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[RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: A TOOL IN REBUILDING POST-CONFLICT NORTHERN IRELAND]

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Introduction:

Restorative justice (RJ) principles focus on addressing harms and needs involved in an offense or conflict. This process includes offenders, victims, and community members in the solution. RJ looks at crime as "a violation of people and of interpersonal relationships, which create obligations and the central obligation is to put right the wrongs" (Zehr, 2002). In this way, RJ is people-centered and focused on bringing individuals together to build relationships. RJ has been used throughout the last twenty years of conflict in Northern Ireland to foster reconciliation and forgiveness. These restorative justice tools such as youth conferencing, structured dialogue processes, peace circles, and forgiveness education in schools have been used to address the collective memory of Protestant and Catholic communities living in Northern Ireland.

Although there are many different techniques used in RJ, the main purpose it to address conflict and community offenses in a constructive way. David Karp, professor at Skidmore University in New York says RJ is "a collaborative decision-making process" that holds "offenders accountable by having them (1) accept and acknowledge responsibility for their offenses, (2) to the best of their ability repair the harm they caused to victims and communities, and (3) work to reduce the risk of re-offense by building positive social ties to the community" (Karp, 2004). The first step in participating in restorative justice is to acknowledge the past and address memories that have been harmful. Taking responsibility creates vulnerability and allows trust to be built between victims and offenders in order to move forward in a constructive way.

Forgiveness can often result from an acknowledgment of the past and contribute to moving forward. Founder of the Tariq Khamisa Foundation and forgiveness expert, Azim Kamisa, says that forgiveness is not a requirement of RJ but it is "restorative justice on steroids"

and can help the trauma healing process. Forgiveness creates a safe passage through the heart of a victim for the harmful memories of the past, by letting go of resentment. Nelson Mandella made Malachy McCourt's quote famous which said "resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for your enemy to die." Resentment and hatred become a disease if the painful memories of the past are not acknowledged. From a neuropsychological perspective, forgiveness has certain substrates, which include "memory of the [original] event in order to link that injury to the offending person" (McCullough, 2000). True forgiveness cannot be accomplished by forgetting the harm that has been caused but rather by recognizing the trauma and taking action. In Northern Ireland one way they have taken action in addressing the conflict is by using RJ dialoguing techniques to bring communities together.

Northern Ireland Context:

The Northern Ireland conflict dates back to the seventeen hundreds because of its religious foundation. There are decades of devastating memories compounding for both Catholic and Protestant communities, still presently alive and being carried into the future. The conflict includes many factors making it complex, comprising differences in religion, politics, and national identity. The conflict is between the Catholic Nationalist Republicans and the Protestant Unionist Loyalist. The Protestants are the majority party, are loyal to leadership from Britain, and see Northern Ireland as part of Britain. The Catholic minority holds their Nationalist identity with the country of Ireland and believes that Northern Ireland should unite with the Irish Republic, becoming part of the larger Irish community. In this paper I will explain the community mechanisms created in the Catholic and Protestant communities, which prolonged the Northern Ireland conflict for centuries.

A discussion of grassroots interventions used in the peace process will be presented, followed by recommendations to institutions and community members in continuing and deepening the peace process, through restorative justice mechanisms, to aid in creating lasting peace and a new culture of acceptance and collaboration in Northern Ireland. The restorative justice tools discussed will focus on youth initiatives in order to stop the cycle of generational memory, where older generations pass the Troubles and traumas from the conflict on to younger generations, prolonging the deep divide between Protestants and Catholics. These mechanisms include forgiveness education and alternatives to retributive justice in the Belfast juvenile justice system.

