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The frame changers: journalists, the conflict, and peace process

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores some of journalists' struggles in gathering and framing news during the Northern Ireland conflict and peace process. Based on interviews with eight journalists who covered both periods, it details how they navigated what has been called a 'propaganda war' or what I call 'frame wars' that ran parallel with the physical conflict. These frame wars became complicating factors with which journalists grappled when seeking to produce meaningful news that fit both their professional standards and their own humanity. The processes that they revealed offers a window into three levels of social construction: First, on the level of the individual, journalists – like all people – come to understand political realities from a barrage of competing information, frames, and narratives. The journalists' humanity arising from real experiences interacted with professional expectations to deliver news. Secondly, while traditional media's norms, structures, and ideologies shaped newsgathering and story framing, their jobs were complicated by opposing narratives, choice of language, and subjects. Third, group dynamics and peer pressure influenced some journalists' reportage. Placed within the context of the political communication literature, the interviews reveal thought processes among some leading journalists about the difficulties of reporting in a divided society.

KEYWORDS Media; peace process; broadcasting ban; journalism

Introduction

This paper explores some of journalists' struggles in gathering and framing the news during the Northern Ireland conflict and peace process. Based on interviews with eight journalists who covered both periods, it details how they navigated what has been called 'propaganda war'[1] or what I call 'frame wars' that ran parallel with the actual physical conflict. These frame wars became complicating factors with which journalists grappled when seeking to produce meaningful news that fit both within their professional standards and their own humanity. The processes that the interviewed journalists revealed offers a window into three levels of social construction

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during this time: First, on the level of the individual, journalists – like all people – come to understand political realities from a barrage of competing information, frames, and narratives (see, for example, Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). The journalists' humanity arising from real experiences intersected with professional expectations to deliver news. Secondly, while traditional media's norms, structures, and ideologies shaped newsgathering and story framing, their jobs were complicated by opposing narratives, choice of language, and subjects. Third, group dynamics and peer pressure influenced what some journalists reported. Placed within the context of the political communication literature, the interviews reveal a thought process among some leading journalists about the difficulties of reporting in a divided society.

Background

Factors that shape news content have long been a subject for political communication scholars, who have defined news as dramatic, conflict-focused, event-oriented (Bennett, 2007), and essentially 'novelty without change' (Phillips, 1976). Journalists are trained and rewarded for attention-grabbing stories, often those that represent a 'violation of values', and still fit within 'normal' ranges of perspectives (Gans, 1980). News is also biased towards popularity among the middle or upper class (Entman, 1996). Media structures such as economics, space constraints, deadlines, routines, and sources also shape stories and framing (Armoudian, 2015; Bennett, 2007; Entman, 1996; Gans, 1980; Gitlin, 1980; Wolfsfeld, 2004).

In pursuit of 'objectivity', traditional news has historically meant moderate ideology and softening extreme language and positions (Gans, 1980). Political reporters covering institutions usually rely on officials from those institutions for the dominant frame and index the range of debate to those articulated by those in power (Bennett, 2007; Gans, 1980). Conflict or disagreement among officials usually results in a 'he-said-she-said' frame. These framing practices tend to favour the status quo, weakening, omitting, or diminishing other perspectives (Gitlin, 1980).

The emphasis on drama, conflict, or controversy leads journalists to quote officials' sensational comments that draw attention to conflict rather than conflict resolution. Alongside a tendency for ethnocentrism, these practices have exacerbated hostilities in many conflicts (Cook, 1998; Entman, 1996; Wolfsfeld, 2004).

The scholarship on the media during Northern Ireland's conflict and peace process has provided a rich background. Studies of the 'propaganda war', media control (e.g. the broadcasting ban), portrayals of the foes, and alternative means of communication, such as murals and 'mosquito' press have all contributed to our understanding of how political communication interacted with the conflict (Armoudian, 2011; Butler, 1995; Condit & Cottle, 1997; Curtis,

1998; Miller, 1993, 1994; Rolston, 1992; Rolston & Miller, 1996). For example, studies documenting government efforts to control the narratives found both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland enacting censorship and terrorism laws to block the IRA and Sinn Féin from what the UK called a 'propaganda platform', arguing that 'Britain is at war with the IRA … and the IRA will get no more coverage than the Nazis would have done in the last war' (Curtis, 1984, p. 10; Miller, 1994, p. 28).

Under institutional pressures, many journalists self-censored. Disobedient journalists were relegated to the children's, religious, or agriculture departments (Meehan, 2003; Rolston, 1996). During the 1970s, Independent Television limited republican airtime to a total of four 'mostly hostile minutes', and the ITN and the BBC aired a total of six interviews each (Moloney, 2005). Coverage of bombings, devastation and mutilated bodies continued, explained mostly as simple terrorism (Butler, 1995; Rolston, 1996).

The British broadcasting ban on airing the 'voices' of 'terrorists' could be lifted at particular times on a limited range of subjects generally unrelated to the conflict. It was one of four means of information control by the British government (Miller, 1995). The others included public relations, intimidation, and self-censorship. In contrast, the Republic of Ireland's ban, which began early in the 'Troubles', grew harsher by the late 1970s, and prohibited broadcasting any Sinn Féin member under any circumstances. It changed only after a court challenge in 1992 (Horgan, 2010; Meehan, 2003; Moloney, 1991).

Although many journalists complied with the ban, some attempted to fight it through official channels, courts, and by interviewing other journalists or clergymen. A few reporters circumvented the ban by honouring the letter of the law but not its spirit. For example, at the BBC, they aired Sinn Féin leaders' images but not their voices, the latter which was prohibited. Instead, actors read the statements while showing their images with their voices muted (Horgan, 2010; Moloney, 1991). Newspaper coverage, divided largely by religion and ethnic background, were not under the same legal obligations.

Things changed during the peace process. Scholars argue that the media institutions were generally supportive of 'pro-peace' framing, focusing on peace, and changing coverage of the parties. Through the combined editorials, stories, television, advertising campaigns, and other cultural sources, what some called a 'propaganda of peace' emerged (Armoudian, 2011; Bratić, 2006, 2008; Finlayson & Hughes, 2000; McLaughlin & Baker, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2004).

Media and politicians were interdependent with reciprocal pressure exerted on each other, and coverage shifted as the process developed, even if the government held more sway on the debate's parameters (Spencer, 2000, 2001). Simultaneously, the media became a forum for cross-

party communication and negotiations, although the extent of this 'megaphone diplomacy' is contested (McLaughlin & Miller, 1996; Miller, 1994; Miller & McLaughlin, 1996; Spencer, 2004). As the referendum for the Agreement approached, the 'propaganda of peace' left less room for criticisms or alternative viewpoints in news media (McLaughlin & Baker, 2010; Spencer, 2000, 2003). Still, reporting in the region improved with greater openness, although it still featured information control and misinformation (McLaughlin & Miller, 1996; Miller, 2002; Rolston, 2007).

