft. What Fresh Start said was that the two governments should produce statements of acknowledgement and encourage others to produce something similar. That should be in the proposals because acknowledgement is critically important.

I would be involved in a charity called Remembering Srebrenica³⁴, the genocide in Bosnia in 1995, where eight and a half thousand people, all but one from a Muslim background, were killed in four days. It was designated as a genocide. In that village in Srebrenica, last year for the first time since 1995 a Serb was elected who denies that genocide took place. I'm not going to debate who did what at that particular time and there's certainly very bad things done by people from all sides of that community and I have nothing against the Serbs, but it is really important when something as traumatic as that happens, that people acknowledge the hurt and the pain and the anguish and the trauma that it caused.

Acknowledgement is, for me, the most critically important aspect here. You need to link that to issues around justice and there are ways of doing that. But the provision of accurate information about what happened, an acknowledgement by those who were behind what happened of the trauma that was caused, not necessarily an apology, but it is about acknowledging the trauma and the hurt caused, is fundamentally important. I don't think we've got to that space yet. There's been efforts and some things were said over the last 20 years, but it hasn't been as much as it should have been. And in a way, the controversy around the politics of this, where victims have been victims of politicisation of this issue, they've been kicked around as political footballs for a number of years, in a way that has got in the way of one of the things victims really need, which is more information and acknowledgement. Some will want justice as well. I think that's part and parcel of this process. But the critical thing is accurate information. I hesitate to say 'the truth' because different people have different truths, but accurate information about what happened and genuine acknowledgement of the pain that was caused by what happened on all sides.

The definition of justice is itself disputed. What cannot be ignored is the sense that if there's organisational, structural denial of things having happened and responsibility for that, then that is a blockage to people moving on.

Yes. I think what you're hinting at is, where does that acknowledgement come from? It needs to come from all sides. There are things that the state did, both British and Irish, but in Northern Ireland, particularly in terms of the British state, there are things that people did on the republican side and on the loyalist side, that need to be talked about more, the information provided on it more and those people who were involved acknowledge the pain that was caused. I don't think we've got to that place yet.

The other really challenging conversation is the constitutional situation. How do we have that conversation in ways that don't dangerously inflame the situation?

We're not going through a good period at the moment. And Brexit has increased instability in the context of there being no Executive [which] makes it more problematic still. I don't know, is the answer in how you get into a real constitutional discussion. We need seriously need to address the issues of structural change before we can have any substantial conversation, meaningful conversation around some of those issues.

What do you mean by structural change?

I'm talking about the reconciliation agenda, about the structural change, about how we organise this society, particularly around housing and education. I'm not coming from any particular political persuasion in discussing this question, but if I was a unionist, I would want reconciliation here because I would acknowledge that reconciliation is an important part of making this place work,

³⁴ [Remembering Srebrenica](#)

especially when we are all minorities in Northern Ireland now. There is no majority. We're all minorities. The only way you make this place work from a unionist perspective is to help reconcile the people in Northern Ireland so they can work together better. If you're from a nationalist or republican background, exactly the same argument applies before you can get into any substantial conversation about changing the constitutional status, or uniting the island as a whole in one political framework.

That brings you back to reconciling the people in Northern Ireland through structural change. It is fundamentally important to both sets of people who want to either sustain the constitutional position or change the constitutional position, to get into that structural change, that change of how the society organises itself. Otherwise, you will get no movement forward. And at some point, we will go back into something that we don't want to go back into in terms of conflict. That's how important this is to reshape how this society deals with each other, to reshape the relationships that we have with each other. And that comes back to take in the big political policy decisions around housing and education.

So how do we persuade politicians from either a unionist or republican background that actually that focus on reconciliation has to come before the arguments as to whether we are better off within the UK or within a united Ireland?

We can say what we say, we can do what we do, write what we write and discuss it in the way we discuss it. Ultimately, it's up to them to make the leap. The Titanic building in Belfast received 60 – six zero – million pounds of public money. A fantastic building and a great facility, but that's 60 million pounds. If the Community Relations Council were to distribute it to the core funded work that it does around reconciliation, it would take us 30 years. And the Titanic is one building amongst many that received public money on the theme of economic development. So, I don't think we prioritise reconciliation anywhere near as much as we should in central government. I don't think it's been resourced anywhere near as much as it should within central government, and especially not when you compare it to other things. Now, it's not about either one thing or the other, you do all of those things. But there needs to be greater prioritisation of reconciliation.

How do you persuade politicians to do that? Well, you make the arguments, but ultimately they need to come to the same conclusions as I've come to and many others, which is that we need to put a lot more resources into it and we need to make those systemic changes to how this society works. I think many politicians are in that same place. They do understand it, but it's a huge challenge. When you talk about those systemic change issues, there are enormous vested interests on either side of the community that politicians need to stand up to. I suppose you're balancing out their belief in the reconciliation agenda, re-prioritising it and making the policy changes, balancing out that with the impact or influence that vested interests have on keeping the status quo as it is. Politicians need to take the courageous step and do a lot more of the challenging and a lot more of the supporting of systemic change.

The civic voice:

Maureen Hetherington (Interviewed 19th March 2019)

Maureen Hetherington is director of The Junction, a project committed to ethical and shared remembering.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

It surprises me how many people are so disconnected almost from reality because of the introduction of social media and apps and different ways of communicating. They're overwhelmed by the amount of stuff that's put into their brains and into society. I think that it has been very damaging, particularly for young people who have an expectation of life and what life should be for them and disappointment whenever it doesn't come up to reality, doesn't come up to the fantasy world that they create through their social media.

There has to be ways in which we mitigate the use of social media and get people back into conversations with each other. It's about quality time. I don't think that's impossible to achieve. The way we do things like talking at people and being quite negative - we have to make everything very attractive for people to re-engage. And that depends on how we engage. What is it that people are interested in? And it has to be based on self interests.

What's in their interests? Better health, wellbeing, particularly mental health. To make civil society move forward, to progress, we have to encourage them to look at a different way of being, with communicating with each other. The negativity around the news and what we hear gets us overwhelmed every day. There has to be a balance about how much they can take in, because it does become overwhelming.

It's about parents looking at young people and trying to encourage different ways of being with each other, opening up different ways of communicating and engaging with people at what their self interests are. Ultimately, whenever you try to encourage people to think of the common good you can get a change in attitude and mindsets. People are like sheep, they follow and it's a way of re-engaging in a different way that values them. It's surprising how many people have no self-worth. The people we work with at the grassroots, they don't feel they've got anything to say, or that it's worth saying. You wonder what's happening in schools? It might be churning out excellence and academia, but what's it doing to young people and how are young people allowed to engage in so much social media that turns back on them as to how they see themselves and their world view and how negative and overwhelming it is.

During what was called the Arab Spring³⁵, social media was seen as the means by which street demonstrations were being organised, demanding change in government. That didn't work out very well because it led to the Syrian civil war. Yet there are examples of where social media has been used positively in terms of producing a more effective voice for the civil society.

There's always a balance to be struck. If you look at the social media around #MeToo, the amount of trolls and negativity and the *backlash* for many people who spoke out was devastating for a lot of people. You get that constantly where social media will gather a range of diverse opinions, but some

³⁵ The Arab Spring comprised uprisings across several countries in the Middle East – including Tunisia and Syria - where young people came out onto the streets demanding fairer societies and greater democracy and government accountability.

are so negative that no matter how good or well intended messages are, you have the kickback. If you look at what Donald Trump is doing and the tweets that he's putting out and then the response to that. The kickback can be far more damaging. We should be aware of what's happening in the world. We are a global village and it's really important that we are connected because we can't be ourselves alone. We're part of a huge planet. The environment has to be looked after. We have to look after ourselves: the French philosopher says, "When I look at you, I am responsible for you". So we all have that responsibility of how we see each other as neighbours, brothers, sisters. Whenever it gets overwhelming people will switch off, but then that negativity is easy to exploit and manipulate people to think in a particular way. You ultimately have the altruistic side, but you've also got the rise of the very right wing fundamentalism that comes out directly as a result of that negative social media.

Can you think of social platforms that strengthen civil society?

I support the Peter Tatchell Foundation³⁶. Despite the awful things that have happened to that man he has been able to promote ways in which countries are doing good work with regards to the gay and lesbian community. We can see how lucky we are that we live in this society, but also the desperate needs that have to be addressed in other countries. That fight for good can trump the negativity. Up to a point, the #MeToo campaign encouraged women to come out and speak out which is brilliant, but then for the women that did speak out then there is a huge kickback and a lot of negativity that came with that. How do you choose your battles, because it's never straightforward. It's long, drawn out and you can suffer for a long, long time after it whenever you put things on social media.

In terms of Northern Ireland do you think there's things we can learn from the experience of the Civic Forum on the one hand and the Citizens' Assembly in the south on the other?

In any society we need a top down and a bottom up approach. Unfortunately not having anything at the top at the moment, it relies very heavily on the bottom up approach. The Citizens' Assembly is a very good idea and it's very good to have people having a civil, mature conversation that draws out the common sense and the conclusions. You can reach a consensus and then you realise everything is about compromise.

Unfortunately, whenever we have politicians who have absolutely no interest in dealing with the common or greater good and everything is based on the self-interest of the party, it becomes stymied and limited. I worry all the time that we raise expectations in the community and then when nothing comes of it people get very disillusioned, disheartened and they disengage. They continually try to make progress. They go to the workshops, they do what they can, but ultimately it's stymied, or stopped, or it comes to an abrupt end and progress can't be seen. We have to be in it for the long term - the short to medium term is no good. Sometimes people can't see that progress *has* been made and the social media *has* worked very well - that's an outcome and a measure for down the road which we don't often see. In this world of short term fixes, that's influenced by social media and the way we view the world, you want everything now. Consumerism, neo-liberalism, everything has to be yesterday and we don't have the patience to wait for the longer term. That's where we have to start to re-think that every stone thrown into the pond does have a ripple effect, but it takes a long time to actually see that ripple effect.

This long term thinking, how do we move towards a shared and integrated society?

³⁶ [The Peter Tatchell Foundation](#) is a human rights charity, established by gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell.

I have no doubt that integrated education is fundamental to getting people to know each other, to engage with each other. The difficulty is that we don't have the integrated society, so the social housing has to be cross community and mixed. We could highlight the cost of segregation. The majority of people out there want the best for their children, the best for the family. They want to just keep surviving. They want a quality of life. This cost of segregation, if we can highlight that and people realise that if we can look at that and redistribute the monies elsewhere where it's really needed, people would be up for a more integrated society. The majority of people do want change. They want a better future, but it's taking that leap of faith, taking the steps towards that. Exposing the segregation for what it is, the systems and structures that are created to keep people separated, and finding ways of bringing them together.

You've mentioned shared housing. One of the problems is that a number of the shared housing schemes put forward have been on interface areas where it becomes a focus of conflict as to whose territory it should be part of, rather than being recognised as a genuine shared or integrated community. How should we improve our planning on that?

There are architects exploring and researching how communities become disengaged, how community planning created these ghettos and how they've sectarianised neighbourhoods because of where they're placed. The lack of infrastructure, the lack of facilities and usually when people become angry, disenfranchised, because they do not have the necessary facilities or infrastructures for their own survival, for their own quality of life, that manifests itself in different ways. Community planning has a lot to answer for, where they decide to put social housing and then the consequences for the long term are negative on the people who end up there. It's usually people who are so desperate for a house, or desperate for shelter, that they're going to take what's given to them. Unfortunately, without the proper planning, the proper infrastructure, you can't satisfy the needs of people. I was talking to a group and they said, "We don't even have a chemist here". They live in a big area, it's a social housing estate. No chemist. There's no facilities for shopping. They have to travel by bus to go anywhere, so they feel dislocated from the rest of the city, disconnected as well, and there's problems with buses and different ways the infrastructure could be improved. They live in a very busy area, but it's outside a lot of the good amenities that would make their quality of life better.

We talk about the retail crisis as if it's only affecting the high street in city and town centres, but for a lot of suburbs and other communities there isn't a viable retail centre there so you haven't got a pharmacy, probably haven't got a GP practice. And there is an interesting challenge to be dealt with.

It's huge. It's the basic needs that have to be met. You look at the way Post Offices have closed everywhere, the banks, and if you don't do online banking for a lot of elderly people and people who don't have transport that's a huge problem. There's many people who are not computer literate. We talk about engaging civic society, but there's a huge amount of people out there at an age where they don't want to engage, or are fearful because their information has been taken or abused or sold or there are scams. People, for good reasons, decide not to engage in it. If you don't have internet, you don't have email, the chances are you're not going to be reached - because the community and voluntary sector, or pharmacies, doctors, all of those areas depend now on emails. That technology has reached the point where there's thousands of people totally disconnected because they will not use the computer, or they're fearful of their computer, or they don't know how to use it. That that's a really important area that we haven't explored.

On one side, social media are overwhelmed. On the other side are people who just feel lonely, disconnected. Going out and working at the grassroots, doing workshops, sessions, engaging with people at the community level, you're desperate to find ways you can keep them engaged, but

without funding and to send letters now, snail mail, by the time you would get something to somebody the event is over. There a whole area of people that we can't reach.

I think your point is that community structures are also under challenge, fractured, because people don't bump into each other in the retail shops anymore because lots of them have closed in local areas.

You've hit the nail on the head. Post Offices were great ways of people communicating with each other: going down to your local shop every day, and even in the banks. They aren't there now and there isn't that way for people to engage.

One of the big challenges is how we deal with the past. How do you think we should deal with that and to what extent can we use the past to achieve reconciliation?

That's core to the work we do: ethical and shared remembering. That's remembering a decade, 1912 to 1922, far enough in the distant past that people can explore it and unpack it safely, but it gives a lot of lessons for today. We don't seem to learn from history, but we have big opportunities now. The second half of the decade 1918 to 1922 was *huge*. Our social, political, cultural and social landscape in Ireland changed forever. There are ways we can *complexify* the narrative that we have now and also to let people look at their past safely and draw conclusions as to how they might go into a shared future and learn the lessons from the past. Brexit's a perfect opportunity. If you look at the hundred years gestation up to partition and then you look at what's happening with Brexit now, it's a whole constitutional question laid bare again. If we can learn from the lessons of the past, not shaming and blaming, but looking at the personalities of the time, looking at the decisions that were made, the implications of those and what can we learn to take society forward.

But it's getting enough people to engage actively and start to ask critical questions. Asking critical questions of our politicians. Our deeply segregated society, the way that our politicians behave to each other and with each other, it's hugely contentious and creates a lot of ill feeling. It's done deliberately in coming up to voting times - that level of hostility goes up. I have to accept there isn't a level of maturity in the political world here - it takes a generation or two generations before you can develop a mature political system.

We have to change the way our voting system works, because it's not working. We have to look at the ways in which, from the top down, that structures, systems, have to be dismantled. The other thing that we have been exploring is liberation from patriarchy for gender justice and the huge role that male domination system and structures have inhibited, prevented peace and peace building - exposing that and dismantling those structures and systems that have created a way of being that is about male domination, it's about violence and it's about power. Unless we dismantle the patriarchal model we can't have peace. That's a *huge* challenge to all of us, it's very threatening.

It's not about the liberation of women, but the liberation of men as well. The whole gender issue, the gender spectrum that we live in the here and now, the ways of being, the sectarianism, how men have used and violated women even through the recent Troubles. Those stories have still to emerge. Dealing with the past and finding a better future, that patriarchal model has to be dismantled. We support a lot of women who work really hard, but they always come up against a brick wall, or a glass ceiling, and they can only go so far. It's usually male interference that stops them from going beyond that.

I was at an event recently where pupils from a number of schools, from different backgrounds. One of the pupils said it was so useful to have heard the stories of the individuals who had lost loved ones,

who had lost limbs in bombs and shootings. What was important for him was that they had heard the human story, whereas in schools they had been taught the political story without the humanity touching them. Is that something we should learn from?

I was the founder of Towards Understanding and Healing³⁷ and that's dealing with the past through storytelling and positive and counter dialogue. I see that's core to moving society forward, re-humanising those we have demonised and hearing the human cost on what has happened here. I do think it's one of the most powerful ways in which young people and adults can start to think differently about the past. If you live in a ghetto, in a segregated society, you have a perception of who the enemy are. If you don't move outside that you don't hear the narratives outside of your own narrative, of your own community. You build a picture and everybody else is the perceived enemy and you're the victim. To expose yourself to the different narratives gives you the opportunity to change the story you tell yourself in that re-humanising and integrating that different story. You can start to change what you've heard from your peers, your family, your community and it can help you to start to move on and think differently. That is about creating the critical thinking skills in which you say well, that can't all be true, or you start to investigate.

It's complexifying the narrative and it's almost about bringing confusion, that you can't be certain. It is about creating the conditions whereby we're as comfortable with the uncertainty as we are with the certainty. It's being uncertain and trying to find and explore the way we see the world differently against that certainty of staying within our victimhood and within our story. That's where it has to be challenged, because that certainty becomes a fundamentalism and you behave in a particular way when you've got a fundamentalist point of view. If you remain in that uncertain area, that category, it means that you're open to change your story, you're open to challenge and you're open to investigating the truth, whatever that truth might be. Creating really good dialogue, community education and training programmes to get young people and adults to think differently is a way of trying to dispel the myths of the past and creating a different way of thinking into the future.

And creating empathy with people who are from very different backgrounds to your own.

Empathy. That's crucial. A child has to learn empathy and if a child isn't taught it at a very young age, it grows up without that knowledge of how it has to develop empathy. That'll extend to areas of racism, sectarianism, prejudice and discrimination. It's one of the areas where parents have to take responsibility about what they pass on to their children. The inter-generational passing on is very important to be challenged as well and we're doing work in that area where we're trying to do education and training programmes raising awareness of what the parents pass on to their children. If we're trying to create a new generation of young people coming up that don't hold onto prejudices, we're in trouble. We carry the conflict on.

It's heartbreaking to me sometimes when I hear someone say, "Well, if I don't get justice I have so many children, I have so many grandchildren, and they'll take up the challenge to find justice" and I'm thinking, "What are we doing to our children? What are we doing to our grandchildren? When are we going to break these cycles of violence, prejudice and discrimination?". I don't believe we have to draw a line in the sand, but we have to get people to think differently about how we start working towards the common good, or the greater good, and compromise and realise there's stuff – this is very difficult to say – there's stuff we have to let go of. We have to learn to let go of things that might be very, very painful if we have any hope for the future for our children. If we care at all about our children and grandchildren, we have to change.

³⁷ [Towards Understanding and Healing](#) is a project of The Junction.

When we're talking about the future the other big question is, how do we have the constitutional conversation?

If I had a choice, I wouldn't have any politicians on air at all. What happens played out on the airwaves is so damaging to the whole community. We work so hard in the sector to bring communities forward and then you have these huge ideologies pushed down our throats. We have things that are said that aren't always the truth, or we use history in a way that is damaging and it feeds their political agenda.

I always saw us as being part of a bigger picture, the European picture, and I didn't see physical barriers. People from north and south co-operated. The north, south, east, west. We've got to get over this narrow notion of identity and nationalism and think how are we in the world today? We are a small island. We are on the periphery of the UK and even on the periphery of Europe and the world. We have to get over ourselves and think of the bigger question of how we want to be with each other, regardless of where we're governed from. There should be federalism: you have opportunities for Scotland, Wales, England - why can't we be federalised and look differently at how we govern ourselves.

People want to get on with each other regardless. The majority of people wouldn't be able to explain to you fully what the implications would be of going into a united Ireland, but their hurt is so deep people have these notions of what they want and they don't really know the implications – just like Brexit. It's like Tony Blair, it's like moving into a new house but you don't know what the new house looks like. You're leaving one house and moving into a new house. If we create a civic society more attuned to what their needs are and what is needed, environmentally, economically, why we exist in a world, why do we look always at retail and trade and economics when there's so many other things out there that we have to look to? Why was the European Union formed in the first place? And the need to look to the bigger powers and how do we put an ethical lens on everything, rather than always based on these small narrow self interests of us, ourselves, alone. We punch way above our weight. We get so much air space and airtime and yet we're this wee tiny part of a country. I find that difficult when across the world there are huge big issues that need to be addressed. So get over ourselves.

Alexandra De La Torre (Interviewed 19th February, 2019)

Alexandra De La Torre co-ordinates parts of The Next Chapter for NICVA, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

It is fundamental for civil society to create spaces where there is room for everyone, spaces that are inclusive, inclusive to women, inclusive to ethnic minorities, inclusive to people with disabilities or sexual orientation. But it is also fundamental to put in wider resources and the accessibility to have these opportunities. Civil society in Northern Ireland has played a fundamental role in peace building. The challenges Brexit is bringing to Northern Ireland are huge and civil society will have a fundamental role to play in this.

Women in Northern Ireland have a massive role in civil society. They have been a massive role being activists in the peace process and peace building. But the roles haven't been recognised, or not enough. What The Next Chapter is doing is to try to empower women and bring these voices back to the public life and provide genuine spaces for women to participate in public life.

Women were powerful in the creation of the Civic Forum and that has ceased to function. How can the movement that led to the Civic Forum be recreated?

We are in a stage where women are realising they need to go back to public affairs. They need to make sure their voices are heard. There are fantastic programmes to support women's participation in public life. But we are in a very different society. Twenty years on from the Good Friday Agreement we don't see women getting the benefit of that Agreement, even though civil society has been great, even though women were on the table of the negotiations. But women need more recognition. Women need a real and genuine space where they can bring their concerns, speak of the conflict as activists, or develop their leadership roles in this new Northern Ireland.

You say women can develop roles in leadership in Northern Ireland. Of course three of the major political parties are led by women here. So women within the political system have reached the top. To what extent does that reflect women's engagement more broadly in civil society?

If you see the recent report about women's participation in public life, produced by the Northern Ireland Assembly, still we are very, very low in numbers, especially in positions of leadership and senior management. On some boards there are no women. We have, yes, women on the top of politics, but the question is, are these women representing other women, or are they representing their male orientated politics of their political parties? They are very different things. One thing is to have critical mass. Number two is having women that represent and can benefit other women. In Northern Ireland we don't have a childcare strategy, but it is happening in the UK. Why is it not happening here and we have women in power? It's not enough having women in power: it's [about] having sufficient power and having women that will work for women.

How structurally should things change?

If you look at the statistics, the senior leadership positions in civil society organisations, the majority are held by women, which is great. But we cannot say that this is where we want - all women only in civil society. We also need women in other spaces of decision-making. What this project in particular is doing, The Next Chapter, is creating the grounds for a group of more than 600 women to go out there and conquer all spaces, not only civil society. To go to the government, to the private sector.

This is what we need. I have been working in the voluntary sector since I came to Northern Ireland and I love it. But we cannot restrict one sector for women while the other sectors are unrepresented in terms of women, in terms of numbers, but also in terms of how policies can be more gender friendly.

How is the Next Chapter working to support women to be more engaged with society?

This is a very comprehensive programme that tries to cover all areas of leadership. One part of the programme is The Chapter Life. We have ten chapters across Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland. In these chapter meetings, we bring facilitators, inspirational women speakers, that can talk about their journey into politics and public life. We develop as part of the chapter a community project, a separate idea that is led by women, by the participants. They decide what they want to do, they plan it, they make a proposal together by consensus and then put it forward.

The other part of the programme, which is fundamental, is the capacity building programme, a training programme. It is made up of four modules, each module addresses different aspects of women's leadership and how political engagement can be more effective. The first was about women's roles as champions of peace building. The second was decision-making, politics and public life. The third is about communicating, developing a powerful voice and it is about how you use your image, your body, your body language, to pass a message? The fourth is communicating with impact. So each module provides women with the knowledge, skills and confidence to make the big step, to go forward and try to join boards of directors, to try to do politics or run for elections, or a position of leadership in civil society or a role in that sector.

As part of this capacity building programme we have one-to-one coaching and mentoring. It's for each participant to decide how they can enhance their leadership skills and how they can develop better their own skills to work in a position of leadership. The other part is that we have a number of women working in peace and reconciliation events where we bring together women from all the chapters and encourage them to know each other, but also to share experiences.

The final part is what we call the Young Female Ambassador Forum, which is trying to bring together very young ladies that can face politicians and develop their own leadership, but in a context where they would be exposed to political activity.

How do you see that connecting with the rest of Northern Ireland's society in ways that will change it?

We want to change culture. We want to change the way that we, as women, take part in society. We already have women who through The Next Chapter have realised that it is important for them to participate, so we already have some Chapter participants who are running for elections in the Republic, or joining a board of directors. Beyond the targets, the main thing is being able to inspire and influence this group of women to make the big step.

Clearly one of the objectives of your project is to create more genuinely shared and integrated society. How do you see that broader process taking place?

If you look at the composition of the Chapters, we have women from all sorts of backgrounds. One of the targets of the project, the aims of the project, was to engage with women through their communities. We're doing that. We have ten Chapters, one of them are only in specific rural areas.

The other part is that we wanted to engage with women from ethnic minorities. There is a massive under-representation of women's participation from ethnic minorities in any sort of leadership. We have this special sort of engagement with women with disabilities and we have a group as well, women from LGBT. We have women from both Catholic and Protestant communities, women from the traveller community. So we're trying to target all sorts of women and bring these women together. It's a challenge and an amazing experience, because you also learn from each other.

Some women prefer to live and work in their own specific areas demarcated by cultural identity, but when they come to the Chapter they have the opportunity to meet women from other communities, women from ethnic minorities, women with disabilities and the discussions within the Chapter meetings are amazing because this is when you bring everything together and when we learn from each other.

How should we address that social separation in Northern Ireland more broadly?

We need to create genuine spaces.

What type of spaces?

The Civic Forum was perhaps the best idea in terms of creating an infrastructure where all communities could come together. In the current context, and with the challenges with Brexit, that public forum or Civic Forum could be so handy. When I say 'creating the spaces' it's just providing resources for those spaces. In many instances, civil society organisations are creating those resources, [creating] those spaces with their own resources and they are underfunded and under-resourced, even though they are playing their role. That needs more people involved and the government more involved in this. NICVA provides opportunities for communities to come together and learn and talk, but we need more of those and we need something more established in the sense that it has some sort of political and institutional back-up. The Civic Forum initially was that structure for civil society to have a meaningful say in society.

To what extent do you think shared and integrated housing and education is part of this?

I worked in shared housing many years ago and at that time the Housing Executive was running a programme called The Shared Neighbourhood programme and I had the privilege to work as a cohesion officer in that programme. That made a massive step towards understanding shared housing and towards realising that it was possible. At that time Jennifer Hawthorne was the community cohesion head of the Housing Executive. She had this amazing vision and was a champion of that. She was determined it can happen and it was possible. We need more women and more people like her in leadership positions in institutions like the Housing Executive to be a champion of that and say it is possible. It was a very difficult programme to run. But after 10, 12 years, you realise that there's been a pay off because housing associations are not talking anymore about housing estates, they're talking about shared estates. The concept finally is tipping into society.

I was a development officer in the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and I see integrated education as the way forward. I don't think integrated education excludes other cultural identities. Integrated education enhances in an amazing way all our differences, enhances and celebrates all communities. Integrated education is one of those spaces where you see that it is happening. We cannot have any more of this divided society and integrated education doesn't go against choice, parents' choice, it doesn't go against cultural identity. When you go to an integrated school you see that both communities have things celebrated equally, where children have the

opportunity to say what they are and what they want and it is such an amazing space for children to grow and learn together. Perhaps the next challenge for integrated education is to incorporate all of these policies, initiatives, to integrate children from ethnic minorities.

We have to recognise that one of the challenges in terms of creating a more integrated society is how we deal with the past.

Dealing with the past in a post-conflict society means that you cannot ignore the rights of victims of the conflict. Whatever your definition about who is the victim, you have to be accountable to what is his or her story. The peace process in Northern Ireland managed to get two communities together, two political sides together, but it's only now that the peace process is really happening, because it's only now the rights of the victims are being recognised, or at least [making] an attempt to be recognised.

I did my PhD on the role of civil societies in peace building and I looked at the role of women during the conflict. Until very recently, women didn't feel, or this is what I captured in my interviews, that they were victims of the conflict because they weren't necessarily engaged in violence, or that they had to suffer the consequence of family loss. Fathers who were imprisoned. And all these day by day situations that they had to deal with, but so many here said, "Well, this is what I had to do" and that's it. But that is part of the discourse of being a victim, when your everyday life changed because of the conflict. And some women's organisations are doing amazing work trying to bring these stories back into oral history projects, to recognise and let society know that those women were also victims of the conflict. Whatever you do in terms of transitional justice, to try to accommodate systems within the political system to accommodate the needs of the victims and also to move on, you need to provide those spaces for women to be recognised as victims of the conflict.

Are you saying there should be not so much focus on justice and more focus on listening to the stories of people so that we learn from those experiences?

I think so. Justice has to come with that. There are a huge number of stories that are unknown. There are many gaps in the lives of people who suffered the violence, who have relatives who disappeared, they don't know where they are, they don't know what happened to them. This is the time for victims to be heard. This is the time for victims to get some relief [from] what happened in the past and to have a space to talk. Significant progress has been made in recognising the right of victims through transitional justice mechanisms, but the issue is that not having an Assembly is a big barrier for those initiatives to come forward and for those procedures to take place, to be accountable to the victims and to what's happened in the past. So that's a massive difficulty.

In civil society organisations, victim groups are trying to create those spaces to keep those conversations going while there is no war. But that's not their role. Their role is to support the victims, not to create those spaces of accountability. But in the absence of government someone has to do it.

The other difficult conversation is the constitutional question and how we move forward without creating new tensions.

That's a very difficult question. Northern Ireland - this is from someone who wasn't born or raised here, but after living here for 14 years - this is a very difficult conversation. I'm not sure that everybody is ready to have it, especially because there are other underlying issues that are preventing people to come together into those conversations. People have their own loyalties and commitment to different things and it's their families, the past, the way they understand their own

history. You cannot come in such an abrupt way talking about the constitutional issues until you really address the underlying issues that make people show strength to one or another position. But I do think society's changing and surely we will get there.

Conal McFeely (Interviewed 22nd February, 2019)

Conal McFeely is chief executive of Creggan Enterprises, which owns and manages the Ráth Mór Centre, a not-for-profit retail and business centre.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

As a society still emerging from conflict we must collectively not allow ourselves to make the same political mistakes and the failure of governance that we've done in the past, but sadly I believe that we are at the moment.

One has to look at the history of what gave rise to the conflict here. It was the impact of partition, the fact that we had a system of governance that clearly denied people equality of opportunity and that gave birth to the civil rights movement. We saw then how government and government officials responded, that in many ways led to the conflict. In this particular city [Derry] we know about Bloody Sunday, for example. How that was obviously decided, how it was executed on the day and how it impacted this city. That in many ways gave rise to the conflict, given the fact that people were denied equality of opportunity instead of people looking at the need for creating an equal society. If that had been dealt with at the beginning, we might not have had the conflict. I would see that as a failure of governance.

So you're talking about the political mistakes going back in the past rather than the ones since the Good Friday Agreement.

We have now got a situation where we don't have a working Executive. We now see the British government appearing to undermine its commitments to the Good Friday Agreement. We seem to be making similar mistakes.

We need a proper system of political governance and that system needs to be rooted within a human rights framework if we believe in democracy and we believe in creating democracy. All genuine democracies throughout the world should be rooted within a human rights framework. We need to construct that. That construction was to all intents and purposes, in my view, contained and enshrined within the Good Friday Agreement. The infrastructure is there. The problem is it hasn't been implemented and delivered. Given the effort that went into bringing about all that was contained in the Good Friday Agreement, if that was being implemented that would be one way of strengthening civil society.

If we look at the situation where we are today, we have a situation that if people had implemented the Good Friday Agreement in terms of a Bill of Rights, addressing inequality in economic investment, targeting the most marginalised communities within our societies be they within working class communities - be they loyalist, be they republican, be they nationalist, be they unionist - we could have seen greater movement. It is a great disappointment that within that framework was a Civic Forum concept that the first thing that our politicians did was throw out. You have a situation now where people say, "How do we create a more proactive civic society?". If we had a proactive civic society, if we had an effective Bill of Rights, if we had policies that addressed economic disadvantage, social disadvantage, educational disadvantage and ensured that was applying right across all those communities, then civic society would be strengthened. We would have a more cohesive society and we could have built and strengthened our peace.

Would you want to see the Civic Forum reconstituted?

What we need to do at the moment is create a social movement. That social movement should be demanding of our political elite. Civic society has a significant role to play in a modern democratic society, based on the principles of equality and equity, irrespective of who you are. We live in a society much more diverse. We need to be creating a society where everyone [is equal], irrespective of their political background, their sexual orientation, their ethnic background and so forth. We now live in a multicultural society and we need to reflect that in terms of a wider civic society. When people talk about civic society at the moment they tend to talk about nationalism and unionism. I live and work within a society which is now more diverse than that.

This touches on your earlier comments about the rights that people expected the Good Friday Agreement to deliver. Perhaps the difficulty is that there were interpretations of the Good Friday Agreement that were not spelt out. For example, people looked to Irish language access and use, they looked to same sex marriage and say, well those are rights. Then you come to economic disadvantage, investment across the whole of Northern Ireland and there were perhaps assumptions that the Good Friday Agreement would deliver, but they weren't spelt out. So are you implying that we need to go back and agree a new fundamental agreement that modifies the Good Friday Agreement?

The Good Friday Agreement, to all intents and purposes, [was about] social transformation. I view social transformation as something that looks at the economic, cultural, educational, environmental needs of society. The focus went on the main political parties and it didn't look at society. All the structures we had in place were quite narrow. We need to have policies that address where people are - and lots of people in this society are denied the opportunity to go into the world of work. A lot of people are being denied further education opportunities. The economic agenda rolled-out over the last 20 odd years is quite narrow. It is predicated on one economic model. It needs to be much broader. It needs to embrace the social economy as part of creating a mixed and balanced economy. People have been looking after the few, instead of looking after the many. The private sector will do certain things. But if you look at where people feel left behind, it's those communities that have suffered most as a result of the conflict. It tends to be in working class Protestant and working class Catholic areas where the conflict was fought out. That's where the highest levels of poverty exist and the highest levels of economic inactivity. Our political elite have been following an economic agenda that's not addressing that.

Given that's where we are, how do we move towards a shared and integrated society?

People need to go back to basics and ask themselves, why was the Good Friday Agreement brought about? People wanted an end to conflict. It's much more wider than that. A lot of people who voted for the Good Friday Agreement said "Let's look at the reasons and the history that give rise to conflict". We need to create a framework that would create a situation where we had a society that was a shared society, where people's rights were respected, equality for all. We need a Bill of Rights that looks at the economic, educational, social needs of people.

It sounds as if there's an implication there that the way that you achieve a better outcome in terms of a shared approach and integration is by having an improved society, by having a better society with a growing economy so that rather than different communities fighting for their share of the cake, the cake gets larger so that everyone can get a better bit of it, if you like the analogy.

Yes. Who could disagree about building a more just society, which looks at the needs of its entire society, instead of looking after the few. We have seen the development over the last maybe 18 months of what is known as 'civic nationalism'. Civic nationalism was a project started by one hundred people concerned that we've seen the British government getting into bed with one

political party and people felt that was undermining the Good Friday Agreement. Out of that process eventually grew to a thousand people signing. It had another very important spin-off, the emergence of civic unionism. They are now having a conversation about the impact of Brexit, the impact of austerity, the impact of partition.

That structure led to a major conference in Belfast where 1800 people showed up. That shows that you can have a dialogue developed in a way which is non-threatening. It's got major weaknesses. The vast majority of people that showed up to the event in civic nationalism and now engaging within civic unionism - very few [are] from working class communities. It's people in the world of work, within the professions. The big gap was those people living in marginalised housing estates. There's a big gap in terms of the people who were not in the room, people opposed to the current so-called peace process. It was an important dialogue initiative, which has been started. That needs to go further and engage people who were not in the room. We have seen many government policies, for example, Fresh Start. We have programmes which talk about community transition. But they[are] not talking to the people who they really should be talking to.

How should working class communities be engaged in that process?

Effective dialogue initiatives, where we treat everybody within society with respect. We don't demonise them, we don't marginalise them, we engage them. I would go back to the fact that we would have effective policies which we don't have here at the moment in terms of how do you demonstrate to local communities, where you have levels of unemployment as pronounced as 50 years ago, where there are levels of poverty and deprivation, lack of social housing. The jobs that are coming are not reaching them. There are people applying for jobs who have university degrees, working in call centres. Where does that leave people who don't have university degrees? Or academic abilities? They're not even getting a chance to go for those jobs. You need to have policies where you're creating locally based initiatives, social economy initiatives, co-operatives and so forth, where people see they have a chance to be involved in the development of their communities and wider society.

In terms of dialogue with working class communities, are you suggesting that's best done by outreach rather than expecting people to go to a big conference, for example?

Yes. You have to have a mixed and balanced approach. You have to find creative ways of dealing with that. Dealing with the past keeps coming back to haunt us. Our political system becomes sectarianised. And they're not willing to address it. We need to create that through community based informal structures that give ownership to people who have suffered in terms of the past, who have been hurt, who have suffered the horrors of that conflict, or people have suffered the indignity of long term unemployment, the lack of education, the lack of investment in their communities. These are to me all forms of violence.

You need to find ways of coming up with new systems of engagement. We can deal with that through creative arts, through different approaches, using different media tools. We have to find ways to ensure that voice is given to those voices that have previously been denied or silenced, or quite deliberately forgotten about. I would cite an example which has happened here at Creggan Enterprises where we felt that we had to give voice to women. The *Unheard Voices* programme we're doing here where people are talking about the past, they talk about the people who lost their lives, we wanted to talk about the people who had to carry on after those lives were lost. What was the impact on women? What was the impact on families? As a result, that brought people from right across the divide here to talk about the impact of violence. That is dealing with the past. The vast majority of people who want to deal with the past just want to know what happened, why it

happened, they want to know the context and so forth. That's why I go back to the very first response to your question was that the fact is that we shouldn't be making the mistakes of the past. The mistakes of the past came as a result of failure of political governance, the failure of bringing in security measures that don't work. And in that sort of situation we need to find ways of creating new roots of activity and ways of doing things and that's what I would simply say is one way and means of doing it.

If dealing with the past is one area where we have to be careful of because of the tensions, the other is how we have the conversation about the future constitutional situation in Ireland.

That process has begun through civic nationalism, civic unionism. There's a debate taking place at the moment which is interesting. That debate is taking place because our political elite have got themselves into a corner and they're saying, "How can civic society help us?". Civic society is frustrated that things seem to be going backwards. So they began the debate themselves, so they began to raise their voice. That's an important development. They're doing that in a non-threatening way.

But I want to talk about civil society in its entirety. We need to widen that out. I would like people who have not gone into those rooms also to be part of that engagement. I think that is possible. There are initiatives taking place, through quiet diplomacy, behind the scenes, but people are not encouraged to do that. If they do, they get criticised by the political elite. They're making a mistake. If you begin a process where people feel they are part of that dialogue and their voice is being heard, then people respond positively. That is one way of dealing with it. If we could create a social movement here which is saying we need to hear all those voices – and that's beginning to happen. We talk about civic nationalism, but we also have a growing movement of young people saying, "We are gay, we want to be treated as equals". That movement is taking place not only in the north, it has already taken place within the south of Ireland. That movement is taking place all over the world. We need to be engaged [with] all those progressive movements. If we're going to build a proactive cohesive society here, then it has to be rooted within a human rights framework. A human rights framework doesn't threaten anyone in my view, it's about saying everybody's rights are equal and should be protected.

Unfortunately, that process at the moment has been stalled because of Brexit. It's not the people in Ireland, it's not the people in the north of Ireland, who are to blame for that. People have made a decision within Britain that they want to leave the European Union. That has serious consequences for our peace process. It has serious consequences for our rights. The only way we can stop that is to create a proactive social movement, an inclusive civic society, saying we want change and that's when we will move this society forward.

Linda Ervine (Interviewed 25th February, 2019)

Linda Ervine is a community worker at the Skainos Centre³⁸ in a strongly loyalist part of East Belfast and runs Irish language classes.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

We've got to reach across the divide. Sadly 20 years after the Good Friday Agreement we are still very much a divided community, which frustrates me greatly. There's been a change in narrative. We have become less sectarian where it's about religion and become more sectarian where it's become about politics. The game now is to vilify people because of their politics. Unfortunately that's played out by our politicians because it sadly works well to polarise people. So it is to educate young people to realise that because somebody disagrees with you, it doesn't make them the devil. They have an entitlement to a different point of view. We can still build a Northern Ireland that works and build on the good peace work that has been going on for the last years.

So what do you think structurally we can do to bring people together and to strengthen the civil element within society?

There's been fantastic work done since the Good Friday Agreement and the run up to that. We've brought people together, but we've got beyond that now. We need to create opportunities for people to come together with shared interests. The main focus is not on the difference, the main focus is on what we share.

What can learn from the failure of the Civic Forum?

We need to look at what has happened over the last 20 years because progress has been made. But everybody's frustrated that we haven't made enough progress. I feel it is the way our system is set up. We have two confrontational parties. We didn't get the Civic Forum that had been mentioned as part of the Good Friday Agreement. We know that when the Good Friday Agreement was being discussed, one of the parties, the Women's Coalition, did sterling work in helping to move things forward, to negotiate between parties. The small parties were invaluable at that time, but they have lost their voice. The Good Friday Agreement has been of wonderful value, but it was meant as a sort of a scaffold to lead us on to somewhere else and 20 years on we need to sit down and say, "Okay, we've come this far, what do we need to do to go further?". We can see that having the two big boys, the DUP and Sinn Féin, hasn't worked. We have got to a massive stalemate, so we need to sit down and think, "Okay, this is how people are voting and that's democracy". But there's also a massive amount of people out there who are not voting, so they don't feel engaged with the politics, they don't feel they have a voice. How can we tweak the system to give [them] a greater voice and stop the situation that we're in now happening again?

So how do we create a genuinely shared and integrated society given where we are?

What frustrates me [is that] when we set up as an Irish language centre in a predominantly loyalist area, there were a small number of people who, maybe misguided I feel, but for the sake of our success wanted us to be very much about, "We're taking it back. This is about Protestants reclaiming their language. This is us in opposition to Sinn Féin and republicanism." This would be a way of winning hearts and minds in the unionist community, but it could also have been damaging, it would have been another picking over the scab and we didn't want to do that. So we took a risk and said, "No, that's not what we're about. We're about taking our place within the Irish language

³⁸ [The Skainos Centre](#) is a community centre on Newtownards Road, run as a charity and social enterprise.

community”, which has been very successful because we have been accepted and we are opening our door to anybody.

People have to stop being defensive, stop looking for offence. We have to have graciousness, generosity and recognise there are certain differences, but that's not what's important. What's important is that we share this place and we have to acknowledge that somebody might have a different political aspiration to us, but it doesn't make them the enemy. They have a valid argument and the only thing - I suppose it's getting it back into perspective, the Good Friday Agreement set it up - there would be a referendum if there's a demand for it and then we'll vote and people will decide if they want to stay as part of the UK or do they want to go to the south. Nothing else will do that. And it doesn't matter how much politicians beat drums or whether there's language acts or anything. I suppose education and helping people to understand the full implications of things, this is what matters, this is what works. You don't need to fight every tiny battle about the minutia of things, it will not change the big question.

You mentioned the Irish language that you're teaching. How many people have been students of yours?

We've had hundreds of students over the last six years. This year alone 225 people signed up for classes.

We're talking about a shared society and we've got problems that even the designated areas for shared housing seem to be focal points for conflict, rather than for bringing communities together.

In east Belfast there's been an attack on one, signs put up and people were threatened. There are always going to be difficulties, even in a non-shared housing estate. I know from experience, when you move a lot of people into brand new housing, there's always trouble. People jockey for position. It takes a while for communities to settle down. I don't think we should be surprised when issues come up within new housing developments because there's even more complications when you've got people coming from different political backgrounds. We have to recognise that some people will move in and some people will move out. Give that time and support people within those areas. Just keep moving ahead.

We have to be realistic, we are a post-conflict society, there are going to be issues. There was no magic wand, we must push ahead with our vision for a shared society. The naysayers, the people who want to hold us back, they are always going to be there. I believe the majority of people want to share Northern Ireland, want peace, don't want to go backwards and do not want the stalemate politics that we have, even though unfortunately the biggest parties are Sinn Féin and the DUP. We have to keep reaching out to the rational, reasonable side of our own natures and keep pushing ahead.

Is placing shared housing sites on interface areas the best way?

Peter Shirlow did a really good piece of research³⁹ looking at interface areas and I know this about the interface area that I come from myself. He said the major problem in these areas was not sectarianism. It was poverty, it was addiction, it was poor health, it was a lack of education, it was lack of opportunity. And unfortunately the area I come from became a dumping ground as well. So you would have a lot of people with a lot of problems and that's not going to be helpful. Interface areas need massive help.

³⁹ A detailed [social analysis of interface areas](#) was conducted by E. Mark Cummings, Peter Shirlow, Brendan Browne, Clare Dwyer, Christine E. Merrilees and Laura K. Taylor.

A lot of places in Northern Ireland have moved on and enjoy the dividends of peace. But if you're living in an interface area with a wall down the middle and still low level attacks, you didn't get that chance. They need extra help. There should be massive amounts of money and support poured in there. Their housing should be above average. They should have access to above average facilities. I also think, and this is very important, there should be youth work, work with the adults, that is only dealing with those areas. Not the political representatives, not somebody that lives six streets away, people who are actually living in those particular streets and dealing with the aspects of having the wall or having stones coming over. Those people should be brought together, taken away for weekends. Talked to, helped to develop their area, helped to realise that they may be living on either side of a wall, but the reality is they're facing the same problems and some of those are poverty, but when a stone comes over from somebody on say my side, over to their side and somebody from their side over to my side, we're dealing with the same problems. It's not Catholic youths or Protestant youths, it's *youths* who are bored, to whom this is a night's entertainment and work has to be done for those young people.

