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By

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ABSTRACT

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As Northern Ireland continues to struggle with its turbulent legacy of the Troubles, one could ask the question of what role the media will continue to play in the process of reconciliation and peacebuilding in the country. This master's thesis sheds light on the role perceptions of journalists in Northern Ireland in a transitional, post-conflict context. This research also explores the use of constructive journalism through in-depth interviews with journalists. As constructive journalism—a journalism style drawing from solutions and peace journalism—gains footage in academia and journalism schools worldwide, this thesis is the first study of its kind to investigate its use in Northern Ireland. This thesis shows that journalists in modern-day Northern Ireland mostly view their roles as dictated by traditional Western values for journalism, such as that of a neutral observer. Journalists in Northern Ireland do not think they should be actively participating in the reconciliation or peacebuilding process. This research further finds that journalists in Northern Ireland do not explicitly use constructive journalism techniques in their reporting. However, journalists from Northern Ireland do acknowledge that the deep political violence in their country provides a unique challenge to their work. Sectarianism, paramilitary violence, economic inequalities, and trauma from the past are elements that journalists in Northern Ireland must learn to navigate.

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Introduction

"News is only useful in the context of humanity."

– *The Newsroom*

"Paramilitary-style shootings on the rise in Northern Ireland," the *BBC* warned on November 23, 2023 (BBC News, 2023). According to the BBC, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) reports that 19 people were victims of these shootings between November 1, 2022 and October 31, 2023. This includes people being shot in the knees, elbows, feet, ankles, or thighs, supposedly to punish the person for antisocial activities. In 2020, the Independent Reporting Commission, an organization established by the British and Irish governments to help end paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland, reported that paramilitary life remains a reality for the people in Northern Ireland (2020, 21). Journalists have also been targets of paramilitary violence; a tragic example of this dangerous reality is the killing of a young journalist, Lyra McKee, by a member of the New IRA in April 2020. More recently, Reporters Without Borders released a statement condemning attacks on journalists in Northern Ireland, including petrol bombs thrown at reporters covering an Easter parade in Derry (*RSF Condemns Attacks on Journalists in Northern Ireland*, 2024).

As Northern Ireland continues to struggle with its turbulent legacy of the Troubles, what role will the media and journalists take in shaping public debate as political developments, such as the UK's withdrawal from the European Union in 2020, unravels new opportunities for violence (Pogatchnik, 2021)? Will it take on a different role than the neutral messenger?

In "Reconciliation isn't Sexy", Rice and Taylor argue that community activists in Northern Ireland "perceive the media to be sustaining the legacy of the conflict and constraining the debates about the way forward" (2020, 2). At the same time, they argue that there is a "desire" for the media to fulfill a more active role in explaining post-conflict realities (Rice and Taylor, 2). The tension and incongruity in how the media is perceived in Northern Ireland present an interesting case study, against a backdrop of a growing body of academic articles, news articles, seminars, and online tutorials in a new journalistic concept called "constructive journalism", often referred to as "solutions journalism" in North America (Lough & McIntyre, 2021).

Leading researchers in this emerging field of journalism, Elisabeth Hermans and Cathrine Gyldensted, argue that constructive journalism "employs a public-oriented perspective and seeks to cover current affairs and news, adding solution-, action-, and future-oriented perspectives" (2019, 536). In constructive journalism, the role of the journalist is more active, emphasizing the feeling of responsibility "for the impact the news can have at the individual as well as the societal level" (Hermans, Gyldensted, 536). According to Gyldensted (2015), constructive journalism can contribute to people's well-being if elements of "positive psychology" are incorporated into news journalism. Positive psychology is the scientific study "of what enables humans to thrive", according to the International Positive Psychology Association (p.n.a.). McIntryne and Gyldensted connect this positive psychology element with what they view as the "well-being" model of the world. This model should then, in their view, form the basis of journalistic practice, as it gives the most truthful view of the world: "Constructive journalism aims to embrace the core values of seeking the full truth and portraying the world accurately, arguing that journalists should report equally about conflict and collaboration, regress and progress, setback and growth." (McIntyre and Gyldensted, 665). The opposite of the well-being model is the "disease model", in which negativity bias dominates in journalism. The focus lies on the illness of the world, corruption, violence, and war. Harcup and O'Neill (2016) argue that the most important criterion for selecting news, both in online and offline media, is negativity.