Statistical analysis of party coverage in five Northern Ireland publications suggested a mix of forces constructing the news during the 1994–1998 years of the peace process: While news norms softened the framing and portrayals in the traditional newspapers, ideology and identity still influenced coverage (Armoudian, 2015). A study of 'newsworthiness' in the same timeframe suggests that Sinn Féin received the most coverage of the parties in the three primary Belfast newspapers, the *News Letter*, *the Irish News* and *the Belfast Telegraph*. Sinn Féin appeared in 41, 45 and 41 per cent of article samples, respectively, while coverage of the SDLP and the DUP appeared in between 19 and 30 per cent of articles in those same newspapers (Armoudian, 2016a). The loyalist PUP, despite its connection to the UVF's violent activities, received the least amount of coverage – between six and seven per cent of articles in those newspapers. These numbers suggest that other factors, beyond drama and conflict, were at play in news-making (Armoudian, 2016b). This article explores one of these factors, particularly journalists' humanity – their judgements and emotions – which has have received less attention from scholars but has been shown through ethnographic research to influence coverage (Armoudian, 2016b). Both the choice of subjects and the framing of those subjects are constructed by a combination of these human factors, alongside news norms, and sociopolitical and media structures, and they are particularly pronounced when covering conflicts that affect journalist's own communities (Armoudian, 2016b). From eight journalists' perspectives, this paper examined this construction through their experiences. It argues that several factors came together to make the news during Northern Ireland's conflict and peace process. Events, changes in political leadership, professional duties, news norms, and media structures mixed with journalists' own experiences, emotions, and judgements to shape their reporting and framing. In the next sections, I will describe the interviews, the key findings, and discuss what they might mean.

Interviews and general findings

Over the course of two summers, 2009–2010, I interviewed eight journalists who all lived and reported in Northern Ireland during the conflict and peace process. The interviews were semi-structured. I asked them to describe their approaches to their coverage, profession, goals, the overall role of

journalism in the region's political issues, and to give examples. I inquired about the journalists' experiences and thoughts about the conflict and peace process. Each interview was a minimum of one hour, but some interviews stretched over several meetings on different days. Three interviewees requested their names be withheld (referred to as 'Journalist One', 'Journalist Two' and 'Journalist Seven'). The remaining five allowed their names to be published. All interviews occurred in either Belfast or Derry where the journalists lived and produced news for traditional media entities.

While not representative of all journalists covering this period of the region's history, the interviews nonetheless revealed four important dynamics. The first was how partisan pressures affected journalists and their work. This included a struggle over words and phrases – not because of journalists' personal or ideological leanings – but because an utterance of the 'wrong' word or phrase would cost them professionally. Similarly, these pressures inhibited investigative pursuits from fear of being labelled partisan themselves.

Secondly, with new revelations, particularly the discovery of secret talks with republican leaders, John Hume and the British government, journalists expressed some confusion and suggested these findings dramatically shifted their approach. Third, interviewed journalists expressed sympathy for all victims. They personally opposed violence, whether enacted by republicans, loyalists, or the state, and discrimination. Some of their assessments and emotions arose from their own life experiences and some from reporting on the destruction, deaths, and interviewing survivors. Fourth, while disavowing violence, journalists expressed ambivalence, particularly towards the republican, unionist, and loyalist parties, not so much for the SDLP's John Hume, for whom they mostly expressed admiration. Nonetheless, interviewed journalists took pride in being fair to all parties and believed they fulfilled their professional duties to work with them and report their perspectives.

Reporting in a divided society

Journalists described their coverage as occurring within two distinct periods – the conflict or 'the troubles' and the peace process – during which time newsgathering and story framing changed. In both eras, five dominant factors drove decisions: First and foremost was their professional duty of 'getting the story', reporting what they believed was the most important 'news'. Secondly, seven journalists expressed desires to achieve high standards of fairness and neutrality towards all parties involved or affected by the conflict. Third, changing circumstances, events, leadership, and party positions profoundly influenced journalists' views and framing. Fourth, their personal experiences, judgements, and emotions about the conflict shaped their understandings, which influenced their craft. Finally, journalists reacted to pressures from the government, media institutions, and their peers, both

during the broadcasting ban and the peace process era. The combination of factors sometimes created a 'struggle' and shifted media frames.

The political parties' opposing narratives and frames made the first task – newsgathering and framing in a fair, neutral way – difficult, according to interviews.

> There's no agreement about what caused the 'troubles.' Unionists would say, 'It was a great place until the IRA came along.' The nationalists would say, 'It's not the IRA's fault. It was the history of discrimination.' So if people couldn't agree on the causes of the conflict, how [could we contextualize anything within it]?

asked Journalist Seven (2010).

Journalists struggled between using frames and language that they believed were fair while maintaining relationships with sources who supplied the information. 'When you live in a divided society, and you're reporting to a divided society, it is very easy to be labeled, depending on what you say', explained Journalist Two (2009).

> So one day you can be the greatest thing since sliced bread, and the next day you can be the biggest bastard that ever walked on two feet … while you're trying to do the best and most professional job you think you could do. It is very easy, very easy to be judged by others. (Journalist Two, 2009)

From these experiences, Journalist Seven (2010) argued,

> People here didn't want objectivity; they wanted sympathy, and so they wanted to figure out if you are on their side or not. So if you came from the Catholic side, you were perceived to be nationalist, and if you came from the Protestant side, you were perceived to be unionist.

These judgements hindered some fundamental duties, said Journalist Seven (2010). One example pertained to the death of human rights lawyer Pat Finucane, who had represented IRA members, including hunger striker Bobby Sands, and was shot dead in his home while dining with his family (Amnesty International, 1994; O'Brien, 2005). Although journalists had heard allegations of collusion between the loyalist gunmen and British agents, investigating it was taboo. 'If you lived here and you asked very legitimate questions about collusion, and you were from a Catholic/nationalist family, then automatically, it was "oh you've got an agenda here,"' argued Journalist Seven, who added that the collusion 'has now been established by the Stevens Report'.[2]

Meanwhile, foreign correspondents had greater freedom to investigate 'a very reasonable question', added Journalist Seven.

> It was easier to come here from, say England as a British person with no 'axe to grind' necessarily against your government, and ask hard questions about your government because they couldn't accuse you of being a nationalist

> sympathizer; you were [just] doing your job … You can ask those questions much more freely because you had nothing to lose; you were not worried about alienating sources or building name for yourself. (Journalist Seven, 2010)

Interviewees believed they had mostly secured trust among all parties and the government. 'That's not to say that it was all hunky-dory and comfortable and cozy. It was not', explained Journalist Two (2009). 'There were times when the relationships broke down when you did your job'. Breakdowns occurred, for example, when accounts for events conflicted, and journalists reported what they believed had been verified. In such cases, the other side 'closed its lines down' with journalists, restricting access (2010).