I know this is a dangerous area because of vigilantes, but the power those people, to be able to police and protect their own areas, where it's not 'them'uns', it's 'us'es'. We are the people under attack here with both sides of the community because we have to live here and we have to share this ground. If you can do that on a very local level where people know who these young people are and are able to be helped and supported to go round to homes and say, "Look, your Billy was round", or "Your Seamus was round", "We want to live here and we want to live in peace. We don't want them coming down, so can you help us?". It's very, very local level in things that need to be done. If the walls are going to come down and people are going to learn to live in peace with each other, then relationships have to be made first. You can't just take the wall down and say, "Here you are, get on with it".

There's a lot of intervention, a lot of money needs to be spent on skilled people. But if we have politicians coming in, or the community workers from six streets away, I don't think that's helpful. It is the actual people who are there, the actual neighbours, because that's what they are, neighbours.

One of the things that gets in the way of making progress is dealing with the past. How do you think we should be dealing with the past and to what extent can we achieve reconciliation now?

What I've noticed over the last lot of years is we talk more about the past now than we talked about it when it was actually happening.

And talk more about the past than the future.

Yeah. We do and we are really obsessed with it and digging it over and it is a scab that we keep picking and it's not helpful. I don't want to disrespect victims and it's easy for me, I don't have a relative who was killed in one of these atrocities. It's easier for me to move on, but if we want to have a better future then we do need to let go.

The whole thing about the victims and even the legacy and the money where we can't even decide on who is a victim. I feel that we don't need to decide who is a victim. We can self identify as a victim or identify our people as victims. Maybe it would have been helpful to have a day where it's not about glorifying the war, it's not about pointing out, "No, it's not you", it's just that everybody can acknowledge, and maybe that's church services, respectful services, where everybody can acknowledge that we did things to each other that were wrong and we need to move on. It would have to be dealt with very carefully so it wouldn't become glorification of it, or pointing out, "No,

you're not allowed to do it". Maybe some abstract piece of art that would go up that doesn't name people, doesn't name groups, but allows everybody to sign up and say, "What happened here was wrong and all walks of life took part in it". Many of us know that we didn't lift a gun, but we condoned it, or we didn't condemn it. These respectful things would allow some healing for victims.

The next generation is coming along, but they haven't changed the approaches of the past. They seem to be feeling that they have got a debt to people in the past and therefore are unable to be flexible.

I see two extremes in young people and there's a class issue going on here too. That's a big problem and a lot of middle class young people, they're not interested in it. They're not tied into it. A lot of them are embarrassed. Then sadly I see some working class communities, young people on both sides that are still – I feel like I'm talking to people I grew up with, and they weren't even born. Why are they buying into this when it has nothing to do [with them], when it's over, why are they still wanting to fight the war? That is worrying. We need to say, "Look, we need to put this to bed. This is over. This was done. This conflict is gone". People say now we have moved into a cultural war where we are using things to mark out territory and it's not helpful. It isn't helpful. So I suppose some way of respectfully remembering what happened and mourning it, and recognising look, what we did was wrong, you know. That's all sides and that includes the British government and it includes the security forces, it includes loyalist paramilitaries and that includes republican paramilitaries and includes us as members of the public who cheered for our own side.

It has to be a process by which there's a sharing of that memory, rather than separation.

Once we got into the, "Well, we're allowed to respectfully remember, but you're not because you did things", then we're on the road to nowhere. It would have to be done very carefully and sensitively. It's a general acknowledgement, something terrible, terribly wrong happened here and it must not happen again.

We could learn from places like Hiroshima⁴⁰, who had the most terrible, awful thing. We look at Northern Ireland, [it's] like a trip to the sweet shop compared to what happened in those places, yet there are people there who travelled the world saying, "We played our part in this and this must not happen again". It would be much easier to sit in Hiroshima and say, "Look, they are still having deformed children because of all that". If we could look at our tiny conflict and look at places who suffered horrendously, what healing they have been able to do, but they don't want that to happen again. If we could recognise there is always a danger that if we keep this up we will recreate it and create more deaths. I felt during the Troubles that you didn't to lift a gun to be responsible for murder. You just had to feed hatred into other people, especially young people who didn't know any better, who would then go out and lift a gun or plant the bomb.

The other difficult conversation is about the constitutional settlement and how we have a conversation about the future constitutional status.

There does seem to be a change. It's a small change, it's a gradual change, I suppose it's Brexit and it's the Good Friday Agreement and people changing allegiance and exploring new ideas. I don't think it's helpful to say that we can't talk about it. That's pointless and will lead us into a situation where if change does come, which may or may not happen, because that's going to be up to the people of Northern Ireland, then it will be a shock and could then bring us back to war.

⁴⁰ The Japanese city of Hiroshima was destroyed by a United States' atomic bomb in 1945, killing perhaps 150,000 citizens. It is now designated a 'peace city'.

I feel things are changing and not just in Northern Ireland. Things are changing in the UK. We've seen movement in Scotland where there was a referendum which didn't end up in an independent Scotland, but that is a change that has a possibility and might come. If I could personally wave my magic wand, I would like to see a federation of islands. The identity issue with an all Ireland isn't an issue for me. The issue for me would be the practical outcomes, the National Health [Service]. I like the National Health [Service], I like being British, I like enjoying the British way of life. For me, if a constitutional change has to come, I want to keep very close links with the rest of the UK and I wonder is there some way that a new discussion could be opened up. At the minute the only discussion we seem to have is UK or all Ireland. There doesn't seem to be a recognition, could we not have an all Ireland that would be within a close knit British Isles, is that not a possibility? Why could that not happen and I'm not talking about Ireland coming back into the Commonwealth, but it would bring Ireland into closer links with other countries within the UK. Could that not open up a new discussion?

And the key is to have an open book conversation isn't it?

Yeah and for people not to be afraid. This idea that if you talk about it it's going happen. No, if you talk about it, that's just talking about possibilities. Is it that things stay the same or that things could stay the same but be tweaked? But, if the population is changing and we know that the nationalist community is rising, which again doesn't necessarily mean that people will automatically vote for a UK, it doesn't automatically mean that people from the unionist community are going to vote for the UK either, but it's just opening up the discussions especially now because of Brexit. I have been surprised at some of the people from the unionist community who have started to say, "Well actually, I would be in favour of going into Ireland". So there is a change in mindset and the only way we can respectfully deal with that and acknowledge that is by giving people space to talk without attacking them. One of the big issues in Northern Ireland is if people say something different and people they see as stepping out of line, they're not talking the party line, all of a sudden they're a Lundy, they're a traitor. But you're not a Lundy or a traitor, you've got a different point of view which may or may not be a popular point of view. I feel one of the strengths about being part of the UK is a democracy that allows you to express a different point of view.

We have to learn from the Brexit referendum by having an open, civilised and honest conversation about a referendum and what it would mean afterwards.

One of the issues with Brexit is that there was a lot of misinformation. They voted on very narrow information on a very complex topic. I didn't vote because I felt I couldn't make an educated vote. I didn't know which way to vote because I couldn't understand what I was voting for, what I was going to vote for, what I was going to vote against. I didn't want to stay in Europe, didn't want to come out of Europe. I regret now that I didn't vote to stay, but at the time I really listened to the arguments and I rejected the racist ones, but I wasn't sure was Europe a good thing. It went from being the European Union into something different, this kind of state that had a lot of corruption in it, but I wasn't sure that I wanted to come out either. I just couldn't make the call.

Philip Gilliland (Interviewed 27th February, 2019)

Philip Gilliland is a solicitor, practising Anglican and former President of Londonderry Chamber of Commerce.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

We all know Northern Ireland is beholden in politics to very uncivil society like forces. I can't think of anywhere else off the top of my head in Western Europe when people propose something politically, you think how it's going to play first in the most extreme impoverished ghetto parts of our society. I can't see that happening in London or Dublin or Paris or Madrid or anywhere else.

We have an issue that we don't have a traditional political class. For whatever reasons, the people who might otherwise be involved in leadership in society feel they do not want to put their head above the parapet. We have to accept there is fear, a legacy of political violence of a very long time. There is fear on the part of people afraid to say what they really feel, fear in what is still a tribal society, fear of breaking ranks and being accused of being disloyal to your own lot, which sounds very medieval but I think that's the way that most people still think.

We have to encourage people to say whatever they think, to feel empowered to say what they feel, about progress in society. If you are my age, which is 52, you have a long memory of that kind of intimidation, real or imagined. It's there and it's easier sometimes for people to default to doing nothing. So we have to encourage people to stand up and say what they feel. Bad things happen when good people do nothing. It's too easy in Northern Ireland for good people to do nothing.

The Civic Forum failed to continue and wasn't particularly effective when it did exist. So are there structural things we could do to strengthen civic society?

Yeah, I've spent probably eight years in business politics through my involvement as an officer in Londonderry Chamber of Commerce. And I feel that some business organisations are a very good vehicle for leadership in civic society. They allow people to emancipate themselves and say what they feel. My experience of being a business leader is that the audience that we were speaking to - which is not just businesses who are our members here in Derry, and not just the business community, the wider business community, but actually all of society - want to be led. They want leadership. They don't want spokespeople who remind everybody about all the old fears and bogeymen of the past. They want forward leadership.

One of the big obstacles in encouraging people to get involved in a political discussion is an awful lot of people now, I regret to say, think that the political institution of Northern Ireland is broken. The system of politics here is broken.

Business organisations are the ones that were standing up and listened to over Brexit. But there's a lot of different business organisations. Should there be a forum which brings them together so that they can create a more unified voice?

Possibly, yes. The Northern Ireland Chamber and the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce worked very closely together. I don't know too much about the IoD⁴¹ or the CBI. The manufacturers' organisation⁴² headed by Stephen Kelly has been very good at representing manufacturers. I get the sense that even though there are a lot of them, they are all pretty much saying the same thing.

⁴¹ Institute of Directors

⁴² Manufacturing NI

Thank goodness they did get a clear run at the policy makers and the Brexit negotiating team in London and a pretty clear run at the Brexit team in the south as well. They are reasonable, rational and speaking not just about their own members. They're speaking about the economic wellbeing of society going forward. It's a mandate to speak about the entirety of the futures for all of us in society.

How should we move towards a genuinely shared and integrated society?

This is the big question. This is the biggie. Pretty much everybody wants a shared society, except of course for the nationalist and unionist politicians who benefit from a segregated society. Pretty much everything has been tried here to try and get a shared society and it just can't work. Structurally the odds are totally stacked against us getting a shared society. If we look at the forces within Northern Ireland, the British government are not interested. They don't want to show leadership in that area. That's something for apparently us to show leadership over inside Northern Ireland, where you've got Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum politics. Neither side in that institutionalised political setup is prepared to share society for reasons that I can only imagine are selfish. "If I allow people to share their identity, then why would they vote for me?". It is, after all, tribal politics. So it's very difficult to know what to do within Northern Ireland to break that horrendous institutionalised tribal paralysis.

One of the ironies of Northern Ireland is if you look at us politically you would think that we were about to go back to war, but other than a couple of idiots with guns in the dissident side and maybe a smaller number of idiots with guns in the loyalist side, actually 99% of people here get on actually really well, much better than they ever did. Obviously it would be better if we shared our education, but the irony is that when we go into the ballot box we vote for the same old idiots. So to me, despite being in my middle age, I have decided that it is time to be radical. I can't see how we can break the logjam without having fundamental constitutional change.

The opinion polls suggest significant support for integrated schooling, but very little progress is made in terms of the numbers.

I'm a lawyer. The devil is always in the detail. People think it's a good idea but, and it's the 'but' part, the standard middle class response is, "Yeah, it sounds great but I might do it for primary school but I wouldn't risk sending little Jonny to a grammar school", or "What does it actually mean?". Then you have the integrated sector and how good is it at second level in terms of standards? Actually, it's good. Then you've got Catholic schools, you've got controlled schools or voluntary grammars, some of which are entirely one flavour only, but some of which have managed to achieve a decent mix despite their ethos. What is a decent mix? I would say anything above 20% is a pretty decent mix and the difference, as a parent of three children, two of whom have been through school with an over 20% mix, and one of them went to school that didn't and she was of the minority tribe, there's a *huge* difference between kids who grow up in a shared schooling and kids that don't. It's the environment they're cultured in. Kids who have gone through the mono environment have to unlearn all of those world views that they received when they leave, if they're lucky. People who didn't go to a school in a mono environment don't have to unlearn those things because they never learned them in the first place.

We have - I don't know what the current stat is - but something like 60,000 or 70,000 too many school places⁴³. I used to be chair on a board of governors of a religiously mixed primary school. The annual subvention per child is continuing to reduce. That's just clearly nuts. Every school can't perform while we have 70,000 too many school places. Surely somebody needs to say, "Isn't the problem that we've got 70,000 too many school places?". Then we have to work out what is the best

⁴³ In 2015, schools had 70,000 surplus places. The number of surplus places has since reduced and is now reported to have fallen to 50,000 surplus places.

way to rationalise schools and when we rationalise schools guess what? We're going to actually have to mix a few of them because it's the only way to do it. Some situations you can rationalise within a tribe, in more country places, certainly in the west you are going to have to have multi flavoured schools. I'm not against ethos education provided the dominant ethos understands it has to accommodate kids who aren't of that ethos. If we're being properly radical about it, we might even incentivise using something akin to anti-discrimination legislation, if a school is not able to attract an appropriate minority of its students from the non-ethos background then you get penalised financially. Put the onus on the school to get rid of the chill. There are examples of Catholic ethos schools that have happily over 20% Protestant kids and vice versa. Why shouldn't we reward those guys?

Now talking of problem areas, and you are a lawyer so this is right up your street, how do we deal with the past in a way that takes us forward?

You're asking all easy questions.

And what do we do about reconciliation?

The two things are very closely linked. I'm not a criminal lawyer so I can't answer directly about the technicalities, but my sense of the administration of justice and the past is that it's just so vast and so difficult a task to apply legal justice to events of over 20 years ago, that it's just not practical. You've got how many unsolved murders and then multiply that by a factor of probably 20 or 30 or more for other unsolved acts of violence. Many of the witnesses are dead, and many of the witnesses who are still alive with the passage of time their memories may be playing tricks on them. They may not even remember what they think they remember etc. What is the truth?

With a very heavy heart I can't see us going back to the administration of justice in the technical sense, in the juridical sense, to deal with the past. All of us over the age of probably 45 have to a lesser or greater degree suffered some degree of trauma as a result of violence. Obviously some people suffered vast trauma and others only very mild peripheral trauma, but we're all a part of it. I would say a healthy majority of people over the age of 45 carry with them some degree of trauma about the past. We all grew up here.

What is the right way to deal with that? Given that the administration of justice in the technical sense is probably not going to deliver the answers, certainly not going to deliver a lot of the truth, what actually is required in my view, if it were possible, is a policy of truth. Why don't the forces of the state, the government, why don't Sinn Féin or the IRA, why don't the loyalist paramilitaries and politicians, why don't they tell us what happened? I can think of loads of people who were killed and nobody has a clue who killed them and why they were killed. Well somebody knows. It's far, far too late for the people who pulled the trigger and the people who ordered them to pull the triggers, it's too late for them to go to jail. Jail is not the point. But what would be extremely good for the healing process is to know, "Well, why did you pull the trigger? What was it in you that said that was a good idea? And were you just following orders? Why did you follow orders? And the person that gave you the order, why did you give the orders? Why did you think that was a good idea?"

If you're going to have a truth process you have to focus on not re-traumatising people, which means you probably have to invest very substantially in psychological support services alongside that process.

That's a fair point, but it has to be an opt-in process. Every victim will want to deal with this differently. Some victims will say, "I'm up for that, I'm ready for it" and others will say, "No, that will

just rake over the coals and I don't want it". It has to be an opt-in process. Do you want to be a part of this? We may not be able to achieve anything at all but is it worth being a part of or not? Every victim would have to answer that question. People who were the perpetrators, for want of a better description, what's the incentive to do it? I would say one of the incentives for them to do it, and this is a generalisation and I don't know many people who openly say they were perpetrators, but I imagine the toll on their own mental health must be *phenomenal*.

You know, very, very few people who got involved in a paramilitary activity or violence perpetrated by the state, were what you might call a sociopath. 99% of people who got involved, for whatever reason, believed they were doing the right thing. A part of that was the dehumanisation of the person who was going to be your victim. Now that we're talking to each other again, it must be quite challenging for the perpetrator to find a humanised person associated with their victim. When the perpetrator goes home and they say, "Goodness me, and I did that his brother. Why did I do it?". There's a tremendous toll on their own mental health and an awful lot of this is in the territory of mental health support. We are quite a damaged society, particularly for people over the age of 45 and I am told there are intra family consequences for the next generation which may or may not explain one of the reasons why we have such a high suicide rate amongst young people. Is there some connection there? I don't know.

And the last difficult question is, how do we have the constitutional conversation in ways that aren't threatening to the fabric of our society?

Actually that's the easy conversation. We've been given a gift in this process which is called Brexit, because it's allowed those of us who are from a Protestant background, which is me, to be able to talk about the heresy of the united Ireland in a way that is not heresy. It's allowed us to talk about the possibility of constitutional change in a way that doesn't seem to be disloyal to the tribe, because clearly for many of us, Brexit is nuts. That sounds very disrespectful to people. I should really retract that. People are entitled to their view, if they think it's the right thing to do, brilliant. Fill your boots. That's grand, but it clearly has changed the dynamic between how we deal with our neighbours in the south and how we deal with our neighbours in Britain. It's shone a light on the fact that the British don't really know or care very much about Northern Ireland. We knew that anyway.

This has shone a light on the fact that those of us whose businesses are totally integrated in the Republic's economy - which mine is - to have a future where that presence in the Irish market is impeded is a threat to jobs and our livelihoods and so we're going to vote with our economic future. It's allowed a lot of us to question, why is it we were unionist in the first place? In the past many of us who were unionist thought we were more socially liberal and there was a fear of theocracy. That's totally changed. We're now the theocrats, apparently. I'm not. I want a socially liberal world. The idea of the socially conservative moral stuff coming out of unionism is utterly abhorrent to me and frankly, ironically, rather un-British too. We've got all sorts of reasons now to talk about the constitutional issue in a way that wasn't open to us.

Now occasionally when you have conversations with people who you happen to know are Protestants, those sorts of conversations over the last couple of years are actually, "I don't really care whether we've a united Ireland or not. I just don't want it to be under the heel of Sinn Féin, that's it. If it's not under the heel of Sinn Féin, I don't really care, I'm happy with it. I don't mind". There's an awful lot more hot air around that issue than people might expect. If there were a border poll and if it were carried, yes there would be some people who would be upset about it, but I don't see it turning into a war, not at all.

Tina Merron (Interviewed 29th March, 2019)

Tina Merron is chief executive of the Integrated Education Fund.

How do you think we should strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

I think the majority of people in Northern Ireland want a shared future and a united community. We need to give civil society more of a say. We need to encourage people to speak up, especially young people, and then when we do get them to speak up we have to listen to them.

Integrated education has been around for the last 35 years and is a model for wider society. It empowers parents, communities and young people and encourages people to speak up. It encourages children to look at what unites us as opposed to what divides us. Integrated schools are safe spaces to have these discussions. Children from different traditions sit side by side, day by day, learning about each other from each other. This experience removes any fear of other traditions and different cultures and enables them to express their identity. This has a ripple effect. Parents and grandparents are waiting at the school gates for the children and they get to know each other. This helps remove the sense of fear of the other.

A lot of people might not understand much about the ethos of integrated education if they haven't got children that have gone there or if they haven't themselves gone there.

The ethos is about encouraging children to talk about themselves. It's about them being open about discussion. It's not about burying things under the carpet. It's an opportunity for them to express themselves, open discussions about different issues and we encourage them at every stage to have these discussions. It is about encouraging people to have their say, not just the children, it's the parents too.

But it's not just about people from the two traditions, it's broader isn't it?

It's about those from all faiths and those from no faiths. It's about them coming together and there are opportunities through the parents' council, through parents groups to have these discussions. We have the integratemyschool.com website where parents who want their school to be integrated can register their interest. Once that gets to 20% the board of governors of the school must have a parental ballot for all the parents of the school and they can decide if they want to transform the school and become integrated. We work with independent researchers to establish a body called Community Conversations⁴⁴, which empowers parents and the wider community to become involved in education, especially in area planning of education, and we're hoping this model will be embedded in area planning. This is a tool and a mechanism and really adduces independent facilitators, focus groups and research and also micro polls to assess what the area wants. Because it's independent of the education authorities there is an opportunity for this to be taken as what the local community wants. We're hoping this will be embedded, but it can be used for other areas too - this bottom up approach could be used for difficult issues around health or whatever.

That feeds into what we're talking about in terms of civil society. Do you see integrated schools as being part of that conversation about civil society?

Very much so. We encourage politicians to go into integrated schools and have these conversations. It is very important for young people to vote, but young people are more interested in social issues – health, wellbeing, the environment - and less interested in the constitutional issues. But they have to

⁴⁴ [The Community Conversations Toolkit](#)

feel their voice is heard. Once it is being heard I think they certainly would be very interested and involved in the future of Northern Ireland and voting. We want to have strong citizens who at the end of day are reflective and confident and can have their say.

Over the last 20 years we've had the different experiences of the north and the south in the sense that Northern Ireland had a Civic Forum that didn't work ultimately, and in the south there's been the Citizens' Assembly which has had significant impact.

Northern Ireland needs time to grow. If you're a young person now, why would you be interested in politics - between the collapse of the Assembly, Brexit, Westminster. There's nothing there to encourage people to become involved. It is around the social issues that people will want to be involved, especially young people. If we can build a consensus on what unites us around those issues we will be able to move forward.

My observation from a distance is that within some post-primary integrated schools there have been active conversations around the issues that the Citizens' Assembly in the south has been addressing around reproductive rights and same sex marriage. Is that a reasonable assessment?

Oh very much so. Post-primary level schools are very interested in this work and they have a strong LGBT group in schools as well.

Is that part of the ethos of integrated schooling that you want to empower young people to be active citizens?

Oh very much so. We need young people to enter politics. It's 20 years since the Good Friday Agreement, so anybody under the age of 30 is less likely to be aware or directly impacted by the Troubles. We need these young people to become the politicians of the future.

Now I know probably what you're going to say to the next question which is, how do you think Northern Ireland should move towards a more shared and integrated society. You're obviously going to say integrated schools are at the heart of that.

I am, but I'm also going to say that there has been very good positive work towards this goal. However, some areas really haven't been touched. Education and shared housing are linked. If there's an integrated school in the area there's a strong impact on the social makeup of that area. The more shared housing [there] is, the more the demand for integrated education. This all helps create a more shared society. However, in the last 20 years there has been no structural change in education and we need to move forward on this. The education system is split into four management types. There is Irish medium, integrated, Catholic maintained and controlled. And this is subsequently - and then you've a further split between grammar and secondary schools. And then this is supported by at least six different administrative bodies who are all funded out of the education budget. So it's time for a change because there's too much duplication and we, the IEF, would like a single unified education system which should be more efficient.

We would strongly advocate to streamline schools on a cross community basis where the curriculum and ethos is developed, so the local school is welcoming and open to all and perceived to be that way. We'd argue that all new schools built should be cross community schools. There should be one administrative body, not six. There should be a single provision for teacher training. There's a whole load of issues. These are all big issues, part of this systemic change, but no party has been willing to look at these because they are so big. At this stage we need some kind of independent commission to look at these different areas and provide support so we can have a plan going forward. A lot of

people say “Oh not another not another commission” or, “Not another plan is going to sit on the department shelves”, but these areas have never been looked at. It's about structural change. If we can get them looked at it certainly would move us towards a genuinely shared and integrated society.

Do you have evidence that integrated schools create a more harmonious society?

Integrated education has been recognised by a growing body of academic research and international evidence. The contact theory has a positive impact on [children's] attitude and their attitude to others. It is providing one pathway to heal division and promote a less sectarian perspective on things, thus help contributing to the overall peace process.

You mentioned shared housing. But there have been problems with some of the shared housing schemes because they, rather than integrating different people from different backgrounds, sometimes become a territory for conflict in terms of whose ownership they are under in terms of paramilitary groups. How should we address that?

I suppose go back to basics. Look to see why people wanted to become part of this shared future. Integrated schools haven't always had the easiest start. There'll always be people there who want to try and stop what's uniting us and look again to see what's dividing us. They just need to be given time and get an opportunity for the residents to talk.

Integrated schools are also subject to some of these pressures with paramilitary flags sometimes being placed outside integrated schools that suggest they're not actually genuinely cross community, but should belong to one community or another. How do you deal with that?

The schools first of all need to talk to the children and explain a bit about it. Then they need to talk to the parents and it's great if they can bring the parents into the school to explain what they're planning to do. You find a lot of parents who have children in integrated schools are very supportive because they've chosen integrated schools because that's what they want for their child. It's really by talking and making sure everybody understands what's happened and if they need to bring in specific bodies, authorities to remove flags, or stuff, that's up to the authorities to do that.

And is that the type of conversation that takes place with schools and the PSNI about the need to remove flags?

It depends where. Some integrated schools don't have any of these issues. Others do. Most schools don't, but they do have issues in the very early days of trying to encourage everybody that this is the right path to go down. Some of the myths come out about integrated education, “Oh our children have to learn Irish”. It's about letting people have an opportunity to hear what's happening, understand what's happening, providing information and then they can make their own decision.

This is part of the question of how education goes forward. Do we teach about the past? Can make progress by considering what's happened in the past and to what extent can we use the past to reconcile different communities?

We must recognise the hurt and pain and provide an opportunity to make victims' lives more comfortable, as well as [provide] an opportunity for them to talk, but also for them to talk to young people. These are difficult issues which need to be aired in safe spaces. Integrated schools provide those safe spaces. We need to have an opportunity for these conversations to take place, but young people are less interested in them. They want to move on to social issues, but we need to remember what happened in the past to enable a division to be healed. So it's important that we do move on,

but not to forget what has happened. I suggest it's an opportunity for people to talk about their experiences and talk to young people.

Do you think that's true that young people are not as interested in what happened in the Troubles? That doesn't fit with my experience where actually often they are very interested but not necessarily interested in the way it's been taught.

I can only speak from personal experience. My children are interested in the Troubles and what has happened, but what they get very annoyed about and which turns them off is when it starts going into the political side of things. They are not interested about the arguments that are happening up in the Assembly. They are not interested in the constitutional – they are interested in the social issues. So we keep saying, let's go back to the areas that unite us and look at the social issues.

My observation would be that they're often interested in personal stories. Perhaps that creates a way to deal with the past by explaining that people have shared experiences even though they come from different communities.

Yes, that would be very good. If there was the opportunity for victims in the past to go into schools – all schools, not just integrated schools – and feel welcome there and have the opportunity to talk, it would be very good for the young people and as well for the victims as well.

What do you feel about the shared education proposals, such as shared campuses that do not involve an integrated school?

We have supported shared education for a long time before it was funded by the government. We were doing it for 10 years in advance of that. I feel it's very important for children to get this opportunity. The only thing we would say is that it's not sustainable in the longer term, because it takes such funding. It would be really important if there was a plan five years down the road, 10 years, for the two schools to come together, especially schools that are smaller. It would be a really good way forward. I don't expect any of this to happen overnight, but it should be a gradual process.

The other big challenge, apart from the past, is the future. How do we have the conversation in ways that are friendly and non-threatening about the future of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland?

It's about encouraging people to speak up. It's about building awareness, strengthening the conversation, letting people understand. The bottom up approach is very important. Let's see what unites us as opposed to what divides us. Look at a social based agenda and it is back to the first question you asked, how do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

How do integrated schools deal with the constitutional question?

All children would be encouraged to give their views.

Studies show that there's been an increase in community tension with unionists blaming nationalists and republicans for, in their view, ramping up the rhetoric around the future of the border, while nationalists and republicans blame unionists for, as they see it, causing Brexit to be imposed upon us. So how do those community tensions get played out in integrated schools and how do the principals deal with those tensions as they surface?

To be honest I'm not really sure if they actually have been raised that much.

But presumably there must be instances within integrated schools where there are these community tensions, people from different backgrounds perhaps coming at post-primary level that haven't gone through integrated schools at primary level. How do the schools deal with those tensions?

Well for children who have gone to a school that's not integrated and then come into a post-primary school, the post-primary wouldn't be aware of this and they would bring the children together and they would have a subject on the curriculum for this and they bring the children together and take it from the very beginning and encourage the children to talk through the various issues. It's part and parcel and built into the ethos of the part and parcel of everything they do.

Maeve McLaughlin (Interviewed 11th February, 2019)

Maeve McLaughlin is manager of the Conflict Transformation Peacebuilding Project, also called "The Derry Model", which is based in the Bloody Sunday Museum. She is a former Sinn Féin MLA and councillor.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

The strengthening of any society has to be based on a rights-based agenda. I believe that if the legislative framework isn't in place to protect, support, give redress to residents, to people in society, that we're missing a trick and we've missed that debate in many ways. Rights have to be looked at in the broadest possible way. We, I think for too long, looked at rights simply as human rights. The debate onus was on the positive things around development of a Bill of Rights, understanding that rights are social, they're economic, but they have to be enshrined in law and I think that whilst we can have all the engagements if you like across sections of society, that if we don't have that legislative framework – I found that growing up particularly in this community in the Bogside where the whole issue of sectarianism was not something that defined me, it's something that I felt became a symptom of our conflict here. But my overview of the conflict was about injustice. Whilst I recognise that a lot of very important engagements and projects and initiatives took place across what was perceived as both communities, if that rights based agenda wasn't addressed, people simply went into their own communities. Certainly as a republican growing up in the Bogside, that sense of "I don't have redress. I don't have protection in law", was very strong for me. So to strengthen civic society we have to do it on the basis of that framework, which is the broadest possible rights based agenda that we can move towards.

That sounds to me as if you're saying that unless we have the framework for rights first, we can't have civil society functioning. Whereas I would have hoped that we could have civil society functioning more effectively to create a recognition of the need to move forward on rights.

I think we do have civil society functioning to a degree. In this city it's a good example of it, that it works and there's a lot of work going in and Derry's looked at as an example of good practice of active participation of standing up and being heard. We could all say it could be better and when you have that coupled with objective need, that brings its own challenges to civil society. I don't think it is an either/or, but I do believe that if we miss that legislation, which ultimately means we can have all of the functioning, civil society and civic society that we need, but if a person believes or a section of society believes that their rights are not enshrined or not protected or not able to be redressed, then we are missing a trick. People have to have a sense that there's justice in the system.

You say that Derry is a model and the obvious example there is the issues around parading. What can the rest of Northern Ireland learn in terms of strengthening civil society from the lessons and sorting out of parading in Derry?

It's back to this notion of what have we done in the city? What have we managed to achieve in the city? From my perspective, it is not one thing. We couldn't say the Derry Model, for example, equals this set of circumstances or experience. It's a mixture. It's our demographics. In some ways we had leadership, we had people who were willing to take risks. We have experiences: I wouldn't be naive enough to say we can simply lift those experiences and tailor them into other areas. But we have templates, we have a sense of people who were willing to take risks. That is a big important message for all our communities. It's how we use those experiences to cascade that learning to other places.

In terms of parading one of the big pieces coming out of engagement we're doing in Derry is the relationship that the Apprentice Boys have in the city with the residents groups. The relationship that we have here in the Museum of Free Derry⁴⁵ with the Siege Museum⁴⁶ is unique. Also, in the city was the role of the business community and the fact that elements of the business community played a very proactive role in trying to reach an accommodation. The reality is that's not going to simply translate to other areas because frankly, if it doesn't impact on a business and doesn't hit a business person in their pocket, they will not want to be dragged to the table to negotiate these things. But we have experiences, we have templates. If we think about the parading issue, even the process of developing what some people will call an accommodation, some people will call an agreement, was a process where even down to the wording that was used that other areas can learn by.

The whole debate about when you have rights you have responsibilities was a big lesson in the city and again, as somebody who would have been very involved with the residents group locally, that was a challenge for all sorts of people in all sorts of different communities. If you think about the debate around The Diamond and marching round The Diamond. The Diamond should be – and I don't even like using words like that – but it should be perceived as your city centre and a neutral place to be. What Derry was able to do at that stage was say, “You're entitled to have your commemoration, but you also need to look at the rights and responsibilities of other smaller, more rural areas”. So Derry was almost able to act as big brother, big sister in that regard.

One religious leader said to me that one of the reasons why the situation has been resolved, one of those special factors about Derry, was that Derry is a nationalist/republican city. So there wasn't that sense of who owns the place and that might mitigate against those lessons being learned elsewhere.

I do agree that. The siege of Derry happened on the west bank of the city and therefore people who wanted to commemorate, which they are absolutely entitled to do, also knew that that engagement had to take place for them to commemorate what was a significant event for large sections of the community.

There is an element within republicanism about risk taking and saying as we move this society on, this is certainly not about doing unto you what was done unto us. I wouldn't say that was foolproof across republicanism because there's a lot of learning that went on within republicanism and nationalism. But I have no doubt that the fact that it was a republican city [meant] that we were collectively able to take those risks. And also importantly I think upheld the rights of smaller, more vulnerable, beleaguered communities like Bellaghy, like the Ormeau Road, like parts of Belfast. Agreements or accommodations are fragile and they're as good as the time that's in it, but it's there in place and can kick-in when need be. When we look at the Maiden City Accord⁴⁷ with the Bands Forum - processes of potentially sanctioning or disciplining individual band members or entire bands is in place, and that was a very significant message to the city that people were taking this seriously. All of the hangers-on that were coming with some of the events, people being drunk, the community could take control of that through that Maiden City Accord.

⁴⁵ [The Museum of Free Derry](#) tells the stories of Bloody Sunday, the Battle of the Bogside and Operation Motorman and is located in Derry's Bogside.

⁴⁶ [The Siege Museum](#) tells the story of the siege of Derry and is located in the premises of the Apprentice Boys of Derry, in the centre of Londonderry.

⁴⁷ [The Maiden City Accord](#) is an agreement by which the loyal order bands will conduct peaceful parades in the Derry-Londonderry city centre, with the approval of local residents. It was an accommodation that brought to an end a long history of parading conflict in the city.

What you're saying is that the solution to parading the city came out of nationalists and republicans recognising the rights of bands to march in the city, to celebrate their culture and that was equated with responsibilities within the bands to ensure good behaviour on both sides.

Yeah. It also was probably spurred on by a commitment to the city and by people who genuinely wanted to be in a better place. There was an element of that and [for] some of the Apprentice Boys that would be their sense as well. They love the city, they wanted the city to be perceived and presented in a very positive light, but there's no doubt that the demographics, the largely republican/nationalist city, spurred on those conversations. Importantly, was that big debate around when you have rights you also have responsibilities.

So how do we achieve social transformation in ways that allow all of society to move forward?

The debate around what we've been doing in the city hasn't been delivering the outcomes that we need. That debate that we've all been through over a number of years round the city's One Plan and the huge learning from that, things like social transformation and regeneration are not just economic. Transformation has to be economic, social and physical, addressing objective need. That's the key bit. While we continue to have huge pockets of deprivation in the city, in the absence of that rights based framework for redress, we will not change the outcomes until we start targeting that need. I remember the debates in the city where sections of society did not like that debate, did not like the fact that we collectively had to do things differently and certainly didn't like the notion that we have to target need. But it was very clear that if we keep doing what we're doing, we're going into the same outcomes.

Social transformation, regeneration is, in the widest possible sense, a bit like rights. For example, the Magee debate, where we have talked for many years about this is not just bums on seats. This cannot be moving to X amount of students by 2025 if you don't address the types of courses that are needed to ensure that those young people or older people stay in the city or come back to the city and link them up with job opportunities. It's almost as if we thought for a while, if we shout it will come, and it's much deeper than that. It's the broadest possible sense of defining what transformation and regeneration is and targeting the need that exists.

If we're talking about targeting need, we are talking fundamentally about how the economy works. Is there an implication from what you're saying that a lot of the tensions between communities would be resolved if we had a better economy - that we have to get the economy right if we're going to achieve better social relations?

I think we do. People's quality of life is critical to this. People moving beyond the benefit culture and the dire poverty that it puts people into. But that's about what type of economy do we need. We had these debates where the likes of Invest NI - and I have been critical of them over many years - didn't look at the particular set of circumstances that we have here. I'm not saying it's all [the fault of] INI, because as a city we didn't work out what our unique selling point was. If we can touch the surface around there's more jobs coming and that's great and not really identify what they are, why they're needed, who are they for, what's the outcomes, are they sustainable? We've seen generations of people who went into, the textile industries is the obvious one, but moved into all sorts of other jobs that were badly paid and companies pulled out. So yes, the type of economy is key. That is around the skill set because we can have announcements about really good high paid quality work, we all know this because we've been around enough corners to know it, that there's a skills mismatch.

I haven't got quite in my mind how the strengthening of the economy will work through in terms of improving the shared experiences of communities that are currently divided.

I reflect on my own situation. If all of the work that you do, and I have done a lot of work over the years, both as a teenager and right through on a cross-community basis both as youth worker and as person who participated in a number of those programmes and initiatives, and I've always had the view that that was all sound, important work. But if it didn't address - and I always felt like you were just going back into your own place, you're just going back into your own place. So your set of circumstances, okay, you might know more protestant/unionist/loyalists as a result of a week in Holland or a week in England or a camp somewhere, but you're going back into your own set of circumstances. So [if] your set of circumstances is less better than somebody else and yet you can't get access to those jobs, that education, way back, the right to vote, the right to challenge. The right to challenge is an important one too in terms of justice. There is nothing in the legal system that supported me as a young person growing up in the Bogside to say, "I want to take that case to find out what happened here". So, whilst you have a disparity in economic opportunities for one section of society over another, then you have the root cause of... not conflict, but disaffection.

We haven't really today though got a situation where Protestants are favoured over Catholics. You've got pretty well 50/50 in terms of the workplace spread. You've got probably a higher educational outcome amongst Catholic teenagers than you do amongst Protestant teenagers. Are you saying that having more shared workplaces is a practical way of breaking down a lot of those community tensions?

I am not opposed to shared workplaces, shared education, integrated education. It all has its place. But the framework needs to be in place as well. The legislative framework has to be in place to protect those rights and you're right to point out that things have changed. The dynamics in the city have changed and we now have a community that are quite nervous and apprehensive about what that future would be and that things like the civil rights debate where they would perceive that civil rights were just hijacked by republicans for a particular aim, or the exodus debate. And I suppose the big message is that this isn't about doing unto a community what was done unto another community, and that is a challenge. It's a challenge in this city, I think, because there is that nervousness there. I do labour on the point that all of those pieces are part of coming out of conflict. They're all sound, good and positive initiatives in their own right, but you have to address the wider framework to protect and enhance everyone.

One of the other barriers to us making progress is the legacy issue. How can we deal with the past in a way that takes us forward? How does reconciliation fit within that?

Truth is a big part of this. In the work I'm doing with the Derry Model that is a common denominator in a lot of conversations I'm having with families, that justice has very many shades. People have different interpretations of justice. If we even look at the issue here, Bloody Sunday, for the large majority of families the apology from David Cameron was enough to let them get on with the rest their lives and there are people that want prosecutions. There's people have different views about what those prosecutions will come to. When I talk to the Dublin/Monaghan families they will say "We don't know where we fit into in terms of the legacy process in the six counties. We're outside that and we don't know how we feed in". But the uniting factor is the need for truth. Importantly, that public apology from David Cameron was *huge* in relation to conflict transformation in the city because it gave people an assurance, it gave people a confidence, it gave people a sense of "Oh my God, in the history of relationships between England and Ireland, this is huge". We've never capitalised enough on that, but the work that I've been doing around apologies is that there has been hundreds of apologies from the IRA, from loyalist groupings, from British ministers. I wasn't

aware until last year that one of the British junior ministers had apologised about the McGurk's Bar⁴⁸ massacre, but it was like twenty past eleven in the House of Commons at night. Nobody there. And it meant nothing to the families. So an apology has to be attached to a process and in Derry it's attached to the inquiry.

There's lessons from that. The whole notion of truth and truth recovery is important. What I find sometimes is that there's a lot of that going on in rooms and in projects and in initiatives which again, probably just needs to be harnessed. I suppose opening up the funding for the inquests needs to kick in to allow people to get that sense of, "This is what happened. This is my truth". And truth will be hard.

But there's conflict over what truth is. Do we need to strive for objective truth, or do we accept that there are different views of what was true?

I think we agree that there's different views of what was true. We have to agree there's a number of different narratives in this conflict. For example, the recent engagement that I did with former British soldiers. I know that people would think that's really strange bedfellows and people may have been quite resistant to it. But, for those guys who all were different age groups, were all in different regiments, but all served here, it turned every stereotype on its head, both for them and for ex-combatants and for victims of British Army violence. What they heard here was people's truths. They came to serve here mostly [for] economic [reasons] and to get a job, to get away from their father a lot of times, but came here with a perception of what this place was and what their role was and either left or came to it later, that that was completely at odds with what was actually happening. So they were exposed to a whole lot of truths.

One of the engagements was with a former Green Jacket whose regiment were accused of the murder of Kathleen Thompson in Creggan. And that was a challenging conversation for the individual soldier because he genuinely believed that that regiment were not as bad as others. That was his reality, his truth and it was emotional for him as it was for the family involved. I think we need to accept that we have different narratives, but it's okay. One of the things this city is probably good at, is saying, "Here's our story up until 1972 in the Museum of Free Derry, here's the story of the Siege". That's fine. And what I find, even in engagement with loyalism, they are quite shocked that that could happen here and could for the most part be ok.

Hanging over everything is the constitutional situation. How do we have the conversation over the future constitutional arrangements of the islands in a manner that is open, inclusive, not threatening?

We all have to become persuaders across society. I am, as an Irish republican, firmly of the view that it just makes sense economically, socially that we work a system of governance that is about self-determination and is about the island of Ireland co-operating and working together. It's about dispelling myths as well. People can tend to look at this debate and think, "Yous just want to tag on to Dublin", and that's as far removed as anything. Sometimes it's about who is best to be the persuaders.

I have no doubt that republicans can get into rooms, as I can, with working class loyalists, with groups aligned to the UDA and UVF, and we can have the conversations and make the connections from a working class perspective. And work collectively on some of those issues. But I'm pragmatic

⁴⁸ McGurk's bar in Belfast was blown up in 1972 by a bomb planted by the Ulster Volunteer Force, allegedly with the support and involvement of British state agents.

enough to know that it might not always have to be republicans in those rooms to do that and I can see the nervousness with the PUL community locally here.

So there's a collective responsibility on all of us to say, "Right. Let's put this on the table. If this issue is about exodus, if this issue is about civil rights, if this issue is just the hurt that has been caused as a result of the conflict, let's get it out here". But the right message has to be as we move forward again, it is not about doing unto that community what was done unto the community that I grew up in and that's a big message. Now who's best to deliver it is another debate. But we all have to become the persuaders and then there's practical things like, for example, the issue of health, which is the one that comes up constantly when people talk about any reunification issue, that people need to get a sense of this again is not tagging on to the 26 counties per se, it's about a completely new system of delivering. And that requires massive work, but it also requires practical examples to people of how it will work.

In the city we have managed to do more strategic level around things like the Cancer Centre⁴⁹, even the Children's Hospital link⁵⁰, Belfast-Dublin link, the Air Ambulance issue⁵¹. Those debates are there, there's models, but for the most part when it hit people in their back pocket. I had a woman just a few days ago saying she had to take her granddaughter to a doctor in Donegal and it was €50 before anything even happened. And that's just completely alien to people here. So we have to ensure that people get a sense of here's practically how this would work out. And it's not just a case of saying, "Ah now, the Brits are all gone. Now there's no border and we're just tagged on and that's fine". So that's not what it's about. And I do think there's republicans who would have a sense of, "Is that what it's about?". That it's just that tag on, when the focus for so many years was fighting the Brits out of the country. But any right thinking strategic activist would have their head round this, this is a whole shift. This is a whole new system of governance. So in answer to your question, we have to become the persuaders. Who are the persuaders? It's a mixed bag. And again, I know we refer to the recent conference in Belfast, all shades of nationalism and republicanism there and that's potentially a good model of how we can debate out, thrash out and lobby for that increased awareness as well.

Are you saying that that conversation needs to take place with a reasonably open agenda in terms of what a new settlement would look like when you're discussing these things with loyalists and unionists?

I think so. Even the wording. When I talk to loyalists about this, they say, "I agree there, like". And even that word is important. Republicans have a set of ideals, principles, which have always been about that 32 counties socialist Republic. We have had from ever I remember, those discussions about what that looks like, how do you do that, how do you manage it, it's not just a tag on. What does a new economic system look like? What does a new health system look like? So that's not going to shift and I wouldn't want it to shift, but there's others that have a key role in all of that as well and the broader the voice, the broader the representative voice that can get into rooms and get into conversations, the better.

⁴⁹ The North West Cancer Centre is a cross-border healthcare facility, located in Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry.

⁵⁰ A children's heart surgery unit serving patients from Northern Ireland as well as the Republic is located in Crumlin in Dublin.

⁵¹ A study was conducted into all-island air ambulance service, before Northern Ireland initiated its own Northern Ireland air ambulance service.

Anthony Russell (Interviewed 14th March, 2019)

Anthony Russell is a trustee of the Thomas D'Arcy McGee Foundation and an academic historian.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

Civil society has been moving. In the past when the unionist peered over the border into the south they saw exactly what they predicted a hundred years ago and they predicted a priest ridden Free State and that came to pass under de Valera when it became a Republic. But southern society has changed enormously. It has become much more liberal, the power of the Catholic church has weakened. Particularly from a unionist merchant point of view, the fact that the Celtic Tiger roared and then aborted, it fell back a bit but recovered to a large extent. I think unionists admire that. So I would be hopeful that unionists looking over the border are now more attracted towards the society in the south, even though it is probably now too liberal for them.

I also think that within the north, within Northern Ireland, the civic changes taking place have been going on since the Free Education Act of 1947 and the rise of the Catholic community, particularly the Catholic middle class, the spatial expansion of the Catholic middle class in Belfast especially around the Queen's University, Ormeau Road, Malone Road area. Despite the apparent lack of noticing it on behalf of the DUP, I think that the unionist community is very well aware that geographically and demographically that change is happening and they will have to accommodate that and that of course puts a major responsibility on the nationalist/republican community to be generous in their response.

What we have in the south is the Citizens' Assembly which was instrumental in achieving something approaching consensus over changes on social policy, whereas the Civic Forum in the north failed to continue, it died. What do we learn from that experience?