Collective Memory:

The Northern Ireland conflict has persisted over many generations, creating a collective memory for both Catholics and Protestants where "they create a socially constructed narrative that has some basis in actual events but is biased, selective, and distorted in ways that meet the society's present needs" (Bar-Tal, 2007). Both groups have a need for their national identities to survive in a threatening environment and therefore, historical events are told in a way that demonizes the other and victimizes one's own group. Because Ireland has been occupied by England since 1169, Catholics and Protestants have been fighting for their religious and national identities for centuries. Burton explains that "The growth of Belfast was accompanied by settler/native differences, frequently the source of rural battles being played out in an urban industrial milieu throughout the nineteenth century" (1978). The island of Ireland was split into four provinces, the North, East, South and Connaught. During the 1800s Catholics were systematically pushed out of the Northern Province by British Protestants who were given land in Northern Ireland by Britain.

In 1920 a partition was enacted in Ireland where the Protestant dominated Northern Province split away from the other three provinces, which was the Irish Free State from 1922 to 1949 when Britain recognized it as the Republic of Ireland. Catholics still living in the North did not have the same voting rights, were not hired for certain jobs based on their ethnic identity, and did not enjoy the same right to free speech because "Republican language" was not tolerated through the British Parliament. Republican language referred to discussions of Northern Ireland uniting with the other three provinces in Ireland under the Republic. A process called gerrymandering, which created unrepresentative electoral boundaries to keep Catholics from voting, was implemented in Northern Ireland throughout the 1900s. This process created a one party state for over 70 years by securing Protestant seats in mostly Catholic areas so that Catholics were not represented in government. Even before this time period "Catholics managed to elect only three councilors in the fifty years previous to 1896" even though "they constituted one-third of the population" (Burton, 1978). Because Protestants were the minority in Ireland, only occupying a small area of land in the North, they used oppression of Catholics as a way to solidify power and control over the Northern Province of Ireland.

Because of the deep political and ethnic divide between Catholics and Protestants, both parties practiced communal deterrence. This is a process of separation from the enemy in order to live in relative peace. The energy spent making all parts of life separate from the "enemy" in order to create peace added longevity to the conflict because it "encouraged ignorance of the other side and hence a lack of self-understanding" (Arthur, 2000). Although communal deterrence created less violence on a day to day basis throughout the early to mid-1900s and Catholics and Protestants were able to live a semi-peaceful existence, all frustration and anger was suppressed. Furthermore, when both parties were unwilling to communicate, differences

became magnified because each party created stories about the other group founded on hatred and fear rather than on facts. In the 1970s physical boundaries such as walls and symbolic colors were constructed to mark territory belonging to each party. Curbs on sidewalks marked in red, white, and blue symbolized Protestant territory and green, white, and orange symbolized Catholic territory. These physical boundaries created a sense of security for both parties, but also encouraged minimal contact with individuals outside their party. The lack of contact promoted a continuation of misunderstandings, which prolonged the conflict. In this way, segregation was more apparent and mistrust flourished because of an enhanced fear of reaching beyond party lines.

Exclusive Dealing:

In the same way, economic boundaries were created in communities through "exclusive dealing," where a person "only bought products from stores and shops owned by those coming from the same religious and political background" (Arthur, 2000). This was a common practice throughout the 1900s and was used to weaken the other party through economic instability and to further support members of the same group. Both Catholics and Protestants created self-imposed segregation as a way to protect their own group identity. A young Catholic recalls, "I was born in a Catholic maternity hospital and from kindergarten to university I stayed in Catholic schools. My father was a member of a Catholic union. We read Catholic newspapers. When we travelled it was with a Catholic travel agency. Our insurance company and bank were Catholic ones" (Kelly and Hamber, 2005). By weaving the conflict through all aspects of life and making it difficult for individuals to function in a community without being of the same religious identity, the Northern Ireland conflict became more intractable.