Three journalists also reported sorting through 'code' and 'subliminal messages' to understand underlying meanings in party communiqué. 'There were lots of statements coming out, and everyone was trying to read between the lines', said Martin McGinley, who had worked at the BBC and the *Derry Journal*. 'What's the message? What does it mean? Every line would be exhaustively discussed … They were [often] actually sending out signals to each other because they weren't talking with each other [then]' (2009b).

McGinley's remarks comport with previous studies that suggest that the media were often used as a means and place of negotiation. At times, the party revealed thoughts to journalists as a means of reaching the other side of the negotiation table, particularly when there were no other lines of communication (Spencer, 2004).

Navigating the battlefield of language

Language itself was a battleground, signifying core issues (e.g. legitimacy, ownership, belonging, governance), so if journalists uttered the 'wrong' word, they could lose sources. For example, calling the second largest city in the region 'Derry' during an interview with a unionist politician or 'Londonderry' with a republican, one automatically created a barrier of suspicion, explained Journalist Seven (2010).

Navigating the region's moniker was also troubled. When dealing with republican or nationalist communities and publications, 'You didn't call Northern Ireland "Northern Ireland." That was a dirty word … [you'd say] "the six counties" or "the north,"' explained Journalist Seven. But when speaking with unionists and reporting for unionist-leaning newspapers, the acceptable terminology was reversed: Reporters could not use '"the north." It had to be "Northern Ireland" or "Ulster,"' explained the reporter. 'So we had to learn different languages for different publications. It was very difficult to work down the middle' (ibid).

Even naming the conflict was problematic. Journalist Two noted that republicans used the word 'war' for what the British government 'described

for years as a law-and-order problem'. But as the conflict period ended, 'then, people started to call it a war [because] they wanted the IRA to declare the war over' (2009).

This changing term-war complicated their jobs of reporting. 'When I first became involved in reporting the conflict, I used the language that other journalists used', which meant avoiding the term 'war', explained Journalist Two, who added, 'It certainly walked and talked like a war. I would now describe it as a war' (ibid).

That did not mean it was 'two warring sides with a referee in the middle', he said. That was 'much too simplistic'. He concluded that

> I don't think we have the information to properly describe it … Certainly I think there were many other actors on the stage than we have considered up to this point. I think the huge piece of missing information in terms of the last thirty years is the role of the British state in this conflict. How many informers … or agents did they run? What were their rules? Were there any rules? (ibid)

Another controversial term related to the emotive word, 'murder', which has legal connotations. The *Irish News* decided to only use the term if there was an 'inquest on that individual' until which 'it could not be classified as murder', explained Terry McLaughlin (2009). '[The IRA] would say, "murder by the forces of the occupation, the forces of the crown" … but we can't classify it as murder until due process [was completed]', he said. 'That caused eruptions because we wouldn't say "murder," and we wouldn't refer to them as "IRA soldiers"' (ibid).

Perhaps the most sensitive terminology pertained to the groups engaged in political violence. Before the peace process, journalists suggested that many media maintained an 'anti-IRA bias … They were [called] "terrorists" and all of that. And the questions were very aggressive toward the republican side', said Martin McGinley (2009b).

> The official line always took priority … And their [the IRA] version of incidents was taken less seriously … The police account generally took. It was accepted more readily than a republican source … So if there was a riot, the police view of the riot would be given first. The local Sin Féin account could have been more accurate, but the police was taken more seriously … [Later], generally speaking, I think [the BBC] performed pretty well. (ibid)

For journalists, the words they used could cost access. 'The unionist politicians and the government called the IRA "terrorists," [but] if you were a reporter, and you typed up the word "terrorist," there goes your Sinn Féin contact', explained Journalist Seven (2010).

The language wars, reflected in a divided media's policies and guidelines, complicated the profession for journalists working for more than one publication. For example, at the *Irish News*, 'you didn't call them "terrorists" … you'd use a more neutral term', added Journalist Seven (2010). But neither

did it use terms like 'soldiers' or 'volunteers', as the IRA wanted, explained McLaughlin (2009). Still, other newspapers, such as the Unionist-leaning *News Letter,* used the word 'terrorist' more frequently, said interviewees. Eventually, when it was settled to use the term 'paramilitaries', Journalist Seven argued that it was 'not even the right term for these people, but that's what they ended up being called as a "neutral" term' (2010).

Talking to 'Terrorists'

Before the peace process, journalists felt pressured to refrain from 'talking to terrorists', on the grounds that, 'You're encouraging them. You're promoting the war', recalled McKittrick (2009). They were told to 'choke off the oxygen of publicity to terrorists', recalled Mallie (2009).

While some journalists followed the restrictions, others believed that refusing coverage violated their professional duties to 'talk to all sides', offering completeness and accuracy. 'Without speaking to those organisations, how could you report what was going on in these conflicts?' asked Journalist Two. Print journalists, who were not bound by the ban, like David McKittrick admittedly 'talked to as many terrorists as you could find, really', he said. Although 'Thatcher frowned on that', he and some colleagues would 'be in touch with republicans or IRA messengers all the time. It was part of what the media did', he said.

> It was kind of obvious that if a bomb went off, you'd try to get an IRA spokesperson. We had to go to the IRA and say, 'Why did you do that? You killed civilians.' So all the journalists knew IRA people, [and] all the journalists knew how to get in touch with the IRA … Sometimes, you'd get an interview or a briefing or whatever, but usually, you didn't get much of an answer back from them (2009).

Mallie agreed, arguing, 'I don't close the doors on anyone. I talk to people – anyone', he said. 'I had incredible contacts in both communities'. To deal with the broadcast ban on the voices of terrorists, Mallie simply paraphrased comments from the banned voices.

Paraphrasing was also Journalist Two's (2009) solution:

> What I would say is that my role for the best part of 20 years was to talk to the IRA, talk to the loyalists, talk to the government, talk to the security forces, talk to the different political parties, and try to report this conflict in as rounded a way as possible. And much of that reporting involved speaking to organisations after people had been killed. (2009)

These duties, however, came with some moral reflection. 'I suppose that moral tug that is in us all … about the morality of what I was doing, reporting on people's deaths within hours of those people being killed, meeting organisations giving us statements within hours of people being killed', said

Journalist Two. McGinley also felt duty-bound to provide information. He was among the journalists at the BBC circumventing the broadcasting ban by speaking Martin McGuiness's words, while airing video footage of McGuinness speaking. In hindsight, he called their 'solution … kind of bizarre' (2009b).

These dynamics changed with two revelations and a series of developments that paved the way for the Belfast Peace Agreement. As the conflict shifted into a peace process, interviewed journalists changed their framing of the political situation although with some initial reticence (Interviews).