There's an example of it in the Waterfront Hall not so long ago when Catholic civil society, or nationalist civil society, got together and thought that they should get their house in order before they approached the unionist house. That is symptomatic of any approach to any problem in the north of Ireland, you're going to have to approach it and the challenge is to combine those two approaches so society as a whole moves forward.

Does that mean we just say it's not possible to bring those different communities together, or do we say that there needs to be a different way of doing it?

We have to recognise, and the voters have recognised it for us, that there are two ethnic communities here and we should not underestimate the power of ethnicity. I always refer to the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia who had 60 years of a dominant totalitarian regime. Once it was peeled back, the first thing that bubbled to the surface was ethnicity. We'd be very foolish in the north of Ireland to ignore just how deep ethnicity is. We may not like it but any problems we have have to be approached recognising that we have two very distinct communities here.

What does that mean in practice in terms of moving forward in civil society?

It means not doing what we're doing at the moment. We have two blocks intent on maximizing the power of that ethnicity. I suppose that's inevitable. We saw that when Sinn Féin came within twelve hundred votes of the unionist parties. The next election there were tens of thousands between the two. People were not voting on DUP economic policy. They weren't voting on Sinn Féin economic policy. They were voting to the drumbeat and that comes back to what I was trying to say, dealing

with that is fundamental to any solution. Having said that, I know from talking to the Protestant community, talking to unionists, that they are aware underneath the 'no surrender' façade - which appears to be their state about Brexit - they are aware of the demographic changes, of the geographical changes and I think they are much more prepared to talk and to compromise and to listen and ask to be listened to than they ever were previously.

Although you talk about two communities, Northern Ireland is increasingly more than two communities because there are people who would not identify as either Protestants or Catholics or either unionists or nationalists. How do people from those other backgrounds fit in within a more effective civic society?

There's probably two elements. One is people who are coming into our community. I think that generally they would be more sympathetic to the nationalist cause than to the unionist cause. As they develop and their children go to school, the chances are they will enlarge the nationalist perception rather than a unionist perception.

The other aspect is that people say, "Well look at the young people". They're going to be different, had a different education, they've had different experiences. That is true to a certain extent, but I go back to the drumbeat and when it comes to the drumbeat, very disappointingly people do seem to go back into their own communities.

Is there no way we can break out of that and achieve consensus between people of different backgrounds?

I would be very optimistic, but it comes from the two communities at all levels meeting each other, getting to know each other and working together. I have purposely emphasised the geographical change, part of that geographical change was the expansion of the Catholic middle class, but it didn't only expand socially, it expanded geographically and as it expands geographically the Protestant middle class was pulled away from it. In my own area in Newry and Warrenpoint, Rostrevor that the Protestant population in Newry who remember the 1968 civil rights march and the civil rights attempt to march into the Protestant area, which is ironic when you consider Drumcree⁵² at the moment. But that Protestant community has largely gone. For a hundred years it was 25/30% in Newry, now it's down to less than 5% and the high school is no longer really feasible as a Protestant school. So those changes are taking place within Belfast, the Malone Road. Catholics in 1947 went to university. I'm not sure of the statistic, [but] I think 80% of the people who go to university five years later are still within a few miles of that university. That is very clear in Belfast. But as the Catholic middle class has expanded the Protestant middle class has pulled back towards Drumbo. As west Belfast has moved over the motorway and towards the Lisburn Road the border between the two communities has gone with it. These are demographic and geographic realities that the future has to recognise. But also embrace and deal with.

How do we move towards a more shared and integrated society?

Talking to each other. One of the things we have been doing in the D'Arcy McGee Foundation is to use history as an aid for reconciliation, rather than as something that has to be fought over; to identify myths and to challenge those myths in a variety of ways. In our own area, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, the non-subscribing Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Church of Ireland within the Newry district all embraced the story of John Mitchel and Jenny

⁵² Drumcree is the location for a long-standing parading dispute.

Verner⁵³. We had exhibitions and lectures in their various churches. They were well aware that he was a physical force Irish republican. But the love story between him and Jenny is one of the most powerful love stories ever. Unfortunately seeping right through it is their mutual support of slavery.

I was involved in the 1798 commemorations in Newry⁵⁴ and again the fact that the Catholics recognised it, Father Murphy didn't lead the thing at all and that in the north it was really about the rights of man and merchant rights and taking that on board. There's great hope in that.

At the moment we're working within the Newry area on the impact of the Great Famine. We had the National Famine commemoration come to the town. I was getting very little traction with the local council. I found myself talking to Jim Wells. I asked to meet him in the Canal Court in Newry. I didn't know Jim, Jim didn't know me. We sat down and his opening shot was "What do you want?". I said "I want you to support the National Famine commemoration coming to Newry", and Jim laughed and he said, "Two things. One is, what's this 'National' bit?". I said, "Well, you know, it was the one nation then. There was no border then", and he says, "But you have to remember, if you look at all our Orange banners, every nasty thing that has ever happened us is on the Orange banner. Now you show me the famine". I said, "That's interesting Jim, but did you know that in Loughgall the Presbyterians were selling their Bibles for food at the height of the famine?". He says, "I didn't know that". And I had two of the hardest hours I've ever had and I've repeated this to other people, talking to Jim, but at the end of it Jim says, "Okay, I'm still not fully convinced, but I am prepared to write to the Sinn Féin minister", as she was then, Carál Ní Chuilín, "and ask that the National Famine commemoration come to Newry". And Danny Kennedy did the same. And there's great hope in that and people looking at history – the 1798 rebellion, the famine, John Mitchel and an openness to look at history and to learn from history.

Does that re-examination of history include trying to provide a greater understanding of the relationship between Presbyterians and Catholics historically and how in many cases within Irish history they were allies rather than in conflict with each other?

Oh very much so. I think that's one of the great values of the 1798 commemoration, the very strong identification of the rights of man. And from my Catholic perspective, approaching it to realise that our social democracy actually starts with King William and comes through the French Revolution, the American Revolution through to where we are at the moment. So I would now trace our social democracy back to the Battle of the Boyne and realise probably the Catholics for ethnic reasons were on the wrong side at the Battle of the Boyne. James was a dictator and as we have seen, when you have a Catholic state, a la de Valera, sometimes it's not a very attractive place at all.

It also means the Irish state needs to give greater recognition to the role of Presbyterians and other Protestant faiths within the creation of Ireland and of the role of Irish Protestants in developing ideas around the world.

There's no doubt about that. Daniel O'Connell sits there in O'Connell Street. Every time I pass there's a seagull doing despicable things on his head. Obviously he's a great liberator and so on and he did bring Catholic emancipation, but there's definitely a downside to the alienation of the Protestant and particularly the Presbyterian community. De Valera's dreary Republic and his close associations with the Catholic church obviously excluded Presbyterians to a large extent and in so doing all the contributions that you have referred to. It's a much better Ireland, a much stronger Ireland, when we realise that the two communities have produced the societies that we now live in.

⁵³ John Mitchel and Jenny Verner were 19th Century Irish nationalists, both brought up in the Newry region. They became pro-slavery advocates and supporters of the Confederate States.

⁵⁴ [Remembering the United Irishmen and the 1798 Rebellion](#)

Looking at the more recent past, the legacy of the Troubles, how do we deal with that in ways that are non-confrontational and can heal rather than make things worse?

Both communities have victims and victims have an awful lot in common with the loss that they've suffered - and not only with the loss that they've suffered, but trying to find out what happened to their loved ones. Collusion has happened, but it's also a political term and what do you say to the children who are the victims, whose parents were the victims of IRA violence and so on? Getting truth and allowing victims to come to terms with what happened is very difficult because you really have two power blocks which are not interested in releasing information.

What you're saying, if I understand correctly, is that part of the process should be to enable people who are themselves victims, or whose families have been victims, of the Troubles should recognise the commonality of their experiences and recognise that rather than perceive themselves as being the victims of one particular side or the other, not least because you have Catholics that were murdered by the IRA and Protestants that were murdered by UVF and UDA, so in a sense it doesn't have to be divided up on the basis of religion or community identification.

Yes, I agree with that. But going back to a divided society, that's difficult to achieve. You have to recognise there is an element of victims saying "Well, it was the other side that done it to me, therefore they are my enemy, they are my natural enemies" and that's difficult to get over.

I was at an event recently where school pupils were there and they said that the experience of listening to people who had lost limbs through Troubles bombs in particular, was that they wished that history in school had been taught less about political history and more about the stories of the individuals that had lost their lives, that had lost their limbs and so on, so that they had a greater sense of empathy with the events of the Troubles. Is there's something in that?

There is. History teaching has to take the overarching view and take you through the events and of course history is open to interpretation. But storytelling is very powerful. Stalin was right that a million people is just a statistic. People pay much more attention to one person's story and teaching history is now learning that.

So more person focused history telling?

Yeah. And it's very hard not to have empathy with any victim when you hear their stories. One of the strengths of the Playhouse and their work is the variety of victims. You realise that 'that story' is just as tragic as 'that story' and you can identify with it. But I remember doing A Level English and Brother McGee would say we must always be aware of the difference between sentiment and sentimentality. He said far too many people identify with causes through sentimentality rather than the sentiment. With victims, those of us who aren't victims and trying to tell victims what they should feel and what they should do, we're in the area of sentimentality rather than the sentiment. That's a bad thing and that's a dangerous thing.

To what extent can we achieve reconciliation through looking at the past?

By meeting and by sharing. You can't have reconciliation if you're standing on either side of the street. You can't have reconciliation if you're living in different areas and don't talk to each other. So, purposeful meeting together. When I was a teacher many years ago we had education on mutual understanding, which had very limited success. One of the reasons for the limited success was that we thought that if we take Class A and Class B and put them together for an hour, something might

happen. Actually nothing happened. We have to find areas - physical areas and social areas and maybe even online areas - where the two communities are integrating purposefully. That it would happen naturally is better. The fact that you work with someone, you're teaching with someone, you study with someone, you play football with someone, you have a common interest in butterflies with someone. That's much more powerful than asking two people to sit together for an hour.

I was at an event and the people who told their stories didn't give their surnames, didn't say whose bomb or weapon they had been injured by. They told their stories and you understood that one person was from one background, one person was from another background. We didn't know who was who. Is that helpful?

Initially it's helpful, but it's almost a deceitful way to approach honesty. It's a paradox perhaps but if you're hiding who you are then you're not being honest. If we if you look at the Orange Order in Canada⁵⁵: the Orange Order was very powerful, almost all-powerful in Toronto. Now the Order is a few hundred people straggling down downtown Toronto with black, white and yellow faces looking at them and wondering who and what they are. As Canadian society expanded and developed then the need for the Orange Order as an ethnic defence group, a social group, disappeared. Is the Canada model for the north of Ireland and for Ireland? Probably not, but there are elements of the Canadian experience which we can learn from. Our two communities are not going to disappear into a secular community the way that Orangeism did in Canada, but things happen in Canada and I think that can inform us as we move forward.

Such as?

The reason for the Orange Order being so powerful was its social and its political clout and people identified with it because they were going to get something out of it. As that power faded, then the Orange Order faded with it. In our context, that is happening. If you talk to Orangemen they'll tell you, "Why are you afraid of us because all we are is a few ageing parade planners sitting around drinking tea in an Orange Hall no longer afraid of the door being kicked open and somebody opening up with a machine gun". So that social and economic element of the Order isn't there anymore. They climbed the shipyards, they climbed the shipping mills, the linen mills, but the need for that ethnic identity is still there. So the Canadian experience is that and one aspect of it - the reason that we look over the fence at each other economically and politically is diminishing. Our identification with ethnicity is still there and probably will still be there until we have managed to sort out our micro problems.

So is there a way that we can make it less dangerous to have that ethnic recognition?

Of course there is. Political institutions are the realisation that violence has not worked. Violence gave us 30 years of terror and what did we get out of it? The IRA came to recognise that, the British government came to recognise that and we had a generation with the John Hume and David Trimble and so on and Gerry Adams who recognised we're not going back there. That failed. There has to be another way forward. One of the dangers is that there's a generation that doesn't remember that and quite possibly might want to go back to it. And going back again, don't underestimate the power of ethnicity, particularly where each group feels that they have to protect their own little rose with thorns.

⁵⁵ The Orange Order became an important political force in Canada, but in recent years has lost its founding close connection to Northern Ireland and Protestantism.

And also the power of the story because if people are given a particularly harsh or unrepresentative version of what's gone before, especially if they're too young to know what actually happened, then that breeds future violence and conflict.

It does and again, that's where the victims actually become a very positive thing because the more they get the chance to tell their stories and the more young people seem to realise that, "Well that happened X but it also happened Y", I think that's very important. It's a much, much better Ireland we live in, even socially. We have our problems but everybody has running water, well not everybody, but the vast majority have running water, have a house, have a home, have a job of some description. So in that point, it's a much, much better Ireland we live in, but we're still a divided community.

Now if the past is one difficult conversation, the other really difficult conversation that has to be had at various times is the constitutional question. So how do we have that conversation in ways that aren't threatening?

By looking at how we got here and again I'm an historical geographer. By going back and seeing where all of this came from. Now analysing the past in the ways that we have been talking about earlier and not moving forward, by being prepared to realise that my community actually thought that at one stage - I never realised my community was a republican community. I didn't realise that my community actually did put people in a bar and burn it. Facing up to the past... also the demographics and the geography have to be taken into account. If I was a unionist I wouldn't be a happy person because I've seen my power block go, I've seen my industrial base go, I've seen the other community get bigger and more prosperous. I've seen my children leave and not come back. I've seen that the whole area, actually area of plantation, the outer counties, we're losing them. And that, as I said, if I was a unionist, I would have that fear.

In terms of the constitutional question, what's going to come from that is we are going to have a nationalist majority. We're going to have a republican majority. If we keep voting the way we're voting, then there's going to be Sinn Féin. If I was a unionist, and I think Brian Feeney was talking about this in the Irish News the other day, maybe originally I would've thought, "Well, you know, we'll hold onto Northern Ireland and we'll have an accommodation within Northern Ireland". That's possible. But if things go the way they're going, Stormont will become a Sinn Féin or a nationalist Assembly and the unionist community will be a permanent minority, not only in Ireland but within a nationalist Assembly in the north. Feeney was talking about this and I think he's right. But maybe the future is to recognise that within an all Ireland situation and unionists sitting in the Dáil, they're probably in permanent government and have more power that way than they ever will have being the minor partners in a Sinn Féin or a nationalist Fianna Fáil type of Stormont.

The religious voice:

Ken Good (Interviewed 25th March, 2019)

Ken Good was the Church of Ireland Bishop for the cross-border diocese of Derry and Raphoe at the time of the interview. He has since retired. Ken was born in Cork.

How can we strengthen civic society?

I'm assuming that included in that would be churches, voluntary organisations, charities, sporting organisations.

I'm thinking in terms of the community organisations, but also ways in which individuals can have a voice within society without being represented on a party political level. In Northern Ireland we had the Civic Forum, that lasted for a couple of years but it was supposed to be an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement, but, for many years, it has not been there. It came out of the Women's Coalition influence I think as much as anything. In the south you've had the Citizens' Assembly which has influenced social policy. There are different ways of doing things. The question then is how we can have opportunities which give ordinary people a way to influence policy without operating through the party systems?

Presumably the reason you're talking to me is you want to know the church's viewpoint and I speak as a church leader, as a Christian. If you're asking about progress, one of the dilemmas is that progress might not be universally agreed. One person's progress might be another person's retrograde step. I would rather frame it as progress being what is building the common good and working for the common good.

My grandmother - bless her - her name was Beryl, when we were children growing up, my brother and I were very close in age and if we were to share anything she had this little pattern, of one cuts the other chooses. All right? So that when you had to share a piece of cake or share a bar of chocolate, one of us had the task of cutting it, the other could choose whichever part they wanted as their desired piece. What that did in a kind of Solomon-like wisdom was implement what I think Christians understand as the golden rule - that we do unto others what we wish they would do unto us. That is the common good. I see this in that kind of framework. What is the common good that we're looking for? It is simple things like, what do we want for our children? What do we want for our parents? What do we want for our friends? What we want for ourselves? What do we want for our neighbours' children? What do we want for our neighbours' parents? What do we want for our neighbours' friends for the common good?

I think what we want for the common good is big things like a health service that really works for everybody, an education system that works for everybody, jobs that are available for everybody, housing that is fair for everybody, dignity and a feeling of belonging is open to everybody. It seems self-evident to me that those are the kind of things that we are working for, if we're working for the common good. And I do believe the golden rule is an important part of this as Christians, that we're not only interested in our tribe, our people, we're interested in *all* and that must be part of civic society, working for the common good.

At the moment the political system isn't working, so the question is how can these objectives be argued for when we don't have a political system that's working?

There's some practical things. Obviously the bigger things we need are we need economic improvement. We need Brexit to be sorted out. We need the institutions of Stormont to be up and running. But you are dealing probably at a slightly different level and you mentioned the Civic Forum. We could do well with having that up and running again. I became Bishop here in Derry in 2002, now that's 17 years ago and I'm about to retire and 2002 I think was the last time the Civic Forum met. So that's long overdue and it could have been, and maybe still could be, a broad based consultative body that is not dependent on politicians.

The second thing is that civic society can give a lead in a way that politicians can't, or at least don't, by setting an example of bridge building at low key levels. I think we do understand the value of partnerships. We do understand the need to reach out. We're not under the same pressure as politicians in public forums. Civic society can give a lead. If it's not too rude to say it, I would like to see our politicians speaking *less* or at least be reported less, and for Civic Forum people to be speaking more, or to be quoted more, or to be asked more.

I'm aware that the churches, our reputation and our standing may have diminished, but if you can focus on the message rather than the messenger I think the churches still can have important things to say about building a society for the common good. In those practical ways there is hope and I think it's happening in low key ways. Just because the media doesn't talk about it doesn't mean it's not happening.

When you say we should be listening to political voices less, are you thinking, for example, of the style of the Stephen Nolan Show and the political context of that which tends to be confrontational, is unhelpful?

I think the adversarial way in which these things are set up is counterproductive. It has to be adversarial for his - I won't personalise it - but for those kinds of shows to work there has to be cut and thrust and "I'm against you and I'm strongly against you". No consensus is possible in the adversarial format that's devised. So that's not the way forward for me.

How should we move forward in creating a more shared and integrated society?

This city is historically one of the sadly divided places. The population shift is well documented and we're dealing with that all the time. Having said that, we need to acknowledge that progress has been made. If you think back to the Belfast Agreement, the Good Friday Agreement, since those days the situation has improved and we need to acknowledge that.

I was reflecting about knife crime in the UK. It rightly has got *huge* media coverage. But if you look at the scale of it there were I think 285 knife crime deaths in the last year in the United Kingdom out of a population of 58 million. In Northern Ireland in 1972 out of a population of one and a half million, there were almost 500 deaths. So that says something about the scale. Now the media attention and focus on the knife crime issue, it's appropriate, it's necessary and it's important, but it shows how far we have come from 500 deaths in a year to so many fewer now. There's good news as well as bad news that needs to be emphasised.

As far as integration goes, there are several things that can happen. Martin Luther King said, "I am convinced that men hate each other...", it was men he mentioned, "... hate each other because they fear each other, they fear each other because they don't know each other, and they don't know each other because they don't communicate with each other, and they don't communicate with each other because they are separated from each other". So there is something about our separated way of living that is unhealthy. We see it in this city in a focused way.

What can be done? The churches have a role and we are playing it. It may not get much media attention, but we are involved in building bridges, breaking down barriers. The churches work quite closely here in the city. My friendship with Bishop Donal McKeown - it's interesting how people respond to it. They find it refreshing. They find it gives encouragement. It comes easily. It's a natural kind of thing for us. We try to do it visibly, to be seen to be friends, which we are, and we have a lot in common. At many levels that's happening. The media aren't focusing on it and I don't think they need to, but we're getting on with it. Churches do relate well in the city now.

Secondly, prophetic signs and symbols are important. I mean actions or gestures can capture people's imagination in low key kinds of ways. Churches are doing this, civic society is doing it. Little signs that people can relate to in an open, friendly, natural way with people of a different background and a different tradition. There should be more of those. They are risky sometimes, not always, but they are happening and we need to see more of them. It is important that schools are not mono-cultural. I do feel, however, that to talk about the magic bullet of 'educate them together and everything will be fine' is too simplistic. It's too simplistic from where we're coming from and to where we're going. But there does need to be more shared education, more integrated education. Integrated education doesn't only mean integrated schools. A lot of our schools are quite integrated. But there does need to be more mixing and sharing of campuses and classes and teachers and subjects. That is happening and there's quite a big budget now for that kind of thing. I'm fully behind it and backing it.

Integration comes down to planning as well. The planners, what plans do they have in mind for our towns, cities and communities for sharing? What are they envisaging? Is it a political decision to integrate people, or does it have to be a voluntary one that comes from individuals? Can there be incentives? That's an interesting question. When intimidation does happen, as sadly it still does, how the police deal with it, how the courts deal with it, is important – promptly, swiftly, fairly and sometimes maybe discreetly. But what it all boils down to ultimately is our hearts and this is where if I can bring it back to a Christian framework, there is a spiritual element in all of this. Loving our neighbour, forgiveness, apology, step of faith, courage. This is the spiritual language that we deal with all the time... changed hearts, repentance. This is language that has something to say to civic society generally. The churches need to be more proactive in dealing with it and exhibiting it. Forgiveness is crucial in all of this.

You mentioned the point that Martin Luther King said about the separation of people. Several people I've spoken to have said that for them the important issue is for people to see a shared experience rather than to see separate experiences, which are actually often quite similar. Do you think that's a strong point?

Yes, it is a strong point. I've met with groups of older people, senior citizens, who grew up in the same city, but they tell a completely different story of what it was like to grow up. For the other tradition to hear their story is an eye opening insight. I think it was Mary McAleese who said that we have a shared history, but we don't have a shared memory. That's a powerful analysis. We don't have a shared memory yet.

How can we have the conversation about the past in ways that enable us to make progress and to what extent can we achieve reconciliation?

I've seen it happen in churches. Groups of people from different churches or different traditions have met and talked about their childhood, their teenage years, about growing up and how they understood the other. That is happening, maybe not as much as it could, or as much as it should, and

it shouldn't only be churches doing this. Lots of voluntary groups or civic groups could be doing it and maybe are, it is quite powerful.

You've spoken to me before, as you did just now, about the concept of forgiveness and you've said that for a Christian society in Northern Ireland it's surprising how little forgiveness there is. How can that concept of forgiveness be promoted?

It's very difficult for me to talk about this because I've never lost a family member to violence. I grew up in Cork and I'm an outsider to that extent. So I have to tread softly and carefully here, because for people who have at first hand confronted the death of a loved one through violence, it's holy ground and I don't want to be preaching at them or above them in any judgemental kind of way and make their suffering worse. But I've also travelled to Africa and seen in Uganda, in particular, where there was huge tribal conflict and mass murder, how there seems to be a capacity to forgive in a way that there isn't as much here. Now there is forgiveness here too, but not as much as I've seen elsewhere.

One of my Archdeacons, Robert Miller, has written with Father Paul Farren a book called *Forgiveness Remembers*⁵⁶ and they're saying that forgiveness isn't about forgetting. You don't forget and you shouldn't have to forget. You remember, but somehow forgiveness is liberating. Unforgiveness is the opposite. It can be ensnaring and it can hold the person who is not able to forgive. It can hold them down more than it holds the person down who they are feeling a grudge against. These are big spiritual themes and I'm not preaching at anybody when I say this, but I think it is something that as Christian churches we have to confront more robustly.

Perhaps it involves us talking more openly about the past. My understanding of psychotherapy is that if you're going to deal with trauma of the past you must address it, talk about it, reveal your inner feelings. Yet somehow as a society it's almost as if we're feeling it's better to repress that and not talk about it otherwise the risks are that we inflame those emotions. What's your perspective on that?

I agree entirely. It is much better to be open about it in a safe environment and in a non-adversarial environment. We should never regard victims as the problem and blame them for a lack of progress. They have suffered enough without having that added burden put upon them, which can sometimes happen. They must be part of the solution and not just regarded as part of the problem. There's a real thirst for justice in their minds. We've seen that with Bloody Sunday, we've seen it with Claudy, we've seen it with so many other serious episodes of violence where deep down people are longing for justice and it's a human right. How you match that with making progress and working through the past and our legacy is a really complex issue, so much so that we haven't been able to deal with it yet.

The word 'justice' becomes very contentious because different communities interpret the word as meaning different things. Do we mean criminal justice? Do we mean a sense of repentance? Do we mean a just outcome in terms of equality in the way society operates today?

I know. It's 10 years since the Consultative Group on the Past published their report and findings. I know Denis Bradley well and I know Archbishop Eames well and I respect both of them greatly. That was a very important piece of work. We could do well to revisit it. There was a lot of rumpus and fuss about the financial payments bit, which was a distraction really from the substance, and I wouldn't want to be prescriptive about it, but there's a lot in that report that needs to be dug into again. When we do, we need to keep victims informed and involved.

⁵⁶ [Forgiveness Remembers](#) by Paul Farren and Robert Miller

If dealing with the past is one contentious issue, the other big contentious issue is how we have the constitutional conversation in ways that don't inflame the situation. You've got a very interesting personal perspective because you represent a cross border diocese and you come from Cork in the south and the Church of Ireland has a strong relationship with the Republic. So what's your perspective on how we have a constitutional conversation in ways that can be open, friendly and progressive?

The first requirement for the debate to take place openly is to have a complete end to violence. That needs to be removed from the debate and discussion. The whole discussion is coloured if violence is still an option, or a weapon, or a threat. Now that sounds idealistic, but it's true.

Secondly, if there were a restoration of the power sharing institutions it would be much easier because of a vacuum as well. History has shown it's counterproductive to have a vacuum there.

Thirdly, the tone needs to be set in which the debate can happen fairly and honestly and securely. I think the political agreement that we have at the moment, it's like a backstop for the discussions to happen and they could with these other requirements that I've outlined, the discussions could happen then more securely.

But what is thrown into the mix now is Brexit and the irony probably now is that the Union is a threat more because of Brexit and Scotland than anything. Scotland could well be the partner to break the Union at a time when we have no government institutions up and running here in Northern Ireland. That's highly ironic, but that could lead us into a whole new environment about what does the Union mean for Northern Ireland? We're in unknown and uncharted territories.

Community organisations that work on a cross community basis report that community tensions have increased significantly because of Brexit with each of the two major communities blaming the other for the situation we in.

Yeah, that's our true to form and there's going to have to be a post-Brexit repairing of relationships.

How should that happen?

Not just here, but in the UK and in Europe, everywhere, whatever the outcome. There's a lot of stress has been put on relationships.

How do we do that? How do we address that?

I have no idea how we're going to address that, but we need to. Sooner or later the politicians are going to have to, here, work together and come together and lead together to point a way through all of this.

Which returns us to the point that we started on, when the political institutions are not working and the politicians and major parties have such bad relationships, perhaps we need to rebuild civic society to enable those conversations to happen?

Yes, I think we do. It'll always be at a lower level and will be less obvious, but it needs to just get on the ground in ways that people may not easily perceive. And I hope the churches are playing their part in this.

I am reminded of Seamus Heaney's poem, 'Doubletake'⁵⁷, in which he says,

*“So hope for a great sea-change
on the far side of revenge.
Believe that a further shore
is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles
and cures and healing wells”.*

That's the kind of spiritual dimension on which I want to finish. We're dealing with not just human physical realities here, there's a spiritual reality as well that I keep being drawn back to and a bigger picture that we need to bear in mind.

⁵⁷ [Doubletake](#) by Seamus Heaney

Father Martin Magill (Interviewed 25th June 2019)

Father Martin Magill is a Catholic priest based on the Falls Road in West Belfast, who is a member of the Stop Attacks Forum⁵⁸.

How do we strengthen civil society in Northern Ireland?

All of us need to see that we have a part in this. Politics is too important to be left to the politicians alone.

Perhaps that reflects the fact that we've got a lot of people who don't vote. The question then is how you engage people that are not within our segregated system of voting for one of the two major parties.

That would be one of my concerns. It's a genuine concern. Yet at the same time, when I'm talking to people they may say they don't vote, but they're very interested in civic life, in the type of society they want. It's whatever has happened and maybe some of the difficulties, some of the inertia, over the past number of years hasn't helped. Sometimes that in-fighting amongst our politicians doesn't. To wrestle with the question, I'm going to go back right into the likes of schools and youth groups or whatever and that whole sense of the empowerment and the involvement of young people from a very early age and a real sense of we can make a difference. It's important that people realise they can make a difference, that their views matter and it's really important that we hear them. I'm focusing especially on young people. I don't like this idea of talking about young people as the voters of the future. They're people in the present, they've got views in the present and they're worth hearing at this stage.

We have two major parties that are uncomfortable about elements of civic engagement, who point out that one of the difficulties with the old Civic Forum was that it wasn't representative. I suppose a point you're implicitly making is that there are areas of decision making, which people don't necessarily see being directly party political, but they still want to be involved in consideration about.

Yes. I'm glad you mention the old Civic Forum, which has gone off the radar in political life. There was huge value in that, bringing people from a variety of different backgrounds is important. The more we can widen out debate, the better. The more that we can see civic society involved in this process and hear their views, the better we are as a society. In terms of our politicians, there's a lot to be said from hearing the wisdom over the years that people have been through so much, that they have a wisdom that maybe the rest of us mightn't necessarily have.

But perhaps there's also wisdom of youth, the inexperience of not having been worn out, losing principles.

Yes, there's a real value as well. [In the] Four Corners festival, one of the events we do is with Ulster University, hearing young people speak. There is something like over 3,000 young people going to Summer Madness. The focus is faith, but there will also be a sense of looking at wider social issues. I have no doubt that I will find their views and openness refreshing.

What's your view about the experience of Citizens' Assembly in the South?

I don't know very much about them other than I've followed the abortion debate. In principle, there's something worth exploring, but developing it here and maybe some of the flaws in that,

⁵⁸ [The Stop Attacks Forum](#)

because those on the pro-life side had concerns. If there are flaws, if there's learning there that that can actually be incorporated into whatever it might be approached here. I would be very keen that we look again at the whole question of some type of Civic Forum.

Peter Sheridan from Co-operation Ireland talked about Citizens' Assemblies as being ways in which communities such as Creggan might look at how to reduce the influence of paramilitaries within a particular environment.

That's an issue I am very concerned about. I'm part of a group called Stop Attacks Forum. I can see what he would talk about. The difficulty with that is there's a real fear factor. But maybe say the area of economics, how money is spent in certain areas, there could be a real value in hearing local people give some sense of how they would like to see some of the spending.

A bit like participatory budgeting?

Yes. That's the direction I'm going in. It could be a very useful way of helping us come together as a larger group, as a community. As people who live in an area, we know the issues best of all.

More broadly, how do we move towards creating a shared and integrated society?

I grew up close to the International Airport on a small farm, in a neighbourhood where my next door neighbour was Presbyterian, further down the road Church of Ireland, further down the road Methodist. We were various Christian denominations. It's still a very mixed area, people living side by side. For me, that's one of the most important things. I'm aware of the Integrated Education Fund and we hear a lot about that. I hear *nothing* to the same degree on encouraging integrated housing. I really would like to see integrated neighbourhoods. Where you're talking to me at the moment, in west Belfast, the vast majority of people living in the area would be coming from Catholic, republican, nationalist backgrounds. The sort of society I believe that we need to see for the city, Northern Ireland, Ireland, whatever, is where we can live together, where there are various religions - and I will say 'religions' rather just simply 'faith' because it's not just simply going to be Christian denominations, but faiths generally, and those with faith and those without faith. To get us living together, that for me would be one of the key factors.

My understanding is where there's been investment into proposed shared housing schemes these have tended to be on interface areas where they become battlegrounds for competing control by different paramilitary groups. Should we focus on perhaps easier ways, such as city centre apartment buildings, which would naturally be more mixed?

One situation in Newtownabbey seemed to have a lot of adverse publicity. But I'm also aware, not too far from the Antrim Road which was an interface in the past, where they have been able to take over an old mill and turned it into apartments and where integrated housing is working extremely well. I would like to see a strategic body focusing especially on housing. And yes, maybe we do need to begin with some of the easier ones where we encourage that without it becoming social engineering.

I would like to see something more strategic, what I call 'community champions'. I am aware of people who have purposely chosen to live in areas that wouldn't be necessarily their first choice. I'm going to give you a theological or scriptural term, which is 'incarnation'. That whole sense of purposely choosing to live in this area to make a difference. We need more of that. If I look at north Belfast, where so many Protestant people moved out and it's had a huge effect on some local Protestant churches. How do we encourage people to come back? A Citizens' Assembly may play a

part in that. But some sort of strategic body: the housing associations, the Housing Executive, would play key roles in that.

You're speaking warmly about integrated education - that might surprise some people, given you're a Catholic priest.

I'm acknowledging that it has been talked about a lot. I'm acknowledging that there's a real value in having a council for integrated education. I see the value in that. In this parish of St. John's, the school beside me, St Kevin's is a great Catholic school. The parents who send their children to this school are doing so because they're going to a very good school. I just see that the model that is used for the integrated sector can be used for integrated housing.

I'm interested in the idea of shared education. There's a real value the more we can encourage schools working together closely. In Ballycastle, there's a very good model at post-primary level. I'm hearing very good examples of good co-operation at primary school level in various places too.

I'm going back to the whole thing of neighbourhood. At the end of the day, yes, I'm a believer in parental choice. I'm very committed to Catholic schools. But it is going back to people living side by side. For me, when I go back home I'd literally be bumping into my next door neighbour. That's the way we take things forward and socialise at all sorts of levels.

This conversation is about how we deal with the difficult challenges that our society is facing, one of which is how we deal with the past and the legacy of the Troubles. How do you think we should approach that?

I've been wondering about the role of churches in this. One word especially would come to mind, the word 'sanctuary'. That's that idea of providing a safe place where people can go. I wondered about churches being open to some of the conversations, maybe to facilitate events where people would share their stories. There is something different from going to, say, City Hall or other facilities. There's something different about going into a church.

If I think back to Four Corners Festival, we put on a number of events about the past. This started a few years ago when we had the experience of Jo Berry and Pat Magee, the Brighton bomber. The focus was on the two of them, but what happened afterwards acted as a catalyst for people to come and tell their stories. They wanted to tell their stories. That whole sense, first of all of being able to be heard, that the value of other people hearing that story and trying to understand why people got involved in the first place is really important.

Something else that I took part in was with the Reverend Chris Hudson, a non-subscribing Presbyterian, the minister of All Souls Church in Elmwood Avenue. In his church last year, we had the solemn reading, in alphabetical order, of every single name of anybody who was killed in the Troubles from 1969 onwards.

From Lost Lives presumably?

The *Lost Lives* book. Events like that, put into a church, in a different context. The focus we wanted to have was on people suffering, rather than going into the details of how this person died and was this person an innocent victim or a perpetrator, or whatever it is. We instead focused on the question of the loved ones left behind, irrespective of what he or she or they did, inevitably people would be left to suffer as a consequence of their death.

One of the themes of these conversations is about the need to make sure that we understand it was people who died and people who were injured, not just simply statistics: telling these stories to try and spread the humanity of the experience as a warning to people not to return to violence.

When I reflected on that event, hearing all those names, I had one regret about the night. If we were to do it again, I would do it differently. My one regret was that I wasn't there from the very start. I had a pastoral visit to make. If I had known the power of it I would have rearranged that and been there right from the start. Because what was happening was wave after wave after wave of names coming – some of the names familiar to me, many not, some I had completely forgotten. It was that impact and that sense of their stories, plus all the stories of the other people as well. The more we can get a sense of the humanity of one another, the real difference it makes.

We need to know more about the stories of what happened. It's also important to put on record that while Lost Lives was an incredibly important and comprehensive record of what happened in the Troubles, there's also been stories told in recent past about the people who died as a result of the Troubles, but weren't included in Lost Lives. For example, I witnessed a performance which included the story of a child who was on a pavement and knocked over by a Saracen as the Army were escaping from a riot. But that was not a child whose death was ever recognised as being part of the Troubles. And there are also many other lives who were lost that were not recognised as being part of the Troubles, but whose stories are also very important to understand.

I agree. The more we humanise this and the knock-on effects as well. Wave is an organisation that works with people affected by the Troubles and they are working with people who have been left behind. Those who are physically injured can be forgotten. And all the families left traumatised and those who may not be included in the *Lost Lives* book.

And whose families feel that their deaths weren't acknowledged as part of the Troubles.

You've touched on a very key word, this question of acknowledging. That would bring me back to a point that has struck me before - the Reverend Harold Good's point about calling for a day of acknowledgement. That sense of having a day where we acknowledge the past. To some extent the Day of Reflection provides a bit of that, but it's a different type of day, where there's an acknowledgement of some of the things that we didn't do well or did badly. There's a real value in that as well as acknowledging the huge amount of suffering we caused and never wanting to go back to that.

Is it possible to have that process of acknowledgement, without it playing into this other narrative of the hierarchy of victims?

That's obviously one of the big concerns. That seems to keep tripping us up. I really can't see us going anywhere. We have to move away from that. To go back to the [reading] event, the focus was on the human suffering, those left behind and you simply can't do a hierarchy. It would be completely unethical to try and to find any sort of hierarchy of victims. Personally, I find that a very, very unhelpful phrase, this 'hierarchy of victims'.

Perhaps the important thing is to acknowledge the pain of those left behind rather than focusing specifically on the deaths of those who died?

I went to see Colin Davidson's amazing exhibition, *Silent Testimony*⁵⁹. The clue is even in the word itself, in the words itself, to describe it. It's very basic details about the loved one left behind. That whole sense of the suffering of those people.

I'm glad you mentioned Colin Davidson. Councillor John Kyle of the PUP made the point that Colin Davidson's work had been very important in terms of personalising the grief and the pain and the injuries.

When I went to see the exhibition, I was really taken with people's eyes and the way Colin painted those. Having heard Colin speak, there's no doubt about it. It's definitely a sense of the personalisation of those left behind. [At] the Wave event on the Day of Reflection... we had a sharing of poetry, a mother whose son was murdered, we had Tommy Sands playing a lament and some other very moving pieces. As I looked around the people there that night, it struck me the amount of suffering there. I didn't know their different stories, there's people I had never met before. I drove back in silence because I needed that silence just to get some sense of the sheer awfulness of what they had been through.

One of the challenges is that people of our generation can perhaps understand that, but how does one influence teenagers susceptible to paramilitary influence, who won't be exposed to those experiences so therefore won't get that empathy, that suffering.

Let me go back to the [2018] Independent Reporting Commission⁶⁰ report. There was something very significant about some of its work, which focused on areas of social deprivation and paramilitary style attacks. There was such a correlation between the two. Whenever I'm talking about how we make sure young people don't get caught up with that, I want to look at it from a structural point of view, look at some of the deprivation and how we tackle that. You're in West Belfast with me at the moment. There's a phrase that I've heard which I find very helpful. Not too far away from here is the Divis area. Within Divis there's a street called Albert Street, which has known a lot of trouble. It's had a lot of so-called joy riding and other anti-social behaviour. One of the phrases I heard is, "Unless the people on Albert Street see the difference the peace process makes to their lives". *Unless* we see this peace process start to address some of that and the Creggan or West Belfast or whether it's the Lower Newtownards Road, or parts of the Shankill. There's so many of those areas in the city and throughout Northern Ireland where there's issues that have to be resolved - educational underachievement and some really good youth projects, funding those projects would be the first ways I would start.

That's an important point. It's 21 years since the Good Friday Agreement. It was implied there would be a peace dividend coming out of that. But for deprived areas, there has not been a peace dividend. If it has not happened in 21 years that's not going to happen quickly now, is it?

It mightn't happen quickly, but the talks are still going on. I really am hoping that the politicians are going to stay at the table. I'd love to see them concentrate their efforts. That's one area where we really need them to be working, so they can address these issues. It's not going to be immediate, but it does need to be a priority. To use your phrase, the peace dividend has to be seen in affecting those areas as well.

The other big, difficult conversation is how we discuss the future of the constitutional settlement in Northern Ireland. How can we have that conversation in ways that are polite, generous and not divisive?

⁵⁹ [Silent Testimony](#)

⁶⁰ [First report of the Independent Reporting Commission](#)

There's such a value in that. A couple of years ago, as part of the Féile, the West Belfast Festival, I helped put together an event that looked at how would a united Ireland be able to address the identity of those who do identify as British? That was in West Belfast, in St. Mary's University College. And we certainly did have some from a unionist background at it. Now as a night, it was grand and it certainly was a very civil conversation. We had some of the leaders of the republican and nationalist parties at it. It's finding the likes of events such as that, but there's probably quite a piece of work to do before we get to that point and it's probably some of those smaller conversations that can do that.

Again, we go back to the churches, can they be part of that so that we can have a conversation that's respectful? From a church point of view, we shouldn't be identifying with the state system we want because our true loyalty is to a greater kingdom, which is the Kingdom of God. So we shouldn't be vested in, "It must be a United Kingdom or a United Ireland" or whatever. I would see churches help facilitate some of those conversations and do it in a way that's civil. We've heard a lot from Declan Kearney and his *uncomfortable* conversations. There's value in that.

I interviewed Ken Good, while he was still the Bishop for the Church of Ireland for Derry and Raphoe. His view was that the one of the important things that the churches can do is to have cross denominational friendships and to be friends with their counterparts in other religions. Do you share that approach?

I would go back to my childhood, growing up where I grew. Part of my DNA is to be neighbourly, friendly with those of other denominations. I could mention Alan McBride and his campaign of the good neighbours. I can't stress that enough. One of the things worth clarifying is inter-church or inter-faith, the denominational relationships, that's Catholic and various Protestant denominations. Inter-faith is becoming more and more important for us as we have more and more different people from different religions coming to settle here in Northern Ireland.

On a final note, Martin, we initially requested to interview you before you became internationally well known over the Lyra McKee sermon. How has that experience affected you?

I was completely taken by surprise. The reaction I got was in the middle of a sentence. I hadn't my sentence finished - it was that evening that I began to realise, "Oh, gosh, this has got quite a bit attraction". It's only really in the days afterwards that I got a sense of the impact. Immediately afterwards, it felt like a tsunami of attention. Letters, phone calls, emails, it just went on and on and on and on.

Now, I suppose one of the things is that I'm very conscious that I want to make sure I was well grounded. I took a couple of days off to just make sure I was okay with the midst of it. I was well supported with friends. But as things settled down, in many ways it really has given me an opportunity out of a really tragic situation to speak into situations. It convinced me I do not want to go into politics. It's given me a greater respect for politicians. I had a huge amount of correspondence, mostly supportive, but some of it certainly not, and some of it completely whacky. I'm thinking, "Gosh, what some of these politicians must get in their mail bags must be just enormous". The other thing is, it convinced me I didn't want to go into journalism. I couldn't do that, moving on from one story to the next story to the next story.

I'm disappointed that the initial "Let's resolve the problems" momentum seems to have been lost and there doesn't seem to be the commitment on an ongoing basis to dealing with the problems that caused her to be murdered.

It's interesting you say that. I'm very conscious that it was the immediate interviews and I was conscious I didn't want to get caught up in a media circus. But I'm also conscious as the time has gone on, there's so much uncertainty around. I want to see real momentum again.

There was something very telling - like a Kairos moment, a moment in time. I really do believe that that needs to be made the most of, to get that momentum back, so that we can start addressing those issues I was talking about, the poverty and the economics. Paul McCusker from North Belfast, he's a councillor there involved with a project called The Soup Kitchen in St Patrick's and he has talked about a tenfold increase in the people coming. The number of people resorting to food banks. We need that momentum to get our politicians back, to address these issues and look at how the peace dividend can be something that we can all enjoy. Not just some of us, but all of us.

The Politicians:

Mike Nesbitt (Interviewed 14th February, 2019)

Mike Nesbitt is the former leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and remains an MLA. He is a former Northern Ireland victims' commissioner and has been a television presenter.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

That's a fascinating question to me because when you look at civil society and that Stormont hasn't met for over two years, you could easily form the impression that people don't care anymore, that they've just moved on and forgotten about us. But on another level you look at what happened at the Waterfront Hall when nationalism came together, you can see the energy there which is in total sharp contrast to my previous statement.

So if you put the right proposition to people they're willing to listen, to get involved and to be activists. What concerns me from a unionist perspective is that we are in danger of becoming the famous frog that Charles Handy used to talk about. He was a business guru who said if you take a frog and put it in a pan of cold water and very, very slowly heat it to boiling point, the frog dies because at no point does it realise the environment around it has changed until the point it's too late. Unionism needs to look and recognise that the environment around us is changing. The demographics are changing. That does not mean a united Ireland is inevitable, but it is something we need to be aware of. Scottish nationalism is a threat to the union, English Nationalism is a threat to the union and I would go as far as to say that I believe the DUP and some of their policies, attitudes and tone is a long term threat to the Union. So I would like to see civic unionism becoming more active.

A few years ago with Peter Robinson I tried to activate them through the Unionist Forum. That was never going to work because although we got a lot of people in the room, some in the room were there to try and destroy the concept from the get go. So I look enviously at civic nationalism and their ability to come together in such big numbers at such short notice in the Waterfront Hall and appear to emerge with a united front.

So it's up to the politicians to give leadership here and try to energise people. We also need to learn that what we did in '98 was get power back from Westminster. But since then we have held it here on 'the hill' and it is long past time where we devolve the power off the hill into councils, through councils into communities, because the closer you get informed decision making to the domestic unit, whatever that happens to be, the more the chance that you will facilitate positive change in people's lives.

Perhaps we need to build civic society that goes beyond the division and the politics of unionism and nationalism?

We struggle when we talk about building a shared future. What I discovered during my years of leadership every July going out to Flanders Fields was that we had a shared past of service and sacrifice. People who aren't interested in the history of the First World War will think that it's all about the 36th (Ulster) Division and the Ulster Tower, but actually on the 1st of July there are three events. The first is at Thiepval and that's for everybody who fought. The second is the Ulster Tower which is for the 36th (Ulster) Division. But then everybody decamps to a little French village called Guillemont where the memorial is for the 10th (Irish) Division for Redmond's men. The first time I went there, when it was all over, I saw people, including men in orange sashes from the Orange

Order, stand proudly to attention for the national anthems of France, the United Kingdom and Ireland. I thought that was magnificent. That there is a shared past in service and the ultimate sacrifice and perhaps if we were to send particularly our primary school children out to take a look we could change the dynamic without changing the narrative

Assuming the objective is that we build a shared and integrated society, what do you think we should be doing?

