

Introduction

This issue of Shared Space has been compiled and edited by Dr Paul Nolan following his recent work on the Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report (Number Two) produced earlier in 2013. The articles offer useful additional insight and commentary which act as a supplement to the Peace Monitoring Report. They examine fundamental issues such as how we measure the growth of peace after a period of conflict and explore in more detail some of the other issues that arose in the report.

This is a welcome addition to the Shared Space series and the Community Relations Council is pleased to be able to include it in its research collection for wider dissemination.

Ray Mullan *Series Editor*

The first of the annual Peace Monitoring Reports was published in March 2011, the second in April 2013. A third is due in March 2014. The intention at the outset was to give a state-of-the-nation assessment of the Northern Ireland peace process. The thinking behind the project was to monitor the progress (or lack of it) each year as Northern Ireland makes its journey out of violent conflict. The Community Relations Council had approached the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust with the idea, and the Trust had involved its sister organisation, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (the Trust funds NGO activity while the Foundation funds research). An agreement was reached that both Rowntree organisations would support the CRC for a three year pilot, and that a research director should be appointed.

This is where I came in. I took up duties in June 2010 and an advisory board was appointed to help steer the research. The first question could be expressed simply: how is peace to be monitored? A simple question, but one that does not yield a simple answer. In the article *The Measurement of Sharing and Separation* I explain some of the methodological challenges that we had to face. The article doesn't claim that the Peace Monitoring Report solved all the issues; rather it simply explains why we made the choices we did. In order to work towards an objective analysis we chose to rely on a fact-based approach, drawing mainly upon open sources. The reliance on quantitative data does not preclude qualitative research, and the two reports that have been published to date have also drawn on polling data and on academic articles based on

qualitative methods. This mixed method approach has, we hope, allowed us to produce a rounded and dispassionate account, but it is interesting to consider how other approaches might work. In his article *Taking Anecdotal Evidence Seriously* Professor Roger Mac Ginty sketches an innovative approach that draws from the perceptions of those on the ground, taking into account things that peace research often disdains, such as accounts of personal experience, journalistic coverage and those small, but telling, changes that local people notice but which too often elude statistical measurement.

This collection however is not all about method. There are a number of articles here which drill down into the detail of areas covered in a more surface way in the annual report. The strength of an annual overview is that, if done properly, it provides a helicopter overview of the society; the corresponding weakness is that it doesn't allow for a close-up, detailed picture of the many issues it touches upon. In many of the sections that have been written to date, there was enough data gathered to allow for a fuller treatment of particular phenomena, but only at the cost of jettisoning the structure of the report. And so, for this reason it was thought useful to move from the wide-angle to the zoom to allow for a more discursive, essayistic treatment of the issues. The activities of dissident republicans, for example, pose one of the major threats to the peace process. The official records allow their military campaign to be tracked and for trends to be identified, drawing upon the statistics for bombings and shootings. We can go further and assess their weaknesses as well as their strengths by looking at arrests and convictions. However, we still would not have answered the question most frequently asked about the dissidents – why do they continue with armed struggle when they appear to have no chance of meeting their stated objective of securing a united Ireland? It is that question that is addressed in the article *The Long Long War of Dissident Republicans*.

If the dissidents' campaign suggests that Northern Ireland is still struggling to escape its past, the article by Ian Shuttleworth and Chris Lloyd provides a different perspective. Working from data from the 2011 census the article shows that 'demographic momentum' is reducing residential segregation in Northern Ireland. The evidence contradicts the alarmist perspective of 'apartheid' that has enjoyed currency in recent years, and draws attention to the new census category, the 21% who choose not to be either British or Irish, but Northern Irish. This means a radically transformed situation where, as was argued in the second Peace Monitoring Report, 'we are all minorities now' and none of the three national identities can ever achieve dominance. The implications of this shift from a dyadic to a triadic set of relationships is profound, as any stable polity must be built upon the recognition that Northern Ireland must move on

from its dependence on two mutually exclusive blocs. The decline in residential segregation may be a harbinger of such a change.

Finally, Ruth McAreavey's article *The Experiences of Recent Migrants: Towards a Sense of Belonging?* also goes beyond the old Catholic/Protestant binary in describing the arrival of the new communities. The 2011 census gave statistical evidence for something that is immediately obvious on every high street of every town in Northern Ireland – that we are now living in an ethnically diverse society. The percentages may be low by comparison with the UK average, or indeed with the percentage of ethnic minorities in other European countries, but the change has been enormous given that Northern Ireland was starting from a very low base: ten years previously the 2001 census recorded 99% of the population as 'white'. What has been the experience of those who have arrived to work – and, increasingly, to settle – in places like East Belfast, Dungannon or Newry? The second Peace Monitoring Report gave a detailed analysis of hate crime statistics, but acknowledged that the slow processes of integration are much harder to track. This is a general problem in peace monitoring. Negative developments manifest themselves through events, and as such can be dated, quantified and analysed. The processes of relationship-building, on the other hand, are often unseen and therefore their importance is often over-looked when the balance-sheet is drawn up. Ruth's article is an exploration of both the positive and the negative sides of the immigrant experience, showing the processes by which Lithuanians, Chinese, Black Africans and other newcomers have sought to navigate the cultural boundaries that face them in entering a society where traditional bonds are very strong.

The one theme that emerges from all these articles is the dynamism of Northern Ireland society in this current period. While the focus on the flags protest has reinforced the sense of atavistic passions playing themselves out in an endlessly repetitive way, this expanded version of the Peace Monitoring Report shows new forces at work – and, with them, comes the hope for change.

Dr Paul Nolan *Guest Editor*

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