The unravelling: changing leaders, changing frames

Four primary factors drove the changes: new discoveries that unravelled the accepted 'truth' maintained by the government, changes in leadership and leaders' positions, their own observations, and political and peer pressure. Revelations of secret talks between Hume and Adams and more surprisingly, British government officials and the IRA challenged accepted political givens and shocked some journalists. 'Since the 1970s … the big theme, journalistically, overall and politically was, "You don't talk with the men of terror, the men of violence,"' said David McKittrick. At that time, 'We were just reporting on the aggression. There was a lot of aggression in the political system, and people were … shouting at each other and so on. We were reporting on that', he said (2009).

When the talks between Hume and Adams first came to light, 'It was totally baffling', admitted McKittrick. 'There was no precedent for this'.

McKittrick recalled the scorn against Hume in the media. 'The attacks on Hume … the *Sunday Independent* had eleven columns attacking him for talking with Adams', he recalled. 'There was a cartoon of him standing there with red hands'.

Another newspaper, the *Belfast Telegraph,* also publicly opposed the Hume/Adams dialogue. 'It thought it was a threat to unionism', added Mallie.

Despite the negative responses in media, for some interviewees, their trust in Hume and his values influenced their approach: 'You had a guide, and it was Hume', said McKittrick.

> [He] was clearly for peace and for consensus and agreement and dialogue, and the Provos [Sinn Féin] weren't for any of these things. But he [Hume] said it is worth talking to them. And everybody said, 'well, is it?' They had made it clear over the years that they didn't want to talk. Then suddenly, they say, 'Well, maybe we can talk.' So [this was] very baffling for everybody. (2009)

The government's secret talks were the biggest shock to journalists like McKittrick who called their discovery 'a red, hot development' and 'a great revelation', adding, 'We didn't know how much', and

> We didn't realise that it was the tip of an iceberg. … They had lied before, but this was the big one. This was [officials] standing up in parliament saying, 'We'll never do it.' … And it turned out that they were doing it. And it turned out that even Thatcher had been doing it,

explained McKittrick.

> [So] another of the big tenets of society and politics here was all starting to quiver and shake … By that stage, the more elderly journalists like myself had spent twenty years saying 'these are the rules.' And the rules [had now] all changed, and people had been lying to you. (2009)

Another big change was the shift in the paramilitaries' rhetoric. 'Adams started talking [about] peace', recalled McKittrick. 'I remember it sounded ludicrous, and there were a lot of scornful editorials. We kept wondering if it was real … I had said that "the IRA was a killing machine with no off-switch." [Now] "terrorists" were talking peace'.

McKittrick did not know yet 'whether this was a peace process or not; and even if it was a genuine peace process, [if] there were still going to be killings along the way', he said (2009).

Then came the 1994 ceasefire. 'A lot of people didn't believe it', McKittrick recalled. 'They said it was a trick; this is a strategy. People didn't celebrate, and they didn't congratulate the IRA or anything. They said, "This is a move. This will take a lot of verifying"'.

The developments, which at times were contradictory, confused the narrative.

> So one day I'd be writing a story saying there were three dead. The next day I'd be writing a story saying talks are to take place next week. The next day, I'd be writing a story saying another three dead. (2009)

Journalist Two agreed, noting that with the ceasefires, violence ebbed then resumed. 'It was just the beginning', he said, adding, 'Until then, all statements were killing statements. Suddenly, [there was a] massive contribution to peace' (2009).

Journalists tried to make sense of these changes. For Mallie, they were seen through a Catholic lens. 'I think as those guys grew older, McGuinness and Adams, I think increasingly that sense of religion and the sense of being a Catholic had an influence on them', he said.

> I remember talking with McGuinness eleven or twelve days before the ceasefire. I had a very open discussion with him. I said to Martin, 'I cannot personally justify or tolerate the taking of life and being a Catholic. They're incompatible in my world.' Do you know what he said to me? 'How do you think I feel?' And he had been one of the big marksmen. So that's what he said to me, 'How do you think I felt?' So I wouldn't underestimate the influence that being a Catholic ultimately had on those guys as they groped their way through the years moving toward middle age. (2009)

Mallie also believed republicans made a practical decision. 'They concluded that [violence] wasn't going to deliver'.

Most interviewees believed the peace rhetoric was authentic, even when others doubted this. 'Journalists covered this process; they saw these people up close, and they saw the change in them', explained Journalist Seven. 'They [we] saw that these people genuinely wanted to make peace … I think that sparked changes [in reporting]' (2010).

Still, journalists like Eamon McCann observed contradictions that left him unsettled. They had called it '"great victory." And they said, "Sinn Féin and the IRA [are] having a ceasefire because the way was clear to a united Ireland. There was no need for armed struggle anymore. There was no need for violence,"' he recalled.

> They were delivering a 'united Ireland.' Six weeks later, the loyalist paramilitaries, the UDA & UDF announced they would have a ceasefire. But what the loyalist activists said was they could now have a ceasefire because now, 'a united Ireland had been ruled out,' that there was going to be 'no united Ireland.' It was totally contradictory. These two things couldn't [simultaneously] be true. (2009)

Before the government shifted its stance, journalists felt pressured to pummel paramilitary leaders with hard-line questions, a practice that Journalist Seven considered futile.

> We had this game where you would ask [Gerry Adams] about his IRA membership, and then he would deny it. And you could spend the entire interview going around in circles … But if he didn't crack at Castlereagh under interrogation, he sure as hell isn't going to crack under my spotlight. So I think it actually became reductive to sit there all the time asking him because you weren't getting any information. (2010)

That changed when the government grew open to negotiations. 'The government attitude changed, and all of a sudden, there were good paramilitaries and bad paramilitaries', said Journalist Seven. 'That's how the government started to see the [situation], and the media reflected the changed attitudes, and their images then began to change' (2010).

The shift relieved journalists from earlier expectations. 'The government started bringing [the paramilitary leaders] in from the cold, so within a period of time, it went from "you can't speak with these people" to "they're now acceptable", and "you can have a cup of tea [with them]"', said Journalist Seven. 'If the Prime Minister can sit down with Gerry Adams, there's no reason why the media should not [be able to]. [We can] hold him to account when he's inconsistent, but you don't have to browbeat him at every turn'.

At that point, journalists felt freer to say, 'let's set that aside', and pursue other substantive matters. 'He [Adams] clearly had things he wanted to say

about changes in the IRA's attitude, changes in the republican leadership's attitude', explained Journalist Seven (ibid).

Journalist Two, however, attributed the expanded permission to the circumstances, not simply assuaged governmental pressure. 'It's much easier in the peace process to talk to these organisations when people aren't dying', he said (2009).

The emergence of new leaders was another important shift. 'It was very different with conservatives like Major and Mayhew. It wouldn't have happened if it were Bush', said Journalist One. 'You needed the right personality. Also, it took an outsider to come in – the American government as a broker. Clinton was trusted by republicans. Blair was a pragmatist and also more personable' (2009).