Because Catholics in Northern Ireland were the minority, there was an added pressure to keep their culture and religious tradition alive among the larger Protestant population. Burton explains that because the Catholic community in Northern Ireland was able to "contain and disperse the troubles into its institutional framework, its normative structure and its symbolic universes, it managed to prevent the dominance of external social control" (1978). The Catholic identity was kept separate from the larger Northern Ireland community by internally focusing on the Troubles. This focus kept emotional control over the Catholic community by fostering the memories of atrocities and inequalities from the past. The creation of effective mechanisms to control violence by local people further separated Catholics from the larger Northern Ireland community because they relied on institutions built from within the Catholic framework. Although Catholics created their own institutions based on the lack of civil and political rights they experienced by the Northern Ireland parliament, this process further bred a lack of trust in the broader Northern Ireland community.

Intractable Conflict?

Catholics and Protestants saw the conflict as intractable with no clear resolution, which motivated both parties to control the use of violence because there was no end in sight. Also, Northern Ireland is a small piece of land, occupying about five thousand square miles, meaning that if massive violence broke out, the threat of devastation is much higher. John Darby argues that their "hostility has been modified by the need to carry on living in the same 'narrow ground'" (Arthur, 2000). Their "need" to live among each other was based on both parties belief that they belonged in Northern Ireland more than the other group belonged. Protestants believed that the North Province belonged to Britain and they had a right to the land. Therefore, compromising with Catholics was not an option out of fear of losing Northern Ireland

completely. In the same way, Catholics believed that the Northern Province should be part of the Irish Republic and persisted in their desire for Ireland to unite. Throughout the early and mid-1900s Catholics used peaceful demonstrations to fight for equality and unification but starting in the 1969 with the creation of the provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), violence and threats were also used as tactics to express their needs. Both parties believed that their home was in Northern Ireland and their identities were connected with the land.

On a similar note, the "symbolic universe" mentioned above was partly created by the use of "telling," which is "based on the social significance attached to name, face and dress, area of residence, school attended linguistic and possibly phonetic use, colour and symbolism" (Burton, 1978). This tactic was used by Catholic and Protestant communities alike in their quest to emphasize their own group's identity in reaction to threats from the other. Because the ways of "telling" were very visible, it was convenient for the symbols associated with Catholics and Protestants to be passed down through multiple generations. Visual symbols accentuated the differences between Catholics and Protestants and created a platform for older generations to tell younger generations about the Troubles and suffering experienced.

Forgiveness and Memory:

Based on the tactics used above, which kept Catholic and Protestant communities separate and continually traumatized by the "other," where does forgiveness fit in? Archbishop Tutu argues that "forgiveness is the only way to liberate oneself from the prison of past animosities and rancor" (Auerbach, 2004). In the case of Northern Ireland, the past difficult and terrible interactions between communities became the "fabric of [their] consciousness and common identity." (2004). Forgiving then means sacrificing the historical fabric of collective

victimization. Catholic and Protestant identity is connected to the traumatic memories of the past.

To disengage collective identity and trauma and the desire to keep group identity alive through divisions, the Corrymeela Community Development Projects were created in 1965. This is a Christian Community Center located in Belfast, which gives individuals from all faith backgrounds a safe place to tell their personal stories and listen to stories of others. Through this process groups of Catholics and Protestants worked on building trust by hearing the pain and suffering others experienced through the conflict. Bridging the expansive gap between Catholics and Protestants through dialogue was an important tool because "approximately 370 years of not living together [had] made the social construction of difference in Northern Ireland very sophisticated" (Conflict Archive, 2010). The telling of stories helped humanize individuals from opposing groups by emphasizing basic human emotions of sadness, loss, and fear. Based on the improvement in trust, community development projects were created so that people with different national and religious identities could work together and have an opportunity to share what was learned with the wider community. The ultimate goal of the Corrymeela project was to build strong relationships after mediators were gone so that groups could take responsibility for their new found relationships and sustain a lasting peace through communication and acceptance (Montague, p. 5).