We have to recognise first of all that nobody is going away. We could all get cryogenically frozen, five years, 15, 50 years, but when we come back there are still going to be Irish republicans and nationalists, there are going to be British unionists and loyalists and people who describe themselves as 'other' on this little postage stamp on planet earth. So we need to learn to share. We need to recognise nobody owns this piece of planet earth. If you go back to the first page of the Belfast Agreement where it talks about building new relationships, the first value was tolerance of each other. It's time to move beyond tolerance because to me tolerance is simply saying "I will accept you're here. I won't necessarily be positive about it, I just won't be negative about it". We need to learn to be positive and use our diversity as a strength. And there has to be political leadership for that.

What I found strange, when I make my pitch for the Ulster Unionists working with the SDLP and trying to go for a post-sectarian election, was that very few seemed to recognise that in our elections, unlike a general election where one party tends to go into 10 Downing Street, after an Assembly election two parties *must* go into Stormont Castle, the equivalent of Downing Street. One unionist, one nationalist. Why do unionists only express an opinion on which unionist party they want on the ground floor when they have a single transferable vote and could equally express an opinion about whether they would like the SDLP or Sinn Féin on the first floor? And equally nationalists by and large tend to only express an opinion about whether they want Sinn Féin or the SDLP. I think that's where we have to get to and to talk about it in political terms.

When Colum Eastwood took over the SDLP I heard him use a phrase that I had been using - "Let's make Northern Ireland work". When I talked to him we were using the same measurements - quality of the health service, education system, prosperity of our people. Not just on how many pounds in the back pockets and purses, although that's important, but also their sense of wellbeing. Everybody now recognises that Northern Ireland per head of population has one of the worst rates of poor mental health and wellbeing. If you set your political stall to try to fix all that and improve all that, that's a lifetime's work. And then the constitutional question becomes an issue for my children or my grandchildren

The conversation that you're talking about is about a shared society rather than an integrated society. We're talking about power sharing. The funding for shared education is potentially for a shared campus where different schools look at each other rather than actually learning to be together.

Yes and I want to go beyond that from a shared education to a single education system. What I've learned, not only that this has been a consistent policy of the Ulster Unionist Party since 1921 when Lord Londonderry was the First Minister right through to Basil McIlvor in the '70s who was the last, but that actually when I say I want to see a single education system, those who are not in the state system think it's an attack, that I am trying to take something off them like the Catholic maintained system. That is not the case and I have to redouble my efforts and be at pains to say, "No, what I'm talking about is saying let's take the best of every sector within the education system and put them together into a single education system". If the Catholic ethos and education is good for Catholic

children why can it not be good for non-Catholic children? Let's embrace everything and bring out something that works for everybody.

That involves the type of conversation that's probably never taken place about how you would actually integrate the existing educational systems.

Those conversations have been taking place in my experience, but very quietly in the background. I don't know that anybody who's ready to really bring those conversations out into the public realm. But some of the in-camera Chatham House⁶¹ conversations I have had which has involved other politicians have been, from my point of view, incredibly positive in that everybody starts with a basis of recognising that the way we're educating our children at the moment is not viable and sustainable. And the alternatives and the options for difference inevitably bring you towards a single education system however you're defining it, so I'm actually quite optimistic that we can get to where we want to get to, but not necessarily in the timeline that I would like to see it.

The system we have at the moment is very expensive. There's an awful lot of wastage by having duplicated system. If you're going to move towards reducing the fiscal cost, the fiscal deficit of Northern Ireland, then you have to achieve savings, which potentially is both beneficial to unionists to argue their place within the union, and also to republicans arguing the potential and viability of Irish unity.

I think that position of saying "We cannot afford to keep doing what we're doing" is the baseline which has brought everybody together to say "We actually need to talk about this". But it's maybe not the ideal place that I would like everybody to start from. I would rather start from a position of saying "We are failing a lot of children in the way we are educating them". I believe, although I'm from a grammar school background, that we overvalue the academic intelligence over all the other intelligences. I believe inside every child there is some spark of ability, creativity and talent. Now you may discover that in the classroom and if you do that's fine, but equally it is fine if you discover it playing a musical instrument, acting on stage, kicking a ball around a field, as long as you find it and that spark then becomes a fire or passion for life and learning and that's the sort of education system I would like to see for all our children.

That's one of the difficult conversations we need. Another one which seems to overshadow lots of things is how we deal with the past and how we deal with the events of the Troubles. How do we have that conversation without causing difficulty?

As a Victims Commissioner I spoke to a lot of people, and victims are not an homogeneous group of people, but there are common experiences. The one that first hit me, and hit me very hard, was that you might think that if something catastrophic happened to you, that you were injured or you lost your partner, your loved one was killed, that the first thing that would happen is the state would form the wagons in a circle. So if you needed medical help, the health service was there for you. If you needed your children taken to school, the education system was there for you. If you needed money... The common experience was you were ignored and forgotten. So then if you look at a comprehensive assessment of the needs of victims you will find that truth and justice is not even on the podium, it's not in the top three. And the top three is mental health and wellbeing. Now I accept that some people's poor mental health and wellbeing is directly attributable to the fact they haven't had truth and justice, so we've got concentric circles going on here. But if we tackled mental health and wellbeing in a very serious way we would help an awful lot of victims to get to a better place. And maybe a place where they are reconciled to what has happened to them. And the commonality of the experience of receiving poor mental health and wellbeing because of a catastrophic act that

⁶¹ Chatham Rules are the convention that governs private conversations that are not to be publicly reported.

happened to them. The commonality of that fact, irrespective of why it happened or who was responsible for it happening, may actually help us move forward.

That implies a disconnect between what victims feel and what the politicians argue for, because the political narrative is very much about justice, but then there are different views about what the word 'justice' means.

When I was appointed Victims Commissioner they appointed four Commissioners out of the blue. I'll not rehearse what went on there, but the four of us had to sit down and try and find a way to work together in much the same way you might ask four chief constables to run the PSNI. It was incredibly challenging. One of the really worthwhile debates we had early on in looking at the legislation that underpinned our existence was, we were there to be champions of the best interests of victims. The question then is, what represents the best interests of victims? Is it what they tell you they want? Or is it what you think they need? Politicians need to learn to listen harder to victims and what they need. They may conclude that sometimes what victims want is not in their best interests. For example, if you have a vulnerable victim who is prone to taking too much alcohol, giving them a big lump sum of money may not be in their best interests, even if that's what they say they want. There is a disconnect between what victims want and what society wants.

When I was leading the Unionist Party through the talks I tried to get the others to say, "Take a blank page and let's go right back to basics. First of all - define 'dealing with the past'. What do we mean by 'dealing with the past'? Secondly, for whose benefit do we want to do it?" If it is for victims and survivors, that's perfectly understandable, that's a perfectly valid thing to do, but it takes you down one path. If you want to deal with the past in a way that allows society to move on, that may be a different path and may involve additional pain for victims and survivors. We have to decide that.

You don't want to re-traumatise either of course.

No you don't want to, but if you want to move society forward can that be done with no pain to any single victim? I'm not sure it can. In the same way, when we talk of reconciliation, I suggested to the other four main party leaders if we took blank pages and five minutes to define what we meant by 'reconciliation' we could get five extremely different definitions. Nobody disagreed with me that that could be the outcome, but nobody was prepared to do it.

My final thought on dealing with the past, from a political point of view, was that we're talking about putting processes in place, some which would be legal, judicial, some about information recovery. Only at the end would politicians make some sort of statement. My view was that all the leaders, local political parties, British government, Irish government, American government, before we began should stand shoulder to shoulder on the steps of Stormont and say, "Look, whatever happened, nobody has clean hands here. We all have a responsibility. We cannot change the past, but we can deal with the legacy of the past and we commit as a collective to do that". In terms of the message you're sending the public, to do it at the beginning of the process is a much stronger, empowering message than waiting until you know effectively what you're 'fessing up to at the end of the process.

If we're talking about the difficult conversations that need to be had, there's perhaps none more difficult than the question of the future constitutional arrangements. How do we de-dramatise the constitutional question?

The first thing I should say is, as a unionist I believe in the constitutional status quo. I believe we're better off in the Union for reasons which I can reel off. I say that to make the point that it's not for me to argue for change, it's for nationalists to argue for change. But it is now incredibly important

that they make those arguments based on the experience of the Brexit referendum, because in June 2016 people voted without knowing exactly what the consequences would be if they voted to exit the European Union. It would be an utter disaster to have a border poll on the same kind of emotional knee jerk reaction without knowing exactly what would happen. If the post boxes were green, would people mind? Is it an issue? It might be and if it is, we need to know it's an issue and then consider whether we need to deal with it. If you are having a parking or a speeding fine brought to your front door by a policeman and you open that door and he's in the uniform of the Garda Síochána, is that an issue? We need to know whether it's an issue for how many people and how big an issue it is. But that is for nationalism to figure out and to process, so that if we do have a border poll, we're doing it with the certainty that was missing back in June 2016.

Are there any frameworks of how those conversations should take place?

I'm not sure there are any frameworks in place at the moment, but if there are I would strongly encourage unionism to engage because it is my experience, not only as a politician but before that as a journalist, that unionism is not good at engaging with others. The best example is 25 years ago, Gerry Adams got his 48 hour visa from Bill Clinton to go to a conference in New York, a conference that Jim Molyneux of the Ulster Unionists and Ian Paisley of the DUP had already signed up to speak at. But when Gerry Adams got his ticket the two unionist leaders not only withdrew from the conference, they cancelled their flights and stayed home, leaving the pitch clear to Gerry Adams. And then unionists complain the White House is green. What do you expect when you only hear one side of the story? Paisley and Molyneux should have gone to New York. They should have had their own event before the conference and said, "When you go across the road, ask Mr Adams about Jean McConville and the Disappeared. Ask him about Bloody Friday. Ask him about La Mon, a napalm bomb on civilians in a hotel". Americans would have understood. So, I am for engaging, and not just to rant as I may have just ranted against the former President of Sinn Féin, but to engage and say, "We are confident about who we are and what we stand for, let's talk, let's see where there's commonality". And there might be a lot more than we imagine.

Frances Black (Interviewed 19th February, 2019)

Frances Black is an independent senator in the Oireachtas and a member of the Oireachtas Good Friday Implementation Committee. She is best known as a successful singer and musician. She established the Rise Foundation, which is a charity addressing addiction issues.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

I'm presuming we're talking within the north?

The focus is on the north, but the border is an interesting issue. To an extent some of the same questions apply both north and south. And clearly the south has got a lot of excellent work done in terms of the Citizens' Assembly. So particularly about the north, but also on a cross border basis.

I feel slightly inadequate, but I can share my experience in my work, particularly in Dublin, Dundalk, other areas and also in Belfast and on Rathlin Island and the little bit of the cross community work that I've done - cross border actually as well - and how it blossomed in a way but unfortunately, due to lack of funding, didn't continue.

The area that I have expertise in is around mental health and addiction. The way I see it is that often people can be united in pain, trauma, emotional pain. We all know, particularly within the six counties, people have been impacted by the conflict. The trauma that comes out of that can be carried down the generations. When I was in college, I did a piece of work on it and when I started to look at it, particularly during the conflict, I talked to a few community organisations. I was very interested in the field of addiction and how that manifested itself. I realised during the conflict there was a lot of prescription medication given out to people and you can understand why. I know myself, even travelling to the north you could feel the tension. You could feel at any point there could be something that's going to go off, or there could be an explosion, or you see the Army going around with guns. Even though people get used to it, it can be scary, particularly if you're a young child.

If you have a partner that went to jail, or any family member, or a family member killed or shot, there's huge trauma. It was dealt with by giving out prescription medication, huge amounts of medication given out. That can impact the next generation. If you have maybe the father goes to jail and the mother goes on prescription [drugs], she's got five kids or six kids, she's trying to struggle, she's trying to get through life, the trauma of what's going on around her, she sees it everywhere, whatever community you're from the impact is the same.

You start taking prescription medication and the children nearly lose both parents because the parent who's on the prescription medication cannot be present. They can go through the motions and maybe cook the dinner, but not really present. Often the eldest child will look after the rest of the kids and there's this ongoing legacy that's carried on down. That's what trauma does and what addiction does. That's what unhealthy relationships with prescription drugs can do. When I went into the different communities and I met with different communities I met with people from both sides, the issues are the same, the heartache is the same, the mental health in particular. When the [Oireachtas] Good Friday Implementation Committee went up to visit, we went into west Belfast and we talked to the community there, - particularly around the Irish language and the impact on them, it was almost soul destroying that they feel that it's their right to speak their own language - then we went into the Shankill Road and the issues were quite the same. When I started to talk to them about mental health and the impact on young people, about what was going on, the deprivation, the lack of housing, the lack of jobs and all of those things, they started to come alive. Within that meeting, people started to talk about mental health. I remember one man saying he was with a

group of young men and asked them, “What kind of a job would you love to do?” and they said “My dream job is to drive a van for a local supermarket”. My heart went out. And they talked a lot about mental health. One man talked about driving down a certain road where at one time a bomb went off and he still goes into the trauma of what that felt like and he still goes into that hyper-vigilance. As a result he had to go to his doctor to get medication. It's just a vicious cycle that can be carried down to the next generation.

I genuinely believe that if those issues, if we started off from that level in working with the communities and bringing people together, talking about their anxieties, their stresses, their worries. I remember in north Belfast one time going to a huge event around suicide and people from both communities who'd lost family members - the pain and heartache were the same. People got up and spoke about their loved one and it didn't matter what community they came from. They could identify with each other through that pain.

How do you bond those communities with the shared experience, who traditionally blamed each other for their experiences?

The Rise Foundation⁶² is the charitable organisation I set up in 2009. We went up in Rathlin Island⁶³, we ran programmes. We ran cross-border, cross-community programmes. What that meant was you would have ten people in a room cross-community, but we also brought people up from Dublin or Donegal or wherever. The Rise Foundation supports family members who have somebody they love with an addiction problem, with an alcohol, drug or gambling problem. Anybody that has a family member in addiction is heartbroken. What I discovered through that programme was that people could identify with each other, identified with the heartache, with the sadness, with the loss they had, but they would bring in their own heartache to being part of the conflict. That has to come out. What happened to them and their family. You would have unionists, nationalists who would talk and people from down south would have had no idea what happened in the north during the conflict. It was amazing the support they gave each other and almost held each other - it was powerful to watch. I have no answers with regard to how do you do that on a larger scale. But it's certainly worth a conversation.

Presumably it can be go beyond issues of addiction.

Absolutely. I'm using that as an example, because when you have somebody in addiction your heart is broken, you can't think straight, you're in that hyper-vigilant place, you're constantly worried. We know the suicide rates are huge in certain areas in the north, but we also know the suicide rates in Cork are huge. Suicide is something that nobody understands unless you go through it yourself. If you have somebody that you know or love, the ripple effect is devastating, not only to the family, but also to the whole community. There's huge levels of suicide across the island of Ireland. Then you have mental health, people who suffer with anxiety, depression, so many different mental health issues. When we say the words 'mental health' we have this image of somebody who's after having a nervous breakdown. That's not what I'm talking about. I would have had depression many, many years ago and I struggled through it and I would consider that a mental health issue. You don't know what's wrong with you, but when you bring people together on that level it can bond people and barriers go down.

That leads us directly into how in the north we build a shared and genuinely integrated society.

⁶² [The Rise Foundation](#)

⁶³ Rathlin Island is off the north coast of County Antrim. Frances Black's father originates from there.

Everything comes down to community. Family and community. I don't have the answers, but community is so important. Since the Good Friday Agreement when go to Belfast or Derry, there was a great sense of community on either side because everybody looked after everybody and everybody supported everybody. But more recently that's gone. It is not that same sense of people looking out for each other and that seems to have disintegrated a little bit.

Not just that, they are still different communities. So yes, there are strong spirits of community within different areas and traditions, but they don't knit together do they?

They don't, no. I don't think there's the same sense of community that was once there during the conflict. It's definitely just not as strong as it was.

But it didn't bond the two communities into a shared experience.

No.

And that's what we need to aim for now isn't it?

A hundred percent. My belief is that now it's about bonding the two communities. It's through so many different ways you can do that. Probably starting with schools and more integrated schools. That would be very powerful because there's a lot of young people out there who have no idea about the conflict and no understanding. The segregation is still there and that's really sad. If there was a focus on the communities. There is cross-community work going on. In north Belfast, the Bridge of Hope do really, really good work around the victims of the conflict. There's always that question, who is a victim of the conflict? Everybody's a victim of the conflict, even the young people today, the legacy of it that's carried down through the generations is still there, it's still present.

But in a way the concept of blame creates a barrier to seeing the similarity of shared experiences.

Yeah. I suppose it's always going to be there, everybody has to blame somebody and we see it all the time even in here, in Leinster House. I suppose it's how we strip it all down to a human level? When I went into west Belfast, when I went in with the Good Friday Implementation Committee, there was a vibrancy about that community. But when we went into the Shankill Road there was a feeling of lost-ness, maybe no direction, or something. I can't describe it. I just pick up on energies and there was huge sadness there. When we spoke to some of the people in the Shankill Road, I asked them about the Irish language and they said, "We don't care about the Irish language, there's people here who have gone and learnt with Linda Ervine and we don't have any problem with it". And I said, "What is the biggest problem?", and they said "It's housing, mental health, health, lack of jobs, employment", all of those things that at the end of the day are really, really important.

How do we deal with the past?

We almost need to take a model that's already working and expand on it and put in the resources to that community on how they're working together. I worked with Irene Sherry in Bridge of Hope. It was Irene who brought the two communities together. Then we went to Rathlin Island and were able to bring people up and we all worked together and Irene works very closely with Billy Hutchinson and others. That model seems to be working.

Do you think that can be expanded to deal with the issues of trauma from the past?

It's a step forward. It's the first step.

Do you believe that sort of truth recovery is a good way forward?

A hundred percent. Absolutely.

There does seem to be a sense that the best way to deal with the past is to repress it and not deal with it.

I know the justice for the forgotten. They have come here [to Leinster House] for a good few meetings. I have met with the families and seen the heartache. I don't think they'll ever rest. I know the people who come in here around the Monaghan bombings. Oh my God, to listen to them to this day, how many years ago was that? Still to this day they're as heartbroken as the day it happened. There's a huge injustice there. It's one hundred percent time for truth and the families need to know what's gone on.

If dealing with the truth of the past and reconciliation is difficult, the other thing which is very difficult is the constitutional conversation. How can we have that conversation without it being seen as threatening?

That's difficult. People are fearful of that conversation. Frightened. Everything comes down to communication. If we can sit down and take the fears away from people, amazing things can happen. I wouldn't be a great communicator myself. I'm first and foremost a singer. I left school when I was very young. I don't have a great language. But I do know that people understand the language of the heart and that can be through music, it can be through poetry, it can be through the arts. An awful lot is fear based and people are fearful of those conversations. It comes back to being open and honest and taking those fears away from people and listening to what those fears are. I genuinely believe if you sit down and listen to what people's fears are and try and work through them from whatever community you're from, amazing things can happen.

It's also about warmth isn't it? That if the conversations begin with a sense of hostility then they don't go in the right direction, whereas if you can build up a sense of human warmth...

Absolutely. That time we went into the Shankill Road, I was the only woman there, as part of the Good Friday Implementation Committee. Everybody else was sitting in shirts and ties and suits. I come from a very working class community, from Charlemont Street. I was born and reared in the tenements, proud of it. But I know if I was meeting in my local community hall with my friends and neighbours and sat with a table like this with a whole bunch of men in suits who were talking about Brexit and trade deals and all of that kind of stuff, I'd get pissed off. And I would find it hard to understand what they were talking about. It was only when I started to bring in the piece around mental health and, "What's it like for you?" that the energy changed and people became animated and they started to talk about their own experiences. And that's where we broke down the barriers. It was very simple.

So it's warmth, plus talking about the things that matter to people rather than abstract issues.

Yeah. To talk about what it's like for them on a human level, "What's life like for you on a daily basis? What are your struggles?". And when you do that and people start to talk about their struggles and you really hear them and you listen to them and you try and support it in some way, whether it be just from sitting down and just having that warmth, amazing things can happen.

Claire Sugden MLA (Interviewed 19th February, 2019)

Claire Sugden is an independent unionist MLA, who was Northern Ireland justice minister for almost a year in 2016 and 2017.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

Knowledge, information is a great place to begin. We've had a situation here at Stormont where we haven't had a sitting Assembly for two years. The anger amongst the general public is palpable. I feel it and see it every day. What frustrates me is that they assume MLAs are not doing anything. But you know, had they know what we do, whether that's conversations outside of the chamber, whether it's progressing policy in a way that we can because we're scrutinising or holding things to account, they may not feel as angry and it may be a way of helping move the process along.

I'm a great believer that leadership is about bringing people with you. I don't think politics is doing that right now. How we do it is by informing people and educating them to what their civic duty is as members of the public. Indeed, what the system is that they're voting for and not voting for. That's how we generally move politics forward.

People talk to me about, it's our deeply divided society. Yes, I suppose that plays a part in hindering our progress, but good politics and good governance is what's missing from our puzzle. The past 20 years were about establishing the institutions, establishing the peace and ensuring that we can get to a place where we can work together. Now is the time when we work together and start delivering for the people of Northern Ireland. When we do that we might start to see that people realise we're all the same despite our backgrounds. We're all aiming for the same thing. I think that's happiness. There's not one person in Northern Ireland that wouldn't tell me they just want to be happy and want the country to move forward. How we get there is leadership and good governance.

You mentioned the institutions. The institutions aren't working. And one of the institutions that's not met for many years is the Civic Forum. So the question then is whether we need new institutions that connect politics with civil society.

I absolutely agree with that. The work that's being done around a civic forum or a civic assembly is really positive. People do need to be engaged because too often politicians take it for granted that they know what the public mood is. And if they're going to go to the polls and the public affirm their opinions on things then why would they think otherwise?

So there needs to be a mechanism to suggest what public mood and opinion really is, a safe space for politicians to engage in a debate where they're maybe tentative or unsure because they actually don't know what the public feel or think. It's sad that post Good Friday Agreement the Civic Forum didn't come to anything. It was perhaps more it's makeup rather than the intention and the idea around it. It wasn't genuinely civic. It was perhaps people who already had a voice within the political system and that's what any future sort of civic forum or civic platform needs to be about, it needs to be about people on the ground, it needs to be about the people who are suffering from the fact that we don't have an Assembly. We need the people who are not at the table to come forward.

That criticism has been levelled at the Civic Forum, that it was constituting people from trade unions for example, religious groups that, as you say, have a voice already. And also that maybe some of the community sector is dominated by people that are already active within the political parties. Is that is that broadly what you're saying?

Yes. The people we need to get here are the people who are not engaged. The community and voluntary sector is fantastically strong and they have a really good voice and they inform policy. I met with them regularly. But it's the people who are not engaged that are the critical element in this. Even to come back to the kind of constitutional question, it's not the people who are nationalists and it's not the people who say they are unionists, it's the people who are not quite sure in the middle that will make the decision of whether we change or we maintain where we are.

How structurally do we engage people that are not represented within the party political system and the structures of the community sector?

We need to outreach. One of the most successful things that I have ever done allowed me to engage with my constituency, was actively go out and seek people who wouldn't necessarily come to me and take an interest in their beliefs and their interests and see how I could best represent them. That's really important. Sometimes people think that politicians think that people have to come to them if they have a problem and then they'll deal with it on that basis, so they're almost reacting to public interests and concerns. Whereas for me, I very much want to be a representative. Therefore I have to be proactive and go out to them, because I'm not going to assume that they're going to come to me. I see them as my boss, that they drive and lead what I do. On a wider, higher kind of way, that's what government has to do. When I was minister of justice I was keen to ensure that the communication was a two way street. In our governance we often think that communication is press releases. It's not. It's stakeholders and it's chatting to people and to me that's leadership. You're bringing people along with you by having them in the room, having the conversation and we need to have more of a focus on that. It can't be just about ticking boxes.

Public policy has strong consultation stages, but is it really effective genuine consultation when they're ticking the boxes of going to the same old groups and the groups who are in the room already? Northern Ireland's not a big place, 1.8 million people. We could easily engage - and new technologies make that possible. We need to start having a civic conversation. I often go into schools and I'll tell kids there's not one aspect or one subject you could bring up that I couldn't connect back to politics. On that basis, you need to have an interest because there are people who are making decisions on your behalf and if you disagree with that, that's an issue. We need to have more of a civic conversation and it begins with schools, maybe primary schools. We learn how to use money, we learn how to tell the time. Maybe we have to learn how to deal with politics and understand that it's a part of our everyday life.

Is that part of the approach of how we move towards a shared and integrated society as well?

Yes, because if anything it demonstrates that we have a shared interest. If we look at the day to day issues and subjects that we deal with here in the Assembly, it's very rare that the parties will disagree on those issues because most people in Northern Ireland tend to want better health services, they want better education and better funded education. They want opportunities and through business they want employment. Those things don't tend to differ along the various parties and they definitely don't differ depending on what your ideological position is, what your skin colour is, what your sex is, none of those things.

When the Assembly was working - and I get disappointed when I hear people saying that it hadn't worked, it worked for 10 years and progress, we maybe weren't putting through policies that other jurisdictions were, but we're post-conflict and we should always be viewed in that way. I think beyond the 20 years if we were still moving forward in a limited way then yes, we would have look at it because it wasn't working but it's unfair to say that the Northern Ireland Assembly wasn't working because we're still very unique and it's still a very fractured society. I don't think we ever did

properly reconcile in the way that we should. What often happens with peace processes is we get the peace and then they think, "That's it, we're fixed" and then they move on to the next conflict era, when really the most critical part is the post-conflict era because that's ensuring that we actually don't go back to where we were. That's the hard part.

You say there's common objectives. I can see that in terms of social and economic outcomes. But to what extent is there a commonality across the party politics towards genuine sharing and integration within society?

I think there is. My experience with the political parties, and I certainly don't speak for any of them, is that they do want to represent the best interests of all the people of Northern Ireland. Every MLA will tell you that it's not just unionists who come into their office, or nationalists, or neither, but it's people from all backgrounds because on a day to day, it's our job to represent and advocate on their best interests and behalf.

Where we get stuck is on party policy. Maybe if politicians learned to say, "I made a mistake", put their hands up said they're sorry, maybe we wouldn't find ourselves in the situation we're in.

Any rational person could see that the past two years has been unnecessary. It's damaging to everybody, whether it's individual MLAs or the parties. Whether that will make any difference moving forward I'm not sure. But sometimes we just need to get back to reality, realising that the job here is to represent the people of Northern Ireland and try and fight for their best interests. Yes, we all have our own ideological beliefs, we all have our own utopias. Is that really what our job is? I would like to think I'm a very realistic and practical politician and I see my job is about improving public services for the people of Northern Ireland. I think sometimes the higher level stuff gets in the way when really it doesn't affect people on a day to day.

I interrupted you talking about reconciliation. The past is one of the things that's getting in the way of us dealing with the present and the future. You're saying that reconciliation should be a central part of that.

Absolutely. How can we even have a conversation towards uniting an island when we can't unite ourselves within one part of that island? Ireland's history, whether it's Northern Ireland's history or the island and its relationship with the United Kingdom, is long and it's deep and it comes from so many different elements. What has always been missing in that piece is that history has happened, but then the bit around people looking at their needs hasn't and reconciliation is key. I get disappointed when I hear people almost bypassing that, or not even considering it in talking about any new constitutional arrangements because I think it's irresponsible, because what is an island or a jurisdiction if not for the people? If we can't unite them then what's the point of uniting anything?

It saddens me where we could go if we don't actually put people at the heart of this. Politics is about people, does it not come from the Greek word 'poli', meaning 'many people'?

Beyond that, how do we deal with legacy? It's more than reconciliation isn't it? People have unhappiness about what's happened in the past and simply reconciling different communities won't deal with the unhappiness about past events.

For me, reconciling is about acknowledging people. All people, all sides, all opinions. Not necessarily agreeing, because that would make us all very boring if we all agreed. But it is about understanding why it is important that we address legacy issues, that a mother who lost her son wants to know why

and knows that the government has a responsibility in some way [in] giving her that answer. They may not be able to give her that answer, but trying is important to all of this.

One thing that really struck me in my work as minister of justice when I was meeting a lot of victims and their families, was that the trauma from what had happened - and trauma is such a big part of conflict and it's appalling that as a post-conflict society we have never even considered how we dealt with our trauma and still aren't 20 years later - but that trauma seems to get passed from generation to generation. If we are genuinely going to reconcile we have to kind of break that trauma at some point.

I met a grandmother who sadly then passed away, but it's her grandson who's sitting in the room talking to me about the injustices of their relative being taken during the Troubles and the fact that they haven't got answers and that the government hasn't upheld their responsibility around that. I don't think it's enough to say time will be a healer because trauma, particularly in a post-conflict situation, is going to get passed from generation to generation to generation. If we don't address it we will be still facing the same issues in 50 years time, let alone 20 years post-Good Friday Agreement.

The current generation of politicians themselves are feeling the trauma of past events and I wonder if that has been fully recognised.

Perhaps it hasn't been fully recognised, but I do take that point. There are current politicians suffering from their own traumas of the past. Trauma is an inevitable part of life, whether it's in Northern Ireland because of post-conflict, or whether it's because someone close to you passed away when you were 16. But it's how we deal with that and it's how we move forward. I don't think we've ever been given the tools or the knowledge or the sense to be able to do that. Sometimes I wonder is it because Northern Ireland was conflict within a western democracy and it's almost assumed that we know how because we're on the periphery of one of the biggest economies in the world and we should be able to deal with these things. But if we could deal with our trauma in Northern Ireland it might help people heal and move on and, if anything, there's a shared emotion there that would unite us more than raising a border would.

You said to me in past interviews that, if I understand it correctly, there's a need to recognise that people from different communities, different backgrounds each have their own story and it's a matter of understanding where they've come from rather than making judgements necessarily on where they've come from.

Absolutely. I think the greatest skill any politician can have is empathy. You don't have to agree. And I think sometimes we misunderstand empathy with agreement. It is important to know where people come from. Sociologically, we are all products of our environments and our upbringings. I don't think anyone is born bad, it's the journey and the path that they have gone through their lives. It is really important that we do look back. It's not even with the purpose of justifying some of the actions, or some of the things that happened in Northern Ireland, but it does get us to a place where we're de-sensitising our past a bit. To move forward is key, because this past two years has inflamed anger and the people who perhaps have every right to be angry because of what happened to them or their families during our conflict were beginning to move forward, because they didn't want their future generations, and their children, their grandchildren to feel the same way as they do.

But it almost feels like we're taking the peace process in vain because we haven't had an Executive for two years and haven't had an Assembly for two years. So the hard fought peace and the pain and the hurt endures in many, has almost been brought to the surface again because what was it all for?

What was the Good Friday Agreement for? What were the hard decisions that were taken at that time for? And many people, I suppose even from my own perspective and I wasn't of the age to be able to agree to it, but my parents did, there was things within the Good Friday Agreement that I wouldn't have been comfortable with. But it was what we had to do to secure peace and to secure governance and secure a future for Northern Ireland. This past two years if anything have said, "What was it all for?". I suppose we made sacrifices whenever we signed the Good Friday Agreement with the hope that it would bring prosperity and peace and now 20 years later it hasn't. It has at least brought peace, but it could go back.

It's brought the absence of war without all the benefits of peace.

Yes, absolutely.

What does that mean in terms of where we go to from here achieving an ongoing settlement, the constitutional question?

I like to think of myself as an honest person. That's what we need to be, honest with ourselves, with each other, to respect one another. It's really difficult. I don't ever assume, or have the arrogance to assume, that my opinion is right. It's what I believe, but I'm one person of how many billion in this world. We're going to be different and have different opinions and ideas. We need to embrace that in one another and go forward in debating, if that's what's appropriate about how we can get to a shared space. It's difficult.

What does that mean in practical terms?

There's an obvious divide in Northern Ireland and we can't get away from that. Does there not come a point when we have to accept the divide, to move forward to unite?

But if we have politicians from different backgrounds that do not respect each other, we can't just enforce respect on people.

No we can't, but then I suppose as a civic society we stop voting for them. I'm a voter as much as I am a politician and when I look at my ballot paper I look at those who are actually genuinely wanting to help people.

Does because of what appears to be a lack of mutual respect at senior levels within party politics, does it mean that much of that debate needs to be led by civic society?

It does, but there needs to be a drive from the higher level politicians that it's not about them. It's not about their individual personalities. The most important descriptor of myself as a politician is 'representative'. Sometimes we have to take our own prejudices outside of what this role is. We have to be leaders and bring people with us. I have so many respectful conversations with people who disagree with me, but it's not about the disagreeing, it's about having the conversation. I enjoy engaging and people say, "Oh, you know Claire, I don't mean to have a go at you", and I'm like, "You're not having a go at me, we're just having a conversation". Maybe we don't know how to debate! Maybe we don't know how to have these conversations and maybe that is how we move forward.

When I had a debate in the chamber when it was up and running, I'd make a point of speaking to that politician after that debate to let them know that what's said inside that chamber stays inside that chamber in terms of relationships. This is our job and this is what we do. But we need to

maintain those relationships because that's important. The big problem with where we're at now, particularly two years after the Assembly, is more to do with relationships than it is issues.

So the three words from what you've said today I think are, respect, relationships and the need for proper leadership.

Yes. Yes.

Clare Bailey (Interviewed 19th February, 2019)

Clare Bailey is Green Party MLA for South Belfast and leader of the Green Party in Northern Ireland.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

We've had a process over the past 20 years and we've called it 'a peace process'. We have to look at what has happened in those 20 years, because I'm of the firm opinion that we've had a political process at the cost of a peace process. We have to look at where have the benefits been in the past 20 years. Working class and the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland and those communities, certainly haven't seen a payoff. To try and get civil society to move and look at progress you really have to start investing in where they are right now. You have to make them feel there is a focus and an investment in them. I'm not seeing very much of that.

So you would suggest that unless people see a benefit from the political process here, that actually you won't get engagement in civil society.

A hundred percent. Why are they going to buy into something that has given them no return, or the return is a negative one? That's a no-brainer. We have more peace walls in Northern Ireland now than we did during the conflict. Our education system hasn't moved on.

Back in 1981, I was one of the first 28 pupils to attend Lagan College when it opened. That was our first ever planned integrated school in Northern Ireland. There were protests at the door of the school. Our buses were smashed and we were identified by our uniforms. That was a bunch of parents and concerned people who'd come together to set that up. To this day that has still been the biggest challenge to peace building in Northern Ireland. Yet here we are almost 38 years later with only 65 of our schools, both primary and post-primary, that are under the integrated banner.

So there's a huge amount to be done in trying to bring people together and let them work together. Obviously we can't knock down our housing stock and build this new way of living, but over the past 20 years I've seen little attempt at integration. The investment in the political process has been very burdensome. A lot of red tape, a lot of slow decision making, the Assembly when it was up and going actually delivered very little. While it provided a space and a place to have debates, it hasn't gone hand-in-hand with true reconciliation and peace building.

We don't want to just wait, do we, for the politics and the economy to get better before we have a stronger civic society? So what do we do in the meantime?

We start to refocus where our priorities are. We're sitting now two years with no government in Northern Ireland, no Assembly, no Executive and our budget is being squeezed, welfare reform coming in. We have soaring levels of poverty. We have more people dying by suicide since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement than were killed in the Troubles. We have intergenerational trauma. We have the social ills and the deprivation and the hardship, becoming stark. That's where we need to focus everything, our time and attention, but I'm seeing instead a return of divisive political rhetoric. While we're facing Brexit we have nobody at the table speaking for the people in Northern Ireland who voted to remain. We have ten DUP MPs who were against the [Good Friday] Agreement in the first place. We have hardline Brexiteers who are pushing for a no deal Brexit and openly admitting that they'd never even read the Good Friday Agreement. And we're being distracted by all this and then the other narrative coming from the nationalist side is pushing for a border poll. And again, they're pushing for a border poll with absolutely no deal on the table. For the

nationalist parties, whose raison d'être has always been about a united Ireland, to reach this point and still not be willing to put their ideas on the table of what that is, yet they're calling for other people to do that for them. So we're seeing this bipolar, this binary sense about identity politics taking over again.

When you transfer that down to the grassroots, onto street level, people are being pushed and they're frightened and their backs are to the wall. I don't see how you can allow this political mess to keep dominating, because that pushes people to the edge. We are still a deeply traumatised society. It doesn't take much to just scratch those open wounds and people are still living with that fear and it's getting worse because we're not dealing with it and that leads to that intergenerational trauma. These levels of systemic generational poverty, disillusionment, lack of hope, lack of educational achievement. If we want to provide the space to allow civic society to come together, to start engaging in what progress looks like, then you have to make them feel secure. And what we have at the minute is a *very* insecure population, a *very* insecure and unstable political process, a serious lack of leadership in many quarters and people, when they're pushed to their limits, will go back and retreat into what they know, so until we address these issues I don't see how we're going to get a true and meaningful progress. We would simply replicate the identity discourse that we're all so used to.

We have a void in the political institutions which means that we need to hear a civic voice. So how can we get that civic voice out? How can it be structured?

If we look to the model they used in the south, the Citizens' Assembly, I think that's an excellent model to start engaging with. That is the best way to go, because we need to break it down into small pockets where we can create safe spaces and all views and all experiences should be legitimate, considered and contemplated and allow people to start that expression. This is going back to that lack of peace building, if we had been able to create those spaces and allowed the development of understanding and networking, it doesn't even necessarily have to be friendship building, but to get to know who we are as a community, as a society, that is one of the best models that we could follow in trying to create that space.

As I understand it, the first Citizens' Assembly in Northern Ireland looked at social care. Is that the type of topic that should be considered by a Citizens' Assembly, or should it be things that are much more at the heart of the conflict history of Northern Ireland?

There's no reason we can't have both, or all, and wider. All these conversations need to be had. It's a bit naive to believe that the general population don't have political views. While the majority don't vote⁶⁴ that doesn't mean they're not paying attention and they don't have opinions that they would want to be put forward. So if we want civic engagement to start tackling the issues of legacy or reconciliation or dealing with our past, they're all conversations we should have been having 20 years ago. The Good Friday Agreement was put together by wider civic society. You had politics there, the business leaders, community and voluntary sectors, trade unions, churches, everybody was at that table. That's what created the deal and we've come from that to 20 years later having a two party stalemate that's brought the institutions down and created the mess that we're in. So I don't believe that politics, in my experience so far in Northern Ireland, has been able to lead the way.

⁶⁴ Voter turnout is less than 50% of those on the electoral register in some parts of Northern Ireland in some elections, including in the [2019 European elections](#). Around 25% of eligible voters are not correctly registered at their current address, according to an official [study](#), suggesting the level of voter participation is significantly below even those levels.

The objective is to create a shared integrated society. How do we do that?

First of all, we have to look at who we are as a society. We have to set up, and acknowledge that we need to put mechanisms in there to, have proper representation. For example, women are still largely ignored from many of our processes. We had our legacy consultation from NIO. And all the structures they were talking about setting up or implementing or moving forward with are very prescriptive. They're not taking in gender balance, smaller minority communities, there's a whole raft of voices missing from that picture. Yet it is very top heavy with political involvement. A discussion needs to be had in terms of updating or developing the Good Friday Agreement. It was never meant to be a forever process. It was a 'for now' process, but yet we haven't evolved very much from there.

We're stuck in this two party stalemate. The missing link is civic society. I think that the political process and the peace process have to be separate entities, because what we have at the minute is the notion that our political institutions can be so involved in the peace building mechanisms, for example, the Historical Inquiries Team, truth and reconciliation, oral histories. That needs to be removed and put firmly into the arena of civic society because this is a citizens' process, this is for wider society. The political involvement is way too much. I see an opportunity to roll-out a full, properly funded, resourced peace process and hand that to civic society to manage, while we learn what it is to be responsible politicians and learn how to do good governance.

That's presumably a task too big for Citizens' Assemblies and that doesn't really bring together those elements of civic society. So how would civic society be the alternative voice to the political process in the absence of the Civic Forum and being a step perhaps too far for Citizens' Assemblies?

I'm not claiming to have all the answers, but proper civic involvement could be managed by an outsider. I look at what we've got now is a very staid politics and political leadership. We know where they're coming from and they're not moving on and when it comes to election time we just need to scratch the surface and get people out voting on identity. While they can still do that, something else has to happen in the background. We need a dual process where wider civic society have that engagement and the proper full engagement. I believe that can be managed by an outside independent arbitrator. From the moment the institution was brought down in January 2017 we were hearing rumours that it would be down for five years, or it would be down for a long time at least, and certainly until Brexit is sorted. There is no will from the British government to get any talks up and going. We know all the rehearsed reasons we are in this stalemate. How can we allow this whole process to be moved forward?

There has to be a forum for civic society to come in, because there are other things that need to be dealt with and they keep getting pushed to the side. While that on its own is not a bad thing, I don't see how our politics is going to come up with the solutions to the future and provide that progress when they're just oppositionally opposed to each other. We have a power sharing Executive, so they're never going to meet in the middle. So an outside body and a dual tandem process to allow civic society - and that gives a lot of duck and cover opportunity to political parties to get themselves into a deep trench.

It's like a new three strand approach which is, you have a Citizens' Assembly to deal with specific thorny difficulties, you have a political process which is arbitrated by an outsider, and you have a civic process alongside the party political process, again arbitrated by an outsider. That's how you see it?

It's a valid notion to explore. The problem is we've never dealt with sectarianism and that keeps us apart. Until we can dig into that, we are going nowhere. You have to start exploring the possibilities of how we do that. This is ingrained in everything about who we are.

We have this deep-rooted sectarianised society in which we have difficulty dealing with the attempts to create shared housing, shared education, the small size of the integrated education sector. This isn't dealing with the underlying problems of separation is it?

No. We need to come up with a framework of dealing with sectarianism and it's going to be more than one generation. This is going to be a long term thing to deal with because it is so ingrained. We have to start investing in all those things and it needs to come from an agreed position. That will only happen when we acknowledge and I don't think that we've even got to the acknowledgement part yet.

Do we need a new way of dealing with the past in order to deal with the present and the future?

Dealing with the past is very tough. The structures, institutions created with the Stormont House Agreement, there's a lot of very sound processes in there. I don't think they go far enough, but I'm not sure we will ever get something that will please everybody and give everything to all people. But we do need to start somewhere. While we have that whole legacy process written into that, we don't have the political will to start it. I don't see how that can be governed by political parties, because a lot within it is completely against their ideological reason for being. We need Stormont House and the legacy institutions and processes rolled out and dealt with and moved on, but not by political parties, because we are a very juvenile political system. It's only been 20 years. Accountability, responsibility and capability is something that we're still learning.

We should invest in our political institutions to do all those things and be responsible, open, transparent and representative, while we allow the legacy institutions and the peace process to be rolled out elsewhere, but I don't think that the twain should meet.

Do we have to do find an effective way of dealing with the past before we can achieve social reconciliation?

Undoubtedly, because it comes down to the whole sectarian issue again. We are so embedded that we don't see outside a sectarian lens. So when I speak to people who are very unfamiliar with the context of Northern Ireland or those nuances and how delicate the whole process is, then you start to unwind or maybe explain and explore a bit more about social policy, for example, and a lot of the harm it's done or how much farther behind areas in Great Britain we are, then they're very shocked. We're hearing a lot about a rights based agenda or about equality for all at the minute, but where's that been for the past 20 years? We have been conflict centred, conflict led. We have been led by our past, which has stopped us being able to look to the future. We have a new generation coming up: my children were born at the time that the Good Friday Agreement and ceasefires were being put in place, so they are that generation of what I would call a new Ireland, or the potential new Ireland. Their experience of growing up and being here is not mine and never should it have been and that's what the whole process was about. So we need to find a way to allow this new generation, this new experience and this forward thinking to be at the centre of anything going forward because that should be what's leading us.

It's that difference between allowing the past to dictate the future, or do we allow the present to open our eyes to that? We still have the same political discourse and rhetoric dominating. While it's valid to be nationalist or unionist, I think that sectarianism has been written into the very heart of

our institutions. I have to designate myself as either a nationalist or a unionist. If I don't agree with either, or don't identify as either, I'm automatically discounted as 'other'. And what's 'other'? I designated myself as a feminist when I was first elected. The computer does not compute. So I am automatically an 'other'. So my 'other' vote in some Assembly debates is lesser than a nationalist or unionist. It's [in] those types of machinations that I mean by sectarianism being written into the heart of the institutions. How can that be fit for the future when our institutions are embedded within a sectarian notion?

And you said that your children happily have not had the same experience as you. Yet the latest research shows that to an extent kids today are being more segregated than they might have been in the past, rather than actually making progress. That's pretty depressing isn't it?

It's a shocking failure. We'll have to go back again to ministerial decision making. We are expecting civic society to have moved on, but not acknowledging the absolute failure of the political institutions that's governing that. If our political institutions are founded on sectarian division, how are we expecting civic society to move on?

And that leads us to the other question which is, how we have the constitutional conversation in this context.

This is a very interesting time to be in politics, just to be alive. We're back into this constitutional notion of are we British, are we Irish? It's that binary sense of who we are. Brexit has brought this up, what will we be the other side of Brexit? Post-Brexit, where there is no plan, we went to a referendum led by hardline Brexiteers with no plan on the table. When I hear about the conversations and the push for a border poll in Ireland, I'm just thinking Brexit Part 2, because there is no plan and that's a real failure from nationalist politicians. If this has been the *raison d'être*, their whole reason for existence – where is their plan? Where is this Socialist Republic that I have heard about all my days?