Personal meets professional

Having experienced what McGinley described as 'trouble fatigue', most interviewees expressed relief for the peace process. They had witnessed the humanitarian effects of the violence. Many had lost family or friends (2009a, 2010). 'Reporters are from the community, so we were all affected', said McGinley. 'Every Monday, I had to go out and talk with someone who lost her husband'. He spoke with 'five bereaved families in one morning. You don't want to see that going on. We had trouble fatigue … and we were traumatized' (2009a, 2010).

Other journalists expressed similar emotions. 'Journalists who live in this society covered this process', said Journalist Seven. 'We covered the conflict, and we had it up to the back teeth with attending funerals and the vicious cycle of "he said, she said" (2010)'.

Journalist One agreed. 'We were sick of reporting murder, destruction and death. We were sick of it, the senseless killing of people, children' (2009).

'I used to hate Friday mornings because the IRA would invariably choose a target around midmorning on a Friday', explained McLaughlin,

> because they knew it would get on the one o'clock news, the lunchtime news. The papers would then do the story full-up for Saturday morning. Then that story would be taken on by the Sunday papers, and then the funeral would happen on a Monday. I remember one Friday morning when I passed a butcher shop, and I remember a man called John Smith being shot dead. He was a part-time UDR soldier. His full-time occupation was a laborer. He was the only son of a widow. For some reason, that has always struck me, that we have … an ordinary name doing a mundane job, being shot, a calculated shot at a certain time in the morning … Not every killing happened like that, but invariably, it happened at the end of the week to maximize publicity. (2009)

For Mallie, his Irish Catholic faith played important roles. For one, he was 'preoccupied with the preservation of life', he said. But he also feared a type of

guilt by association, worrying about having a 'Nazi complex … because of what the IRA were doing … I genuinely feared that I would end up with a complex like what the Nazis had done to the Jews', he said (2009).

Interviewees also emphasised their personal connections. They belonged to the community and had families there. So the peace process brought hope: 'Could this be the killing machine's off switch?' asked McKittrick. 'You can take it as a given that we wanted the violence to stop]', he added. 'There might be the odd, crazy journalist who liked reporting on those things, but certainly, everybody was for peace … We're war correspondents but we're also citizens … People were dying. This is coffins, this is funerals; these are human beings' (2009).

This hope mixed with most interviewees' desires to maintain neutrality and to critically question and challenge. But it was complicated. 'On a personal level, we all wanted an end to the troubles', explained McGinley (2009a).

'I would say that journalists were being rational', added Journalist Seven. 'We wanted a better society' (2010).

Journalist Two, however, believes he successfully resisted his personal and societal goals and maintained his professional journalistic duty. 'How could you not have feelings of the peace process? We all wanted it', said Journalist Two.

> If you're asking me, at times, did I feel the tug of that tug-of-war between the implication of me saying 'this is A, B, C or D,' the consequence of me saying this is that it will cause damage, I think I asked myself that question many times. But I don't think it stopped me reporting the information. But, you again would not be … living in a process like this, being involved in what you're involved in, in terms of your career, and say, well I've a family here; I've a stake in this place. Yes, I want it to work, but no, I'm not prepared to turn a blind eye to make it work. (2009)

He recalled pressure from the Secretary of State suggesting that reporting an event was 'not good for the peace process' and being asked whether journalists were a 'help or a hindrance' to peace. 'Journalism is not about being good for the peace process', he argued.

> You're a help when you're saying the right things that suit certain people at certain times, and you're a hindrance when you're saying things that are putting people in corners and asking difficult questions. It is not our job to be part of the peace process. It is our job to report it. (2009)

Mallie agreed, and in the long run, he believes his reporting helped the peace. 'I didn't see that [supporting peace] as my role', he said.

> I didn't shy away from putting facts in the public domain. Now there are those who would argue that by reporting what I had reported was being deleterious to the potential for a peaceful resolution. My wife was among those. She opposed my making those facts public [but] by establishing facts and publicly airing those

> facts … In fact, I think my putting that in the public domain served [the situation] very well because it conditioned the masses to accepting that it was ok for the governments to engage with the IRA. So ultimately, I think it served a purpose. (2010)

Some journalists believe the atmosphere of hope stifled important criticism. McLaughlin, for example, saw flaws in the Belfast Peace Agreement, arguing it seemed to be 'predicated on a false premise … [but] you couldn't say that because you have to remember how grim and dismal things were at this time', he said, and journalists did not want to be seen as 'destroying what hope [there was] … The worst thing to take from a person is hope' (2009).

In that atmosphere, McLaughlin admitted that 'I did at times implement more than a smidgen of self-censorship … It was very difficult, very difficult'. In retrospect, he said, 'If we are to discharge our responsibilities correctly, we have to question', and wondered if the media 'overstepped the line' or went 'over the cliff with enthusiasm. And once you've gone over, it's impossible to get back over again. How can you be a cheerleader, and then complain?' (ibid).

McCann, also, critical of the Agreement, similarly felt pressured to stay silent. He believed collectively the media failed to report problems 'that I think were obvious to everybody', he said. 'The majority of people in the media, the mainstream media, didn't want to focus on [the problems] because they passionately wanted the process to work, and they thought, this is the best thing and let's … consolidate' (2009).

In one meeting of editors, he raised a concern to which one editor suggested that he '"shut up about it and the peace process … If you don't agree with it, say nothing,"' recalled McCann.

> They didn't say this in so many words, but they were absolutely adamant that it was their duty, that it was wrong to be drawing attention to these [contradictions]. It was almost like a hint that I didn't want there to be peace. That bias, [the] de facto [desire for peace] was there throughout … and overruled everything … Anything you could do to get peace, even in the short term. (ibid)

As another example, McCann noted the changes in individual reporters' coverage:

> I remember a political correspondent at the *Irish Times* who … around 1980 wouldn't cover the Sinn Féin conference on the grounds that 'I will not dignify them by … pretending that they are a normal party.' They wouldn't do it. A little later, only fourteen years, and you aren't allowed to criticize them. (ibid)

He likened the silence about the past to 'everyone agreeing to ignore an American candidate who had a background in the KKK or something reprehensible, and everybody knew this, and his colleagues in the reprehensible organisation talked about it quite freely, and have pictures of him in

uniform', argued McCann, adding that the Progressive Unionist Party representative was

> chief of staff for the UVF, leading one of the most bloody and violent paramilitary forces and convicted of two murders … You don't see that mentioned much … [and] you're sort of regarded as a trouble-maker if you mention it. These are facts, which are public, [but you're] not allowed to mention it … there's a lot of toxic material left around in the political landscape that isn't being dealt with and isn't being cleaned up. (ibid)

McLaughlin made a similar observation. 'I remember looking at the TV screen and seeing five members of the government of Northern Ireland, and four of them had killed people', he said (2009).