Relative Peace:

During the 1960s, while the Corrymeela Project was just getting started, a period of relative peace was being fostered through an increase in understanding between Catholic and Protestant leadership. Many factors contributed to this decade of peace including the leadership

of Pope Paul XXIII who called Catholic practices into question through the Second Vatican Council. Protestants saw this as a step in solving corruption in the Catholic Church and began to gain respect for the Catholic tradition. Also, Terence O'Neil became the new Prime Minister of Northern Ireland in 1962, and he produced the era of "relatively good feelings" by trying to move away from anti-Catholicism. Kelly explains that "O'Neill was held to be interested in diluting the strong wines of Loyalism and Republicanism" (Burton, 1978). Strong leadership by both groups was able to lessen the tension between Catholics and Protestants but because there was no grassroots movement in support of peace, violence eventually erupted.

In 1969 a new Catholic civil rights group called the provisional IRA was created to fight for equality and Catholic rights. The provisional IRA was made up of young enthusiastic Catholics who were told about the Troubles from generations before them and saw themselves as the "defenders of the Catholic community" (English, 2003). This group used violence, threats, and fear to fight for justice throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Although the IRA had support from the Catholic community when it was founded, they lost their influence as violence escalated. While IRA members rioted and threatened the Northern Ireland government with bombs and violent attacks, the Protestant based military became more oppressive by imposing curfews for Catholics and imprisoning members of the Catholic community without trials. Both parties were reacting to the extreme actions of the other party, while fearing for their own group's existence. In this situation there is no room for compromise because every demand by either side is considered essential for that group's survival. Protestants were vying for domination over Catholics in order to keep their majority status and Catholics were fighting for liberation and fostering a victim mentality through the Troubles and inequalities they faced. This process of

escalation in violence added to the trauma felt by both Protestants and Catholics, which made their divided society more justifiable.

Decades of Violence:

Violence came to a head in January of 1972 with the shooting of fourteen Catholic protesters on the streets of Derry by the British Army. This day was referred to as Bloody Sunday and it exacerbated the mistrust between Protestants and Catholics because so many lives were lost. Over five hundred people died in 1972 due to the conflict, which was the bloodiest year in Northern Ireland. This "long-term exposure to atrocities and human suffering" experienced by all parties to the conflict produced a "loss of trust in a safe and predictable world" (Coleman, 2006). Based on this lack of trust, Catholics and Protestants used self-protective mechanisms as a safeguard, such as story-telling with an emphasis on the "other" as the enemy. Because the atrocities took place over centuries and escalated into the 1970s and 1980s, both communities used the memory of their trauma as a defense. Trust is not possible without building relationships between opposing groups and emphasizing common goals. Societies in Northern Ireland were deeply divided and unwilling to work together because of the historical context of the conflict and the loss of loved ones and livelihoods through the violence inflicted on both parties.

Protestants and Catholics saw each other as the enemy and needed to build trust through relationships before cooperation was possible. A community development worker associated with rural Protestant groups noted, "Protestant people have a real fear of losing their identity and want no part in changes in their culture. They will not take part in any reconciliation initiatives which aim to make them lose part of their own identity" (Kelly and Hamber, 2005). The conflict

was sustained through a focus on differences in identity rather than similarities. Both Catholics and Protestants felt their identities were at risk because of a threat from the other group overpowering their own identity. Both parties in Northern Ireland were minorities; Catholics had a smaller population in Northern Ireland and Protestants had a smaller population in the larger country of Ireland. Both minority groups were fighting to keep their identities alive in the larger community they felt threatened by. Stein explains that group "members consider that recognition of another's identity can compromise their own, when they perceive the granting of rights to the others as an abdication of their own rights" (2001). In order to begin the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland steps must be taken to shift this paradigm away from sacrificing self for the other, into believing that one's own goals are intimately connected to those of the other. This includes a realization that Catholics and Protestants have a similar goal of calling Northern Ireland their home and they can work together to make this a reality. Both Catholics and Protestants can then find value in cooperating because their goals are contingent upon the support of one another.