Every economic model that I have seen put forward for the case for unification is built on the same neo-liberal economic system. Is the north just going to be subsumed into the south, are we just going to be one Ireland under Leinster House? These are not fit for purpose conversations. If we want a united Ireland we need to talk about transformation and we need to be in no doubt whatsoever that a new Ireland is coming and she's on her way and she's called climate chaos. So regardless, we've been given 12 years to the point of no return from the International Panel of Climate Change where if we do not radically change our lifestyles, our behaviours, then the damage that will be done will be irreparable. So we are going to be forced into renegotiating who we are on this island, how we get along, what our relationships are, but more importantly how we do business together. I am in no doubt that a new Ireland is coming, but I don't believe that it's the one many people have been thinking of.

And how do we have that conversation though?

There are a lot of ways to introduce that. In terms of energy infrastructure, we need the all island interconnector grid up and going. This has been an ongoing conversation for a long time, yet we have no solution. We still are talking about this. As climate chaos gathers momentum, as we begin to feel the impact of that more, there is an opportunity to be able to talk about this without it being an identity, an old school constitutional question, because the future is coming and we have to engage with that. How do we feed ourselves? What is our agricultural output? What are our energy needs? We live on an island and it's quite a small island, surrounded by the Atlantic and Irish Seas. We have an awful lot of wind, we have mountains. The natural resources that we could be tapping into, not

just to produce the energy that we need, but to produce jobs, to produce community wealth, to learn a new way of being. We can be world leaders in this. If we can implement a green new deal, we have a proud history of industrial heritage. Belfast was built on it, the shipyards and the industry there. We can use that infrastructure, we can retrain, we can engage, we can create new jobs, long term sustainable jobs investing in new energies and new industries we can build ourselves.

We have to start looking at new economic models for that within community ownership, co-operatives and small scale production. There is a huge opportunity that we're going to miss in terms of having those conversations, showing people real possibility outside the narrow nationalist/unionist sense of being where people can thrive within that and it will be sustainable and fit for the future. We need to focus on that. That would be a great way of trying to introduce the possibility of looking to the future.

So the constitutional discussion should focus not on identity but on environmental, social and economic concerns.

That would be my dream.

Fergus O'Dowd (Interviewed 15th March, 2019)

Fergus O'Dowd is a Fine Gael TD, a member of the Oireachtas Good Friday Implementation Committee and is his party's lead for developing links with Northern Ireland.

How should we strengthen civil society in the north and the border region in ways that enable us to make progress?

By civic society, in whatever way it's organised, having a pathway to access decision-makers, political and administrative, so that policy issues which are key to them will be on the top of the agenda. And that should be at a very high level. That means you can articulate your views and ensure they are being heard.

There's a big contrast between the north and south: the Civic Forum in Northern Ireland no longer exists even though it was in the Good Friday Agreement, whereas the Citizens' Assembly has been widely respected, recognised as having assisted the south to move forward. What can we learn in the north from that experience?

Obviously there are significant differences in society in the north and south: there's a bigger religious divide, there's a very difficult history in the past and indeed the difficult political present, in that they're not able to work together at this moment in time. I suppose the big problem is that you don't have local political decision making, you don't have the two major parties interacting with each other in terms of an administration which is what the Good Friday Agreement was about. The first strand was to have that Executive and its absence is not good for anybody, not for the parties, not for civic society either.

So does that mean you think that without making political progress at party level it's difficult to see how something like a Citizens' Assembly could work in the north?

I would think yes. In our Parliament right, we all agreed on it and it happened, it was funded, it was supported, we got key players in the community to commit to it in terms of time. That's what you need as well, if you can get to that path. Without having a working Executive it makes it more difficult for you, but obviously you could lead a change by having a forum and articulating a point of view which was common in society to get the political system to listen to you. But it's a huge disadvantage.

It's a perception that the reason why the Civic Forum didn't succeed is because the main political parties, or some of them at least, felt threatened by it. How does one make progress in having a civic voice if the political parties are concerned about that civic voice coming through?

If you're a nationalist, your entitlement to your nationalist view is absolutely your entitlement. It's of equal status and of equal balance as to [those who] want to be and remain a unionist. That can't change unless there's a vote of the majority in the north to agree to that change and the demographic at this moment doesn't say that's going to happen any time soon. The fundamental issue, that I see, is between the two parties, that one looks to England, the other looks to the island here. They shouldn't be worried about interacting with communities if that guarantee is there. I don't see why they should be worried because civic society articulates change, as you say here in the south, it led our changes. It gave a framework for change, it gave a pathway to other parties that might not necessarily have embraced all of the ideas felt that well they must because this is the view of society and we must listen to it.

Do you believe that we can't make civic society progress without unlocking the political deadlock in the first place?

Change requires legislation. You must have the tools to do that. If you want to make a legislative change like recognising issues - I know some issues may be [for] the UK Parliament as opposed to the northern Executive - but if you have the physical legislative framework in place and working, it makes it much easier to say, "This is what we want and this is how you're going to do it, and what's your timeline on that?".

That assumes the purpose of a new civic framework would be focused on legislation rather than unlocking problems. Some people would say that we could have Citizens' Assemblies to deal with micro problems, such as problems around particular interfaces in a particular place.

You can say about gay rights for instance. Gay marriage is an issue. There are lots of issues I don't want to articulate them in a negative sense, but they do require legislative change and in many cases they are the issues people agitated or progressed here in our society and we fundamentally changed. We have become a completely different society because of the pressure put on the political system by a consensus. Even on the issue of abortion, which is a very fraught issue, and everybody's entitled to their views on that, but we were led in that by our Citizens' Assembly here.

So if you're talking about the constitutional issues that the Good Friday Agreement manages in terms of your rights, the question of constitutional change, the question which I hear from nationalists is how do you articulate or bring into play the view of the Secretary of State as to whether it was time to have a referendum on the united Ireland? That's a legitimate wish just as much as the unionist wish is also there. What can civic society change without having the vote on that? It can inform society, but in many ways in the past men of goodwill and women of goodwill have got together on these issues, but they weren't listened to. Is that a fair point?

Presumably the Citizens' Assembly was established as a result of social pressure that was already coming through on government?

Yes of course. And they articulated in many ways you could say, "Well, we'll ask the Citizens' Assembly", you pass the parcel, you pass the problems. That is what happened because it was given to them and they articulated a profound change and then we had to listen to it – from a negative, as I say, but look at the glass being dark, but the glass is full of light really when it works. There are all sort of political, social, economic issues that ultimately the point I can't understand is Northern Ireland in terms of its economy has access to all of Europe and all of the United Kingdom and I just don't understand why that isn't embraced. And I'm not being facetious, but I find it very hard to understand why people wouldn't want that because there's no challenge to your fundamental unionism, there is no challenge to it, you retain that until it changes by a vote of the people.

How do we move towards having a shared and more integrated society in the north and the border region?

Education's a key thing. We're moving in the south. What's happening now is that if there's a new primary school wanted in an area because of population growth, the right is given to the parents to choose the school they want. I might bid - if I'm a Roman Catholic or I'm whatever religion I am, or if I'm in the community, if I'm Educate Together – everybody bids and then the parents have a vote on it in a process that's away from the political system. They express their views and they're listened to and then you get the school that you want. That integration in education, male and female and regardless of one's religion, to me that's a fundamental issue. If you continue to have separate

schools for separate religions, I don't think that's a good thing. Integration means you go to the same school. My view is always that you go to the school that nearest to you.

I suspect a lot of people in Northern Ireland don't understand the extent of changes in the schooling system itself in the Republic.

It's a huge change and it's very welcome, because the views of the parents are the ones that count. Everybody can bid for the school. The parents make the choice. What's happening is that primary schools are much more reflecting the changing society. I'm not making a judgement on Northern Ireland, but our society in the south is better for it. There's better integration, more awareness.

I think the statistics show that County Louth's new immigrant population is twice what it is in most other counties. We have everybody here. I was at a community meeting, a group here that assists and promotes integration: there were 32 different languages in the room on that day, along with the English speaking.

You have had your own challenges of integration.

We have and they're very welcome. Drogheda is a wonderful place because of that. It's enriched, it's a happier place. We learn more. You have to consider other points of view. That's hugely important. And other cultures. Apart from languages, you have eating, look at all the different restaurants of all varieties here and the integration of our newer citizens into our society. I'm not saying it's seamless, but it seems to me that nobody thinks twice about it.

One of the big challenges we have is how we deal with the past. That's true on both sides of the border, because there's events that happened in the south as well as the north. How do we deal with the past in ways that don't threaten the current?

The first thing is information and education, familiarity with the reasons why people held positions they held, understanding their background, understanding the historic energy that's driven them to that point of view and trying to integrate. Obviously it's easy for me down here, because we don't have the problem locally, but all of the parties here, we all talk to each other. We're not saying we're all friends, but we're not all enemies. In many ways the time warp of the division between Protestant and Catholic which exists most in the north of the country, is a historical situation and it's one which integration of schools, society, all meeting clubs, everybody getting together so that it doesn't matter ultimately what religion you are. We're all human beings.

How should we deal with the events of the past though?

The events, even as we speak, are continuing with Bloody Sunday. I was listening to those families. I listened and I looked back over the papers. I read some of the evidence and I'm just horrified by it. Some of the commentary wasn't helpful from the United Kingdom at a high level and indeed the Secretary of State wasn't helpful. And you have a society where you get law, but you don't get justice. It's not for me to throw stones at anybody. I've read my latest book, it's about William Pitt the Younger, Prime Minister around the 1790s, because I'm very interested in the history of Northern Ireland, particularly the Presbyterian, the Church of Ireland, the established church then and how the French Revolution affected our society and its impact on our politics. I've also just read a book on Castlereagh by Bew and I'm trying to understand myself, trying to go into the history to understand, as difficult as it may be, to try and appreciate what the other point of view might be.

That is the key problem, isn't it? There's a lack of objectivity. You've got different versions both of history and of what the word 'justice' means. For some people the word 'justice' means whether you've got a fair society today. For other people, 'justice' means recourse to the criminal justice system and whether that can be achieved on an equal basis for all communities. We're dealing with things that happened 50 years ago often, and you've got disputes about what happened and whether they were justified or not.

I was reading today about Bloody Sunday. It wasn't that there isn't evidence, it was that the evidence that the soldiers gave to a military commission immediately after the awful events, they gave that evidence, but they weren't cautioned, it wasn't in the proper judicial or quasi judicial evidence giving. Therefore it can't be used in a court of law and therefore you can't produce that evidence and therefore you can't get justice because the truth is there but you can't use it.

Some of the soldiers have died, so you can't have justice there either.

So how do you make sure that those people who suffered at that time and their families, how do you give them justice? You give it by giving them a society that works, an administration that respects all sides, that gets jobs, that changes the perspective.

But also, how you discuss the events of the past in ways that achieve reconciliation and moving forward?

Glencree⁶⁵ obviously does a lot of work, but at a political level there must be greater leadership. I raised this today in my radio interview with RTE, I tackled Sinn Féin and the fact that notwithstanding their decision not to go into the UK Parliament that Brexit is such an important thing and the people in the north have voted by a majority to articulate the remain position, that they should be going there.

There was another person there on the air interviewed today and they were saying that if the Scottish Nationalists can do it and if Plaid Cymru can do it... the nationalist voice is not being heard in the UK Parliament. It's hugely important that it would be and that would help. But it probably won't happen. The leadership is not there. They should be strong enough to say, "I don't mind". If you take the money⁶⁶, you have to take the oath, don't you! I don't see the principle involved there as being absolutely sacrosanct and the point that Sinn Féin make is that they say that they are Irish members of parliament and the UK government is a government for the United Kingdom. But this decision is about all of Ireland, it's about all of our island and all of Ireland so this is historic, this decision will have ramifications probably for hundreds of years for all we know. It's the most crucial decision.

And of course we're talking about Brexit.

We're talking about Brexit. It's so important. We deal with so much trouble, if it goes wrong you could have a return to violence, you could have a return to division and then the whole island. I'm a nationalist, I believe in the united Ireland, by consent. The whole idea of different tariffs for products moving up and down and all of that, it just doesn't make sense. We should all be together in a customs union or whatever, that we can all say, "Yeah. Let's work together".

⁶⁵ [The Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation](#)

⁶⁶ Sinn Féin MPs do not take the salaries available to them if they take their seats. They are paid some MP expenses.

You're a Fine Gael politician and you're saying you are a committed nationalist. Do you think that is the common view across Fine Gael today?

Everybody is entitled to their view. I believe in working with the unionist parties. I believe in co-operation, I believe in working with people to bring about change. I get on well with my colleagues in other parties. I meet occasionally with members of the British Irish Inter-parliamentary, so I've met some of the unionists, not too many of the DUP. I would like to engage more with the DUP because I need to understand their position better. I have met moderate unionists and I understand their position absolutely and respect it. I've met moderate nationalists. I just think we need to engage more in the south with the majority party in the north which is the DUP and obviously that's something that they don't want to do. I was Chairman of the Fine Gael Brexit Group at one stage under our previous leader, Enda Kenny. I wrote to all the leaders in the northern parliament and I met them all. The only people that wouldn't meet me were the DUP. I said, "Why not?". So I'll have a go again now and hopefully I'll do a bit better. We don't threaten anybody.

This leads neatly into our final question which is, how we have that constitutional question in ways that don't threaten people and don't lead to future difficulties.

It's hard to say. Around the border counties I think it's clear that the economy north and south have the same view. Farmers have the same view. They would be traditional DUP voters.

Again, you're talking about Brexit.

Yes, but I'm talking about the economy. We can all agree, regardless of our politics on the future of the economy, the future of jobs, the future for investment north and south.

Northern Ireland needs more investment, it needs more jobs. A lot of the jobs are public service jobs, excellent as the people are, but is it sustainable? If it isn't, how do you make it sustainable? Ultimately, nationalists have to offer the unionists, to make them an offer they can't refuse.

In the nicest possible way.

Of course, yeah! But what I'm saying is that to meet and respect and understand all those points and don't change them, but can we work closer together? Can we do more things? And why can't we?

So it's a focus of really what the positive opportunities are.

Yes, absolutely for everybody and everybody benefits. If there's a new factory either side of the border, north and south will benefit if there's more employment. If you look at Newry and you look at Dundalk, during the Troubles they were really desperate places for unemployment. Youth unemployment up on 40% I think it was at one stage in Newry, nationalist unemployment, higher even than that. That changed with the peace, that changed as the European Union. Being part of Europe has been hugely beneficial for us. Our offering must be increased co-operation, increased investment with no strings attached.

Simon Hamilton (Interviewed 29th March, 2019)

Simon Hamilton at the time of the interview was a DUP MLA, but has since resigned to become chief executive of the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce. He is a former Northern Ireland finance minister, health minister and economy minister.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress in your opinion?

I think yes, we should be strengthening, or seeking to strengthen, civil society. I don't like the phrase 'civil society'. I may not be alone within unionist ranks in not being comfortable with the phrase because of perhaps previous connotations - I think the first time I ever heard the phrase 'civil society' used was in and around the time of the Belfast Agreement. Obviously things were fairly charged and heated back then and a lot of unionists, particularly those who were anti-agreement at the time and probably still hold that position, would have seen civil society as something that would have been used against them to encourage them to accept a deal or an arrangement or an agreement that they didn't like. The old phrase of 'the great and the good' is one often attributed.

So we need to be careful in talking about civil society, that we're not just talking about the usual suspects - or maybe a new generation of usual suspects - who would be in that category of the great and the good, who would pop out from time to time to tell people what they were doing wrong and what they should be doing right in their opinion.

Where is the concern and who is the concern with?

You would have seen perhaps an example of it pre-Christmas [2018] with the Prime Minister's [Theresa May's] withdrawal agreement. All of a sudden there was a co-ordinated group of people coming forward making points. I'm being very careful - it's not that people wouldn't have had legitimate interests or concerns or a point to make. They did and they should be making those.

My good friend and mentor Sammy Wilson was quite strident in some of the comments that he made around this. It comes from an age old concern that whenever there's an issue to be pushed forward or some sort of deal or agreement or arrangement, that there is a group of the great and the good, civic society, sometimes as they might be called, who can be relied upon by government in London, to be there, say whatever is required.

So there is sometimes some suspicion of a cadre of civil society. I've sat with republicans and heard them say similar things and perhaps their experience is quite similar, because they would also be described as being on, at times, derogatorily, as being on the extremes, as being marginalised, out on the edge of politics and not in that big middle, which is probably a much smaller middle now in Northern Ireland. They would have similar [concerns] - I don't think it's just solely a unionist concern, but maybe in my consciousness it was something that dated back probably to the Agreement and whenever I was getting involved in politics - but it's probably something that's been there a lot longer.

So you'd feel that a lot of the people described as representing civil groups are either puppets of the government or else self-appointed? Not actually legitimate representatives?

I wouldn't go so far as to say puppets of the government. I'm not saying that others wouldn't use that language. I think that's not fair. You're right around the representation side of it and that's where we have struggled. I think also some of that criticism is that, and again this will probably work both ways - but I can only really probably give you at best from a unionist perspective and from my

own perspective - that civil society in Northern Ireland, and this is why I think it does need strengthened, isn't very good in my view at coming out. It will pass comment or pass judgement or express an opinion or a view from time to time, whenever it's maybe easy, whenever it's maybe a sort of a fairly straightforward set of circumstances. They don't tend to come out and be critical - and I'm sure this is the case on both sides, and somebody from a different political perspective might argue the contrary, or the same from their perspective - that whenever things are difficult and whenever, and you can think back and we don't have to go over all of the various cases, there's too many of them nearly to go back where even when we've been in government, Sinn Féin and the DUP have had some tensions or some difficulty and blame. Blame should have been more apportioned to one side than the other, but civic society or civil society would tend to either not engage and say nothing, or just plague on all your houses or maybe not as strong as plague on all your houses, just get it sorted out.

If civil society is to make a contribution and it is deemed valuable, then it has to be less of this, "Oh would you just sort your problems out" and actually calling things and being a bit more clear. They will gain respect and authority. I think particularly - and this can maybe be seen as a bit of a controversy too - I think our church leaders in particular are part of civil society. I would consider them as part of it. Maybe others mightn't or mightn't want them to be and they in particular have a role. The role for the business community is a very different one. Sometimes their interests will be the same and they will align, but you know there are things that church leaders can say with an authority that is absolutely consistent with what they do and what makes them tick, but can maybe be used to call out politicians, government, whenever they're not doing things correctly or properly and be a voice for people in a way that I think they have shied away from. I can understand that and there's a whole discussion about why that's the case.

I'm sure you could apply it to the business sector, the third sector and others as well. But I think if they're going to make a contribution it needs to be maybe a bit more frank than it is or has been, maybe a bit more partial sometimes and by 'partial' I don't mean always picking the side of Sinn Féin or the DUP if you take that example, but just where something's right say that it's right and where something's wrong, say that it's wrong. And they don't have the respect or haven't always had the respect that perhaps they deserve or they should have, because they haven't done that.

It sounds like I'm picking on the church leaders, but I always go back to a friend of mine that once joked with me that it was not a political crisis in Northern Ireland until the church leaders issue a joint statement. That in its own way sums up the political view of what these type of interventions are and it shouldn't just be about interventions. It shouldn't be just calling out bad behaviour or calling for something to be done differently or "Would you all just wise up, up there". They should be part of that process of trying to create a common good in Northern Ireland, because they are part of the whole. It needs to be politically led and if it's to work politicians need to be at the heart of it, but they are absolutely, whether it's business or community groups or the charity sector or the churches, they are absolutely and ought to be part of shaping that common good which should be what we should be striving for. I know it sounds like an alien planet given where we are politically at this moment in time, but I still have some hope and I think they have a role sometimes in being a bit more frank and honest and pushing the boundaries a little bit more than sometimes our politicians can be.

And when you look back on the Civic Forum, how do you reflect on that?

You can be very impolite about it, but it's so distant now. It's not that something like that couldn't work, but it was so unrepresentative. I don't think people knew of its existence. I think we would all struggle to name one single thing they did, never mind one single good thing they did. People might

say that about Stormont as well. There were not people who were clearly identified with it. You can understand the principle and the idea behind it, but it was just totally anonymous, it wasn't representative and nobody really understood what its purpose was. How was it going to evolve and change? It wasn't a check on the Assembly, it couldn't be a check on the Assembly and there ought to be far better ways in which that voice can be [articulated] because it was sort of appointed - it's hard to get that balance. You can't have it elected because then it loses that aspect of it, but you can't [operate] purely by appointing it, then it's like you run the risk of so and so's place men or women.

What about the Citizens' Assembly in the south where they've been drawn on a fairly random basis?

I'm not hostile to it. I've spoken to people like Steven Agnew who have been advocating and pushing for them here in Northern Ireland. He and I have talked about some of the concerns that unionists have, certainly members of my own party who have a very strong faith and the concerns they have as they view what has happened in the south and the issues that Citizens' Assemblies have been focusing on, or at least the high profile ones, and that's maybe the point. Everybody sees the high profile ones around social issues and doesn't see the other work they're doing on a range of different, very dull, very boring things.

The concerns amongst unionists would include how they were used in the south in terms of same sex marriage and reproductive rights rather than necessarily dealing with interface conflict for example.

Yes, correct. Would these be used for a narrow, but obviously important in the minds of many, set of social issues that many believe are better discussed and agreed in the Assembly? I know advocates for Citizen Assemblies would say it's not mutually exclusive, it's a way of getting a sense of where people are.

The one in Northern Ireland at the moment is about social care.

Yeah. They shouldn't be dismissed instantly just because you don't like what some other jurisdiction was doing with them - and how they were maybe used, or your perception of how they were used. [That] doesn't mean you should abandon the principle completely without exploring it a little further - you mentioned the social care focus and I know from my time in the health department that there are a range of issues which you think you know the answer, but executing them in a way in which the public understand, get it and are on board with, is a different matter entirely.

Take for example health reform where there's a need to close hospitals but you wouldn't necessarily be able to persuade the public because they just see it's losing services.

Yeah. In the last number of days around stroke services and the objective is to get a fewer number of 24 hours a day, seven days a week stroke services, where you can get the best outcome. But that means moving services around. My own local paper has a headline that the local hospital is going to lose the service, but yes, if it goes ahead you will get a far better one three miles up the road. It's not that it can't be an education process, a Citizens' Assembly, because you don't have everybody there unless they're going all out and evangelising wonderfully around the country - it's not going to work like that. What you get is a sense of how people think about it. Because people think about these issues in a far different way to politicians think about them, or how politicians think people think about them, so it can be educational where just listening to people you get an understanding of what the concern is and therefore how you need to present the case. In a lot of these health reform areas, there is only one answer, but how you present that answer, you only get one shot at it.

It's also because of the loss of trust in politicians - the public would feel more comfortable if this random group of people reached that conclusion, rather than elected politicians.

Correct. Yes. I see that point absolutely. When I was in health I always thought that it was far, far better whenever we were making some of these issues, we always thought that it was far better that a doctor in a white coat and stethoscope around their neck was making the point than I was. I could be saying exactly the same things as the medic was saying, but there was a trust.

That's not the case in every issue. People want to hear from their politicians, but there are certain issues like around health, there are a lot of issues where people want to hear somebody who knows what they're talking about, has lived it, has worked in that area and that field is an expert. There is a lot more trust there than there is in politics. There is a space clearly for civic society, civil society to play but it needs to be less about second rate political commentary and a little bit more about helping politicians to shape that common good and how to help. Politicians aren't always keen to admit that they need help, but help to shape that, but to make it a reality as well. And there are any number of areas, whether it's in health or in peace building, where we need a lot of help.

It sounds as if your concern as much as anything is about the validity of the representative quality of people.

I think we're very resistant to creating an industry of people who always appear - the sort of self-appointed or appointed heads of various sectors, or industries within sectors, or groups or whatever might be. It may be the layer below, the practitioners, the people who are in the field every day. I'm thinking in particular about the likes of health, but there are other areas too where that would be very relevant. Changing faces, different people. Not just the same people all the time.

More broadly, how do you think we should achieve a move towards a more shared and integrated society?

A lot of good work was done over the 10 years that devolution was there and the power sharing executive was in place. Some of that was symbolic, but symbolism is important in this part of the world. There were a lot of steps taken, that were courageous, that were brave, that showed a desire at the top to try to move things forward, to try to make a difference.

In practical terms, did we do enough? No, we didn't. But that isn't to dismiss a lot of the good work that was going on. We're all impatient for change and particularly with the twentieth anniversary of the Agreement people were asking, "Why are we not much further on than we are?". I thought the anniversary of it was broadly well-handled and people were instead of being acrimonious given where we are at the moment over a range of different issues, there was a lot of thoughtfulness about what was going on. One of the things that came through was that people were saying, "Yes, it's 20 years and wouldn't you love to be further on and maybe we should be further on, but this is a long, long, long, long process here". We probably haven't taken collectively the time to sit back and say this is a 50 year job probably here. Nobody wants to hear that it's a 50 year job, but that's maybe at the low end of the scale.

I don't think that we did do enough to prioritise it politically. There were times we were very good and there were lots of gestures and symbolic things and there was substance behind it. Sometimes that was around incidents - the murder of Ronan Kerr⁶⁷ for example, and the two soldiers at

⁶⁷ Ronan Kerr was a Catholic police officer murdered by dissident republican paramilitaries.

Massereene⁶⁸ – there were times there was a coming together and a “We're not going to be beaten by this and we're going to push forward”. But there wasn't maybe as much evidence of that happening in between times. This sounds maybe a bit ridiculous saying it out loud – but I have thought for a while now that it's odd that a power sharing executive of Sinn Féin and the DUP, with all the difficulties that were there but the effort that had been put into coming together, the symbolism that was inherent within that in itself, didn't actually prioritise peace building and trying to develop a shared society. Even trying to work out what we meant by 'a shared society' or 'a more integrated society'. It didn't feel that that was always our priority.

Peter Sheridan of Co-operation Ireland has said that the Executive should have created a Department of Reconciliation, for example.

There are any number of different ways in which you could practically do it. Ian Paisley did it symbolically with Martin McGuinness and vice versa. A lot of work continued beyond that first big moment and the first couple of months. I'm conscious of not trying to dismiss some of that and the importance of that. It wasn't just one issue, there was a financial crisis happened at the same time as we came into government, which was unfortunate, and there were always day to day issues and our politics intervening.

It's what Macmillan⁶⁹ said isn't it, when you're in government it's events that derail you.

Yes, that's right. Maybe what I'm trying to say is that we maybe thought that just doing it, ie power sharing, was enough in itself without realising that you had to go much, much further beyond that. You have to be careful of course, we can't go further than our community any more than Sinn Féin can go further in theirs, but there was and there remains in spite of it all, a yearning. People don't talk about it as shared society or more integrated – just normality. That is what they call it. There'll be a difference in people's definition of 'normality', but they do want it. Most people don't want the continuation of what happened before. They don't want to go back to what happened before. They want it to be better. They don't want their kids to grow up and their grandkids to grow up in a society which is as divided as the one that they did.

We maybe made the mistake of thinking, “Well, look, we're coming together and we're working together, sure what more do you want?”. Maybe we were a bit reluctant in it. Often both parties have said, “Well, we don't really want to work with these guys, but...” and that's actually going to be a hard one to overcome in the short term in the problems that we currently face, but I think that there is a need to be a lot more clear with people that, yes, we don't agree with Sinn Féin and Sinn Féin doesn't agree with the DUP and they all fall out over different things, but this is for the greater good, the common good - that's where we need to inject into any new Executive, that needs to become our number one priority. Yes, we have to deal with the economy, we have to reform health, you have to deal with education, but that's number one and everything flows in and out from that and that's the focus.

Back to your point about what Peter is suggesting, I'm not sure about a department or specific ministers. I think the First and Deputy First Minister are your ministers for shared society, integration – whatever you want to call it – and they should, by their example and the example that they set, be doing that. There's lots of evidence of that happening. Sometimes, I think, get a little bit preoccupied with how it all collapsed. Martin was there the whole time, but whether it was Doc or Peter or Arlene, there was a lot of effort put into working together to try, but yes of course it maybe could

⁶⁸ Two soldiers were murdered by dissident republican paramilitaries outside the Massereene army barracks in Antrim. The murder was condemned by then deputy first minister, Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin.

⁶⁹ Harold Macmillan was UK prime minister from 1957 to 1963.

have been more. Maybe we need to make that the number one priority. All the other things are important too and they need to be worked on, they are the events that happened, but that needs to be at the top of the list.

If it's a 50 year process, what's the next two staging points?

That's a good question. I don't think I've thought of it in that sense. Sometimes we probably tried to get to the end point or points towards the end much quicker than we're actually really ready for. If you take something like education, it is seen amongst the public and then in political circles, if we could only have a more shared or even integrated education system then that would solve all of our problems. That's not something you achieve overnight. There have been attempts. There was a report out recently from the Department of Education showing that the tens and tens of thousands of school kids were going through very shared education projects. What that produces in the end remains to be seen, but it's a heck of a lot more than whatever I was at school. We didn't share anything with the other state school across the other side of the town. So there has been good progress, but we've a tendency I think to try to go for the big slam dunk. They are central, big, big important problems or big, big problems and ones that if we sort it out we would be well on the track to having a much more shared society, but sometimes we don't recognise or we fail to acknowledge that they are there towards the end of those 50 years. They are another 10 or 20 years away from where we are now. I've been a supporter of shared education, even though lots of people talk about how we just need one system, integrated. I think we need progress towards that and you can't just do that by telling everyone we're going to close that sector or de-fund this... you wouldn't be permitted to do it anyway, but it can't be a big bang. It has to be a slow process.

How should we deal with the past in our schools?

The past is a subject we're struggling with. It's wrong to call it the past, because it's part of the present and it will be part of our future as well. How we teach it is incredibly sensitive. I know from talking to school groups in my own constituency and the ones that come to Stormont from time to time that they are taught about Northern Ireland politics and it tends to be post '98 and how we came together, but there's very little about [the past] – and you can understand why teachers are reluctant to get into it without a lot of support and guidance. It can't be done on an ad hoc basis, it needs to be sort of a very clear structure to that sort of a process.

It seems as if there's a fear about how we talk about the past in case it sparks things back off.

Yeah. There was a controversy not that long ago in your adopted home town of Derry, where Martina Anderson was sort of lauded as a hero former pupil of the school and that caused a backlash. That shows the difficulty of that interface between the Troubles and our education system. There is a danger. The point in the argument in exploring and dealing with the problem is that if we don't do that then it does allow that more ad hoc approach of some individual teacher or school interpretation – I'm not saying interpretation in a political way, but just somebody gets up and says, "This is my view" effectively and that's not being counterbalanced then with the hurt and the pain caused on the other side by the actions of one person or vice versa.

So it would be your preference to have people who are specialists who come from different backgrounds or a neutral background who come in and perhaps introduce victims of the Troubles to explain the personal suffering?

I've had the privilege to be at a few Holocaust Memorial Trust [events], the education around it. When Peter Weir was in the Education Department he put a bit of funding in to make more school

kids able to attend. I've been at a couple and they're incredibly powerful. That's only one perspective, but that's incredibly powerful testimonies of people who were in concentration camps, survived it, got out, talking about their families who in some cases didn't know what happened, or do know what happened and it's grim and gruesome stuff. It has a profound [impact] - and nobody leaves that room whether you're my age, older or the schoolchildren themselves, without thinking, wondering and appreciating that that was awful, was terrible, should never happen again.

The difficulty is there's a very clear sense of right and wrong when it comes to the Holocaust. Right and wrong in our Troubles is, my 'right' is different to somebody else's 'right'. So that is a tricky one, but you know getting those - getting the testimony of people who suffered would have a profound impact I'm sure, no matter what conflict it was that you were talking about. I think it fits into something which I would become increasingly worried about which is that I think we were all a bit naive in thinking that this was just a generational problem. You know, that as people who lived through it and experienced it and perhaps were victims or survivors themselves got older and passed away, that the problem would pass away almost with them. And it hasn't and it is being passed down and there's lots of science around how this gets passed on, even just through the behaviour of people - the struggles, the difficulties that victims went through particularly with their mental health and maybe sometimes their addiction and how they behaved and how that then gets passed on down through generations, but also just the interpretation of it. There is now a romanticism around it.

And the other thing is you seem to have the next generation that feels they have an obligation to fulfil the aspirations of the previous generation. And that they must not sell them out.

That's exactly right and also younger people coming through political ranks. And again, I bet you've said it, I've certainly said it, we just need a new generation coming through and it'll all be fine. And that's been shown to be the opposite actually is the case in many... I'm not trying to put everybody in the same basket, but there's a sort of, "I have to prove myself that I am as tough as nails and I am not going to betray the cause". I listen to some of it and I sort of feel myself as an old man nearly in the Assembly now. We used to be young once and there is a younger generation has come through. In fact there's... of course people might expect me to pick on Sinn Féin and there will be other younger ones in my own party's ranks and other parties too, but there are some of what is being said is being said from, couldn't be said from, the first hand. It's not from personal experience. In some cases it is in terms of there are some newer members whose families were involved or were victims themselves of the Troubles so there is an understanding there. There's others who clearly haven't had that and it's just becomes a rhetoric, it's just a regurgitation of that they've heard through the years and there's not the authenticity to it and whenever you compare it to - when I was first in the Assembly and was looking across at people who were in Sinn Féin but had a past in the IRA, there was a clear - whatever they said and some of them just said stuff that was offensive or hurtful or completely diametrically opposed to my viewpoint - but there was always a sense of "We're not going back. We don't want to have that. We've gone through all of that but we're not going to have another generation go through it". And I'm not saying that some of these younger representatives are saying, "We'll go back but there's...". The tone is different because the experience is different. There is a danger and we just can't... what I suppose I'm saying is that we can't just sort of take for granted that because they didn't go through the Troubles that some of their rhetoric that perhaps led to the Troubles and would certainly have inflamed the Troubles during the thirty or so years of conflict isn't there again. I'm not saying that we'll fall back into violence or anything as a result of it, but it's not solving itself as generations move through is the point.

Which takes us very neatly onto the last point which is, how do we have the constitutional conversation in ways that are friendly, positive and don't take us backwards?

Yeah, well, things are clearly very charged at the moment both in terms of the absence of an Assembly so there's not even a place where politicians from across the country can and sit and have any sort of a debate. And I'm pretty sure that if we were back in business it mightn't produce a terrible lot but there would be occasional debates and discussions around the constitutional issue. I always think it was a sign of some of the progress that we were making that we had fairly few debates around the constitutional question over the sort of 10 years that devolution was functioning. But there's nowhere to have that debate. Brexit has obviously produced – well, it has brought the issue onto the agenda in terms of the constitutional question but not in a positive or, maybe 'positive' is the wrong word to use. I would say not in a positive way but in a way that has allowed for constructive conversation.

So I think clearly atmosphere and context is important in all of that. You're not going to get a polite, civilised conversation whenever politics itself is not polite and civilised at this moment in time. So for a whole host of reasons, we need devolution back. You would expect me to say that of course, but we absolutely do and it allows us to have... even the process of getting it back ought to allow a more civilised conversation to develop. You see I'm still the optimist you know regardless of what experiences we've had. I think there's... I think at the core, no matter what institution or institutions are there that would allow us to have a conversation, there is still... at the core of why we haven't been able to have that. You know, we can almost, it's like Basil Fawlty – “Don't talk about the war”. We can have civilised conversations about any subject almost except the constitutional issue. And that's when everybody starts backing into their corners and you can understand that and that's historical.

But the question then is whether it is more healthy to suppress that discussion or whether you can have it in a polite and positive way about arguing the evidence base which is a better approach.

And that's the point I was going to... I think that at the minute and certainly recently there hasn't been - once the topic has come up people start to argue, row, fight and then just walk away from each other and then wait for somebody to raise a topic of conversation, “What about the weather?” or “Where are you going on your holidays?” or something. It's not... and I think at its core is perhaps still, even after all this time, and you see this manifest itself both in language and in actions and how people react to things, there is still a lack of appreciation that my desire for the constitutional position is as legitimate as somebody else's, which is the opposite. So, I could broadly – it's a very much zero sum sort of... I am right and you are wrong, that there is no... and whilst you might – and yes it's absolutely your right to argue that the other person is wrong and to do it until your final breath, but to give them the space to make their point without descending into some sort of name calling. I'm sure I've done that plenty of times myself, but I think there has been sort of a prevalence of people saying, “Look, my view is... I'm right and you're just wrong and I'm not going to listen to you being wrong” and that's been on both sides and we need to, I think, and this is maybe naïve, but it doesn't stop me hoping anyway that most people, regardless of whether the constitutional issue is a hotter issue today than it was say pre EU referendum isn't really the point, it's still not – whilst it might be more important and seen as more important, it's still not the most important issue, so there's a slate of issues which are far more important in the minds of the people, whether they are unionist or nationalist or nothing, that can unite us and bring us together and that's what we should be focusing on.

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir (Interviewed 14th February, 2019)

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir is a former Sinn Féin finance minister and was still an MLA at the time of the interview. He is a successful business leader and owner.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

Well Paul thanks for the opportunity to talk to you again. I think we could start by listening. It is a truism that you learn more, I invariably learn more by listening not by talking. I don't have all the answers in this but I have been for 30 years of political activity a big believer in building community. That's the phrase I use really for developing and working for the common good. That has to be to the fore in our mind if we are going to adopt any strategies, whether around economic development, whether around providing an adequate health service for our people, focusing on education, building healthy, prosperous societies. I think we have to be focused on the common good. How do we do that in this often divided society, as I think the tone and timbre of the debate has to be respectful, we have to find ways of not feeding the ratings monster. We have to find ways of not sectarianising discussion, which has issues of sectarian elements in it, we have to find ways not always to try and have a race to the bottom in terms of the dialogue and debate and turn it into a rant. I speak to you this morning after having been on the Nolan Life show last night. I have huge respect for Stephen Nolan. I think he is the pre-eminent broadcaster on the island, certainly in the north of the island, but as he knows, there are a lot of angry people out there and he has to find a way to get the balance between making those people angrier and instead of that, trying to find a way for angry people to express, to emote, to vent – if necessary – but what is the purpose of us as a society in trying to start discussion and debate that you're talking about if actually all we're going to do is poke people in the eye with a stick or make people a wee bit more polarised. So when I was the mayor of Belfast, one of the lessons we had in the council was that Belfast City Council, when I first joined the council in 1987 I wore a flak jacket, we weren't allowed to speak. I was put out by the RUC after ten minutes on my first night. We had orange juice thrown over us, we fought, physically fought, DUP councillors and so on and so forth. And now it's a beacon of unity and collegial relations and therefore being mayor was easy until someone mentioned the past. And once the past was mentioned it was almost as if you entered a different, a parallel universe where the tone of the debate sharpened, the unwillingness to countenance any other view was to the fore, that the bitterness came, I suppose oozed out on all sides because Seamus Heaney said people hurt and get hard. So, for me, if we are going to try and find ways to build a stronger civic society, we're going to have to find ways to engage in a frank debate because there's no sense a lot of blushing violets, shrinking violets saying, "We're not going to talk about this and talk about that". So we need to find a safe space in which to do that.

And we'll talk about that a bit later in the conversation in more detail, about dealing with the past. But this issue about showing respect as part of conversations and Michel Barnier was talking about Brexit, has talked about how to de-dramatise, which is quite a good word, for what we're talking about here as well. But you're talking about those individual conversations, not necessarily strengthening civic society. So how, to try and bring you back to that point, do we do that?

But we have to give leadership and anyone who engages in partisan and provocative politics and calls it 'civic leadership' is not going to do us justice. So if you want to enter the public square and have 90% of the debate around the present focused on the past, it's not going to work. If you're going to refuse to listen. If you're going to refuse to turn up. So I've been in a series of debates recently where the DUP have just been AWOL. Just refused to turn up. So the parameters of the debate are important. I also think every voice has to be heard. The mistake made in the past, I'm someone who spent six, seven years banned from BBC and six or seven years banned from RTE when I was a public representative. Every voice has to be heard and anyone who tries to say "We're going

to build an inclusive and prosperous and shared society. By the way, here's the people who aren't allowed at the table..." or "Here's the people who aren't allowed to speak...", I think therein lies madness. The great poem by Langston Hughes *I, too, sing America* where he says, "They send me to eat in the kitchen when company comes", so we all have to be at the table as well. So those are the ground rules.

Do you mean then, for example, the people who would be classified as dissident republicans and dissident loyalists, those voices should be heard as well as part of the debate?

Every voice has to be heard. There are also have to be ground rules. You can't come in and talk at the table with everyone else but then go outside and be selling the drugs which are damaging the east Belfast community and then insist that I have to be at the table so there are ground rules. There are, as when Michel Barnier says, about de-dramatising the backstop and finding ways to talk but they do have ground rules for negotiations and they have also ground rules for accepting and delivering on an agreement. But actually I'm not even thinking about dissidents, I'm just thinking in this normal society we are in. Are we going to allow everyone to have their voice and for me, one of the reasons the government collapsed was that the DUP were unwilling to have all voices heard. They were unwilling to share power. They were unwilling to accept that there was another view and that other view had absolutely equal legitimacy to their point of view, and when it came to matters of rights, that they couldn't either shut down or shut out that point of view.

But perhaps also civic society needs to be stronger in terms of the non party political voices that are heard?

Yes, but even those need to be inclusive. I've seen, as you know, in recent weeks the business community has united around the issue of Brexit. But I've seen in the past on different issues where business says, "No, we only have regard to profit and the success of business". And for me that isn't enough. If you're saying, "I speak for business but I don't care about the dignity of people. I don't care about human rights. I don't care about where people get educated or equal opportunity". So building civic society has to be more than saying, "We're going to fund and make sure there are enough groups to speak for everyone", if people aren't willing to have a holistic view of whether it's business and it's people rather than profits. But if it's not inclusive for me that's not a strong civic society. I've seen that in the past, I've seen strong organisations from which I have been banned, even though I was an elected representative in Belfast, people saying, "No, we won't let you through the door", but then they'd say, "By the way, we're speaking for the greater good and speaking for all the people".

Okay, so the objective really, in a sense, is to move towards a genuinely shared and integrated society. So how do you think we should move towards that?

I think that it speaks for itself. We have to have policies from the top which exemplify a shared approach and inclusive approach. You can't be a leader but say we believe our partners in government are rogues and renegades. You can't be a leader and say look I believe everyone should be at the table. But by the way in all my actions I'm making sure that money only goes to certain people and not other people. So it has to be, in my view, the most important think in leadership. If we have leaders in society, and I'm thinking not only of politics, but I am thinking about politics because that's my area of expertise, if I have any expertise at all. You can't say one thing and then your actions portray another thing and that is why, in my view, again the government collapsed. So the issue of leadership and delivering on your promise and walking the walk is absolutely essential. It really doesn't matter how many groups you have, it doesn't matter how many voices are heard if actually you're excluding other voices or if you're engaging in a partisan fashion.

So you're asking me how it can be done. I think it's done then by it by policies which encourage shared society which encourage understanding, which encourage people to listen each other.

One of the fascinating things for me about my own experience of dealing with the hurt unionist community or victims or IRA violence was, I felt it was very pertinent, a lady said to me, "It's quite clear that you don't understand the wounded unionist community and by the way, they don't understand you either". And it does seem to me that many times when I would go into a room and talk to unionists in civic society say about the Irish language, that they haven't heard a *word* that we have been saying around the Irish language for two years, or two and a half years. They haven't done that deliberately, but we're talking past each other, so I can still go into rooms where people would say, "Look, get back into government tomorrow", and that's it, they get it done. And you would say, "But, you know, we've explained these issues", and they would say, "But what's that got to do with us?". So there is a problem in this society around being heard, being taken on board, not to say that people can't disagree with you, but it seems to me we talk absolutely past each other and that is one of the things that shocked me when I would meet Unionists two year on from the collapse of government and they would look at you as if you had two heads, about "Why are you talking about the Irish language? We don't understand. We're still totally blind to the issues you're raising". And I'm not even saying they're doing that in a vindictive way or a malicious way, but we don't hear each other in this society.

And is part of the problem that conversations take place at too high a level that they don't actually engage people in their communities, so that there aren't the conversations between republicans/nationalists and unionists/loyalists beyond the political representation?

But it's more than that because you know sometimes I'm out on the Lagan towpath and I'll meet unionists that will stop me and talk to me and I will realise, "Wow, their image of me is based on the *News Letter*". And they would ask me questions about... you know, "What was your answer to that?" and I was saying, "Wow, no-one's ever asked me that in the community in which I'm based, a nationalist/republican progressive community". And then you realise, hold on, there's an entire cohort of people out there who get their information about *you* and about your beliefs and your values and they get it through a different filter and that filter is telling them stuff which, in my view, is absolutely just crazy, but there you go. But that's then their facts, that's their world view, that's the way they regard so. One of the interesting things, when I was the mayor of Belfast and this *shocked* me, the *Belfast Telegraph* had a love-in, a real love-in with me as mayor, partly because I wasn't really stretching the republican stuff and demanding parity of esteem and equality for republican victims and so on. So I made it easy for them, whether deliberately or not deliberately, but certainly – so the *Belfast Telegraph* had a cartoon, Superman – Supermayor, which was incredible and it didn't even make a lot of difference to my voters because my voters don't read the *Belfast Telegraph*, but boy did it make a difference going into rooms at tea parties, going in meeting a congregation at the Presbyterian Church at Duncairn, which was being closed, and you could feel all of a sudden these people saying, "Okay, this guy's okay. This guy's a good guy" and you realise listen, it's where they get their news from. So that worked in my favour that year. But now it can work against you because if those same papers are saying, "Nah, listen this is someone not to be believed, this person is a bad person", so there's a big issue for you. How do we...? Maybe that's just life, but how do you counter that? You tell me.

Well, I'm asking you really in a sense how do you have those communications that break down those concepts whereby the conversations take place through our political leadership rather than community to community?

Well it seems to me that it is about meeting people but it gets more and more difficult because when you go into the room then they have a preconceived view. For example, I have reached out to all the Presbyterian Ministers... in fact all the Ministers on the Ormeau Road and I have formed relationships with some of the Presbyterian Ministers in south Belfast and suggested to them that I would call in and see them and none of them took up the offer. And then they come back and said, "Well we do do a cross-community meeting every three months, would you come to that?". I'm not against that, but it wasn't what I was asking. But it was clear to me that they're not bad people, but they were trepidatious, fearful, they thought there was an agenda, there was no trust. So those meetings never took place. And yet, if you don't have dialogue as Father Gerald Reynolds used to say, dialogue of the heart, then how do you make peace with people? How do you build a shared and inclusive society?