Based on this fact, McIntrye and Gyldensted pose the question: if the main task of a journalist is to portray the world accurately, how is this reconciled with the focus on the "disease model" of the world in news reports when the "well-being" of the world is being left behind? In fact, the general focus on negativity in news contributes to audiences becoming "disillusioned and disinterested in civic issues" (Oliver 2016, Kruger 2017). This is the opposite of an audience that is engaged and proactive about the world's problems. An example of a recent event causing such an effect is the outbreak of the novel coronavirus at the beginning of 2020.

News desks around the world had to switch gears and focus on the covering of the societal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has led to an increase in feelings of despair and anxiety among those following the news (Harris, 2020). Breaking news alerts flooded our smartphones, detailing the number of infected and deceased people.

Between 2020 and 2022 the pandemic held a tight grip over the production of news journalism and social media. Interestingly, and perhaps understandably so, the WHO advised

those who were prone to anxiety to avoid watching, reading, or listening to news about the pandemic. With this in mind, what could be said about the effect of newsmaking in an equally stressful environment, such as violent conflict? Or, as this thesis shows, the fragile state of peace in a post-conflict society? Could constructive journalism offer a new outlook on journalism in a divided society? An excellent example of this is McIntyre and Sobel's research on constructive journalism in Rwanda (2018). This research concludes that in addition to fulfilling traditional values like informing and educating the public, Rwandan journalists highlighted their goals to contribute to healing a broken society. In order to fulfill this role, they consistently engage in constructive journalism practices like restorative narrative and solutions journalism (McIntrye and Sobel, 2018).

Investigating constructive journalism in post-conflict Northern Ireland.

As Ginty and Ginty (2007) argue, Northern Ireland serves as an excellent case study for two reasons. First, it has a long-standing peace process (since the Good Friday Agreement in 1998), which enables a research process over a long period of time. Second, there are a number of relative advantages for researchers: Northern Ireland is a relatively open society that is easily accessible, and the location is an English-speaking part of Western Europe. Moreover, Northern Ireland has had a long exposure of "communities and political actors" to researchers, making it the "most researched conflict on the planet" (White, 1991 cited in Ginty and Ginty, 2007, 3). Of course, this provides a substantial body of academic and non-academic sources (such as news media, think-tanks, and non-governmental organizations), to build research on.

Moreover, popular discontent exists amongst civilians in Northern Ireland with the local government and its failure to realize the hopes for a positive change after the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 (Breen, 2017). The Council on Foreign Relations mentions that Northern Ireland's leadership faces difficult challenges in providing basic services as well as addressing sectarian divisions; less than 10 percent of students in the country go to religiously integrated schools, and social interactions between the Protestant and Catholic communities remain limited (CFR, 2021). On Northern Ireland's peace process, the think-tank provides the following analysis:

"*Northern Ireland's leaders have never developed a comprehensive approach to the legacy of past violence, as some other postconflict societies have. Efforts to prosecute those responsible for killings and pursue other initiatives have been uneven, which analysts say has hindered*

reconciliation. The uncertainty related to the future of Northern Ireland is furthermore fueled by the continuing balancing act to maintain the fragile peace between nationalists and loyalists in the country."