Journalists had not stopped asking hard questions according to Journalist Seven. Rather, they were constrained by the answers. 'When we asked the hard questions, we didn't get the answers we [had] traditionally got', said Journalist Seven.

> [For example], during multiparty talks there were a number of drug dealers, alleged drug dealers being killed. But the IRA didn't claim responsibility. Direct Action Against Drugs claimed responsibility. But everyone knew that was a cover for the IRA. The dogs in the street knew it. So we were waiting for the authorities to say it. Is the chief constable saying it? Well, sometimes the chief constable said 'yes, it was the IRA.' But sometimes, I think the chief constable was coming under pressure. So if the police aren't saying it – journalists, we have to deal in facts; we can't just stand up and say, 'The dogs in the street are saying it.' So if the chief constable wasn't saying it … we could say – and journalists would say [to the Prime minister], 'our police sources have said … categorically that this is the IRA. Now are you prepared to lead Sinn Féin in these talks?' But the government's will was not to expel Sinn Féin over drug dealers getting killed, which became known as 'housekeeping.' In this new language of the peace process, it wasn't a breach of the ceasefire. The Secretary of State Mo Mowlam herself described it as 'housekeeping'. The murder of a citizen was 'housekeeping' within the context of the ceasefire, so how can you blame the media when [this is] the attitude of politicians? (2010)

Personal meets professional II

Another factor in the media during the conflict and peace process was grounded in journalists' experiences and assessments of the parties, their leadership, activities, and positions. Interviewees expressed ambivalence about each party and its leadership, except for the SDLP's John Hume, for whom they expressed admiration, comporting with Journalist One's suggestion that his colleagues 'tended to take a nationalist view' but not a 'pro-republican view', although there was an 'occasional pro-republican reporter' (2009).

The expressions of genuine trust and admiration for Hume and his work shaped their approach to the events. Their emotions and judgements were

reflected in interviews. For example, Mallie described Hume's 'big leadership' and his 'courage' when 'Hume escorted Sinn Féin from the sidewalks to the corridors of power'. He further suggested that other countries heed Hume's example to solve their conflicts.

He admitted that he was 'very, very close' to Hume. But when Hume asked him for advice, he thought it was as if 'God was asking me what to do' (2009).

McGinley called Hume the 'prime mover' and 'de facto lynch pin' of the peace process (2009b). And McLaughlin called him 'the man who started the peace process'.

Both Mallie and McGinley quoted Hume during interviews as examples of his admirability. For example, when a member of Hume's party called Hume 'a laughing stock' for talking with Adams, Hume reportedly replied, 'You say I'm killing the party? There are people every day being killed', recalled Mallie. 'Hume convinced [people], intellectually, that there was merit to resolving the problem in an integrated way, on a broad canvas through the "totality of relationships"' (2009).

Similarly, McGinley recalled Hume saying, 'You cannot eat a flag', and, 'It's not land that you unite; you've got to unite people', and that we should be 'spilling our sweat, not our blood' (2009b).

Hume's international respect and relations were additional reasons for trusting and admiring him. 'He was somebody that they respected over there and in Europe and Westminster', said McGinley. 'He was shuttling all over the place … and close to things happening here too. He had fingers in a lot of pies [and] was a total advocate for peace' (ibid).

Journalist One concurred. 'Hume connected with the more stratospheric parts of Irish America, such as President Clinton and the White House, State Department, and all that', he said.

> I remember one of Clinton's visits, and we were waiting for him, and there was a special seat in the front, and there was John Hume in it. You can see the importance that the White House place on Hume. And you know about Hume's role in getting an entrée for Adams (2009).

McLaughlin added Hume's talent for 'bridge-building' and his 'ability to articulate a case that was all-encompassing', which, he argued, helped Sinn Féin 'to escape from the straightjacket of republicanism that they were locked into. It was like a chastity belt that he [Hume] was able to unlock', he said. McLaughlin also noted the SDLP as the 'party that at one stage was the aggressive civil rights generation – Hume, [Seamus] Mallon and Austin [Currie]', remarked McLaughlin, adding that MP Alistair McDonnell was 'a very popular figure. He has the ability to interact with people … a lovely and very kind person, and he has a lot of respect from both sides of the community' (2009).

These assessments mattered in journalists' coverage. As noted by McKittrick. Hume was a type of 'guide' or leader for them, someone whose intentions and instincts they trusted.

Despite positivity for Hume, however, coverage was dominated by the IRA, partly because of news norms. 'Everybody focused on the IRA', explained David McKittrick. 'They were the people who were organised, and they were they people trying to overthrow the state. They were by far the most dangerous in terms of the state itself. And they took more life than anybody else' (2009).

Professional colleagues outside of the borders also influenced local coverage. 'The world focused on the IRA. Radio stations from Australia would ring up and ask, "what's the latest IRA atrocity?"' added McKittrick. Even when local reporters told international media corps of other events, including loyalist violence, these events were met with less interest, he said (ibid).

Journalists' contempt for the IRA's violence was met with respect for Sinn Féin's communication and organisational skills. For example, Mallie criticised 'that campaign of violence that the IRA carried on … ceaselessly and endlessly', adding 'I hated that violence … I vehemently opposed the campaign of violence [by the IRA] and the loyalist campaign of violence' (2009).

Simultaneously, however, 'The Provos went to such extremes to facilitate the media. They were masterful and so far ahead of the game … They briefed us, gave us good access', he said, adding that Danny Morrison 'fed us an awful lot of information. He's an amazing guy. He has a photographic memory … very interesting guy. I would respect him', he said, adding, 'I would say, he's the greatest propagandist in the history of the revolution' (ibid).

The funerals of the hunger strikers were a prime example –

> so beautifully choreographed, from the IRA's point of view. [Journalists got] maximum shots of the family, of Joe McDonnell's wife touching the coffin, the girls carrying the red roses, the sisters of the deceased, et cetera, the platforms that they had provided, the scaffolding platforms so that the camera men from all over the world could get the best shots,

recalled Mallie (ibid).

Mallie's ambivalence extended to Bobby Sands, whom he described as simultaneously 'a beautiful Gaelic speaker' and 'callous and quite grotesque' in his justifications for violence.

> I had gone to the scene of Earl Mountbatton's killing … I had also covered the Narrow water bombing outside Newry, when eighteen soldiers were killed … I had covered both. And I was furious with him. I'll tell you why I was furious with him. He justified the killing of an 80-year-old man on a boat with his family. I couldn't subscribe to that, you know (ibid).

Mallie also covered the 'terrible bombing in Ballygally' and

> the poor soldiers who were killed in a bus going to Enniskillen. When the bomb went off, some of them actually crawled across the road, down into an old farm yard, and one or two of them died behind bales of straw,

he recalled. 'I challenged Gerry Adams about the morality of violence, which resulted in human beings dying behind bales of hay and straw'.