The Good Friday Agreement:

In order to reach the realization above, the Northern Ireland conflict had to come to a ripening point, where parties to the conflict realized their zero-sum positions were unrealistic. This point was reached in 1998 when the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement was signed and they realized that continuing the conflict was more painful than working together. The Belfast Agreement stated that "the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland [is] to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish, British, or both" (Arthur, 2000). This allowed all groups of people to be free to choose multiple identities and promote acceptance of being a part of more than one community. The Belfast Agreement promoted an atmosphere where "for the first time

in the history of Northern Ireland nationalists [could] feel a sense of joint ownership, while unionists [could] look forward to a future of peace and political stability" (Walsh, 2000). Through this process some of the overarching goals of Catholics and Protestants were met through peaceful means. Both parties were interested in peace and stability instead of violence and chaos and desired enough power to ensure that their community needs were met. This political change through representation for all major parties in the Northern Ireland Parliament is known as power-sharing. Another focus has been on economic equality through maximizing access to resources and opportunities for Catholics and Protestants alike.

Although many structural improvements have been put in place through government regulations, an acknowledgment of pain suffered by both parties and a community based structure for confronting the atrocities of the past has not been a main focus. A human relations approach to addressing intractable conflict must be acknowledged in order to ensure that the Troubles do not reappear in the next generation. For decades Catholics and Protestants had a "destructive relationship in which parties [were] locked in an increasingly hostile and viscous escalatory spiral and from which there [appeared] to be no escape" (Coleman, 2006). Now that negative peace has become a reality through a lack of violence and death and equitable opportunities are given to both Protestants and Catholics through representation in Parliament, it is essential that a grassroots approach to healing relationships and building trust is a primary investment.

Multifaceted Approach to Peace:

Because peace is still new and unchartered territory, it is easy to revert back to the cycle of violence that has persisted for centuries. A multifaceted approach is needed to continue

progress in the direction of peace through cooperation on a grassroots level. Peace is only possible if relationships between individuals and communities are fostered. Relationships must be built that are strong enough to overpower differences between communities. This will ensure Northern Ireland is not in a state of frozen violence where negative peace is established but the memory of the conflict and suffering associated with the Troubles is still alive within communities. A beginning point for these relationships to flourish is a process called dialogue, which is a "genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. No participant gives up his or her identity, but each recognizes enough of the other's valid human claims that he or she will act differently toward the other" (Saunders, 2009). Through this process, individuals are called to acknowledge the emotions and experiences of others and focus on the similarities between their own feelings and the stories of suffering by their supposed "enemy." Trust can eventually be built through sharing and realizing the inherent human emotions, such as fear and pain that are produced by atrocities on both sides.

Dialogue and Peace:

Dialogue was also a key factor in the Belfast Interface Project, which is a community based program with the intention of dissolving emotional walls built through years of conflict by creating a communication system between Catholics and Protestants. The physical walls along party lines were built in order to create a sense of security and safety within communities. The walls were explained as an Interface area which was "the boundary between Catholic (Nationalist) and Protestant (Unionist) areas, especially where two highly segregated areas are situated close to each other. In many such areas of Belfast the interface is marked by a physical barrier known as a 'peaceline'" (http://cain.ulst.ac.uk). Although the walls are still up presently, the Interface Project provides participants on each side of the walls with cell phones that are used

to convey information that could be a possible threat to the other side so as not to build more tension. Through these phone conversations, Catholics and Protestants are able to address negative rumors and dispel fear from their respective communities. This is a cost effective and less intimidating way of communication because community leaders that use cell phones to discuss issues never have to meet face to face. If they do meet in person, a relationship has been built through phone conversations and a foundation of trust is already in place to help facilitate a more lasting peace process.