In research on the demilitarization of paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland, Ariel Heifetz claims that "conflict is still very much present on the ground, though primarily nonviolent" (2011, 89). In fact, since the Good Friday peace agreement, more security walls have been erected than torn down (Heifetz, 2011, 90). Belfast itself was divided by 99 security walls (locally known as "peace walls") to separate the Catholic and Protestant communities. On February 2nd, 2016, one wall was torn down. An opinion piece published in the Belfast Telegraph discussed the tearing down of the wall with cautious optimism – yet the writer emphasizes the "fear factor" as still being relevant between Nationalists and Loyalists, adding that "it would be a mistake to portray the bulldozer smashing through the Crumlin Road peace wall as a kind of Berlin Wall moment; as our November 1998" (McDonald, 2016).

In fact, the peace in Northern Ireland has been coined a "negative peace" (Murphy, 2018; "Why it's a negative peace while we remain divided", 2013). According to Galtung, during a negative peace, the civilian population is safe from violence to a certain degree, but the main issues remain unsolved and could lead to a flare-up in situations of crisis (1967). The Conflict Barometer of the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research placed Northern Ireland in the category of a "violent crisis" in 2022, with 33 injured: 8 people in shootings and 25 in paramilitary-style punishments (Conflict Barometer, p. 52). The latest in Northern Ireland also remains a concern in terms of press freedom, with journalists reporting on paramilitary groups and organized crime being among the most at-risk journalists in the UK (Safety of Journalists Remains Active Concern in Northern Ireland as BBC Panorama Team Is Threatened, 2021). It is safe to say that with political and societal upheavals like Brexit and deep political violence, keeping track of the developments in Northern Ireland remains a necessity for researchers.

This is certainly also the case for research related to the news media. According to Rice and Taylor, Northern Ireland provides a useful lens to understand how media in an economically advanced Western nation operates in a post-conflict context (2020, 4). Furthermore, the concepts of constructive journalism and peace journalism have gained traction in Northern Ireland for at least a decade. In 2019, a two-day international conference on the role of media in divided societies was held in Belfast, where journalists discussed these journalistic concepts for advancing peace through media. However, there is not much recent research into

the media's role in post-conflict Northern Ireland, as Rice and Taylor have pointed out (2020, p. 23). In the absence of previous research on the role perceptions of Northern Irish journalists in the context of constructive journalism in Northern Ireland, this thesis will build on McIntyre and Sobel's investigation of journalists' roles in a post-conflict society, this time in a Western (Anglo-Saxon) context. However, the subject of this thesis is not the validity of constructive journalism, solutions journalism, or peace journalism per se; it is the exploration of using constructive journalism in post-conflict areas, with a focus on how journalists view their professional reporting roles.

1.2 Research questions

The main goal of this thesis is to gain insight into the news-making process in a post-conflict area. Specifically, this research will explore the use of constructive journalism in a post-conflict environment through in-depth interviews with journalists and, additionally, journalists' perceptions about their roles in a post-conflict society. The focus of this research will be on a country that is considered to be part of Western Europe in a transitional, post-war context: Northern Ireland.

The main question (RQ1) of this thesis is: How do journalists and editors in Northern Ireland view their roles as journalists in the context of a negative peace in the country?

The subsequent questions are:

RQ2: How do journalists perceive the media's role in peacebuilding?

RQ3: What do journalists in Northern Ireland say about using constructive journalism techniques, like conflict-sensitive reporting or solutions journalism?

Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interviews with journalists working for media outlets in Belfast could provide additional insight into policies in newsrooms regarding conflict reporting. For example, are there any constraints put on journalists who would like to incorporate peace journalism into their coverage of marches, protests, and violent events? How familiar are journalists with terms like constructive journalism, solutions journalism, or peace journalism in general?

The terms solutions- and peace journalism will be used alongside constructive journalism because of a strong overlap in characteristics and practices between the three forms of journalism. A journalist may be familiar with one term, but they use parts of all three forms of

journalism. This will allow the interviewee some flexibility in their answers and avoid dead-end “yes” and “no” answers.