But Mallie believed Sinn Féin's leaders had a change of heart. 'When Canary Wharf happened, he [Adams] seemed shattered', he said (ibid).

Journalist Two described republicans as 'very disciplined, very organised', recalling, for example,

> The IRA issued statements under the name P. O'Neill, which was the official spokesman for the IRA. From the mid-80s through to 2006 when the IRA last issued a statement, I would've dealt with five different people who were P. O'Neill in different phases of this process. (2009)

In contrast to republicans, loyalists appeared

> much more fragmented, disjointed and disparate, so you would've been speaking to many different people, different organisations – though there was one period [late 1990s] when they operated under the Combined Loyalist Military Command, which was the most stable period within loyalism,

said Journalist Two (ibid).

That sentiment arose from other interviewees, who criticised loyalists' approach as 'less sophisticated', 'uneducated', 'primitive', and essentially 'anti-republicanism'. 'Loyalists couldn't express themselves in the same way', said McKittrick (2009).

> They didn't have the aims; they didn't have votes the way the IRA and Sinn Féin did … The Provos [IRA] got their degrees in prison. They were getting their sociology degrees … On the loyalist side, there was much less of that. They were in the gymnasium, pumping iron,

which McKittrick suggested was the loyalists' 'political theme' of 'muscle – if you can express muscle'.

That did not resonate with him or his colleagues. 'Few sympathized with the loyalist cause', he said.

> There were few who thought that the loyalist cause was a good cause. It just didn't connect, and they knew that … You'll notice the theme of the [loyalist and unionist] frustration about being able to communicate in the outside world. It didn't go over very well. [It was] just hopeless. Even in Britain, even in London, there are very few who identified with the loyalist cause. (ibid)

Five interviewed journalists expressed less trust in Loyalists because, as Mallie said, 'they were ugly to the media. They told them to "F- off." They didn't know how to handle [journalists], and saw the media as the enemy' (2009).

McKittrick agreed: 'Loyalist paramilitary members didn't take kindly to the media. They were not friendly to [journalists]', he said. 'They were suspicious, and they said, "You guys never tell the truth or give our point of view. You're against us, and you are pro-republican." They thought the media took an anti-Protestant view' (2009).

Despite criticisms, Mallie and other interviewees acknowledged and lauded the loyalists' role in peacemaking. Thus, as with republicans and unionists, reporters simultaneously expressed some admiration alongside their criticisms.

Praise was less forthcoming for unionists who resisted a timely coming to the peace-negotiating table, they said. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) leader, for example, 'allowed his antipathy for Adams' to dissuade his 'display of courage', leading the party into 'endless carping, highlighting the inadequacies and problems' of the party, according to Mallie. And the DUP's 'decades of rabble-rousing', he said 'wrecked' the 1974 Sunningdale agreement (2009).

McKittrick added, 'Unionists said … "we're not taking part in it." [But] they didn't have any ideas', he said.

> The Unionist party [UUP] back then was saying each year, 'oh, it's getting a little bit better; it will be ok. And this is as good as it gets.' And [they] lost the intellectual argument because that's a very pessimistic thing to say. This is [all]? They kept saying, 'Don't do dangerous things. Just keep a steady ship.' But everybody looked around and said, 'well, this isn't much of a ship; it's just a recipe for violence. The violence is going down a little in statistical terms, but not the capacity for violence; and it's broken; it's not working. We need to do something,' [but] they argued to just 'keep going on, and who knows? Maybe in twenty years, it will stop' … [but] the violence was not going down tremendously, [and] the Sinn Féin vote was going up, and that was an extra dimension, a very dangerous dimension because in those days, they [Sinn Féin] were entering [the government] to smash it, to poison it, to corrupt it, to bring it down (2009).

McKittrick compared the unionist approach to South African apartheid leaders' attempt to hold power, but not 'in a very fair way', he said. '[They] wanted security, and they defined security as military defeat of the IRA' (ibid).

Historic discrimination and animosities against Catholicism stood out for the Catholic reporters. For example, Mallie recalled unionists' as historically 'wrapped up in Calvinism, absolutism, the right to rule and righteousness', he said (2009). Similarly, McLaughlin saw the DUP as rooted 'in religious and working-class fundamentalism' and 'had anti-Catholicism in its genesis', although, he argued, 'They have evolved over the decades into a very slick political machine and became a very dominant force' (2009).

Despite the historic animus, interviewees worked with unionist leaders to break important stories. 'I didn't agree with [the DUP]', admitted Mallie. But

when 'a senior figure in the [unionist] community with whom I had very little rapport' had information for breaking news, Mallie welcomed a conversation (2010).

'I didn't like him; he didn't like me. He was positively hostile to me in my presence', Mallie said.

> But I heard him being interviewed on the radio, and I phoned him up and I said, 'Sir, you know and I know where our relationship rests, an appalling relationship. But what I have to say is what I am hearing falling from your lips is making a lot of sense.' He said, 'Why don't you come and talk with me?' I went to see him. I spent four hours with him, and before leaving me, he said, 'there is something very big going on in the background.' (ibid)

Another important facet for Mallie was Ian Paisley's eventual evolution.

> The extraordinary thing about him [Paisley] is that he spent his entire life opposing everything, and [then], he did the big thing: He did the big deal with the Provos. It took him thirty-five years, but what a conversion. I call that a political miracle. And do you know what he said to me? He said, 'I want to sort Northern Ireland out before I expire. I want everyone working together – Catholics and Protestants.' And he went into government with Sinn Féin. Remarkable! He did a U-turn, after thirty-five years of vehemently opposing republicanism' (2010)

he said, adding, 'It was unbelievable'.

This conversion won Mallie's respect:

> Despite all the evil that went before, and he may well be responsible for inciting a lot of young Protestants for joining illegal organisations, Protestants who died in prison, who went to jail and lay in jail … young Protestants who went out and took up a gun and who were shot dead by the IRA or shot dead by the army or whatever. Whew! What must go on in his head? But at the end of the day, he did the ultimate. He did the deed. And to me, that is a political miracle. And that's why today we have stability here, despite the shortcomings of the system. (ibid)

Discussion

This study contributes to the literature on the conflict and peace process in Northern Ireland with new information about how journalists thought and navigated the political obstacles to deliver news. Interviews with eight journalists covering the Northern Ireland conflict and peace process revealed important factors that influenced the changing media content during the conflict and peace process, providing insight both for the region and for journalism more generally.