I haven't worked out the way around that because I am very pleased to have 7,006 or 6,007 votes, whatever it is anyway, but I have a good strong vote in south Belfast, so you're saying to yourself you've enough votes there to get elected, you're very strong, you need to serve that base and when you try and reach beyond that base you're met with reticence, maybe a better word than hostility, reticence. Mistrust and distrust. You're saying, "Well, why bother?". And therefore I have met in here over the last two years, I don't meet any of the young MLAs in Sinn Féin who are telling me about the cross-community work they're doing. Now maybe they are doing that work and of course having no Assembly is a real hindrance in terms of building relations among political leaders because you don't see people in the corridors or in the cafes or whatever, you don't get to know them, you don't hear them speak or anything else. But I don't hear in the Sinn Féin group, I don't hear people saying, "I met the Minister last night", with the exception as it turns out of Barry McElduff who had his own troubles who was an MP, very active and would talk about some of that stuff. So, it seems to me that we are – maybe it's because there's no government – we're actually in a worse place than we were two years ago. I think there's less dialogue and interaction and if you're asking me how to solve that, I don't know. I'm sure people would come up with a hundred ways. Somebody said, "Oh, I'll just pick up the phone". But there's less dialogue. The term I've used is "all bridges are down". If you ask me now to ring a DUP MLA, first of all I don't know half of them because they were elected after the Assembly election, I've never met them. I see their pictures in the paper occasionally and I'm amazed, I'm saying, "My God, who is this?". But if you ask me now frankly could I ring a DUP MLA and ask them to co-sponsor an activity for Inspire Mental Health or PIPS, anti suicide prevention agency, I don't have a DUP MLA I could talk to.

So that wouldn't have been true in the last Assembly, I don't think it would be true if you had normal politics, so the bridges are down more now Paul than they were two years ago and one of the... well I'll go back to the stuff about rights and social justice, but if you ask me are we in a better place now in terms of bridge building than we were two years ago, I think we're in a worse place frankly.

Now, what I stopped you talking about in detail earlier was the issue of how we deal with the past because that is one of the big challenges that we face, that this tends to break the communities apart when we talk about past events. What's your suggestion about how we deal with that in ways that don't re-traumatise people and actually take us forward rather than backwards?

Well we actually found a way through this tortuous issue in the Stormont House Agreement where we said, "This is how we'll deal with the legacy of the past. Here's the institutions". If they want to seek a judicial remedy they can do that, if they want to go to a truth body, they can do that, if that's more their interest. And we had the mechanisms to be actioned and of course then the British government wouldn't accept that because they had their own, they say, their own security concerns and obviously we don't believe that, but actually, that's an example that maybe proves my point. There was more progress being made up slow, snail's pace, difficult, but there was progress being

made and we found a way through and we are now, and I blame the DUP for this in particular, we've now retreated to a place where we're back farther than the year 2000 with the DUP saying, "No, no there's only one group of victims". And even Tony Blair when talking about the Maze/Long Kesh site, turning a symbol of violence into a symbol of peace, now the DUP is really back on a black and white narrative which we can't accept and which is not going to work because we are not going to accept that the victims from the republican or nationalist community are in any way less than victims of IRA violence or victims from the state. So that is that is a conundrum, we are at loggerheads and I have no great insights into how that is going to be put back especially with the British government now not in a position to use positive influence on the DUP, the relationship is the other way, the British government is doing what the DUP tells it and at the minute the DUP is retreating on all fronts.

If we went back to Eames-Bradley, that instead of talking about compensation, ignore that element of it, would that help with the way forward do you think?

I don't know enough about Eames-Bradley and I don't know enough about legacy issues to comment upon that. I came into the Assembly in November '14 and maybe I should have been keeping closer watch but I don't consider myself knowledgeable enough to comment on those matters. What I would say is this – the war is over. If you can't accept that we can't make any progress. I have said previously Anne Graham, the sister of Edgar Graham⁷⁰ who was shot dead by the IRA in the early eighties at Queen's University, a law lecturer, and I have said to Anne, "We will never agree about the past". She wants me to condemn that dreadful, dreadful killing of her brother and condemn the IRA and I'm saying, "Anne, that isn't going to happen. We're never going to agree about the past, but can we find a way to build for the future?". And I'm not suggesting we've found that way because she is still on a mission to vindicate her brother and she's quite entitled to do so, I'm sure he's very proud of her. But she did a very bold thing, I thought, bold as in a brave thing, I came into Fitzroy Church, a Presbyterian Church in the University area at a service and sat down and she put out her hand and said, "I'm welcoming you to Fitzroy". She said, "I'm welcoming you *because* the IRA killed my brother". And that's a big statement. That's a big statement of grace and forgiveness and she has her own views, I don't want to misrepresent her because she still is on all our cases, as it were, but there for me is an act of peacemaking that I could never hope to emulate and we have to learn from. So we're going to have to find a way to deal with the terrible hurt that we have suffered and I think that Stormont House maybe led the mechanisms but it is a matter of the heart and people finding peace, feeling they've had justice for their loved ones. That's a path everybody has to choose themselves. Emma Rogan just left the room here whose father was shot dead in Loughinisland and as we know, once of the most egregious examples of collusion during the conflict. I don't know how she finds her peace with that all, all those sorts of things, but somehow or other we're going to have to find a way through this. I have said publicly the past will kill us all, the past has the ability to destroy this peace process, so it's vital we find a way through it. And I'm no pioneer in these matters, but one of the things I do try to do and I probably did a little bit better in the past, is I try to go to Protestant churches because interestingly I have high regard, I'm not a person of faith, but I have high regard of the Protestant churches in particular and the work they do with wounded and vulnerable people and those on the margins. But there's another little thing, when you go into a church the people feel obliged to welcome you. So I've been to church with the Reverend Mervyn Gibson, who is a chaplain of the Orange Order and a former Special Branch man and Mervyn would always welcome me very warmly to service and that's an interesting discovery to me, that instead of trying to meet people away from the church, if you want to try and find a way to break the ice or to seek the security of an encounter where you can maybe make some progress rather than it being a shouting match, actually going to church with people is in my view a good way to do it. It has to be done sincerely and with authenticity and genuine, but I have found that going to church is one way

⁷⁰ Edgar Graham was an Ulster Unionist Party politician and university lecturer.

that you can try to learn a bit more about people and try to understand their perspective and at the same time you know you won't be chased.

That's an interesting point because when I interviewed Bishop Ken Good a few months ago, one of the points that he made is that for a Christian society in Northern Ireland society was pretty bad at forgiving which is a fundamental principle of Christianity.

Yeah. And I'm no authority in these matters and it's easy to say that you forgive if you haven't lost someone very close to you. I don't think that's a statement I have to make or should make, but I do think I have to make a statements that the war is over. For me that means that the slate is clean. People are absolutely entitled to deal with the past, hopefully through those mechanisms that we read and we'll come back, but for me if you were going to continue to fight the battles of the past today, and I think the DUP did bring that into government, they thought, "No, no, we're still at war, we're going to beat these people. There was a stalemate during conflict, we're going to beat them now". If you bring in the war mindset into government or into any type of society, it's not going to work. You're not going to make peace. You're not going to make progress. So that's something that I always said when people say... this week someone said, "Well, look, there's a meeting taking place in such-and-such a place, but did you know this is the 27th anniversary of the Sean Graham bookmakers atrocity and that place is named in the Ombudsman's report as the place where the killers went to and were cheered and celebrated and so on". And I have just made my peace with all that. We have to accept that the war is over and that you have to deal with everybody on an equal basis, on a fair basis and you have to say that it's a new start. And I am at that place and it's much easier to just go into a room and say to people, "So-and-so was responsible for killing a certain person in our neighbourhood 30 years ago and therefore we must make sure that we continue to oppose their group and to pick at them and to not let them be heard". It's easier to do that but there's no future in that. The war is over.

But if there's one conversation that is perhaps even more difficult to have than dealing with the past, it's dealing with the future and the constitutional question. So how can that conversation take place in a way that is not threatening?

Well that that is a threatening conversation because if you are a unionist, if you're in the DUP, if you have built your success or your progress on discriminating against others, then losing the right to repress others is a threat and I've seen this in Belfast City Council when it went on, when I was a boy. 80% of the representatives of Belfast City Council were unionist. Today the unionists today are 22 or 23 out of 60.

And do you actually feel oppressed today?

Absolutely and I'm not going to accept that my children or hopefully my grandchildren will live in a society where they are treated as second class citizens where their identity is not afforded a parity of esteem. I see and I saw in government people who came to the government table with orange tinted glasses that looked at every proposal that came through – the only proposals they scrutinised, because you know they didn't scrutinise the RHI proposals – the only thing that they scrutinised was anything that might benefit Catholic, nationalists working class communities or that might benefit ex-prisoners from the republican community, or might benefit Irish language speakers. So I have seen that and we battle that and there's still this society, in my view, has a long way to go before you have equality and especially parity of esteem and people want respect and I'm front an era where we got education, that we are absolutely resolved to ensure that we're at the table and that our children are at the table and there's no way I'm going to accept anyone treating our children like rogues and renegades or like crocodiles. And that is why we're at the impasse we're at because the

DUP will believe until they no longer have the numbers that that's the way to treat people. And I see this in unionist controlled councils. It's still despicable the bullying culture which exists against small minority Catholic communities. So yes, do I feel oppressed? I wouldn't allow anyone to oppress me. Do I think there are people who would like to treat me as a second class citizen? Every day. I'm in Stormont, Parliament, I don't see one word of Irish anywhere. It's like a non-language. I don't exist. As Langston Hughes⁷¹ said, "they want me to eat in the kitchen". They've got the wrong century and I will be making sure that everybody treats the people who vote for me with the respect I deserve.

So your view would be that it's not possible to have the future conversation, the conversation about the constitutional rearrangements, without it being threatening to many people. So how should the conversation take place anyway?

First of all, it has to be allowed to take place. So those who have come from a culture of domination, who have had their way, who have used their numbers to oppress others, I'm talking in particular about the DUP, now they're saying, "No, you can't have the conversation. It's irresponsible to have the conversation" is what the voices from Dublin are saying. So the first thing we are going to say very loudly is, "We will have this conversation. We are allowed to talk about the future of our own country and the future of our community, which is Protestant and Catholic at the centre". So that's the first thing.

We have to give a pledge that we will do so in a responsible, sensible, rational, respectful manner. And that means that you don't go out and try and incite fears, that you don't go out to try and appeal to base instincts, whether they're sectarian or other partisan political instincts. But you know if those who want an equality to persist are those who want to hide the truth about the past, those who want to live in a society where, as basically the DUP said at the talks, "We don't mind the Irish language, we don't see it, don't hear it". People who want to live in that and who think it's 1919 rather than 2019 or 1969 rather than 2019. I can't help them. I cannot give them an assurance except that I will work to end that pattern of discrimination and that society of discrimination, so it's going to be a tough conversation, no tougher I suspect than a conversation taking place in America at the minute between Democrats and Republicans with Democrats now trying to get back into power. That's a polarised and hard conversation. It's harder than our conversation, but this is going to be a tough conversation and we've had it in Belfast City Council. We've had it, because when the unionists ruled the roost, the rest of us couldn't breathe in that place. Could not breathe. I was banned from committees. They set up subcommittees and banned me from committees, when we attended the subcommittees we were told we couldn't put our chairs at the table. When we put our chairs at the table they wouldn't sit beside us. When we tried to speak at meetings etc, etc, etc. And we used the courts to end that. The courts are being used today to ensure equality for people including many Irish language cases. And there's two ways to do this – unionists can hide their heads in the sand and say, as they're doing with Brexit, "We're not going to discuss this. It's going to go away". Or, they can face up to the fact that there is going to be, in my view, a unity referendum and that could win. If we can marshal our arguments that could win because there are now within the unionist community some people who don't sign up to this 19th century fundamentalist anti rights conservative world view which is being espoused by the DUP. So we have a chance like never before to win a unity referendum and of course, the big question as well is... the ghost in the machine is now that people are going to be, it looks like, be put out of the European Union. There will be people who say those who want to have this so-called renewed United Kingdom, there are people going to say, "No, no, I'd much rather be part of the European Union", and that's going to add to the vote. So, these are changed times. The ball's in the states and it's up to those who don't want to have the argument, they're going to have to face up to it.

⁷¹ Langston Hughes was an American poet and black social activist.

John Kyle (Interviewed 21st March, 2019)

John Kyle is a Progressive Unionist Party councillor in Belfast, a former leader of that party and a GP.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

Well we have a fairly vibrant civil society in Northern Ireland already but it does seem to be to exist in a parallel world to the political society or the politicians which is a problem. And politicians seem to be able to cocoon themselves away from the views, opinions, advice of civil society. Civil society gets its strength from the platforms from within which it operates. So social media offers civil society in a way to express themselves to try and influence thinking and influence the direction that the country is moving in. The media themselves and the the credibility and opportunity that they give to civil society, is also a major factor in that. You've also got established communities, you've got the faith communities, the churches, you've got the trade unions... so there are various compartments in civil society within which conversations take place. But politicians do seem to be cocooned or have tin ears when it comes to responding to what broader civil society is saying because it seems to me that there is a huge disparity between what people say they would like to see happen and what politicians are actually doing.

So how do we improve that interaction then?

That is obviously a difficult question because if there was an easy solution we would have done it and we had the forums in the past that petered out and part of the difficulty is that you get people together to talk and to share and to express their views and to debate for a period of time. But eventually the steam runs out of it and then people just retreat back into their own homes and feel disenfranchised and feel alienated.

People need to have the courage to vote outside of their traditional patterns of voting, particularly in elections where the constitutional issue is not at stake or is not fundamental to what they're doing. We need to realise that we need a broader political representation and people who feel exasperated with the politicians who currently hold power, yet they tend to go back and still vote for them at the next election. So people need to have the courage, we need to start a narrative which challenges people to think outside of their traditional habits because someone said to me "Voting is a habit". I think that's right. People tend to vote for the way they've always voted. So we need to begin to challenge that and when we meet together and discuss things civil society needs to reflect on the fact that those politicians are in power because they voted for them. So there's also a sense of within civil society of people wanting something different yet they keep on doing the same thing. So there's a challenge for both. But politicians clearly are not listening and politicians being politicians they will not listen until it hurts them at the polling booth, at the ballot box. So you know we can't expect things to change really until it begins to affect who gets elected and that's why people need to stand back, reconsider who they vote for and begin to break some old habits.

And do you think we can learn anything from the fact that the Citizens' Assemblies in the south seem to have gained a lot of respect and influence whereas the Civic Forum in the north collapsed?

Well of course we had our constitutional differences in the north and perhaps the Civic Forum was overtaken by the developments at Stormont which were full of potential, very promising, contentious, but there was a real sense of momentum there and I can understand therefore why the Civic Forum would peter out.

The situation in the south is interesting and we would benefit if we were able to have some adapted version in Northern Ireland and there are people around who would be willing to engage in it, who would feel that they want to express their views, that they want to influence the debate, that they want to challenge some of the more accepted social mores, that they want to move things in a new direction, but more particularly that they want to look to the future, that they want something different. If you want to create something different you've got to create the environment, the circumstances, the conditions in which something different can emerge. At the moment we are stuck in ruts and so we need to shake things up, create some new opportunities for people to debate, to meet, to argue, to make decisions, to plan, to take initiatives and we are going to have to create those opportunities otherwise if politicians' position of power is not under threat they are happy to just let things continue to trundle on.

One suggestion that was made was that Citizens' Assemblies might be a good approach in very micro situations. So where you've got a community interface where you've got problems, so in a very localised neighbourhood area you might have a Citizens' Assembly to address problems. Is that something that would be attractive to you?

The difficulty is that there is a lot of apathy around and my experience of trying to organise public meetings is that people by and large don't turn up, unless they're really angry about something in which case they'll come in their droves. But they're not angry, if it's not particularly impacting their daily life, then they may well think it's a good idea but they don't usually come to those meetings. So that's a challenge. I think the nationalist community tends to be more active on a community level than the unionist population and we could debate and discuss why that is but certainly within unionist communities when I have tried to organise public meetings to discuss problems, issues, the future... I will get some very committed enthusiasts but in terms of large numbers it just doesn't happen.

And why do you think that is, that there's that lack of engagement with unionists and loyalist communities?

Well I suppose the unionist political ideology and culture is quite an individualistic one. You know, the idea that you're responsible for your future, that if you work hard and pay your taxes, that's the way forward, the sense of belonging to a community, being part of a broader network of relationships - that isn't as strong in a unionist Protestant area as it would be in a Catholic and nationalist area. I personally think that part of it goes back to our church philosophies or the Christian culture that we come from. I think the Catholic church is much more communitarian than the Protestant church. I think the Protestant church is probably more entrepreneurial than the Catholic church, more innovative but it doesn't create that cohesive sense of community and that is weak in unionist areas and in order to try and build up the sense of Citizens' Assemblies, that we would have to do quite a bit of work to encourage people to see that there actually is benefit in it.

But if you go back a few decades the Labour Party was strong in Northern Ireland. Presumably the trade union movement would have been strong within unionist communities in east Belfast. So what changed that?

Within the working class communities? The loss of heavy industry, the shrinking of the unions and also the fact that the constitutional issue was so front and centre throughout the '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s and 2000s.

But I was thinking more in terms of that was the collective approach and so that's of a different mindset from the one you're talking about today. I suppose if you've got smaller workplaces that

does help to explain it because that underlies the trade union movement but also undermines the sense of collective solidarity in other sectors as well.

Yes it does. I mean smaller workplaces, smaller communities. You know urban planning broke up a lot of the very densely knit communities and people's capacity to nip in next door to get a pint of milk or they go and look for the kids down the street – you know that diminished with the changes as... we had terrible housing. When I was a young GP working in east Belfast, some of the housing was appalling. So we needed to do something about that but in removing that and then and building new housing stock, that sense of community was fundamentally undermined.

So that takes us on to the next point which is how do we move towards a more shared and integrated society across the community divide?

And that is a burning question for us today because in my view we have lost ground in the past 20 years. My reading of it is that there are two important, maybe three important, elements to the progress that we made. The first important element was that violence was shown to fail, it was a flawed strategy, it didn't achieve its ends and people got to a certain age where they were they thought "Look, we have suffered, we have paid a price. What have we gained? It's very modest. Do we want our children to go through this? Sure as hell we don't". And that was one factor that brought about change.

The second factor was that I think the churches got their act together. The sort of preaching against one another and calling one another anathema... I think that suddenly changed and the churches realised, "You know, we have a responsibility to love our brother, we may disagree with them, we may disagree strongly and vigorously with them. We have got to show respect and love to our brother". And I think the church leadership - well, it probably was a grassroots movement, but there was a movement within the churches to say, "Hey, this is no way for us to behave, if we believe the book then we need to behave in a different way". And there was a remarkable coming together between the Catholic and Protestant traditions, not involving everyone but involving a vast majority of influential and leading people and many congregations. So I suppose you could point to the Fitzroy-Clonard Group⁷² which is a very good example of that. So the theological justification was suddenly removed from the conflict.

The third aspect was that, particularly within the middle classes in Northern Ireland, who were able to travel more - I remember the first time, I was the first person in my family ever to travel to the United States of America. It was a big deal in those days as a young student. Nowadays people travel to America 10 times a year. So living in this more mobile society, a more cosmopolitan, more international society, many of the sort of middle classes who had had loads of opportunities that their parents hadn't had realised that there was a bigger perspective to the world than just our entrenched cultural differences here in Northern Ireland. And can we not find another way to make a success of this country rather than fighting each other, or rather than badmouthing each other, or rather than diminishing and demeaning one another? And that more international sense within the middle classes ameliorated a lot of the animosity between the two traditions.

But the ending of violence does not in itself create a cohesive society does it?

No.

We're not there in terms of cohesion or sharing or integration.

⁷² [Fitzroy-Clonard](#) is a cross-community Christian fellowship.

And we made progress. With the Good Friday Agreement people had a sense of hope. They said, "Hey, we can do this". And there was a real sense of this has been a monumental step forward, this opens up new opportunities. Let's build on this and let's capitalise on this. But some things happened that undermined trust. There still was a huge reservoir of hurt. People had been damaged and suffered and that that reservoir of suffering was not really being properly addressed. And the realisation that the politicians came to that by playing the populist card, by blaming the other, you often will increase your votes. And what we see more broadly now in western society is sort of a more florid form of that. Our politicians were guilty of playing that card and that while it may produce short term gain in terms of political wins, it does ultimately end up in long term damage to the community and our politicians need to man up to that and recognise that they bear a significant responsibility for the ground that we have lost in the past 10 to 15 years.

Quite a number of people are saying that we are not able to create a more shared society without dealing with the past in a way that's better than we have done recently. How should we be dealing with the past in ways that take us forward, not back, and to what extent can achieve reconciliation through that process?

That is a huge issue. I think that you have to deal with the past in some way but you must not be ensnared by it. Colin Davidson has done some remarkable work in terms of victims and survivors and one of the things that Colin says is that most of the people that he's worked with, what they're looking for is an acknowledgement of their suffering. Now I personally did not lose anybody in the conflict. I knew people, I had friends, but I didn't have anyone close to me that I lost, so I realise that I have to tread warily here. But we have failed to acknowledge the suffering and loss adequately of the people who have lost and who have suffered.

Secondly, we still struggle in terms of blame and recognition. Who is at fault, who is to blame and how we interpret the past and we've got different interpretations and those interpretations are often in conflict, and often painfully in conflict for the people who were involved. My understanding is that during the negotiations behind the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement that one of the first things George Mitchell did was to take the politicians out of the current situation here, take them away and enable them to relate to one another as human beings. And I think that we have - there's a huge need for us still to do that, to relate to one another as human beings, not as political opponents or as the other side, or as the enemy, or as the cause of my suffering. We need to find new contexts to enable people to talk together. I know that there have been loads of very noble and very worthwhile initiatives in the past - Healing Through Remembering, the Wave organisation - but there is just an ongoing need for that and particularly for some of the people who have suffered the most and who perhaps have not received the support, the recognition, the help that they deserve and need. There needs to be a refocusing on that to help them and part of the difficulty of course, as we all know, is that where politicians differ and disagree then constituents or the people in the community suffer. And our politicians' failure to find some way forward in dealing with the past has exacerbated the suffering of victims and survivors.

At the present time there is neither a carrot or a stick to get politicians to begin to tackle this properly. There's nothing for them to gain by doing it and furthermore, there is no punishment for them not doing it. They do not get sanctioned for not addressing the past and that is a highly unsatisfactory state of affairs. But when it came to the Good Friday Agreement or the Belfast Agreement, politically sensitive terms, that it only happened because the Irish government, the British government, the President of the United States, other influential bodies, exerted enormous pressure on the politicians. George Mitchell set the deadline, "I am out of here by this date. It is not settled? That's the end of it". And at the present point in time there is no pressure, there is nothing that would impel politicians to tackle what is a difficult and thorny and politically sensitive issue. But

there's simply no pressure on them. And the British government have been negligent and irresponsible in their approach to it. The Irish government could have done more. We've got a completely different situation than the United States of America and their capacity to be constructive is minimal at the present point in time, so therefore we are in a difficult situation and one I cannot see any short term change, short term resolution of this difficult problem.

I suppose there is an onus on all of us to respond to Colin Davidson's comments and say we need to at least start to acknowledge what we did to each other, the suffering that we all have a responsibility for, and we need to create the vehicles where we can more actively acknowledge and recognise what took place here. And for the younger generation, those who were born after 1995, they need to be educated in it and that our education system, our schools and our churches need to see that actually we need to begin to educate folks as to what happened and make them aware of how things improve, but what is yet to take place.

But also to teach people in ways that aren't abstract because what Colin Davidson has done is to show the personal face of the pain of the Troubles, the physically injured bodies and the point that has been made to me is that that in a way is what needs to be taught in school, not simply the broader politics and the broader numbers but actually the personal stories, but also to do so in ways that show that there is a shared experience there in terms of the pain and the suffering and the loss rather than to set people against each other.

Yes. Yes, absolutely. I absolutely agree. And we need leadership. The problem is that we're not getting leadership from our politicians, so other people need to step up and show leadership and our church leaders could do it but I think that they're not doing at the present time. I think that our trade unionists could do it. Our business leaders could do it. Our artists, the people in the creative industries, they can also contribute. There are people who are making a difference who are showing leadership but there are too few of them and people perhaps don't realise that they can do it, actually that there is a vacuum of leadership and it just takes some people to step forward and to do it and to show leadership and to begin to say, "You know, this situation is unacceptable. This behaviour is inappropriate". This is something that we need to be moving toward as a society and be prepared to take the brickbats and the criticism and the ridicule for doing it but we need people to do it.

Now clearly dealing with past is extremely contentious but the other issue which is extremely contentious is the constitutional conversation. How do you think we can have that conversation in ways that is not threatening and that does not ramp up the emotions and tensions?

Well I don't think we can do it if there's a border poll on the horizon. I think that completely undermines any sort of rational, thoughtful, reflective debate about the constitutional issue. People are immediately defensive, insecure, feel threatened and then become aggressive. My personal view is that Brexit has shown us that any short of a referendum where you're 51% against 49% is a recipe for disaster. It may have a certain democratic legitimacy but it causes social turmoil and enormous collateral damage. And so I think, if I'm not mistaken, in the past for certain constitutional issues you needed to have a two thirds majority or to change a constitution you needed to have a significant majority in favour of any fundamental change and that would be necessary. Now I realise in saying that that I am a unionist and I am supporting the status quo, but I suppose I would say in my defence that actually this is a country in transition. The post Good Friday Agreement Northern Ireland is a different animal to the pre Good Friday Agreement Northern Ireland. There was a fundamental change. It was a country that was evolving and developing. I think that the concept of being able to live here comfortably being British, living comfortably being Irish, is what we're aiming for. Now obviously, at the end of the day the country falls under the jurisdiction of either United Kingdom or

Ireland, but we need to find a matrix within which both identities can grow and which we can share and work together and we can have a Northern Ireland or an identity, although I know even that term has now become very politically sensitive, but we can have an identity of people here of the six counties or of Ulster, that there can be an identity a unitary construct here that people can be a part of while having another allegiance to a greater constitutional entity.

The problem with what you're saying is that that would require the rewriting of the Good Friday Agreement because the Good Friday Agreement is clear, it's a simple majority.

Yes, but the Good Friday Agreement was never a finished work. It was a brilliant construct but it was an agreement. And 'agreement' is a very appropriate word for it. We had reached something that we could agree on but it was never intended to be the finished article or to be set in stone for all time. So we are in an evolving developing situation and hence the importance, hence the vital importance that politicians see that this political construct that we live in, this entity, is vulnerable, is fragile, it needs to be nurtured, needs to be cherished, needs to be protected, needs to be treated with respect, needs to be allowed to grow and evolve. We need to allow one another to engage, to debate, to find a way forward. In the 21st century world, at least toward the end of the 20th century, national identities were becoming weaker, the European Union was becoming more of something that people felt they belonged to. They felt less entrenched as an Englishman. Many people should I say felt less as an Englishman, an Irishman, there was a sense of "I am a citizen of everywhere", there was that cosmopolitan... In Dublin particularly people had a sense of being European and in the famous words of John Hewitt, "I'm a British man, I'm an Irish man, an Ulster man, I'm a Belfast man, I'm European..." and of course obviously there are caveats and conditions and qualifications to that, but I do think that trenchant strong exclusive nationalism is a very dangerous and difficult philosophy or approach.

But the problem with what you're saying is, that an Irish nationalist would respond, "Well, at the point on which unionism conceded it loses the simple majority and tries to change the requirements, the goalposts. How in your view should the Good Friday Agreement be replaced or amended to reflect what you see as the preference for not a simple majority, but a loaded majority, plus other changes. What would those other changes be?"

Well, better brains than mine have struggled with this. I've not come up with a clear answer and I wouldn't in any sense claim to have an answer to that very difficult question. We need time basically, to be honest. We need some time to sit down together and begin to create some sort of peaceful, constructive relationship. So a time out is necessary. Secondly, the political structures changed at St. Andrews, those changes were unhelpful. The present way that our political institutions are set up is a recipe to reinforce sectarian divisions. That needs to be changed. The problem is I do not believe that we can do it ourselves. We would never have achieved the Good Friday Agreement ourselves, we needed outside help and that is as true today as it ever was. And of course, those who are in the seat of power don't want outside help. They want to maintain their power and influence, so the DUP and Sinn Féin will say, "No, we don't necessarily need any help. We need to work it out together. We just need to do this together". But that will not happen in my view. So we do need help from outside. George Mitchell did a remarkable job. We owe him an enormous debt of gratitude. It wasn't him alone, but he was a very skilful negotiator and a very patient man and a man with great vision. We need people like that again to help us.

Naomi Long (Interviewed 25th June, 2019)

Naomi Long is leader of the Alliance Party. On the date of the interview she was also a newly elected MEP, but that position will end once the UK leaves the EU. She has also been MP for East Belfast and an MLA.

How do we strengthen civil society?

First of all, we need to find a role for engaging with civil society. There is a lot of good work that goes on in our communities and as elected representatives we're all very aware and very conscious of that. But I don't think we ever really lived up to the objective of finding a proper mechanism through which those of us who are elected members of the community would be able to formally engage with civic society. And so what tends to happen is that we engage with civic society on an ad hoc basis, often at their request, it will often be through particular interest groups who approach us and ask for meetings or at our request, because there is a particular issue that's coming up, or when the Assembly is setting properly. They'll come to committee to brief us on things. But there isn't really a structure for us to properly engage with civic society and so there isn't really a structure for members of the community who want to get engaged in that process to buy into.

So one of the things that we have been looking at, certainly in terms of the talks and the discussions we have been having, is how do we get something which is akin to the Civic Forum, which was there originally, but is able to engage with an Assembly, now that we know how the Assembly should function when it's actually working and would actually be a good platform for us to engage with. And so that is one of the strands of work that we have been looking at as part of the discussions that are ongoing about getting the Assembly restored.

So what was wrong with the Civic Forum?

It ran out of road. It was large and unwieldy in some senses but, moreover, there wasn't the real commitment from the political side to actually believe that engaging with the wider community would bear any fruit. What has happened since the Good Friday Agreement, and I've said this to a number of people over the last few years, at the time of the Good Friday Agreement, everyone was involved. So we had a lot of groups around the table and the Forum and the Forum elections brought a lot of new parties to the table. We had this very open conversation that was going on about how Northern Ireland society would change and the public were also involved in that conversation and the Civic Forum sort of arose from a sense that there needed to be work done with communities as well as at a political level.

What has happened over time is that the politics has become more and more precious about its own position. So what we have had are parties that are, if you like, more focused on their leadership role and less on the engagement side and the working with communities to bring them on board and to take, if you like, issues that they're concerned about or knowledge that they might have and actually make use of it. But I also think there's been constriction in the political system too where we've kind of gone from a situation where we had an inclusive process to one which very rapidly became a kind of four party process as it was and we had to battle for it to be even a five party process, to what then emerged more recently, which wasn't even a two party process, in that the governments weren't even involved in that two party process. It was literally just the DUP and Sinn Féin. And it doesn't work because actually if people are locked into very fixed positions and they just repeatedly meet with each other to discuss those positions, there's no new thinking, there's no creativity, but there's also no opportunity to bring new issues or ideas to the table that could allow people to start to move their position. And so we have been really clear, even in this round of talks, how important

it is that we open that up again and start to include not just the other parties, including ourselves, but actually the other Assembly members. So when I hosted talks here back in October and at the start of the year, I invited every party that had representation in the Assembly, regardless of size and every independent MLA, because I believe that everyone has a vested interest and they represent groups of people in our community who do as well.

And there is an appreciation now that wasn't there over the last few years that we do need input from outside the political sphere in terms of input from the community sector, the voluntary sector, the churches and other organisations who have a genuine vested interest in society and how it works. The Assembly is a big part of that, the Assembly is a political institution, but it's more than that. It's also an institution that's meant to be reflective of wider society, and there is an appreciation now for civic engagement and the importance of it as a way of dealing with complex and fraught issues that perhaps wasn't there before. I also think the emergence of the Citizens' Assembly in the south and how that negotiated through what was very sensitive work around, for example, termination of pregnancy and how they would deal with that has led to a new appreciation of the fact that if civic engagement is properly structured and if it isn't just simply a replication of the political views of the parties in proportion to party size, then it has something new to bring to the table. And those two dynamics have actually helped put it back on the agenda for discussion.

Because in fact that's one of the issues, isn't it, about what is the purpose of engagement with civil society that concerns by the two major parties are the Civic Forum wasn't democratically accountable, it wasn't representative, whereas the Citizens' Assembly is not trying to be that type of representative body. They're trying to be a mechanism by which you deal with difficult issues.

But equally, the Civic Forum was never going to be, strictly speaking, representative. It was never going to be democratically accountable because it wasn't a decision-making body. It was a discussion forum. And that also led to frustrations for those engaged in the Civic Forum because it appeared to have more weight than in practice it did. Some people who were involved felt that it became a talking shop. They also felt that it was very much devalued by the fact that when they did come up with ideas or suggestions, politicians weren't engaged with that and didn't respect their opinions, just dismissed them, which of course politicians have the right as elected representatives to dismiss views that they don't agree with or that they don't want. But it would be good if you're going to ask people to do a piece of work that you would at least respect the fact that it's been done. And so on both sides there was this tension about what the purpose was. The thinking around engagement with society in general has changed in that time, people now are more focused on particular areas of work where it would make sense to engage with communities where there is that element of trying to work out where people stand on issues, whether you want to get a range of opinions.

But also by focusing in that way, that sort of almost joint design of how you want to move forward, it takes some of the pressure off politicians in a way that allows them to be facilitators of what the community want, as opposed to having to advocate for something that they might feel is unpopular or unwelcome and that dynamic is also something the people are more aware of now than they were in the past.

And it sounds as if the Alliance Party is saying within the talks process that it would like to see something like Citizens' Assemblies in the south.

Well, we would certainly want to see some form of civic engagement. We have been very poor at this. There have been a number of attempts - take something like education and planning and so on where there's meant to be this idea of co-design, where you sit down with the users of services and you are meant to go through civil service with them and so on. And then you talk to people

afterwards and they say, "Well, we don't feel like what we said was taken on board. We feel like they came to us with a plan in their head. What they did with us was defend their choices as opposed to involve us in making the decisions". And so it has to be real. If the people who are going to do this are going to feel that there's value in it for them, it's got to be something where they feel they are making a difference. Equally, if those who are in the decision making positions who have to actually drive processes and take decisions and make hard choices, feel that people are coming along with unrealistic expectations of what's likely to be the outcome, then they're going to disengage. So it has to be something that's structured in a way that both sides feel that there's benefit and the Citizens' Assembly is one example of how that works.

There are other examples. There are examples where the Civic Forum worked quite well. There are some poor examples I think of how we've tried to engage in the past where it has been through sort of public consultation meetings and so on where the uptake in those has not reflected the strength of opinion that people actually had. It's important to try and find the right mechanisms but also the right issues, because some issues are more easily dealt with in that kind of format than others and we need to be realistic about that rather than raising expectations across the board as to how that's likely to pan out.

Which leads into the next question about how we create a more shared and integrated society.

A number of things from our perspective. Obviously, we believe that first of all, you have to want it. It has to be a political decision that that's what you want to do. It has to be your ambition as you go through every decision-making process that you go through. It can't simply be in a silo, it can't simply be one department's responsibility to create a change to society because that doesn't work. You've got to look at every decision that you make in government and you've got to look at how that decision will impact on the level of segregation or integration in our society, how it will impact on the ability of people to share their communities or not. And so that's one of the reasons why we have proposed having what we have called 'PASS' as a sort of 'Policy Appraisal for Sharing over Separation', to look at every policy that's going through government and ask "What will the impact of this be?", and if it's going to enhance segregation, then what is the mitigation we're going to put in place to balance that out?

So that's at the policy level in terms of actually wanting to see that implemented. I suppose at the other end, it's the practical stuff on the ground that makes a difference in terms of supporting communities. But also we need to look at how communities function. Communities are like living organisms and there are some things we know about communities. Communities form, for example, around schools. So working age people will cluster around schools where their children are attending and like depending on the schools you will get different clusters of people in those areas. So we know that not only does integrated education change attitudes of the young people going through integrated education and affect the views and values of their parents, but also it creates clusters which are more mixed and integrated in terms of housing. And so there are things that you can do with your policy choices around education, around housing, around transport, which can start to change the way society functions.

So we know, for example, that public transport is crucial. That people feeling safe, feeling that it's efficient and effective, but also knowing where it starts and stops. So, for example, more people now will travel east to west in the city because of the Glider system, because they know that they can get on the bus on the Falls Road, come to the Upper Newtownards Road, or to Stormont, or wherever it might be - it's one bus journey, there's no changes, there's no getting lost, they know where they're going to get off and then they can get back on the bus and go straight back and there's a sense of security and safety in that, but it's also simple and straightforward. And so what we have seen is

people exploring areas outside their natural comfort zones. So to be able to do that, you've got to facilitate that movement of people around the city and that's important.

And then the other part of it, I suppose, for us is creating a shared space that is able to be used by everybody, it doesn't have to be neutral space, but it does have to be space that's open and welcoming to everyone. And by creating that and allowing people to come to that space and experience that positivity, they can then take those principles back into the communities in which they live. So there's a whole range of things that need to be done in terms of supporting an integrated and shared society but I don't believe that all of them are political. Many of them involve people doing work on the ground and involve political decisions that will support the work that people do on the ground, which is why civic engagement matters, because it's not as simple as having a policy on a desk in an office in Stormont. It has to be something that communities are actually buying into, that they understand the benefits for the community and that they actually see it. In terms of the rewards that it brings in local communities, will we get more shared an integrated society? Because ultimately that will be one which is more prosperous but also more secure and safe.

I'm a bit confused Naomi because at the outset you said that it's got to be something that people want in order to achieve, but I would have thought that you were going to say that neither the DUP nor Sinn Féin genuinely wants a shared society.

Well, they would both say that they do. But I would say that the evidence is to the contrary. So I tend to judge people by what they do, not by what they say.

So how do you change that dynamic?

The amount of energy that they have invested in peace building generally and in reconciliation, but also in integration and shared projects, has been minimal. One of the things that we need to do as part of the negotiations that we're engaged in at the moment is to ensure that things like integrated housing, integrated education and those kind of practical measures that can be put in on the ground are dealt with. But also we need to be willing, now not just as the fifth largest party, but actually it's on circumstances, certainly in the east of Northern Ireland, the third largest party in Northern Ireland, to flex *our* muscle when it comes to saying that this is what people want. It's what the public demand and so the parties may not like it, but if they believe that the electorate like it, they will be surprisingly open to delivering it because no political party will set its face against the electorate if they know that that ultimately is what the electorate wants. So the more people vote for parties that are in favour of sharing and integration, the more *all* parties will put that in their agenda. It's the Green Party's dilemma, for example, that when people start to vote Green, all the other parties appear to suddenly have an interest in the environment and then people start to vote for those parties because what they really care about is the environment, not the party.

And so it's a similar dynamic. But what we're saying is, look, if people are voting Alliance they're sending out a very strong message about the kind of society they want and it would be foolish, I think, of Sinn Féin or the DUP to ignore that message. So in many ways, by voting for Alliance in greater numbers than before, we have an opportunity to challenge at Council, at Assembly and beyond but also we have an opportunity to push those parties towards more interest in creating a shared society but it has to be a process that we engage with on a regular basis. So when we're in talking about things like the Programme for Government, we're in there pushing for objectives in that Programme for Government that will cover issues around integration and sharing. I don't believe that other parties' heart may be in it to the same degree that it's the defining feature of Alliance and it's our most important objective. But if we can get that further up their agenda, if we

can get that in a place where they can't avoid taking the action that's required, then we will see the outworking of that. And the people who really need to want it is the community.

When you're talking about the flexing of muscles, is there an opportunity to flex the financial muscles? Because the figure that you've quoted as a party is one billion pounds a year wasted through duplication of resources because of the segregated society. Does that create an opportunity?

Of course it does and the difficulty, of course, with that is that none of it is a lot cheaply either and we have been very honest about that, that it is essentially an invest to save opportunity. But that's a very strong argument to take to Treasury when you're actually going to go and make a pitch for additional funds. If you go to Treasury and say, "Well, we've have a massive hole and we'd like you to plug it for a year", they're not going to be that enamoured by that proposal. But if you say to them, "We have a massive hole here in our budget, but if you give us the money, we can spend it in a way that will fix that hole, so in future years the hole will be smaller", they're going to be much more interested in investing in that project than they would be otherwise. And there is an opportunity to look at the costs of division in our society. And some of those are hard financial costs of duplication of the violence and the extra policing and everything else that we require. Some of them are missed opportunity costs, things that we can't do and miss out on because of division. It's really important that we look at all of those costs and see how do we minimise those. And as I say, one way is at policy level and the other way is by investing in order to restructure what we do.

We have a massive problem, for example, in the sustainability of our education system. That's clear. And what isn't working is a whole series of vested interests having such sway over large chunks of the education estate and to different degrees, being able to deal with things like reducing numbers and so on and amalgamation and all of those things. There is an argument to say that if we do root and branch reform of our education system and actually look at what the requirements are and meeting the needs of people, that the default really could be integrated education in areas where we need new schools. And that way we do away with a lot of the over proliferation and the empty seats that we have had for many years and we start to deal then with how do we deliver education which reflects the diversity of communities without needing a diverse number of schools. And that's the bigger challenge that we face. So from our perspective, it is about trying to do two things. It's about trying to show where the benefits come for society, but it's also about trying to say if we're able to unlock the money that's tied up with division, and the estimates vary everything from three quarters of a billion to about a billion and a half. So about a billion is probably reasonable, and that was a few years ago. If we look at that and say, "What could we do with that money if we started to unlock even some of it each year?", then we would start to see opportunities where we could be reinvesting in communities and actually making a massive difference. And at a time when money is very, very tight in terms of the Assembly and particularly in terms of long term sustainability of a lot of our services, actually being able to look at the sustainability around segregation and say, "Well, that's one we can get rid of that is costing us an ongoing cost". That is a very attractive prospect.

Now, you've spoken about the challenge of doing that when the other big challenge is how we deal with the past and the legacy issues. So what's your solution, approach to that?

This is possibly the last chance we're going to have to do anything that looks anything like a comprehensive process with this. The alternative to going ahead with the Stormont House arrangements that were agreed is for us to end up in a situation where it's just ad hoc, if at all, being addressed. And I don't believe that that in the long term is good for society here.

I also think we have to be honest with people about the prospects of justice being delivered at such a remove from the events of the time. We need to be realistic about how likely that is to happen and

be honest with people about their expectations and what can and can't be achieved. But we need to leave the door open for justice to take its course. In a post-conflict society to expect people to draw a line at a certain date and say anything before that date, we will just ignore it, I don't think is good. I don't think it's good psychologically for a community emerging from conflict to believe that what went on before should be ignored. But I also don't think that it's good in terms of setting the precedent for the future in terms of what justice looks like in modern society. So we have to leave the door open that if new evidence emerges, that if new information comes forward and is found, the prosecutions can continue. But realistically justice is only one element of it. There's a whole wider element about reconciliation, about acknowledgement of the pain that people have suffered, about respect for that pain and often people are very poor at respecting some pain as opposed to others. And it's not just about as people, sort of that hackneyed phrase of there being a hierarchy of victims. But in some ways too there can be a bit of a hierarchy of sympathy and the people can't even empathise with those from different parts of the community who also lost family, maybe in very different circumstances, but nevertheless feel that human pain of their loss.

And then there's the practical element of it. There is what do we do for those people who who lost loved ones, who themselves were seriously injured, who suffered psychological trauma and who are living with the impact of that today? What are the services we put in place? What is the support that we give to people - the pensions issue is a big issue in terms of giving people dignity and independence as they grow old with very complex disabilities as a result of of of the conflict. And so we need to do all of those things but we need to do it with integrity and with honesty. If we over-promise and under-deliver, people will feel very cheated. If we are if we attempt in any way to interfere with due process around these issues, that will also cause huge frustration with people. We saw that with things like the OTR letters and other things where people felt that there was an interference, that there was opaqueness in what government were doing and so on and they genuinely felt that they had been cheated of justice and denied the right to pursue their cases. And that that has a very embittering kind of impact on families. So it's important that we make sure that people have transparency about what can or can't be done, that we are honest about the likelihood of that bringing resolution, but that we also invest in the support around that to make sure that people can move, not move *on* from their loss, but move beyond it, to live a life beyond it and to have an experience beyond it that isn't entirely consumed with what happened in their past. Because one of the really sad things that has happened as a result of the Troubles and all the circumstances around non-investigation or the lack of transparency over what happened or not known where the bodies were abandoned and all those other things, is that people have never really got to the point where they have been able to properly grieve. And part of grieving is the recovery and the moving on with your life, albeit that it's a very changed life. There are many people still suspended at that point where they've not got beyond that initial shock and grief and we need to do all we can to try to assist people to get beyond that point, because if we don't, that becomes an intergenerational problem that will still cast a shadow over the next generation coming through.

So I think personally, the Stormont House Agreement is like any other set of arrangements. It is imperfect. But it is the best that we are going to do and if we don't do it now, we won't do it at all, and not doing it at all would be much worse.

So that would be a five stage process, if I hear correctly, which is: open process, Stormont House, pensions for victims, counselling services for people with continuing trauma and adequate investment into social care for dealing with people as they deal with their own injuries as they get older.

Yeah. One of the issues, for example, around the pensions. I've met with a severely injured group and there's a lot of work being done on that in terms of scoping and so on. But one of the issues with

people, for example, who've had amputations is just the ongoing nature of that. Often when people are amputees, they're much older. It'll be as a result of an illness or whatever, it will come with age. And so it's a one-off thing. For a lot of these people they lost limbs as teenagers or as young people and they are now in a situation where they're having to live with that and they're getting into their forties, their fifties, their sixties and they're caring for what were very old amputations. They're having to have further surgery, wear and tear on their joints because they move differently than they would otherwise have moved. And all of those things and just the indignity of having to go and ask for a new wheelchair or new adjustments to their property and have to make the case and the re-traumatisation that it causes for them to have to talk through how they got to that point. To me, being able to provide for them financially through something like a pension that allows them to afford to care for their own needs without having to give that repeated explanation all the time and just let them live out their lives with some degree of comfort.