Education and Peace:

In order for a lasting peace to prevail, younger generations must be included in the process of transformation as well. By giving young people tools and teaching them values based on communication, forgiveness, and being held accountable for actions in their daily lives, the cycle of violence is less likely to continue. To this day, youth are still segregated through a "school system that is separated along denominational lines with the vast majority of children (94%) attending either controlled (mainly Protestant) schools or maintained (mainly Catholic) schools" (Montgomery, 2009). A lack of integration in the school system does not give students the opportunity to interact with other young people from different religious and political backgrounds. This separation allows Catholic schools to teach Irish history and Protestants schools to teach British history. Therefore, students are indoctrinated with historical foundations about their country that are not cohesive. Because peace in Northern Ireland is still fragile, communities may not be willing to combine youth education into one interconnected school system, but can present tools that promote cooperation and conflict resolution into the present curriculum.

Forgiveness education was recently established as a foundation for kindergarteners through fourth grade students to create a framework for acceptance and cooperation. Dr. Robert D. Enright of the University of Wisconsin formed a forgiveness education curriculum for grade schools in Belfast with the hopes of teaching students how to instill "a deeper and more lasting peace in their community than their forbearers because they may be less angry and will have a tool, forgiveness, for reconciliation" (2007). Learning about forgiveness at a young age can help establish the groundwork for a more receptive and open dialogue between Catholics and Protestants as younger generations mature. This curriculum does not discuss the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland or ask children to forgive in the context of the atrocities their families may have faced. Rather, the curriculum is based in storytelling that appeals to young students about fictional characters who use forgiveness to solve problems and enjoy peaceful and joy filled adventures in life. Many books are included in the curriculum including Hirosuke Hamada's, *The Tears of the Dragon,* about the power of unconditional love between a little boy and a scary looking dragon who is all alone, and Chris Van Allsburg's, *The Polar Express,* which illustrates a young boys adventure of Christmas and his experience of generosity. These and many others express the virtues that forgiveness is founded on including inherent equality, moral love, generosity, and learning from lessons of evil.

Through these stories, children are also taught about the opposite of forgiveness, which is revenge, and the pain and suffering it can cause. Worthington (2001) noted that "forgiveness is an altruistic gift that symbolizes a cessation of revenge for the transgression" (Moeschberger, 2005). Part of the curriculum explains that students do not have to forget the wrong that was done to them in order to forgive, but part of forgiveness is not using violence in order to right the wrongs done to them. An essential book in teaching this concept is the *Butter Battle Book* by Dr.

Seuss, where the young Yooks and Zooks learn to be enemies from their grandparents and fight each other with increasingly larger weapons to try and out do the other side. Neither side wins in the end and both Yooks and Zooks are worse off for getting involved in the war between the two communities. This curriculum was supported by the communities of Belfast because it was focused on teaching children to use forgiveness as a way to problem solve without discussing the controversial topic of their own conflict. Through this curriculum, young people can be more resilient when exposed to the suffering experienced by their family members as a result of the conflict, because they have a more accepting and forgiving framework to formulate opinions of the past.

I believe the next step in forgiveness education is creating a more advanced curriculum for middle school and high school students. In Dr. Enright's book, *Forgiveness is a Choice*, he explains that children in middle school and high school are especially influenced by authority figures and "having good role models at this age is important if the child is to grow in appreciation and understanding of forgiveness" (2001). This is the perfect age range to teach forgiveness education so that teachers and authority figures have the opportunity to show the value in forgiveness. An eventual goal would be to integrate the school systems so that Catholic and Protestant students can learn together. Through this process, the school aged children and young adults in Northern Ireland can be the first generation to have a more integrative perspective on the "Troubles." They will have learned tools, such as forgiveness, and grown up together with students who are members of the "other" group.