While the dynamics changed as the conflict shifted into a peace process, some factors remained consistent. For example, a key influence was professional duty – working in a way that maintained access and preserved reputations as fair and neutral. This was difficult in a divided community where

language and subjects became part of the rhetorical conflict that ran parallel to the physical one. Journalists struggled with that rhetorical battlefield in which the language, framing, and subjects were codified with meanings and suggested allegiance to one side or another, leaving them open for challenge to their impartiality. In these situations, getting a news story sometimes conflicted with appearing neutral.

Although impartiality was a goal in itself, it was also a means of achieving success. Because the means of succeeding in their professions required maintaining relations with opposing parties in the conflict, these media professionals navigated a difficult balance, carefully choosing story subjects, questions, frames, and words. A wrong word could mean severed trust and relationships, thus limited access to information, a journalistic necessity.

The media's ownership structure also mattered, as certain media outlets aligned themselves with particular identities and ideological viewpoints. Journalists who worked at different outlets found themselves using different language when delivering news during the same time frames.

Drawing from journalistic norms, including the definition of 'news', reporters pursued 'hot' stories using established routines. Most interviewees wanted to deliver stories that exposed injustices and dishonesties alongside major political developments. But what constituted 'news' shifted with new events, leaders, and new language used by existing leaders, changes that profoundly challenged journalists' long-held understanding of the situation and the parties, leading them to question established 'truths', or at least what they had believed and reported to be true. This occurred in transition to the peace process, when, for example, it became public that the government had been lying about its talks with paramilitary organisations, which it had long denied. This revelation challenged the basic understanding of the parties and the conflict itself.

To some degree, journalists tended to index their framing to those parameters established by government officials and other political leaders, according to interviews, which reflects earlier studies of government/media interdependence and 'megaphone diplomacy' (Miller, 1994; Spencer, 2000, 2004). But journalists also challenged official statements from both the government and the paramilitary groups when they did not comport with reality as they understood it, to prevent being 'a puppet on the end of one of those strings', according to Journalist Two (2009). But officials remained a key part of making news during both periods.

Still, new rhetoric, events and leaders had an automatic effect on the media's frames. For example, the realisation that John Hume, who had been widely lauded and trusted by journalists, was secretly talking with Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams led journalists to question their earlier judgements about the republican party and that the conflict was intractable. Later, leadership changes, such as the hands-on engagement of US President

Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair shifted the overall narrative about what was acceptable in the pursuit of peace. These new policies, events and narratives, which endorsed and pursued greater dialogue with the paramilitary-associated parties, began to shed the 'state-versus-terrorist' framing, and simultaneously relieved pressure on journalists to exclusively lambaste those parties during interviews.

These shifts did not necessarily free them to pursue all investigative matters, however. Journalists still had to tread gently on sensitive subjects as a means of protecting their reputations as impartial, standards that they believed were unfair to them and their colleagues in the region. Some interviewees expressed resentment about the accusations of 'having an agenda', when they believed they were trying to do the best possible job for their audiences within a divided, judgemental society.

Together these new developments and discoveries had another, more latent effect: As noted, before the discoveries and changes, interviewed journalists believed that the conflict was intractable and experienced an array of negative emotions, mostly sadness and sympathy, but also despair, frustration, and disgust. The shift in the political environment created new emotions, such as hope and relief, which then guided new framing. As the possible shifted, the definition of 'news' did too. Breakthroughs in dialogue became the leading news stories, and the portrayal of republicans and loyalists softened.

Some interviewees saw and respected the changes in paramilitary leaders, appreciated their own newfound freedoms to talk openly with them, and expressed pride in their professional rapport with leaders across the divide. Others, however, expressed concern that an uncritical acceptance had supplanted a previously hypercritical narrative. For the latter journalists, it was a tacit acknowledgment of what scholars have called a 'propaganda of peace' (McLaughlin & Baker, 2010).

Simultaneous with broad rapport, however, journalists expressed different degrees of scepticism and ambivalence about most political parties and their leaders with one exception – John Hume. And this factor – trust – is an important one. For several interviewees, deep, enduring trust in Hume's values and wisdom encouraged them to see the possibility for the conflict's resolution, which helped to shift reporting and framing. Had this come from another leader, it is less probable that journalists would have readily believed that the peace was possible.

This and the ambivalence expressed about the other leaders and parties suggests that interviewees' assessments about the leaders and parties arose from measuring those positions against their own deeply humanitarian values, which were revealed during interviews. Those assessments and the accompanying emotions – especially trust – guided story selection, analysis of events, statements, and framing. The quantitatively measured paucity of

loyalist coverage, for example, ostensibly arose from these evaluations and emotions related to loyalists' treatment of journalists, activities, and general disorganisation. Journalists' own emotions are an oft-overlooked influence on news coverage but were revealed in these interviews. In a violent conflict affecting their own home country, interviewees experienced the conflict's consequences and admittedly wanted 'an end to the Troubles'. Every interviewee expressed some type of trauma, either first or secondhand, arising from these experiences. That did not mean, however, that they turned 'a blind eye' to events. But it did mean an emotional 'tug of war' about the effects of their reports.

All interviewees believed they did their best under difficult circumstances and constraints arising from politics, their profession, and duties to their community, but they acknowledge in hindsight, that they missed some things in their reports. In the words of Journalist Two,

> All you can do is take the information you're given and make the best journalistic assessment and judgment you can. Did I always get it right? I'm not for one minute saying that. But I didn't deliberately get it wrong is what I'm saying. I didn't run to any agenda. The reporting I did, the assessments I gave, the analysis that I presented, was on the basis of the best information that was available.

Two interviewees nonetheless believed that the media institutions collectively self-censored, in part as a means of protecting a fragile peace, and ostensibly from collective sympathy, anxiety, and trauma. Social psychology appeared to play a role here. Psychologists have long noted the influence of groups – social, professional, regional, and societal – on their members (e.g. Asch, 1951; Janis, 1983; Zimbardo, 2007), and interviews suggested that when the overall metanarrative changed, some criticisms became unacceptable. Despite the individualistic nature of journalism, journalists, like most people, are susceptible to their communities' influence.

In essence, these eight journalists revealed a very human side of their profession, which helps to explain some of the past findings about the media coverage of the conflict and peace process. In simultaneous roles – citizen and journalist – personal and professional desires, appraisals, and emotions mixed with the professional, government, and societal pressures to construct news. Real changes in leadership, rhetoric, and circumstances were met by journalists' own psychological responses to shape the peace era's media content Through both periods, they struggled with these simultaneous roles, particularly if their duties or desires conflicted – verifying statements, reporting and analysing developments, maintaining professional standing and relationships, and being true to their own moral standards. Getting any one of these wrong would cost them either personally or professionally – creating a 'thin line' for them to walk.

Notes

1. The ‘propaganda war’ is a term coined by Liz Curtis.
2. The Lord Stevens Enquiry Report (2003) established that a British army double agent provided the intelligence to Loyalists to identify Finucane to the gunmen and had been central in collusion between the British Army and loyalist paramilitary groups.

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