Also looking at people who became carers for someone who was injured severely during the Troubles, weren't able to work as a result of that, or lost their husband or wife and ended up being the kind of main carer in the family and weren't working because of that. That will have impact on them when they go to draw their pension, when they move into old age and they find that suddenly their entitlements are less than they might otherwise have been. And we need to find ways of making sure that people are not disadvantaged and that way, that we can try to support, as best we can, people to be able to live in some degree of comfort in their final years, because we owe it to people as a society to be able to try and make their life as comfortable as it can be, given the trauma that they've already been through.

So we need to look at all of those issues quite sensitively. There are wider issues at the moment that are being debated, obviously around prosecutions and so on and we've heard all the debate about statute of limitations and so on, but that's not something that I would support. I simply believe - I don't support amnesty, I don't support a statute of limitations because I believe that would ultimately lead to an amnesty. I think justice would prevail and if you're going to give some people a by ball on these issues they have to apply to everybody across the board. But I also don't think it does justice to the fact that a lot of people who serve in the military didn't do anything wrong. There's a huge amount of hurt that would be created by the statute of limitations that people don't perhaps appreciate from those who never broke the law when they served, but who feel that they would be in some way smeared by that approach to suggest that they did operate outside or above the law when they didn't.

All of those issues are hugely sensitive. It's important that what we agree at Stormont House with all party input. It's important that that goes forward and is properly implemented and properly funded, because ultimately we cannot expect the police of today to foot the bill for the policing of the past because they have the present to police. And if it gets to a point where the funding isn't forthcoming for the historic inquiries part of it, then we will really have a difficult problem, because to just take that out of the current-day policing budget isn't realistic and won't gain public support.

So the last of these difficult questions is how do we deal with the constitutional question without inflaming issues and people and communities?

The Good Friday Agreement set out a structure within which it would be addressed. We're sitting in a building that's supposed to house one of those structures and the Assembly and yet it's not functional. But the anticipation in the Good Friday Agreement was that at some point, if the Secretary of State felt there was going to be a change, if there was a referendum. So the premise is you don't call a referendum unless you're expecting the vote to be 'yes'. And the reason for that is quite sound because otherwise you would end up with a war of attrition and with referendum after

referendum caught in this suspended animation. And we've seen what happens when you have a referendum that's narrowly won or lost, how difficult it can be after that point to kind of manage people's expectations. We've seen the impact it's had on UK politics with Brexit. It has been a shambles. And so the test that was put in there to say there needs to be a vote at a point where we think there is a convincing majority in favour so that we believe that that would be the outcome.

But it was always anticipated that that referendum would take place with fully functioning structures, with north, south and east, west bodies functioning with the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, working with the North-South Ministerial Council meetings happening with the Northern Ireland Assembly, fully functional with as it was then, the Civic Forum fully operational. The anticipation was that we would be working together – north, south, east, west within Northern Ireland, political and community, all connected so that those conversations would be happening against the backdrop of established relationships, confidence, trust, that it wouldn't be a conversation happening in a febrile environment where people were divided, already segregated -

Are you saying there should be a lock, that if those institutions aren't working, the trigger wouldn't take place?

I'm not saying there should be a lock, I'm saying that's what was anticipated in the Agreement. And it makes sense in that context that you could have that conversation and debate and discussion. Theoretical, what if it happened? How would it look? How would it function? How would it work? That's a conversation that you can have much more easily with people that you're engaging with every day as part of your regular process than it is when it's thrown into as it is at the moment, into the mix of a completely chaotic situation around Brexit, a lot of fear, a lot of concern about the future. Then it's seen as though the suggestion of a united Ireland is a way out of that is trying to bounce people into a decision when the other decision hasn't actually been settled yet.

The context for having that discussion is like every other sensitive discussion, really important. You can have the conversation and this is part of the discussion I've been having with others. You can have that conversation about what would a united Ireland look like? What would the place be for those who are unionists or those who would maybe not necessarily say their unionists, but British? I mean part of my identity is British. So how would that be reflected in any kind of new Ireland situation, how would that work? But it also can't be a conversation that only takes place, for example, with Sinn Féin as a political party, because they're not a majority stakeholder in the Republic of Ireland or in Northern Ireland. They are a large party in Northern Ireland, but they're not by any means the most influential of the parties in terms of what any new shaping of the society would look like. So that debate needs to be happening on a much broader base, if that conversation is going to happen. It can't just happen between individual political parties in Northern Ireland who kind of use the constitutional question as a stick to beat each other with.

So who has responsibility for mapping out what a-

There isn't anybody who has responsibility.

Who should then?

Well, I guess it is about political leadership, at least in part. It's kind of a fraught question, because before the presumption would have been that it was the Irish government's role, but the Irish government, in terms of its constitutional claim to Northern Ireland, has sort of changed its position and whilst it doesn't claim to be neutral on the issue, it's also not seen to be advocating strongly for

any change. It's a matter for the people of Northern Ireland how the conversation takes place because the decision is ultimately theirs. In the Good Friday Agreement it's for the people of Northern Ireland to decide how they want to go forward and so ultimately, it's a matter for them how they frame the question.

There's been some quite interesting examples of engagement around it. It's a debate that's much more live at the moment because of Brexit than it has been for a long time. I think the settled will was much clearer when the Assembly was sitting, when society was slightly more functional before Brexit happened. I think that the upending of those old certainties of Brexit itself posing a threat to Northern Ireland, I think the Assembly not sitting has raised questions in people's minds as to where Northern Ireland's best interests are suited and best fit in the long term. And I think that question's been raised in people's minds, not just those who would have been traditionally nationalist in their aspirations, but actually people who would have been more naturally unionist in their aspirations but who have started to question actually is the decision being taken within the UK in Northern Ireland's best interests? And that's a question that was very rarely ever asked before. And so I think for that reason, the conversation has happened in all sorts of different places.

We're part of that conversation, it happens within the Alliance Party, it happens between the Alliance Party and other parties. We have engaged in that and I've been asked to go along and speak, do podcasts and other things. I'm engaging in that conversation because I don't think having the conversation in itself should be a threat to anyone. But I am clear that I don't believe this is the right time for a referendum. And I don't believe that the context is right at this point in time, because I don't, first of all, see the test in the Good Friday Agreement has been met in terms of I don't see when you look at all of the polling, I don't see that there is a clear nationalist majority in Northern Ireland. So I don't think that that test has been met. And more importantly, our focus at the moment primarily needs to be on addressing the Brexit issue, which is the biggest and most urgent challenge that we face. And I would say that if we can deal with that and getting the Assembly structures restored, then we're in a position where we can have the wider debate and discussion as to what happens next.

And to complete the circle, it sounds as if you are thinking that at least part of that conversation needs to be led by civic society.

Yeah, I mean, I don't think it can be just led by politicians. If Sinn Féin, for example, raise the issue of a united Ireland, it will get the knee jerk eye roll from other sections of society. I don't think that Sinn Féin's vision for a united Ireland is one that a lot of unionists and indeed a lot of nationalists would necessarily want to buy into. I think that equally, if you have the discussion, unionist parties will feel the need to defend the union where unionist people might be open to having a discussion about what a united Ireland might look like if the defence of the union doesn't win the day. So I think that some of that civic society conversation can be had at a different level where it's not a political threat to anyone, but it's actually exploring relationships.

One of the sad things for me about Brexit is that actually relationships were what led to the Good Friday Agreement. It wasn't simply about the politics. A lot of it was about the fact that Britain and Ireland were in the European Union together. They needed to work together. They got to know each other in the corridors and doing their business on a daily basis. And for that reason, the hostility between the two governments couldn't practically continue and so they came together, first of all, with the Anglo Irish Agreement and then beyond that in the Good Friday Agreement. But there was a sense that London and Dublin were on the same page, certainly when it came to Northern Ireland, that they were they were trying to be on the same page and that they would try and assist us to sort out our problems.

One of the saddest things about Brexit is to see so many levels, London and Dublin, not on the same page, but on opposite sides of the table and that will continue when the UK becomes a third party and Ireland remains in the EU as they won't be on the same page. Of course, they'll still cooperate. They still have a vested interest in terms of Northern Ireland's future, the operation of the border and all the rest of it. But it suddenly becomes so much more difficult than it needs to be, because I ultimately think that that relationship – east/west - is as important in terms of stability as the relationships we have with each other within Northern Ireland. When that relationship – east/west - became civil and even warm at times, it made it a lot easier for us to solve our problems in Northern Ireland and the cooling of that relationship has had really quite profound effects on how our parties locally have been able to interact and engage with each other. There are lots of other complicated dynamics around it obviously in terms of people's relative positions within the governments and everything else. But there's something fundamental there about those relationships. And if we were able to get to the point where we had the UK and Irish governments on the same page again, it would go a long way to resolving our issues.

But I agree, it can't just be a political conversation. Civic society has to have a say, has to have an influence and an input and perhaps that is the best place for the conversation to start, rather than be led by politicians who will automatically deal with it in a confrontational space.

Mark Daly (Interviewed 20th February, 2019)

Mark Daly is a Fianna Fáil senator and former chair of the Oireachtas Good Friday Implementation Committee.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

Well I literally only launched a report⁷³ in relation to Brexit and the issue of Northern Ireland returning to violence in the event of a hard border due to Brexit, and also the issue of a rushed referendum on a united Ireland. And this report I did in conjunction with two UNESCO World Chairs who are experts in preventing violent extremism and they make the point that in reality most kids in Northern Ireland will never get involved in any of that. But that was the same during the Troubles, most people were not involved in armed conflict on either side but it didn't take much more than a few people to create a huge amount of harm to the whole society.

So Professor Pat Dolan and Professor Mark Brennan who compiled this report, along with myself and Michael Ortiz who was President Obama's senior policy adviser at the National Security Council on counter-terrorism, but also he was the first U.S. diplomat appointed by the State Department on the issue of countering violent extremism - they put together a number of recommendations, in fact the vast majority of the report is about what needs to be done now in those disadvantaged communities. And a lot of the great programmes are there, they'd been done and they are being done on a cross-community basis but simply not on the scale that is required with the amount of money that is needed to make sure that what is termed in this report "the Agreement generation", those who were born just before or since the Good Friday Agreement aren't radicalised, to use a term from a different conflict, and exploited by paramilitary leaders for their own ends, either in the use of republicans to achieve their aims of a border poll on a united Ireland, but then on the other side, loyalist paramilitaries wanting to maintain the status quo.

So what it needs is a scaled up approach and the professors are quite good in terms of the outline, the fact that history could be used as a tool against itself and what they term as instead of using history as a way of mobilising communities to settle grievances from the past. And as we all know, even God can't change the past so trying to settle grievances by using force is not the way forward. But what they do is they talk about using history as a way of teaching people the consequences of violent resistance and the consequences for ordinary people.

The issue of integrated education is well known in Northern Ireland but also in terms of housing, in terms of community and talking about non-formal education settings and the role of the arts as a place that, through music, movie, theatre, that you could bring young people together in a shared space. And the ideas set out in this report are all about prevention and that is, I suppose, given the amount of time left before Brexit, which is just less than 40 days. You can't put in those programmes or you can't scale them up to the way that they should be for the ones that are being done now, but you can do that as we go forward.

So the key in your view is to scale up good practice. Clearly that can't be done overnight and presumably that has to be a part - simultaneously we need to close down bad practice I guess.

Yeah. It's in the report, that some of the community leaders in both communities are community leaders by day and then they're involved in criminality by night and again, not a very huge scale. Most people are doing great work but there are some who are not and they are giving a romanticised view, and again, this is referred to in this report, a romanticised view of the Troubles

⁷³ [Northern Ireland Returning to Violence as a Result of a Hard Border due to Brexit or a Rushed Border Poll](#)

and in some communities, the loyalist community, your paramilitary leader during the Troubles you had standing in your community, you were protecting your community, you were in the UDR, you were in the British Army or you were in the RUC. You had standing. You had a well-paid job and there was that idea in the loyalist community that in some ways they were undefeated and therefore they will never be defeated and that view was being put out there. And then on the republican side, this is unfinished business, and again, young people who have no memory of the harm of the Troubles will be exploited by people, adults, who want to achieve their own ends and give this glorified view of the past.

So that takes us straight in to how we deal with the past. There are different narratives of the past but there's an implication for what you're saying, if I understand correctly, which is that a more objective view of the past also needs to be put forward to undermine the paramilitary narrative.

Yeah. Professor Dolan and Professor Brennan, the UNESCO Chairs, are quite strong on this. They do say that actually the history that has been taught in Northern Ireland is fair and that there has been a huge amount of work done on that, but it needs a continual conversation and that is ongoing. It's not just one history class in a school that a child might receive, or a week of it, or a month of it, it's about the particulars of the Troubles - that's not enough. People need to be told about the consequences of violence and [given] empathy training. And empathy is one of the big learnings on this as people – this again, the UNESCO Chairs have worked globally on providing programmes and implementing programmes on preventing violent extremism and what we're talking about here to a large degree is preventing violent extremism and preventing young people being radicalised. The issue of identity is very important but what they talk about is the amount of good work that has been done, but the return on investment that would come from having a huge scale up in the great practices that are in place at the moment but simply don't have the funding and the resources and the personnel to bring them across the board, and the need to put in that investment because there will be a huge return on that investment but not putting in that investment will have equally huge consequences.

So it sounds as if what you're saying is that the emphasis shouldn't be simply on the political history, it should be more on the social history and the harm that was done to society. To encourage people to have empathy with the victims of the Troubles.

Yeah. That's about people. You can have all the textbooks you want and especially former paramilitaries and the victims coming together and sharing their experiences with schools and schoolchildren. But the most disadvantaged ones are the ones that are the hardest to get to because they might have dropped out of the school system. So how do you make sure that they still get that investment in their futures that is required?

Michael Ortiz - President Obama's policy adviser on counter-terrorism - his programme and what he wrote for us was basically talking about the need to devise a programme for Northern Ireland because each country is different, how the structure is, community leaders in some areas can be religious, in other areas can be civil, the role of family is very important to prevent the kids being radicalised and that is about making sure that there are social networks and shaping civil society through cross community contact. But that is about scale. That about scale and it needs to be done on a *massive* scale where you have things like soccer, which is broadly cross community in some instances, but also theatre, the arts, those are the areas where people can agree on but doing that not only within Northern Ireland, but north/south as well and having business groups get together and then it makes it much harder then for people to be radicalised by paramilitary leaders and politicians, so that's a huge job of work but the investment is going to have a huge return because not doing that investment will have very bad consequences.

So that's part of how we deal with the past but we also have the legacy, we have the different views about how you deal with the past, whether you actually focus on sanction of people who committed activities during the Troubles or whether you focus on healing. What we learn from your work?

There is no one size fits all answer. If you were talking to family members of someone who was killed or murdered during the Troubles, some would want to truth, some would want a court case, some would want to confront the person who killed their loved one and so therefore there is no one size fits all answer to that question. The difficulty is the balance between what is good for the future of Northern Ireland and what is the entitlement of people to get justice and they are entitled to get justice, they are entitled to get the truth. But it's trying to ensure that we get the truth while at the same time moving forward.

And also not re-traumatising people because that is the key thing isn't it?

They are traumatised and in the report that I did in 2017 for the Good Friday Agreement Implementation Committee which was the first ever report in the history of the Irish state by a Dáil or Senate committee, on the issue of reunifying Ireland, a long title of which is 'Brexit and the Future of Ireland, Uniting Ireland and its People and Peace and Prosperity'. Senator Frances Fitzgerald did an excellent piece where she talked about the intergenerational trauma where in fact there are now more people being traumatised by the Troubles and people who weren't even born during the Troubles are being traumatised by the consequences of the Troubles because their parents who had gone through the Troubles who might have lost a loved one, some of them could be suffering from mental health problems as a result, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, alcohol and drug addiction, and that then is having effect on the next generation. So now we are having a pyramid effect where there are more and more people being affected by the Troubles and a generation that wasn't even born at the time.

So the issue of investing, and that's what I'm talking about, the return on investment in mental health services is very important but that requires structure. There are a lot of good people who set up something either on the Shankill Road or the Falls Road but then there's nothing over in east Belfast or there's nothing in Newry or there's nothing in Ballymena for people who suffer the same trauma. So it doesn't have the roll out in the way that it should and that's why you need a plan. Because of course policy neglect seldom goes unpunished.

So in other words, we shouldn't focus too much on avoiding re-traumatising people because they are still in trauma and the only way that that trauma can be dealt with is actually getting to the truth and moving beyond it.

Some people may never want to access the services but the thing is the services need to be there and some people don't even know they are traumatised and again, some people would seek the justice, some to seek to confront someone, some would seek to bury it. And that requires again the Victims Commission and all that and the fact that the system is even holding back information on state security grounds means that people are being traumatised more, they're becoming victims again of the system and literally the campaigns are being passed on from one generation to the next as the generation who lost a loved one, a brother or sister, as they're dying off then you have their sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, who are taking up the campaign to get the justice, to get the truth and that again has a huge drain on them as human beings and their futures as well because they are not getting the justice which they deserve and it is having a knock-on effect on society. So it really is about making sure that you have programmes in place but not having a belief that one size fits all - you have to tailor the programmes and and there is no simple solution but ignoring it is not

the solution. And in some instances that's what the Irish government and the British government have done in terms of dealing with the legacies of the past, they have not dealt with them in the way that they should. Say for example in the case of some of those people who were killed during the Troubles, they haven't received an inquest. Legally required by the law of the land to have an inquest but no inquest was carried out. The basics weren't even done.

And again, as you've said before, there needs to be a focus on the hurt of the individuals and the families and the communities rather than necessarily the politics.

Yeah. The problem with the politics is that there are so many people who have so much to hide on all sides, on the paramilitary sides and the police in the north, in the south, in Britain that the system and the establishment and that in every way, shape or form, on unionist and loyalist sides, republicans and nationalist sides, the paramilitaries have a lot to hide because they had informers in their own ranks and people in some instances don't want that coming out and politically that can be damaging from their own point. Same with Britain. What they were up to, the Irish government in terms of the stuff that they did and didn't do during the Troubles. So the system is quite happy to hide all the stuff that it has hidden for so long because it doesn't want that information coming out but then the consequences are for the citizens and civilians who continue to seek justice.

Now the main objective at the end of the day is to create a shared integrated society. So how do we move towards achieving that?

Yeah, that is the one lesson of Brexit, in relation to the issue of holding referendums. You do not hold a referendum and then try to figure out the future. And as I said earlier, the issue of policy neglect seldom going unpunished. That is the clear outcome of the Brexit referendum, is that because of a lack of planning, a lack of foresight, lack of engagement, a lack of studying the consequences, it has meant that Brexit is a disaster in economic terms and nobody knows the long term consequences as of yet but suffice to say, they won't be good, it's only how bad will it be? And there's no good options. Northern Ireland is divided and in this report by the UNESCO Chairs it points out that it's nearly no more divided than it was because people are living in more segregated housing, going to schools that are not integrated, attending social and sporting events that are largely separate. And then politically it's gone to what would be the more extremes in terms of the politics and Stormont isn't working. So 20 years on from the Good Friday Agreement the violence has stopped but the reconciliation hasn't happened. I remember talking to Mike Nesbitt and he was talking about reconciliation and genuine reconciliation is all hope of a better past and you have to give up all hope of a better past and you have to move forward and that requires putting in place programmes and young people and people on all sides coming together, but giving them facilities and the ways of doing that but doing it in a scale that is required and that has not happened in the north. It has happened and great work has been done as I've said, but not in the way and in the numbers that are needed.

Peter Sheridan of Co-operation Ireland has suggested that the way, assuming that we get this Assembly and the Executive back up and running, that there should be a department for reconciliation. Do you think that would be a reasonable approach?

That would be a positive thing to happen but it needs the funding. It needs a strategy and again, you know the UNESCO chairs have talked about the need for reconciliation but also we have to look at the next steps forward in terms of the future generations. And that is the challenge as a result of Brexit as well having the conversation about what is the best for the people of Northern Ireland in the future of Northern Ireland, having the debate between unionism and nationalism about well, is it better to stay in the United Kingdom or is it better to be in a united Ireland? And making the

arguments and the logic of it. But the problem, as we've seen with Brexit is logic doesn't always come to the fore and identity is a very important issue and you have to address people's fears and concerns and that's one of the other pieces of work I'm looking at at the moment, but it's really about putting the work in place now.

And of course the referendum over Brexit has inflamed community differences within Northern Ireland. So what do we learn from that in terms of how we have the constitutional conversation in terms of the future?

Yeah I suppose people are pointing to that but in reality the tensions are there and what some people are looking for is the excuse. And we saw that with the flags protest in 2012/13 where young people were holding banners, people who weren't born during the Troubles and were very young during the Troubles, they were holding banners saying, "We will not be the generation to fail Ulster". And that was before Brexit. So you know that's a concern in the run up to any future border poll. And the thing is in reality there's going to be a referendum on a united Ireland. The question is when.

And how it's conducted.

And how it's conducted. And that is a great lesson in policy neglect because I was in Belfast when Raymond McCourt took the secretary of state to court⁷⁴ on seeking the Secretary of State to come up with a policy on how a referendum on a united Ireland would be called. And the Secretary of State was not forced to come up with a policy because of what the judge said.

What ultimately happened in that court case was that Justice Girvin said, "I cannot force her to come up with a policy, even though it would be prudent for her to have one and it may be prudent", but he said it, I imagine, as a combination of election results, opinion polls, and the problem with that is that opinion polls are showing the event of a hard border due to Brexit, the majority would vote for a united Ireland. And the election results in 2017 show that the majority of people did not vote for pro-union candidates. Now that's People before Profit, Alliance, Sinn Féin and SDLP.

And the Greens as well.

And the Greens. So that's not decisive. But at some stage it will be decisive. The predictions are somewhere between 2024 – 2023/24 and 2029. Ten years max. And knowing all these facts, what are the governments doing, the Irish government, the British government, with the assistance of the European Union and the United States, going to prepare for that reality, that there is going to be a referendum. And people will have their views obviously. I want to see a united Ireland but all we have to do is learn those lessons of the past, learn the lessons of Brexit, you sit down, you engage with people, you talk about their fears and concerns. You address their grievances and then you move forward. So the debate that needs to happen is the debate between people of ideas, they say, well the best idea is to move forward, then what's the best for future generations? And that is a debate about the day to day issues like housing, health, education, opportunity and then when you have those debates and ideas, obviously also addressing people's concerns and that's all done under the umbrella of the Good Friday Agreement and people may not understand this but like, any united Ireland, Stormont remains, there is provisions that have to be in place in Northern Ireland that wouldn't necessarily have to be in the Republic and issues of the Commonwealth and flags and anthems, statues and issues of identity all have to be addressed. But that needs to be done now in the build up. It cannot be done in the twelve months before a referendum. That's simply too late.

⁷⁴ Raymond McCourt is a victims campaigner and human rights activist.

So in other words the ground rules, the evidence, needs to be prepared now in advance of a referendum at some point in the future.

Well it's very interesting, you mentioned 'ground rules' because one of the things in that court case, and the most disturbing thing in that court case, outside of the fact that the secretary of state could call a border poll at any moment, but that's unlikely, it's more likely the secretary of state would be *forced* to call a referendum by being taken to court and it going all the way to the Supreme Court and a judge is saying, "Well, the evidence is there and therefore you must call a border poll". You do not want a border poll caused by protests and people on the streets protesting for a referendum being called and them others... because the simple fact is there is no policy, nobody knows the grounds on which a referendum will be called.

But what I must mention is that not only does the Secretary of State decide when the border poll gets called, but also the Secretary of State decides who gets to vote and in Northern Ireland that is disastrous given the context of gerrymandering and vote rigging that happened in the past. And the reason that is of concern is if you took the Scottish independence referendum they decided that everybody on the local election register got the vote and they obviously had it from 16 and up which suited the independent side because young people were more in favour of Scottish independence. But what they found is when they did the exit polls, the people who were from, we all know it was lost by 49/55, but people from elsewhere in the UK voted against Scottish independence by 75%. People from outside of the UK, EU citizens who were allowed to vote, voted against it 57%. But people from Scotland who were born in Scotland voted by a margin of 49/51. So people who were Scottish voted by just a margin of 1%, so a 1.1% swing and you're home and hosed. And if you take that into a Northern Ireland context, you can decide the outcome. The Secretary of State could decide the outcome of the referendum long before any vote is cast because if the 16 year olds are allowed a vote that obviously favours one community, if it's 18 year olds, it affects a community. If it's British passport holders, British and Irish passport holders, British, Irish and European passport holders, you have different outcomes depending on that. So there is another court case. So without that policy being put in place now, all you're going to have is chaos in the run up to referenda, you're going to have court case after court case where the Secretary of State will come up with, "Here are the parameters for the voter register for the referendum". Guaranteed to be taken to court by one side or the other.

And that work needs to be done now basically.

That's the work that needs to be done now because if you don't do that work now you are adding fuel to a tense situation and then all it needs is a spark. And it doesn't have to be that way. Because that's the job of politics, the job as politics is to plan and prepare. No-one ever got a statute put up to them because they prevented a war. Nobody. But this is all highly foreseeable. All the outcomes that we're talking about are highly foreseeable, very predictable, some are very likely. So therefore that requires government to act.

And the longer and the longer you don't act, the more conflictual it becomes when you do act.

Yeah, because people get used to the idea, "Well, here, I know the parameters".

And in a sense, the longer it goes when the demographics change then the more of a sense of "This could happen at any moment".

Yeah. It becomes far too tense and that's where it's like you need to establish those rules and parameters well in advance but also address people's fears and concerns. That's a very important

issue. So the issue of land ownership in Northern Ireland and I've met members of the unionist community who think the land is going to be taken off them. I said to him, "Who do you think we're going to give it to?". You know? But there was intimidation in the '20s, there was intimidation in the '70s and '80s and when I say 'intimidation', farmers were killed in the hope that their families would sell the land. That's a reality. It wasn't widespread, but it happened. And that fear needs to be addressed. So how do you do that? You do it by engagement. You do it by planning and sitting down and saying this is what *is* going to happen because in the absence of that information that vacuum will be filled by politicians saying, "They're going to take your land. They're going send all the RUC men to jail. They're going to open up tribunals". Well, somebody has to be able to say sorry, you know, "The Irish government have signed this international agreement that says the following..."

Mark Durkan (Interviewed 18th February, 2019)

Mark Durkan has been Northern Ireland's deputy first minister, leader of the SDLP, an MLA and MP for the Foyle constituency, as well as MEP candidate for Fine Gael.

How do we strengthen civil society in ways that enable us to make progress?

We need to recognise that civil society made significant contributions during our peace process. Mo Mowlam as Secretary of State engaged civil society very strongly as a positive pressure point on the political parties. And we also were hearing from civil society through that period the benefits of partnership working, but already manifesting itself through the way in which EU funds were being used, often with quite innovative local delivery mechanisms and intermediary funding bodies that were bringing people together of very different backgrounds in new models of partnership in new ways and that were delivering things.

There were practical lessons and experiences for people there that were reaching into politics, because some of those local partnerships involved local councillors, ex-prisoners, others, people who maybe wouldn't have been sitting in the same room or around the same table on other things. When we're talking about civil society we're not just talking about people who might be invited to an NIO reception or whatever, we're talking about people who are engaged in the here and now in their own neighbourhoods in everyday ways.

When we negotiated the Agreement one of the reasons we had a Civic Forum as part of the institutions was because we wanted to continue to harness that value and insight. I can remember talking about how a body like the Civic Forum could be used as outriders to cut through some of the challenging and structural policy issues that we would have to face, that maybe the formal government system of civil service papers and stilted stances from parties wouldn't cut through, not least on community relations, and some of the other issues that Civic Forum could play a lead role on of course and we want to see is not just the Civic Forum in the north but also the consultative forum for north-south bodies as well.

We thought that because civil society representatives, different sectoral voices, would come forward with authentic ideas for north-south cooperation, people wouldn't see this as north-south for its own sake, which was the kind of criticism that many unionists had of some of our ideas for north-south cooperation. So we were saying if your argument for north-south is that these have to be practical measures of mutual benefit and not an artifice for its own sake, well having this sort of level of civil engagement where you have the real sectoral players in there means that there will be credibility around some of these proposals and ideas, that they will be practical, so you don't have to worry that you're being sucked in to some political agenda.

There is a strong sense there that civil society has a voice that isn't always heard. We need to make sure that if we go forward with restoration of institutions, as I want to see, we need to make a priority of not just restoring the Civic Forum, but also looking to other mechanisms.

But the Civic Forum collapsed. Presumably the main parties would not agree to it being reconstituted in the future.

First of all, the Civic Forum didn't collapse. The Civic Forum became a casualty of suspension. There was nothing in the Agreement that said it should be a casualty of suspension. Some of us argued at the time that the Civic Forum should be maintained even though the Assembly was suspended. Then the North South Ministerial Council was deemed to be suspended as well and the north-south

bodies were put into care and maintenance. And then some people felt well if that's happened to the north-south bodies then the Civic Forum should be parked as well.

I believe that the Civic Forum was engaged in some good work. Just before suspension, I had got David Trimble⁷⁵ to agree that in publishing the Harbison review⁷⁶ - which looked at some of the community relations challenges - that the Civic Forum would take a lead in helping to frame that public debate. That experience of the Harbison review was interesting because it was commissioned by Seamus Mallon⁷⁷ and David Trimble and it was received, but then it couldn't be published because David Trimble felt that phrases that were in the Harbison review about a shared society would be neuralgic for unionism. The Harbison review was putting up the challenge that the Executive were going to have to work out that if we wanted to create a shared society, was that going to be a working policy goal, was that call to inform how budgets, of how services were planned and aligned for the future? Or were we prepared to do things on a binary basis, more back to back and continuing the sort of patterns that society here already knew?

In my discussions with David Trimble when he didn't want this to be published, and it's not as though the Executive would have been taking full ownership of every last word of the Harbison review, it was this particular concern around shared society. My view was, well if the leader of the Unionist Party is telling us that even the phrase, 'a shared society' was going to cause such a negative reaction from unionists, that was all the more reason why we needed a public debate. That was all the more reason why we needed to frame understanding around these issues. And this went on for a long time - what we needed instead was not publishing documents, what we needed was funds, patronage and that could be under the First and Deputy First Minister to deal with community relations type issues.

I remember saying at the time he was talking about a riot-driven slush fund, a sort of a similar criticism which has emerged more recently in relation to SIF⁷⁸ and the way in which it operated. But what we got to at that point in September of '02 was an understanding that we would publish a broad paper for consultation, that the Harbison review submitted to the Executive would be published alongside that, but that before we would launch those papers we would have engagement ourselves with the trade unions, with the churches and others with a view to framing debate. But the idea was that the Civic Forum was going to lead a lot of the discussion and follow through on a lot of the excellent questions that Jeremy Harbison had put.

So you're saying there needs to be a public debate about civil society, the role of civil society, how we create a shared society. But I'm not quite clear, given that the Civic Forum doesn't meet and there's no prospect of it meeting, what your suggestion is about how that public debate should take place and presumably it takes place beyond simply the existing structural organisations of religion, the trade unions within civil society.

We have the experience since then of seeing Citizens' Assemblies and operations in a number of places, not least in the south. So it might be a case of looking at a Civic Forum model on the basis of a variable geometry, that it might be different according to different issues, that who's there that you're not maybe just as the original Civic Forum drawn up a list of so many people. Remember the original attempts of the Civic Forum were going to be that the Civic Forum itself was then going to cast the model for what the future of the Civic Forum was going to be. So the Agreement only gave

⁷⁵ David Trimble is the former First Minister for the Ulster Unionist Party, who now sits in the House of Lords as a Conservative Party peer.

⁷⁶ [Review of Community Relations Policy](#) led by Jeremy Harbison.

⁷⁷ Seamus Mallon is the former Deputy First Minister for the SDLP.

⁷⁸ [The Social Investment Fund](#)

you the means of establishing the first Civic Forum with the future plans to be drawn up by that forum itself. I'm sure that would have been done on a fairly open and consultative basis. So we can look to try to re-fix or restore something along the lines of the original Civic Forum, but even if we do that, that could be complemented by or indeed that could commission various Citizens' Assembly-

Because one of the risks with the Civic Forum is that it becomes a representative body of the main political parties rather than actually taking people from broader society. What you're saying is that Citizens' Assemblies through randomised but proportionate elementation of different people from different backgrounds could be a more representative way of engaging civic society.

Yes. We want to make sure they work in a way that brings forward ideas and can challenge as well. The original Civic Forum wasn't party political. There is a danger that it can end up drifting in that way over time, but that's way the forum had its own mandate, that it would come forward with recommendations as to what the future shape of the forum should be. We know there are serious challenges facing us in terms of the structure of our public services, the shape of our economy and those are challenges were there before Brexit. They are now compounded by Brexit and how far we take our economy on an all island basis, which somebody like me believes is to the good, but obviously many unionists are suspicious of and wary of. Brexit and its fall out can be a complicating factor.

Politics can be brittle around trying to deal with some of those issues, whereas where you allow sectoral insights shape things and decide public policy and point to the different instruments that can be used, and often can point to examples from elsewhere, that can sometimes be received more neutrally here than if they come from one political party or another. There's an awful lot that we can be taking from civil society if they are given that sort of platform. The other side is that civil society needs to believe there is a system of government that is going to take up and work with those ideas.

So that's one of the building blocks for the future. Beyond that, how do we move towards more genuinely shared and integrated society?

A few years ago the SDLP put in a paper to talks about the need to have a whole community approach to creating a wholesome society. We were saying that a wholesome society would be one free of a lot that marks our society - the legacy of sectarianism, division, vestiges of paramilitarism and all the derivative distortions of criminality and other things associated with paramilitarism, that if we're going to create that wholesome society it needed a whole community approach - it's not enough for parties to be pointing to things like paramilitarism or sectarianism in somebody else's constituency, but not confronting them in your own. It's not enough for us to say it's just down to the police to deal with some of these manifestations. Often you have political parties criticising the police for not intervening in relation to a flag dispute and then criticising them for intervening or having a presence when it was a funeral that had some paramilitary elements at it.

We were making the point that the political process was giving conflicting signals to the community and police. Rather than putting these things up to each other, it was a matter of us sitting down together. In that paper we had put forward the idea that this was going to be longer term work that needed a united commitment not just from the Executive, but from all the parties. We were conscious that at that stage you could have some parties moving into an opposition mode. So there still needed to be this cross-party mandate, but we proposed in essence there was what people may call a civic society element in terms of oversight and review, tracking where we are making progress in overcoming these vestiges rather than constantly recycling them and just saying, "Oh well, people have changed the language that they're using, but we still really have the same traces of

sectarianism and division in our society or we're still sustaining the vestiges of paramilitarism but we're just happier that they're in a better managed context”.

Has there ever been a genuine commitment by the Northern Ireland Executive to creating a shared and integrated society?

It's what I hoped we would have been getting back to in 2002 if we ever had that consultation on the Harbison review. I'd hoped it was going to be more than a consultation because it was going to challenge us into what type of society we wanted and where we want to front load some of this thinking into how we do things, or are we just going to manage the divisions that we have inherited and work in that sort of way?

So it needs to be done and it wouldn't be just for the Executive, which is one of the reasons why back in the previous round of talks that it mentioned we were conscious about saying it should be all of the parties and not just the Executive, that people - because you didn't want to create a situation then where people who went on the Executive were somehow deemed to be disowning their responsibility for changing the character of our society in a positive way, or just simply criticising the Executive and the parties in it for the lack of any progress so we believed that that was a commitment that should be there on an all party basis. But also we didn't see it as confined to parties, which is why we were building in this other element of review where civil society would be there with party representatives, essentially in going through, hopefully nothing as bland as a dashboard readout or anything, but actually monitoring progress – are we actually changing society and how we do things as a society or not? Or are we just finding new ways of replicating the traditional divide?

So having just gone back to the future in terms of the Harbison review, I suspect we're about to do the same with Eames-Bradley, because the next question then is how do we deal with the past in ways that don't inflame the present?

That's another huge challenge. Again the parties came close to grappling with that in the Haass talks. I don't think what emerged in Haass was actually as good as Eames-Bradley and the later papers in the Haass weren't as good as some of the middle papers, so I would say Haass five or six were probably better than Haass seven.

But we came to a point where there was some acknowledgement of ways of dealing with the past. We didn't get agreement there and we're still locked in this way where different parties are saying different things at different times, so you will hear some parties in one context saying, “Draw a line under the past, don't be looking at anything in the past”. And then in the next breath they're demanding inquiries or demanding pursuit of certain issues and files to be published, etc, so you're getting contradictory tendencies from parties, which confuses and dispirits people.

I don't think we can just simply draw a line under the past, but it's how we create the situation where we don't endlessly pore over the past, but don't glibly pass over the past either, because the past leaves a very real sense of grievance for people and it's not just those people who are directly affected, or who carry from their own injury or their own bereavement, but also as a society these questions of the past throw up issues about distrust and accountability and evasion that affect people's attitude to current politics and current political players as well. So we shouldn't pretend that the past is another place and we're concentrated on the new place we're going to that is the future.

We do have to have ways of doing that. Eames-Bradley pointed out that it wouldn't be one size fits all. People have different needs in terms of acknowledgement, remembrance, accountability or justice. We should have measures for dealing with the past that facilitate those in different ways. Some people want the truth to be told. There's some victims of the Troubles for whom the official record still suggests they contributed to their death, or holds them under suspicion, and you can't just say forget about that. Things need to be corrected, including even in Hansard⁷⁹, because often a lot of these false versions of what happened to people were described in the records of Hansard and it's those false versions that stand in Hansard - which is one of the reasons why a number of years ago when I was still in Westminster, and it was just at the start of the Haass process, I proposed an amendment to a Bill that was then going through that would have meant that there would have been an effort on the past that would mean that depending on what came out of the different past review mechanisms, that there would be annual reports with corrections to anything that was falsely on the record in terms of Hansard treatment of those sorts of events. I do think we have to address and deal with the past in a meaningful way and parties have to stop the politicking around it, but as I say, parties at times have quite a different emphasis in relation to different aspects of the past. Sometimes they're all for dealing with the past, other times they seem to be trying to run away from it and blaming other people.

So we need to recognise that dealing with the past is both contentious and dangerous for the current politics. But equally, or perhaps even more so, talking about the future is clearly an issue of significance in terms of how we deal with it. So how do we have the constitutional conversation in ways that don't inflame present?

There's no perfect way because in Northern Ireland even a civil conversation can invite somebody to decide they are being needled or provoked by the terms of that conversation, that somebody will react to even the language that is used, they will find language too neutral, or too pointed, so I don't know that there's going to be a perfect way to have an entirely steady conversation.

That's the nature of the territory that we deal with where even language can be contentious in terms of nomenclature, vocabulary or whatever. But we need to work those things through.

We should be going back to the Good Friday Agreement and say [that] if we all agreed then while we have different constitutional aspirations, we can be part of shared institutions, we can give allegiance to institutions which we can regard as legitimate because for unionists they are supported by majority people in Northern Ireland, for nationalists they've been mandated by the majority people in the island of Ireland.

If we've agreed that we can pursue our constitutional choices alongside being in that shared democratic engagement, we need to say, "Well, if we thought that was going to work for us before, why can't we make it work for us again?". The reasons things have broken down aren't because those structures are inherently unworkable, it's not because we can't live with our differences. In fact we want to create a situation where rather than being afraid of those differences, we can be honest and honourable about them, we can respect each other.

We need to get to a position where we can have an honest debate about honest differences over honest preferences as to whether United Kingdom or United Ireland is the best context for us. One where we get back to moving away from the politics of mutual attrition that nationalism and unionism are locked in. More to the politics of mutual assurance where unionism is trying to say how good the status quo of Northern Ireland is and therefore nationalists might have less appetite for a

⁷⁹ Hansard is the official recording of debates and decisions of the UK Parliament and other parliamentary bodies, including the Northern Ireland Assembly.

united Ireland. And nationalists say how good the shared institutions within an agreed Ireland are working and therefore that should assure unionists that they didn't have anything to fear from a united Ireland and that the more we're doing on an all island economy basis shows that there's economic sense to this and not just an old political score to be settled.

Going back to properly using the logic and methodology of the Good Friday Agreement in ways that don't hide the constitutional differences in the way that they are, just play them out in the clunky way they're played at election time, but actually do it as a genuine debate or, as you call it, a constitutional conversation.

And the part of that, if I interpret what you're saying correctly, is inverting the current implications of politics so that it's to both unionists' and republicans' advantage to make Northern Ireland work economically and socially - because that way you can persuade people of the benefits of the UK if you're a unionist, but equally you can persuade people in the south and the north that they'll be better off in a United Ireland if you're a republican or nationalist.

Yes. People will have their different choices, but so long as people feel fully respected in pursuing and promoting those choices. [Some people suggest that] even if you talk about a United Ireland that somehow you are subverting the sensitive arrangements of the Good Friday Agreement. The Agreement was saying there were legitimate aspirations, so those legitimate aspirations have to be able to properly express themselves. And those who hold them can do that responsibly."

The writers:

Julieann Campbell (Interviewed 8th April, 2019)

Julieann Campbell edited the Unheard Voices⁸⁰ collection of women's stories from the Troubles.

On a personal level how has your research affected you?

It has affected me on several levels, emotionally and in my work. It has made me more sensitive. It has made me more empathetic towards people I meet and it has made me less judgemental. It has opened my eyes to the hurt that is still here that I would never have seen if I hadn't indulged in this kind of work. So it was a real eye opener for me personally.

It's a very interesting word 'judgemental', in what sense has it made you less judgemental?

Some of the strongest work that I've done in recent years was with the security forces. And I would naturally, being from my community, I would have been afraid to speak to those people, but they were some of the most powerful interviews I've ever done and it was really, really interesting to hear that point of view, because it was something that I had never, ever been privy to before.

And in what ways did that give you a different perspective?

Because it just showed that the hurt and the fear were universal and that was very important. Even the reserve police officers on the streets, they had the same fear as the people on the streets and that's important to know that all these years later.

That's a very important point, isn't it, about the universality of the experience? Because of the way our society here is broken up, there's a sense of "This is what happened to us", without recognising that's what happened to people in various different communities.

That's what happened across the board, really and in different ways to each community. But across the board, there's a feeling of a shared anguish and a shared pain and that shared feeling that you were afraid to go to bed at night because you didn't know what was going to happen, and that was victims and that was perpetrators and that was security forces. Everyone had that same sense of dread and uneasiness and that comes across very prevalently in the work that I've done.

And of course, the work that you did was very specifically around women's experiences and probably the majority of the women that you would have spoken to would not personally have been combatants in any way. But to a large extent, they were the recipients of the trauma.

Yeah. They were the backbone of society. We always say that, but nobody ever asks women for their voice. So that's why this *Unheard Voices* project was a challenge. When you sat down with these women, most of them said, "Oh, I haven't anything to tell you" and then they would start speaking and you could hear a pin drop. Often we abandoned the questions to just listen, because that's what was necessary at that moment in time, was someone to just listen. And that became very obvious, that no-one had ever asked before and that's something that we need to address. If there's all these untold stories out there, who's asking and who's listening? And that will go a long way to healing and moving on. Just that basic human want to be heard and acknowledged.

⁸⁰ Published as [Beyond the Silence](#)

Because that is one of the things, isn't it? I've heard many times people say, "Well, I've never been able to... No-one's wanted to listen. I've never been able to say this before".

And I think that comes across very strongly. In my other work since it is a recurrent trait that people think no-one wants to know what happened to them.

When you say your 'other work', you mean at the Museum of Free Derry?

My Museum of Free Derry work and other oral history work that I've done. I've also worked with Bloody Sunday families and other victims and have organised the *In Their Footsteps*⁸¹ campaign, the shoes campaign, for bereaved families across the spectrum. It was open to everyone, that was the point of it, to try and make it inclusive. But again, it's a chance for people to come together, share their feelings, share their thoughts and have that sense of shared acknowledgement and that someone else is listening. So that comes across throughout. And I'm on the board of the Pat Finucane Centre. Again, that comes across through many other cases, that families need to be heard. That could be very important if we could harness that and use it.

Isn't it also important that we learn those stories before people die and they're lost? There's so much we need to learn from the experience of individuals in the Troubles that there's a real risk we're going to lose it because people die. And if we don't learn from the past, we are condemned to relive it.

I do agree. And I agree it's a timely venture, especially now when people are of a certain age, especially all our civil rights leaders have spent the last few years trying to get some of those guys to talk while we still have them and thank God we have done that. I got Bishop Daly's last ever interview about his experience as parish priest in the Bogside. These were vital voices that could be lost. And community voices are even more important than the well-known voices, the average Joe on the street. What happened to them? A lot of the work needs to be done, going into the communities, not just for projects outside communities. You need to get your hands dirty and get in there and see what else needs done in communities.

Because of the nature of the Troubles, a lot of what happened won't have been seen, witnessed by the people who write history. It would be [witnessed] by the people who don't normally have any access to writing history.

It would. And that comes across in a lot of my work as well, that we didn't really have a voice here and I wasn't really aware of that because I was born in 1976. So I don't have that early frame of reference that everyone else has. But no-one asked and no-one had a voice here and that's why it's important to have these peace building projects. And they have community resources like the Museum [of Free Derry]'s Oral History Project, and they try and let people talk and give them the opportunity to talk now while we have them. I wish we could hurry up on that and I wish there were more people than just a pocket of us talking about it. And there was talk of an oral history initiative as part of the Stormont House Agreement. Again, it's lying dormant and by the time they get it going, everybody they want to hear from will be dead, or too infirm to speak anymore. So there should be a push on these kind of things, because it's *now* we need it, not five years, not 10 years.

And what are your learnings from the voices that you listened to?

That people here are so strong and inspiring. It goes back to not judging. If you see someone on the street and it looks like your grandmother - you don't know her story. It has opened my eyes. You'd

⁸¹ [In Their Footsteps](#) remembers those who died or were injured in the Troubles, with relatives donating shoes of Troubles victims to represent ruined lives.

never know the stories behind people and that sets me in great stead for the rest of my life, because you won't just say, "Oh, it's some wee granny", but some wee granny that could have changed history in her day.