Forgiveness education is the first step in a longer process of combining students from the Catholic and Protestant traditions into one holistic school system, where students from different ethnic backgrounds can learn and work side by side. Steps in this process will include curriculum

trainings that bring teachers from different schools together to learn and problem solve as a cohesive unite. Also, education policies and structures in government must reflect a more inclusive and integrative school systems, perhaps by requiring a certain percentage of different ethnic groups in each school. Before such drastic measures can be enforced, forgiveness education and a slow integration of education professionals must take place to ensure the community is prepared to absorb the discomfort that accompanies a change based on trust and reliance on the "other." Parents may feel more comfortable combining youth education when they trust that a combined school system will not be indoctrinating their children with inaccurate history that glorifies the "other." A stronger integrated curriculum must be developed before this is possible.

A similar forgiveness education curriculum was established for parents to teach their children at home. Through this process there was a hope that while parents were helping their children learn about forgiveness, these adults would also absorb some of the values set up by the curriculum. Dr. Enright explains that "the point is to allow people to learn about and practice forgiveness so that deep resentments, which can lead to prolonged violence, are reduced and therefore the violence may eventually be reduced across the community" (Enright and Magnuson, 2009). Through this home based curriculum a study was set up to compare two groups of parents; one group who taught their children about forgiveness and a second group who participated in art activities with their children. The study found that there was a "significant increase in interpersonal forgiveness of an offender for parents who taught forgiveness to their child compared with the control group parents" (Enright and Magnuson 2009). Therefore, when parents teach forgiveness in their home, they are more likely to act as a good example to their children by using the virtues of forgiveness in their daily lives and in their

interactions with other ethnic groups. Forgiveness education is beneficial, not only for the children being taught, but for community relations and healing between Catholic and Protestant adults as well.

Juvenile Justice and Peace:

Another youth program was implemented for youth offenders in 2003 through the Youth Justice Agency (YJA). This program was in response to the fact that the "Troubles" created an unhealthy environment where "violence and civil disorder had a corrosive social and political impact generally, leading to an increase in ordinary crime, particularly among young people" (McEvoy and Newburn, 2003). Because of the generational memory passed down to young people from centuries of violence, they are more susceptible to actively exacerbating the conflict through criminal acts. To counter act this susceptibility the YJA created a youth conferencing program, which is founded on the principles of restorative justice. These principles focus on victim/offender relations and emphasize truth-telling through face to face communication, empowerment of both parties in the healing process, restitution and vindication, accountability of perpetrators, and integration back into the community (Zehr, 2002). Through these goals, youth perpetrators learn that violence is not acceptable and they will be held accountable by their entire community through an in person meeting. There is also an aspect of building relationships with those who were harmed in an effort to understand the impact a youth's actions had. This helps humanize the victim so violent acts are less likely to occur in the future. This process also sets a good example that healing and forgiveness are possible through communication. The point of youth conferencing is to have a collaborative and community based approach to juvenile justice to promote interdependence instead of separation between young perpetrators and victims.

Alice Chapman, the director of Youth Conference Services under the YJA of Northern Ireland explains that youth are taught to communicate with victims face to face and make amends through a process which involves "victims, the young person's family, the police, the community, and supporters to reach an agreed decision on what can be done to put right the harm" (youthjusticeagencyni.gov.uk). Many times offenses cross over party lines and the youth conferences give Catholic and Protestant communities an opportunity to interact and work together by coordinating ways for young offenders to be held accountable for their destructive actions. This process can build trust, empathy, and deeper relationships between both youth and adults coming from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds. A safe space is created through the justice system for constructive interactions with community members from different ethnic groups.

Peace Circles and Peace:

Peace Circles are another restorative justice mechanism used to help bring troubled youth from different backgrounds together. The use of peace circles in Northern Ireland could help create a safe space for communication between youth from different ethnic backgrounds who would never have a chance to interact otherwise. Peace circles are formed "not to find a solution, but to identify issues and begin the collaborative process in addressing issues surrounding" a given problem (Hamlin, 2010). Youth come together in a circle and rules are set so that every person has a chance to talk through the use of a talking piece, such as a rock or some other tangible item, that is passed around and signals a person's turn to talk. A moderator asks a list of questions about a particular topic, such as love or loss, and youth are encouraged to express their feelings and tell personal stories about that topic. Peace circles create an equitable space where

youth have a chance to contribute and learn about other young people's concerns and experiences.

Restorative Justice and Peace:

The technique of restorative justice can be used not only in the youth justice system but also in community based programs focusing on reconciliation for adults. Since the 1990s "there has been a proliferation of community-based restorative justice projects established in order to try to supplant paramilitary punishment violence" (McEvoy and Newburn, 2003). Restorative justice in Northern Ireland was first used as an alternative to police brutality. Communities took it upon themselves to hold people accountable for their crimes. This restorative type of justice protected people from paramilitary violence but also gave individuals an opportunity to express their feelings and perspectives on the past, acknowledge their own roles in the conflict to take responsibility, and come up with solutions to right the wrongs from the past.

Every person has their own story to tell and must take responsibility for their own actions which makes the solutions a joint effort between all individuals in the divided society. Moeschberger explains that in order "for reconciliation to occur, both offender and offended must heal" (2005). In the case of Northern Ireland, Protestants and Catholics are both offender and offended, making restorative justice a productive avenue for individuals and communities to work through the suffering caused by both parties in the conflict.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the Northern Ireland conflict persisted over 300 years, killing over 3,500 people in its wake, and making it one of the longest and most devastating conflicts for its size throughout history. The conflict was able to last throughout many centuries based on the

partition and cultural divides, which allowed Catholic and Protestants to live among each other while having limited contact. This lack of communication, through separation of all life activities exacerbated the conflict through the use of storytelling and demonizing of the "other." Violence finally erupted in the late 1960s when Catholics and Protestants began interacting through the civil rights movement. After two bloody decades of suffering and loss for both parties a hurting stalemate occurred where Protestants and Catholics both realized that violent conflict would not allow either party to accomplish their goals; Irish unity and equality for the Catholics, and British citizenship and governance for the Protestants. Since this time, many positive steps have been taken to ensure equality for all groups. A Northern Ireland Parliament separate from the Republic of Ireland and Britain, has been created where Protestants and Catholics share government power.

Negative peace has been restored to Northern Ireland through power sharing and an immense reduction of violence. The beginnings of positive peace are being created through community based projects such as the Corrymeela Community Center and the Interface Project in order to build an atmosphere of trust and empathy between Catholics and Protestants. New education curricula are being developed to help break the cycle of the Troubles being passed to younger generations and the youth justice legal system is incorporating restorative justice mechanisms to promote accountability for violent actions and communication between members of different religious groups in society.

Northern Ireland is now in a positive post-conflict position where structures are in place to create a lasting peace through grassroots initiatives and restorative justice mechanisms. It is imperative that the work must not stop here. Northern Ireland is in a fragile state of peace and more effort must be put towards the cultivation of stronger community relationships through

dialogue and community projects where individuals from different backgrounds can work together. Through these efforts, eventually the thirty six physical walls dividing communities will come down, schools, sports teams and community centers can be integrated so that Protestants and Catholics feel comfortable using the same services, and a united vision for the future will be recognized and implemented fully through collaboration of Catholic and Protestant groups.

Restorative justice mechanisms such as dialogue sessions, forgiveness education curriculum, peace circles, and alternative youth justice conferences can greatly decrease the cycle of violence in Northern Ireland. This is possible through a focus on youth initiatives which break through the walls of generational memory and a four century long conflict cycle where Protestant and Catholic communities were divided, group identities were protected through demonizing the "other," and victimization and suffering was emphasized. Through the use of restorative justice to address generations of collective memory, the newest generations can grow up with a value system of acceptance and love, learning to challenge the status quo of hatred, being held accountable for violent actions, and encountering and collaborating with other young people from different ethnic backgrounds. Through these new grassroots techniques concentrated on youth, Northern Ireland can begin to create a future filled with positive peace, safety and trust.

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