To what extent are people unwilling to talk about things? My grandfather fought in the First World War and never, ever, ever spoke about it. And that is a common experience of people who fought in the First World War. To what extent have you found that people are unwilling to talk about their experiences in the Troubles?

Some people are unwilling. My daddy was present on Bloody Sunday and is not with us anymore now, but I wish I had asked him because he never spoke about any it and he never gave evidence at the inquiry. Whatever he saw was so horrific he never revisited it again. And now in the line of work that I'm in now I would love to go back and sit him down and say, "Right, what was it? Tell me all about it". But all I know is that he was hiding in Joseph Place. But it must have been something for him not to have been part of the inquiry and not to even have a voice as part of that, because it really, really affected him. So, yes, that's just one example from my own house, yet there's so many people out there that are afraid to maybe speak because it might re-traumatise them.

Exactly. Because in a sense, the not talking about it is a symptom of the trauma they experienced, isn't it?

The trauma is there either way. If you stay quiet, it's an internal trauma. And if you share it, then it almost feels like you're sharing the burden and that has to help in the long run.

I've seen some of the women that you've interviewed speak and they seem to have been released by the experience talking with you. Is that your perception?

It has been life changing for a few of them that just had never dealt with what happened to them in the past. And even having one person listening to them, well two in the case of this project because it was me and Carol Cunningham, but that acknowledgement - it was a few hours of our life, but it changed someone else's life. That's not to be sniffed at. That's a significant achievement in their lives, that they were able to speak and be heard and feel that they can start... what's the word... I can't say 'move on' because you can't move on, but start to deal with what was in their head.

So some people feel re-traumatised, but a number of women feel a sense of being able to deal with things they had buried away previously.

Yes, I would say a catharsis. It's always a word I use - there was a catharsis involved in it and I would find that with a lot of storytelling work, that people get a lot out of just speaking and recounting their own experiences. It goes back to that, "Oh, I don't have much to say", and then they start speaking and it's unbelievably, historically important stuff. So while it's traumatising we had, especially on the *Unheard Voices*, we had trauma support in place and counselling services and things like that, just in case. We didn't want to reopen raw wounds and then leave these people to it. That was part of the deal, if you need help, we will help you.

How did you choose the counsellors?

They were chosen from a few different organisations.

But presumably they were professional counsellors?

Yeah. But it was fast tracked, so you didn't have to wait six weeks. So if we had reopened some woman's awful, awful secrets from the '60s or '70s that she'd never spoken about and that woman needed to speak to someone that day, then we could organise that and that was very, very important that you weren't sending her home.

And that did happen?

That did happen. Yeah. And that's important, you can't just expect people to speak, tell their life stories, and send them on their merry way. That doesn't happen like that. It's a very serious, significant thing that you're asking and you have to have everything else in place to make that happen and make it happen properly.

So some of the learnings from the experience are you've learned about the character of the people who lived through these things. You've learned about the need or the benefit of people talking about their experiences, providing this counselling support. What do you think you've learned in terms of how Northern Ireland moves forward?

Unless we start listening, we're not really going to move forward. And there's a lot of talk out there, but there's not a lot of listening. There never is. And everything's always up in the air, it's always someone else's problem, but until they sit down and get together and start communicating, we're never going to get far.

But I do think that giving communities a voice is one way, you have to go back and offer them that voice in order to move forward and have them embrace the future. And I do believe that even in terms of my own family to do with Bloody Sunday, you have to let them revisit what has happened and come to terms with it before they can positively face the future.

That's again another very interesting point which other people have raised with me about the fact that there are secrets within families, not necessarily bad secrets, but there are secrets about their experiences and it can be very important to talk about things that other family members, perhaps that are younger, can learn about the past and learn about what's happened to their family.

I was fortunate in that I lived next door to a [Bloody Sunday] campaigner. And she regaled me with her stories over the years. So I had a bird's eye view of the campaign. So although I wasn't born before Bloody Sunday, I was always kept abreast of what was happening. In a quiet way, that inspired me to follow in their footsteps and *help* these causes or help social injustices. I don't really know how I got into this, but I do know it was from listening to my aunt and uncle and their stories and them trying to change the status quo.

And one of the important questions is whether we need to deal with the past in order to deal with the future. What's your perception on the basis of what you have experienced?

Most definitely. We need to. We can't just brush it under the carpet and that comes up time and time again. There's so many historic cases that have never even had an inquest, let alone a police investigation. And these are coming on 45, 50 years ago now and if it's not addressed now, then we are actually leaving the next generation with a burden and that's not fair on them either. I know, I'm that next generation. It was very, very important to my auntie and uncle that they weren't going to pass that on to me because I was the person interested in the cause in my house and that hasn't happened. But it will happen with so many other families because they have left it so long to deal with the past and they haven't addressed it properly and it's an open wound that is being passed on.

But there's an interesting question here about justice because if you speak to people across the spectrum, they will say one of the objectives they want for their future society is justice. But then there are very different interpretations about what justice means and to what extent it can be achieved and whether actually just telling the stories is in itself a form of justice. What's your perception that?

It is a form of justice. I agree with you that there are many variations to the meanings behind justice. I know that a lot of people think prosecutions in a court of law is the way ahead, but for some others, it wouldn't be such a strong... acknowledgement and being heard and having your place in history acknowledged and recognised, that would be a sense of justice. That your story is heard, that it is known, in my thinking that would be justice also. So I'm not so sure I believe in the whole prosecution thing as strongly as I should do, but I do believe there should be a rule of law, there should be a law upheld. And if people have done something wrong on no matter what side, it should be acknowledged and it should be a fact, even if there isn't a court case hanging over them or a prison sentence, it should be acknowledged.

Is there a difference between acknowledgement and apology? Because one of the things that was said to me is the only way we can move forward is if people move beyond the acknowledgement actually apologise because, specifically, loyalist communities won't believe that republicans will never return to violence unless they publicly say, "We acknowledge the violence was wrong and we apologise for that and we are committed to a peaceful future". Do you think there's validity in that view?

Maybe, maybe not. Apologies are okay, but unless apologies are followed up by action, then they can be a bit hollow. And again, I'm speaking of my own experience in terms of David Cameron's apology. It meant the world to Derry at the time that he apologised for Bloody Sunday but nine years later, it hasn't followed through to what the Public Prosecution Service have ruled on it that only one soldier out of seventeen will be investigated for murder.

And I wonder what the value is of an apology if it's actually not the people who were involved in giving the apology? Does it matter - David Cameron wasn't Ted Heath. It was Ted Heath that ordered the Parachute Regiment in.

But the fact that he apologised on behalf of him and his country meant a great deal. And I'm sure you were there that day, you felt the wave of euphoria from Derry. And it was just we wanted that apology. Didn't matter what Prime Minister, it just mattered that it was a Prime Minister on behalf of his country.

But that apology has been weakened in recent years because of everything that came after it and because, if there was wrongdoing, then the police investigation sought to clear that up and now we are better off with just the apology perhaps because now only one soldier is being prosecuted. So it's a fine line, really, would we have been better to stay with the apology and accept that and move on? Or were we right to pursue prosecutions which was taken out of the families hands anyway? And that will be the same across the board for a lot of historic cases - is apology enough or do they want to pursue it through the courts? It's a difficult one for families.

The big concern people have about dealing with the past is whether it will just inflame tensions and take us backwards instead of forwards. What's your perspective?

Secrecy has a lot to do with inflaming tensions and if we're going to move on at all we may have to look back and see what we need to tell the truth about. I'm thinking about Sammy Devenney, the

only investigation ever done into the death of Sammy Devenny, the family have never seen and he's dead 50 years this year. And the family have never seen the *one* police investigation and there's one copy of it with the Metropolitan Police in London. And the Devennys have still never seen it. Now, if that was your daddy, you want to see that in order to be able to deal with it and get your head around it and be able to accept what happened - maybe never, ever accept it, but at least be able to deal with it somehow.

So that's the Drury report⁸² it's called. But that always stuck out in my head, that nobody has ever seen the one report done about their daddy. So I'm sure there's many other instances like that here, so a bit of truth and a bit of accountability wouldn't go amiss from the likes of the governments.

It's difficult to see how you can deal with the past unless old state papers are released.

Exactly. You can see from the work of the Pat Finucane Centre⁸³ just how valuable that material can be. It can open up entire cases what's found in Kew Gardens⁸⁴. So unless there is that open book policy from their side, then we are fighting a losing battle.

In terms of the work you've done and the book that you published, what would you hope people and wider society could learn from that?

That there was more to the Troubles than just Catholic and Protestant. In my head, that's what I was hoping from the book and it was so much more than that, because to people outside Ireland they think, "Oh, the Catholics are fighting the Protestants and vice...", they don't think of the wider context of it and they don't think of the minutiae of it. They just see this Catholics versus Protestants. And the book to me made me see that it was so many more facets of a conflict and they all sort of interwove into each other and it wasn't so set in stone. It wasn't black and white at all and unless you actually look at it from that objective viewpoint, we're never really going to get past it.

And it's often ignored the extent to which there were cross community friendships before the Troubles and I believe that there were cross community friendships that emerged from your research as well.

Well, two of the ladies involved in my book, one of them had never crossed the bridge to come over to the city side in 20 years. She just thought she would get battered on the city side and that's what she said, "I thought I would get my head kicked in". And then she made friends with a woman from Creggan who would be a republican woman and those two women were great friends, brilliant friends, and one of them met the other one at the end of the peace bridge and that was a real healing moment, that they both met at the end of the peace bridge and came over to the town for some shopping. But in those small acts, that's where the success of that project was? That we changed those two ladies lives in a small way.

And how can we arrange, how can we organise for more people to learn from those experiences?

More projects like that, more community based projects. Not these highfalutin ones from the government, but actually people out there on the streets talking to people that matter and not so many consultations, but actually getting your hands dirty on the ground.

⁸² An independent report by Kenneth Drury, a former chief superintendent of the Metropolitan Police, established that Sammy Devenny was killed when RUC officers went into his house. The [report](#) has never been made publicly available, including to his family.

⁸³ [The Pat Finucane Centre](#) is a human rights organisation, based in Derry.

⁸⁴ The UK government's National Archives are located at Kew.

I've done lots of conversations, I've been to lots of meetings in the last few weeks as a result of this project and the one comment I heard that has most affected me was from a schoolboy at a meeting organised by Wave, where he was saying when he was hearing the experiences of individuals who had lost limbs, who had lost their partners as a result of bombs during the Troubles, that if only at school, history was taught about the personal rather than the political, and that they at school learned about the human damage of what happened in the Troubles. Do you think that there's ways that things like you've been doing can educate people more widely?

That's a very good point from that young man, a very insightful point. I haven't thought about it like that before. I would agree that you have to bring it back to the human story, because statistics are what is left after all this and we are not about statistics. We are about the human story. So we need to try and get back to creating the human voice and letting them have their say.

And it's about giving out that human story while people are still alive to a wide audience and particularly young people isn't it?

Yeah. I remember when I was hired to be the press officer for the Bloody Sunday families ahead of the Saville report⁸⁵. My *main* remit was to remind the world of the human stories behind the headlines because it had been forgotten over the decades.

To what extent have we succeeded with that?

Well, we've done features on the wounded and how they felt after surviving, that people hadn't heard from them in years. We really did. We brought back the *human* stories behind the headlines because it was just so easily, "Ach, the Bloody Sunday families". You forgot about each family individually and how it absolutely tore their lives apart. And we really did get that across a lot before the Saville report. So, again, if that was carried out across communities, all communities, that would be a really, really healing thing.

To go back to where we started from, it has to be done in a way where people see the commonality of that experience rather than the individuality of that experience?

Yeah. So you're not doing it to divide people. You're doing it to try and create a more united society. Yeah, I would agree. It's a shame that some of the security force ladies in this book went anonymous and there was actually one who didn't and she said, "Oh, no, I'll use my name". But we made her anonymous and that's also significant because we didn't want one standing out among all the others. So that was very sad that she *wanted* to use her name, but because of the times we live in we suggested she go anonymous. So that's also sad.

A lot of this is terribly sad. How did that affect you personally? Did you have difficulty dealing with that sadness?

I did. And I would've had a lot of crying in the middle of the night. And one time there was a story about a woman whose husband was shot dead through her living room window when they were just sitting watching TV, and speaking to that woman about that and then writing that out and transcribing it in the house... I had to stop and drink wine and watch cartoons in the middle of the night. And that was one that particularly affected me, that I had to do anything to get those images out of my mind. It became quite difficult sitting intruding on someone else's grief, almost. But in a way, that's a privilege as well and you've to do their story justice.

⁸⁵ The [Saville Inquiry report](#) into Bloody Sunday.

And we have to not be scared of that. We have to, as a society, be not scared of that hurt because we've got to face up to what's happened.

No point shying away from it, because it could be very easy if someone's telling you something that's so significant and so detailed, to move on to the next thing. But no, let them speak and let them go into every single detail, because even if it's uncomfortable for us to hear, my God, they need to say it.

Jo Egan (Interviewed 1st April 2019)

Jo Egan is a playwright and the dramatist of *The Crack in Everything*, a performance that was part of the Playhouse's Peacebuilding Academy⁸⁶, financed by the EU's Peace IV programme.

How has your research for that dramatic work affected you?

Well, that's a strange one to answer because you're working with people who've lived with a lifetime of grief. So you feel a little embarrassed about talking about stuff like that. It's a continuum. So it wouldn't just be working on *The Crack in Everything*, but there's stuff that would have started when I first became involved in working in community theatre and I did a very, very large project that was very intense. It was the first large scale cross community play here in Belfast. And the community theatre at the time had had lots of single identity pieces and this was the first big piece bringing everyone together. So it was very intense for about a year, bringing people together to work. It was throughout the end of 1998 and most of 1999. And you were understaffed and underpaid. So you had all the kind of pressures of life, but you had all the pressures of trying to make a project work and it was very stressful. After that project, I was conscious - what normally happens with a piece of theatre is there's a lot of intense work that goes on and then you *have* to get it together for the preview or the opening night and then there's immediately this wonderful sense of relief that all that intense pressure is over. But I didn't work properly for about a year after *The Wedding Play*⁸⁷. So I went into other stuff. I did do other work, but I couldn't have gone into another project like that. I was exhausted and drained and I had anxiety. I now recognise I had been living on adrenaline for a very long time throughout that process and afterwards, what happens is your body just wants to keep going, but you're trying to relax, but you can't and you don't know what's going on. So nobody ever said to me, "This is what happens after a very intense project".

The next time I did anything as big as *The Wedding Play* was a play in the Shankill called *Crimea Square*⁸⁸. That was a two year project and I did a masters in the middle of it as well. But the really intense part of it was, again, for about another year and I was doing a lot of work and the Shankill was a very depressed area to be in. I was unlike everybody else in the city, because when the flag protests went up and there was a little bit of violence and there was a little bit of fighting back, the energy with the people I was working with improved and who they were and how they wanted to represent themselves really mattered to them. So a project that I thought was going to collapse - because when I first saw the flag protest I thought that's what's going to happen - it didn't, it probably strengthened it a bit. And it certainly made *my* life as an artist easier working at that.

On that project, I was working with four other people from the Shankill to create the play. So they were working with me and there was all sorts of politics involved with that and stress. And then there's a strange thing that happens because I'm from outside the community, so as the project is gaining a lot of momentum, there's a lot of people going, "Who is she to be doing this?" and, "Why's she representing us?". And I wasn't, the play was. But anyway, so there was a lot of other politics aside from the fact that you were also trying to train people to perform, you're trying to get them to write, you're trying to get your team together. I used to wake up at four in the morning remembering - because four in the morning is when you remember all the things that you've forgotten to do during the day. I'd have to get up and I'd done the same with *The Wedding Play*. I remembered exactly the same thing and I've done it on other projects too. But that's gone on for months and I knew yet again, I just thought, "I'm just chawing through this on adrenalin. There's

⁸⁶ The Playhouse is a performance arts centre based in Derry: [the Peacebuilding Academy](#) is its truth recovery arts initiative.

⁸⁷ [The Wedding Community Play](#)

⁸⁸ [Crimea Square](#)

going to be a price to pay for this afterwards". So I was prepared for that. And I thought, "If you really, really look after yourself for about three months after this, you should be okay". But what happened? I didn't get the normal relief after the play went up. I kept waking up every night in panic, in *real* panic, in whatever dream I'd been having, there was something I'd forgotten to do, something I had forgotten to do. And it was majorly, majorly important. And I would wake up and I wouldn't know where I was, in a state of panic. And that happened every night. I finished that project in November, probably on time to write in January. And again, I would be exhausted. You've got this battle going on between adrenaline and desperately wanting to relax and chill out. I would have been really exhausted for a year or so after that as well and I would have done smaller projects.

When I came up to do *The Crack in Everything* - I tendered for it but I had no idea what the thing was. I really loved the project. But I did observe other things and I said it in this article that I recently wrote for the magazine, *The View*, I noticed that I was afraid.

In what sense afraid?

Well, I had all the traditional fears that I wasn't going to be able to write the play that reflected what the people wanted. And that fear drives you as an artist. What I began to do on *The Crack in Everything* was separate out, I was beginning in my head to be able to separate out all those fears. There was a fear of the artist not being able to deliver the job properly. There was the fear that I wouldn't be able to finish it in time. There was the fear that I would let the families down, there was all of that. But then there were also these other fears began to creep in that, I was hearing about death so much that in some way I would call it to me. And I had two small grandsons at the time and I thought, "If I'm with them, I might pull - and the other part of me was going "This is really interesting, look at the way you're thinking". So, I was already beginning to distance myself from the feeling. But even towards the end of the play, I thought "I'm just not going to go down and see them for the last month and I just don't want to be carrying that fear around".

I found myself more distressed but I thought that's fine. I found myself distressed during *The Wedding Play* and during *Crimea Square*. This time, I thought, "You just remain focused", because you learn that after a while. So you're not the only person who's afraid, you see, because all these projects that we do are very frightening for everybody involved. So with something like *Crimea Square* my playwrights at times would have been frightened that they were misrepresenting their communities, some of the things we were trying to say within the play were worrying them.

So everybody around you is afraid that they're going either to let their community down, or that they're going to make fools of themselves on stage, or that it's not going to happen - they would say things like that. "This is really going to happen? You're not really leading us up the garden path?". So you begin to recognise that as well. The best thing you can do is put your head down and mind your own business and focus on the job that you've been asked to do. I've learned that because as a community facilitator as well, quite often you're put in the position of being the one who makes everything okay for everybody else. And you can do that, but you have to be very clear about the priorities. So as I come to *The Crack in Everything*, I'm being asked to interview people, to speak about the death of a brother or sister or child. What are the needs of those people that you're interviewing? For some people, one side opened the can of worms and they needed to be able to speak for three hours. For other people, they very clearly had finished speaking in 45 minutes and didn't want to speak about it anymore. And so if I was going to phone them back and ask for more information, I had to be really, really clear about what I wanted to get from them because it was too much to spend any longer.

So you're trying to facilitate all of that as well as your own insanity going on in the background. And I found myself very, very upset about everything that was happening, tragedies that were going on around the world and the pain other people must be experiencing because of that and the loss of children, the loss of family, the loss of everything that was coming up in the families that they were telling me that the loss of potential of that person who was in their family and the loss of that future life that they could have had.

And this sense of exhaustion, to what extent was that related simply to the fact that you've been involved in intensive community theatre and to what extent is it specific to the themes you're dealing with, the tragedies of the Troubles?

The exhaustion? I think that all becomes much of a muchness. You would know sometimes when we'd been in intense conversation with people and you just didn't want to go and speak. I like chatter, I can talk. And if I'd gone away for weekends with friends, I could talk for Ireland, there'd be no reason why we wouldn't stop talking. Whereas I would find I would have enough of people and I would have enough of talking.

It sounds if you were traumatised by the experience.

Yeah, you are traumatised by the experience. Yes.

And what was the impact on the participants? To what extent did they feel relieved? To what extent do they feel sometimes re-traumatised?

You never know. You start the projects with something in your mind that you're doing. And by the end of that project, you have delivered what you've said you're going to deliver, but there's always different perspectives that have crept in. It was not quite the play you thought you were going to deliver. I knew I was writing a play [*The Crack in Everything*] about six or seven children that had been killed in the Troubles. But a part of me was going, "Why? What is this doing? What's the purpose of this?" Each project has its own accomplishment. What I really felt was that most of the people I interviewed, even if bombing hadn't been part of the family experience, it did feel as if their capacity to tell a story coherently had been fragmented, had been blown apart, so that people go to tell you a story and it's that traumatic storytelling, that they spiral off into different things, they that can't quite pull it together. They can't quite grab it in the way that you or I might want to tell a story. We know how we're going to tell the order of it and we tell it. Other things would almost come into the memory and in the middle of telling, they'd go off on another [direction].

And so when I was putting the stories together, I would get the transcriptions and then I would chronologically put it together so that I began to see things in the story that I couldn't actually get from their storytelling because it had been so fragmented. And it felt to me at the end of it, when we were performing the stories, that I was giving them back a coherent story that they hadn't been able to put together. Now they can always add to that, and I felt that that was what I was trying to do for the audience as well. I needed a coherent story where they could clearly see the wrongs and the rights of the injustices of the story and hear what had happened. That seemed to surprise the participants. I don't think any of them had foreseen that. It seemed to surprise and was a joyful aspect of it. I could see that there was kind of happiness to have got this cogent story back. So I liked that element of it.

I remember one of the participants saying that one of the things she got from the engagement was learning about hidden parts of her family's history.

In some families they were more hidden than others. The other thing that I found, and it's part of Irish culture now, is a play done a couple of years ago by Enda Walsh, called *The Walworth Farce*⁸⁹ – I took from the play that he looks at how trauma and traumatised storytelling has influenced the Irish nation since the Famine and that blew me out of the water because the whole narrative structure of who we are as people is wrapped up in traumatised storytelling and I thought, “Wow. That is such an extraordinary insight”. Because one of the things we would do as community arts facilitators, is we would get people to work together so they are sharing their thoughts and they're moving from traumatised storytelling to progressing thinking, using each others' building blocks to start thinking something forward into sort of a chronological or organising time as they wish so that they're using creativity to shift from one place to another.

I then began to see within the families that there was this artistic streak that was coming out because [one interviewee] had already, although nobody told him the story, was trying to make a film about his uncle that had died long before he was born. And I thought, “That is extraordinary”, that actually the creativity manifests itself from trauma within a family. And I thought, “Oh, that's something as a community artist that I'm going to keep my eye on, because that's really, really interesting”. And I do believe it myself.

Since then, I've been looking out for it and it is very interesting that you talk to people about the family of origin that they come from as artists and quite often there are these very interesting titbits that they choose to tell you that influence them as an artist. So they were the two things that came out.

And that's a very interesting point, because I observe in Derry and Belfast that there's a lot of people who lived through the Troubles who've written memoirs. More so than you would experience where I come from in England.

Absolutely.

And that perhaps is a way for people to try and make sense and also to try to reduce the emotional impact that they're feeling of their experiences.

But even being able to get that story right, because that thing about not being able to make meaning and what I would call traumatised storytelling, where you tell the same – it's like you want somebody to step in and say in some way to give them the answer to something or in some way, tie that up neatly for them, or there's something going on for people when they keep on telling you the story over and over and over again. So it completely makes sense.

And what do you hope the audiences and wider society gain from the work you've been doing?

Well, I wouldn't necessarily have chosen to tell a story about six children that died, but that was the brief I got and I'm very glad I did it. I would have shied away from it because of all the reasons that a lot of people would shy away from telling the stories of six children that died and the level of pain that's going to be contained within that. So I'm very glad that that process made me rise to some kind of artistic challenge.

In my work, quite often it is all around narrative. If I'm teaching - because quite often I train people to be community performers - one of the things that they do – so say, for instance, I have a very small professional theatre company called Macha Productions, and it's a professional theatre company - the minute you've got people from a community who join it, they immediately begin to

⁸⁹ [The Walworth Farce](#)

change the narrative of themselves. You could have a single mother who's really struggling to keep her head above water financially, mentally, emotionally, and she joins and before that she's been a single parent with a two year old child or whatever who's poor and lives, say, in west Belfast. Once she joins this organisation, she suddenly begins to change the narrative about herself. And in a sense, that kind of seduces her into doing the work that she needs to do, because sometimes it's very difficult for people to commit if they haven't been able to maybe to commit to education or commit to employment. And sometimes they fall by the wayside and you go back and say, "Come on, come on, come on, you really enjoyed that. Come and join us again" and before they know where they are, maybe two years later, they're having to get up on stage and they're really having to commit to what they have to go through for rehearsals. And it's very, very demanding but the payoff that they get and we do train them very well so that when they're on stage, they feel as if they are part of a professional production. They're not being patronised, some piece of theatre, they know that what they're doing is incredibly good. So they can come out of the process.

In terms of the impact on the audience, two themes that affected me is within The Crack in Everything one of the children that died was not included in Lost Lives because he was knocked over by an army vehicle during street troubles. And that has a resonance in terms of the broader impact of the Troubles, that you can't simply count them in terms of the number of dead. You've got much wider impacts. And one of the most affecting comments I've heard in recent weeks was from a school pupil at one of the events from Wave where the school pupil said it was so important for him to have been present, where people who had been very badly physically damaged by bomb blasts were there so that the schoolchildren could see the experience of the individuals, because at school they learned the politics of the Troubles. They didn't hear or feel the personal stories and the personal stories are cross community by their nature, because people were affected equally in different communities. In a sense, that's what your work's doing as well. It's taking it out of the numbers and putting the personal story there on the stage.

When we did *Crimea Square*, it was looking at 100 years of Shankill history. So we started in 1912 when Belfast is just booming and it's got this extraordinary wealth and people are very proud of their city and we finished in 2013 on the Shankill, the play finished. So we've come through the 1912, but then we've got the First World War, poverty after it in the '20s and '30s, the Second World War, the '50s, beginning to get really upwardly mobile, '60s, Troubles, decimation. And then, of course, you've got the Shankill bomb in the early '90s and then you have the Shankill feud that comes in the millennium. So you have a community on its knees. So the young people, and we were lucky, we had about four or five young boys on the Shankill who were part of that community cast from about 13 up to about 16 or 17. And I remember one of them saying after the post show discussion, which they loved coming out and being part of, and he said, "You know, I'm always embarrassed about saying I come from the Shankill", and he said, "Since I've done the play and I've seen the resilience of my community, I will never deny them again". He said, "I am so proud of my community". And I thought, "Great".

And do you feel there's any risk that the telling of the personal stories can take us backwards rather than forwards?

I suppose I am a pacifist, I don't believe that violence sorts anything out. I went to the Film Festival last year and *Unquiet Graves*⁹⁰ was in the Belfast Film Festival. I remember watching *Unquiet Graves* and thinking "My God, if I'd seen something like this while the Troubles were still going on, I don't know that I wouldn't have joined up". But what was brilliant about it, was that they had *I, Delours*⁹¹

⁹⁰ [Unquiet Graves](#) is a film about loyalist killers 'The Glenanne Gang', who were assisted by members of the UK security forces.

⁹¹ [I, Delours](#) is a documentary about Delours Price, a member of the Provisional IRA.

on the same week and *I, Doulours* to me just is everything about why you always felt the violence could never lead to anything. In the singularity, if we're always talking about the lack of justice that victims and survivors have, then we could be accused of maybe inciting people to go out and pick up a gun again and engage in violence. But that is the duty, we have to be able to tell all stories and that's why in many ways it annoys me that so much of the paramilitary story has been told, as somebody who has come up from outside Belfast. The unsung heroes are the people that hold it all together and just kept trying to plug that dam the whole time – [why] aren't [their stories] told? And they're not viewed as being dramatic enough, or being interesting enough, where actually they could be framed very nicely into a story and told as well because that reveals such terrible state collusion. So I believe very much that being shot, taken out into the light. But I also believe that the other stories have to be told as well. So that if we keep missing those stories, we miss a trick. We will be inciting people to violence. You can imagine if *Unquiet Graves* goes out it could, because that reveals such terrible state collusion, but I believe the other stories have to be told as well.

What do you think your experience tells us about how we should deal with the past?

Counselling and psychotherapy and the *correct* type of treatment for post-traumatic stress is very, very important. I don't personally believe that we have enough counsellors who can do that and if you speak to somebody like [Professor] Siobhan O'Neill⁹² she backs that up and I'm lucky that I have a couple of close friends who have gone through many years of training to be trauma therapists. So I'm aware of just how much work they've had to do. But we can bring in as many people – and that's a very important part of this - we can bring as many people into the counselling room as we like, people want to be *heard* and they want to be heard in society. They want their stories recognised and we need to recognise and hear the stories. I know people will become exhausted by it and I think we have to become more and more skilled and adept. I think if we keep repeating that style of theatre, it's not going to work because there's got to be something for an audience to be able to catch on – we don't want to do Troubles porn. You don't want that because that's what people have done in the past. But you need to fall back then on the dramatic skills. If you don't have people who know how to dramatise something properly, then you'll either have people turning away and not listening or you'll have people exhausted. And what happens then is that people will go back into thinking that their story is not valid. “Why isn't my story valid?”. So film responds to it very, very well and certain documentaries respond to it very well. And also, theatre is always in a constant state of flux, but monologue isn't always the best way to address it. And music and dance also have their place within that. And then, of course, visual arts.

The other thing is looking for stories that can be representative. What was really interesting for me about *The Crack in Everything* was it becomes representative of innocence, not just children, I felt. Because people are so sceptical that when you say, “Oh, there was a 16 year old boy who wasn't involved in anything, but he was in the wrong place at the wrong time”, and people go, “Aye, dead on”. Whereas it was unmistakably that we had these six children and you knew they were innocent during the storytelling and so in many ways, not only did they stand for children who had been killed, but they stood for innocent people who'd been killed as well. They encapsulated innocence. There are other stories we can tell that will also be representative of groupings.

⁹² Professor of mental health sciences at Ulster University

Freya McClements (Interviewed 25th July, 2019)

Freya McClements is co-author, with Joe Duffy, of Children of the Troubles⁹³ and is northern correspondent for the Irish Times.

You've done a lot of research dealing with some of the worst cases of the Troubles. How has that research affected you?

There have been times when it has been really difficult. I'm very aware that it's not about me. In a sense, and as a journalist particularly, your focus is always that it's not about you. It's about the person that you're speaking to and it's about how you then convey their experiences, or what they say to the world. There were times when we were doing several interviews in a day with people who had lost children. If you think of what might happen to you in your lifetime, to lose a child is probably the worst thing that can happen. And to lose a child in violent circumstances, sometimes unimaginably, just terrible, terrible circumstances. And you might be sitting down with the mother or father of this child who has never before spoken to anybody, who's maybe been carrying the hurts and the trauma and the grief of this for 40 years, for nearly 50 years in some cases. And you have to give something of yourself to that, as well. When you're doing, as we did, so many interviews over a relatively short period of time, most of the interviews were conducted over about a six month period. We would have done sometimes one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

There was one moment in particular, I'd been talking to a couple of people, but talking in particular to the mother of a little baby called Angela Gallagher, who was an 18 month old who was killed by a ricochet bullet in Belfast right at the very start of the Troubles. Her sister had her by her hand, and they were walking to go and get sweets. And there was shooting going on between the IRA and the British Army at the time and one of these bullets ricocheted and hit little Angela. And this was in Belfast. I was driving back up the road to Derry and the tears were just coming down my face as I was driving along the road. I had to pull over and stop. I was conflicted with these thoughts of, "Well, why am I crying? This isn't about me. This is about them. Look at what they've gone through". But if it didn't affect you in some sort of a human level, you wouldn't be human and it's really important to bring that empathy to what you do. How you deal with that yourself then is a different question, but in the book that will come through because you feel in a way you've got to know all of the children. We've done interviews with just shy of a hundred families who lost children during the Troubles. And you feel you know them. Above all, you want to do them justice and to do their stories justice.

How did you cope?

I'm reluctant to focus it on me because I'm very aware it's not about me and Joe. We're just the conduit. At one point I did go and talk to somebody because I could feel the weight of it pressing on me and being able to go and talk about it just enabled me to let that out. It's that balance - as a journalist you feel you need to be impartial. You are impartial. It's not about you. It's about the story. You are not the focus. And there's a sense in journalism that you're used to reporting on really difficult stories, you're used to reporting on really tough things.

I would have been I suppose 15 years, you've been out at stories that are difficult or things that stick in your mind and I said to a friend, "I kind of feel this is stupid. I'm a journalist and you're supposed to be able to go out and do difficult stories and come back and it's okay", and they said, "What are you talking about? That's stupid. Of course, you're a person. That's ridiculous. Get over yourself. Go and talk to somebody". So I did and that really helped and it also helped in terms of expectations

⁹³ [Children of the Troubles: the Untold Story of the Children Killed in the Northern Ireland Conflict](#)

because you can put a lot of pressure on yourself as well because you really want to make sure you do everybody justice and you do the families justice and at the end of the day, you have to take a step back from that and say, "Well, look, we're doing what we're doing and this is...". I'm confident and Joe is confident this is going to make a real contribution to our understanding of the Troubles and hopefully to that discussion about where we go from here. So that is the achievement. I hope. You need to try and take a step back and say, "I can stand over this. Everything in this we can stand over and it's been done well and it's been done properly and it's been done correctly". I know some of the victims groups that we were in touch with were really, really, really happy with how we handled things, like the interviews and the contact with families and that's wonderful as well actually to get that vote of confidence from them.

In a sense, what you're talking about is comparable to what all those generations of war correspondents who came to Belfast during the Troubles, many of whom resorted to alcohol, which was quite similar to what the population as a whole did in terms of coping with the Troubles. But hopefully we're now entering a more reflective period and perhaps the approach needs to be more reflective on that basis where we use professional counselling services for people who are still traumatised by events.

That's absolutely right. Families over and over would say things, "There was nothing. There was no counselling back then". How did family members cope? It was through alcohol. Just anecdotally, the prevalence of mental health issues within families is really significant. That distance is a really key thing, because families would always make the distinction between that there was nothing back then, but there are families now who maybe lost a child 30 or 40 years ago who are only now feeling that they are at the point where they can go and do something about it, or go to and talk about it. That's really significant and that idea of it being more reflective is definitely true because, even to do a book like this and to do a project like this. It would have been difficult to do even 10 years ago.

The last child, and we take child as being 16 and under, so by our criteria the last child who was killed was Michael McIlveen in 2006, so there's a 13 year span there and that time – it's about giving space and giving space to reflect and to I suppose talk about things that really haven't been talked about and that's a key thing as well. This kind of thing wasn't talked about and there are families who would say things like, "Until it came to our door, we didn't really know anything about the Troubles". You were aware it was going on but we didn't pay attention to it because you were just concentrating on living, you were concentrating on raising your family, you were concentrating on keeping them out of trouble and then suddenly there's a bomb or something happens and suddenly it comes to their door in a sense. So there was the element of that keeping going and now because we are in more peaceful times there's that space and there's that ability to reflect and there's also, in some cases, there's the importance of acknowledgement and that was one of the big things about the book compared to what I do day to day as a journalist. There were families who would say, "Look, we have never spoken to anybody before but because this is a book we want this down in the book because it is going to be a record of the children and we want people to know". There are mothers and fathers, siblings out there who are really elderly now, in 10 years time they are not going to be here. So, there's a merit in getting that down in print now.

Because the timing has to be now in a way, doesn't it? Yes, you're right, of course, that you can be more reflective because the Troubles have ended, but on the other hand, people are dying and people's memories are then lost.

Yes, exactly. Again, from a journalistic point of view, even just to have those down in paper, is really key. And one of the things we've tried to do is make it almost a... 'celebration' is not entirely the right word, but we've tried to convey something about each of the children, make it about them and

about them as people and about people who lived and who were loved and who, they messed about and they played games and all those kind of things that make childhood what it is. And again, that's a really important part of acknowledgement and in everything that we talk about at the moment in terms of legacy and where we go and obviously there are families who want justice, which is a movable term for the families who talk about wanting the truth. But there are also families who just simply want acknowledgement, they want on a really basic level for people to know that their son or daughter lived and died and shouldn't have died and that's really, really powerful.

And it seems actually from people I've spoken to as if there's two levels of grief. There's the loss of someone who is very dear, very close, but then the offence that that wasn't acknowledged, that they weren't recognised as a person. They were perhaps a statistic. That life wasn't recognised or valued.

Yeah, absolutely and that's the thing that you keep coming to over and over again. It's about the importance of acknowledgement and that the acknowledgement needs to come first and then it's whatever the individual family potentially wants to do after that or doesn't want to do. You're talking about a huge range of circumstances. There are a huge number of the deaths that were bad luck or bad chance or accidental or they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. And in some cases there's nothing that can be done. One father said to me, "I wish we had a case. I really wish we had a case. I follow all those other families on the news that can take cases and that can do something about it. If that was me I'd be up in that court every day, I'd be doing everything. But it was just an accident. There's nothing that we can do about that".

And there's that sense of powerlessness.

Yeah.

So what has been the effect on the families from you talking with them?

I'm not sure, to be honest. I think, gratifyingly I suppose everybody that we've spoke spoken to has been so, so positive, almost embarrassing to an extent, because people will, and again this goes back to it's not about me or it's not about Joe, it's about the children, it's about the families' stories. But time and time and time again families would thank us and thank us repeatedly and say things like, "Thank you for listening. Thank you for being interested". There's something terribly sad about that because, again, that feeds back to people feel like they haven't been listened to and people feel like nobody has wanted to hear and nobody has wanted to hear to hear those stories. I know there's cases that it's been really difficult for families and a lot of the people that we spoke to have been put in contact with various groups who are able to offer follow up counselling and things. There was a wonderful gentleman who I was talking to last week whose son had been killed. And I said I'll give him a ring back this week and sometimes it's just a matter of having a chat on the phone and talking and talking through things with people. Funny, sometimes people will say to you things like, "Aren't you just kind of dragging up the past?", or "Are you just reminding people about terrible things that they prefer to forget?". And that's nonsense in a sense, because there's not a single one of one of these people – I would say there's not a single person in this place that we live in who has lost a loved one in the Troubles for whom that that is not always with them. I know in the case of the children that it is always, always with them. Hopefully we've helped to give them a voice.

I was reading a quote this week from Senator Mark Daly where he said, "Well, there isn't a danger of re-traumatising people because people are still traumatised".

Yeah, very much so. There's one mother who said the idea that you're bringing anything back is just ridiculous because it is always there and of course it's always there. That's your child. Of course it's

always there. One of the things that we're really overwhelmed by has been that willingness of people and people who have – as I said at the start, this is the worst thing that can ever happen to you in your life, pretty much, to lose a child. But people have been so open and so trusting and so willing to share and I suppose have seen the value in what we're trying to do, that this is about acknowledgement. The fact that there is no complete list of all of the children who were killed in the Troubles is remarkable. This was a conflict that happened in Western Europe at the end of the 20th century. The fact that even that doesn't exist is remarkable.

Acknowledgement was one of the issues. The lack of stories is the other issue, though perhaps I was very struck that one of the participants in The Crack in Everything was saying that she was still herself a young person, one of her relatives had been killed, but she hadn't known the story until she was involved in that project because it was almost as if it was a guilty secret in the family, even though there was no sense in which it should have been guilty. That it's just one of those repressed secrets.

Yeah, absolutely. That's very true and that goes back to the way in which it was dealt with and wasn't dealt with at the time. Anecdotally from the number of families that we've spoken to, it is almost as if very, very broadly speaking, there were two ways of dealing with it. There were some families it would have been discussed and then in other families, it simply wasn't and for siblings... in one case there were siblings who would have shared the same bed and suddenly the sibling that they shared the bed with was gone and they were sent to bed that night and that was it and it was never talked about again.

Because the parents didn't want to cause them upset.

Yes, exactly and they wanted to protect them. All of this was done for the best of motives and it was ordinary people coping with a completely extraordinary circumstance. You have families trying to raise their children and suddenly they're in the middle of this with no help, no support, so they're all trying to do the best they can. Siblings would say things like, "Well, we didn't want to mention it because we knew it upset my mammy" for example, that would be a really common thing, "So we didn't talk about it". So there are all these kind of things within families trying to protect each other.

Did you feel that some of the families bonded more as a result of talking to you about the stories?

To be honest, it's hard to say because where possible we tried to go and talk to everybody in person, so you might only have seen that group or that family group in person once. It's hard to compare, but I know for example there was one particular family where there had been five or six siblings and the eldest brother had been killed and all of the siblings came together to talk and all of the siblings, it was the one thing that had really, really bonded them and it was wonderful actually that it so bonded them together. The flip side of that sometimes is that there were children sometimes who had nobody to speak for them. There was one child who was killed very near the start of the Troubles who had only one sibling, one sister, who had since died herself, his mother had been – there was just no family left and that's sad.

And going back to the personal again, what do you feel you've learned from this process?

A deeper understanding of the extent to which all of this still affects where we are in Northern Ireland at the moment. As a journalist in the north, my whole career so far, you've been looking at stories like this. You've been following the stories like this, you've been reporting stories like this. So, in a way, it's inescapable. But it just underlined that yet it is the extent to which our recent past is inescapable. And I suppose it's also a conviction that something needs to be done about it. I say

'something' because I don't really know what that is. And people have tried and tried and tried again. This phrase sort of 'dealing with the past', can it be dealt with? It almost gives the impression that it's something, "Oh, we'll just deal with that and sort it out and it'll be fine". And one of the things that I did learn from the families is in a sense a lot of this is never, ever going to be dealt with because it can't be dealt with. But what you can try and do is you can try and make it better. You can try and do something. And even if you look at where we are at the moment, politically, legacy, as it's termed, is one of the things that continues to bedevil things like political settlement, things like figuring out where we go in Northern Ireland. It's not my place to try and figure that out. Far better people than me have tried repeatedly. It's hugely, hugely complex.

But the thing that I always go back to is two interviews actually that I did when I worked for the BBC and one was with two sisters and one had had a brother who was in the UDR who had been shot by an IRA sniper and killed. And the other had a brother who was a member of the IRA who had been killed by the British Army. What we did actually was we played the two interviews without identifying who the people were and who the victims were and when you listened to them without that knowledge, all you heard was two sisters who talked about how family life had been destroyed, talked about the effects on their mothers, talked about the fact that their brothers weren't there to see them get married, to see their nieces and nephews, to have children of their own. And it was loss and it was the impact of the Troubles on a really human level. And only at the end did we say who the two individuals were and the context in Northern Ireland is that inevitably once then you say who the people are, people then start... the what-aboutery starts and the distinctions start to be made and if you're asking in terms of what did I come away with from this, it's that for families grief is the same, pain is the same for a mother who has lost a child. It doesn't matter at all what the circumstances are. The deaths of every single one of those children was wrong and it should never have happened. Can that inform something in terms of where we go from here? I don't know.

Did you observe any reconciliation as a result of people telling their experiences?

It does help. Again, difficult in the context that we were working in because it was individuals interviewed specifically for the purpose of the book. But from other work I've done, for example, with things like the *Unheard Voices* project in Creggan, talking about it in all circumstances helps and again, I'm far from an expert but I've seen, for example, in *Unheard Voices* there's women from both backgrounds coming together and just talking as women and that's actually then how they connect and if you connect on the small stuff, you know...

The comparability of the experience.

Yeah, exactly. Worrying about, "My son's not doing great at school", or "How do I support the family?". It's the commonalities of human experience. That's where you build the connections. There's been some wonderful examples of that with some of the families that we've spoken to. Some people have been really, I suppose, proactive in terms of things like that, maybe slightly outside the scope of what we did, but some of the efforts towards reconciliation, also some of the forgiveness on the part of some of the families has been remarkable. I've never been in that position. Thankfully, there was nobody in my family who was killed but equally, you're aware from this that sometimes that that's actually just chance, it could just easily have been. But thankfully, we were never in that position. So I can't speak for anybody who is.

But I do know sometimes that the levels of forgiveness - one man spoke about how he thinks he has received phone calls from the man that he thinks killed his daughter and it was an accident and he didn't hadn't meant to do it and it was accidental. But it that he got these phone calls late at night

and this man would cry and he just said how sorry he was. And that father's view on that was just that, "Well, look, he's suffering". And that's a tragedy too, that he's suffering.

It was a privilege. All over Northern Ireland and further afield people welcomed us into their homes and they shared with us the worst moment of their lives and they trusted us with that and they trusted us with their memories, with their really precious memories. And it's a privilege. And again, you need to try and get away from thoughts like 'doing them justice' but actually that's the motivation. You want to do the children justice and do their memory justice.

And to give them the acknowledgement and to tell their stories. And clearly you feel the process is valuable.

Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Even from a purely historical point of view, or even from purely a matter of setting the record straight. There are names in that book that some of them have not really been publicly recorded anywhere or publicly acknowledged.

Because they weren't, for example, included in Lost Lives.

Yeah, things like that. And that's because of differences in criteria sometimes or things like that. But from the point of view of the families, that acknowledgement is just so significant and when the book comes out, which is going to be out in October, there's going to be a real sense of pride but also of significance that there's going to be a book that's going sit on a table or a bookshelf that actually just records, that there's something concrete that everybody can read that says that they were here. And the example I always give, there's a boy in the book called James Cromie who was one of two children who were among the victims of the McGurk's Bar bombing in Belfast. In *Lost Lives* there's one line. There's very little has been written about him and that's not through anybody's fault, it's just the nature of newspaper reports at the time, when you had an atrocity on that scale inevitably sometimes there isn't that detail. But I asked somebody in regard to this particular child, Jimmy, and his face just lit up and he said, "You know the thing that all the other children said about him? They said that he was their hero. He was the other children's hero. If there was something had gone wrong with the adults that needed to be sorted out, he was the boy they would go to. He was the one that would sort them out". And suddenly you see him as a character, as an individual, as a person, rather than just a name with all those other names and I think that's the significant thing.

Conclusion

This collection of observations and suggestions deserves a conclusion, which brings them all together. That will happen – but not here.

We plan to publish a book in the new year (of 2020), which considers in detail the range of ideas brought together in the interviews. So please keep your eyes open for that.