1.3 Brief content overview

This thesis is divided into several parts. The introductory chapter will be followed by a literature review of all concepts that were introduced in the previous paragraphs:

1. Constructive journalism; 2. Peace Journalism vs War Journalism; 3. Journalists’ roles.

After becoming familiar with the leading journalistic concepts in this thesis, the reader is presented with a brief introduction to the history of the conflict in Northern Ireland, also known as the Troubles. This chapter will also discuss the role of media during the conflict, up until the Peace Agreement of 1998. It will become clear to the reader what the media struggled with during the Troubles and what changes were made in *how* the conflict was reported. For example, in which journalists tried a new approach to conflict reporting, like incorporating elements of peace journalism.

This is followed by Chapter 3 about the methodological approach to the research. In this chapter, an introduction is made to qualitative research, the concept of semi-structured interviews, justification for media sources, and the method of coding the interview transcripts.

Chapter 4 contains the results of interviews with selected journalists and editors from Northern Ireland's selected news outlets. Finally, in Chapter 5 the conclusions are presented along with a discussion of the research, followed by suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter elaborates on concepts such as constructive journalism, peace journalism versus war journalism, news media in Northern Ireland during and after the Troubles, and journalists' roles. These concepts are explained through a literature study.

2.1 Constructive Journalism

The need for a new way to approach journalism and news fatigue has helped to establish a concrete and fixed term for a journalism technique that helps us contextualize the world: constructive journalism. Constructive journalism has gained traction in the past decade as media navigates through a difficult time in which trust in media is plummeting and revenues from news outlets are decreasing. The principles of constructive journalism are not exactly new; as Danish researcher Peter Bro argues, there are similarities with many more past movements in the history of journalism, such as action journalism and public journalism (2019). Yet, the relatively new term "constructive journalism" formed an inspiration behind the establishment of the Constructive Institute, located at Aarhus University in Denmark, and sparked various seminars and tutorials for journalists worldwide.

In 2016, Windesheim's School of Journalism in the Netherlands was "the first international School of Journalism in the world to integrate Constructive Journalism into its curriculum, research and international partnerships" (windesheiminternational.com). One of the leading academics in research on constructive journalism, the Danish journalist Catherine Gyldensted, had assumed the position of the world's first director of constructive journalism at the school.

In her thesis, "Innovating News Journalism through Positive Psychology", Gyldensted argues for using positive psychology in journalism by creating an "engaging and factually correct narrative" (2011, 41). She explains that the media makes use of a negative "explanatory" style. An explanatory style is defined as a psychological mechanism for explaining particular events in one's life. People with a negative explanatory style will explain negative events as being part of "internal, stable, and global causes", and are more likely to suffer from depression as a result of a negative event (Gyldensted 2011, 9). People with a positive explanatory style will see such negative events as temporary, with their cause being external and temporary. The news media use a negative explanatory style in their reporting (Gyldensted, 2011, 9). This does not mean, however, that a negative explanatory style should be banished completely. As Gyldensted argues, specific interviews or investigative journalists

will have to resort to the negative frame, though, as she argues, this should not be a "chronic rumination" (2011, 37). However, even interviews can be conducted in the spirit of constructive journalism. For example, by emphasizing questions regarding a politician's plan for the future, which the public is highly concerned about (Pleijter, 2015). Van Antwerpen and Fielding describe constructive journalism as a series of techniques: solutions, future orientation, inclusiveness and diversity, empowerment, context, and co-creation (2023). Studies show that people who read or watch solution-oriented stories have a better knowledge of the topic (Curry and Hammonds 2014; McIntyre 2015). It also leads to a more positive attitude towards the news topic and inspires people to be more engaged (Kleemans et al., 2019). However, research also shows that the way the audience interprets constructive journalism needs to be approached with nuance. The distinctions in how constructive and non-constructive articles are perceived are not as clear-cut as indicated by the findings in existing studies on solutions journalism (Meier, 2018). This same study also concludes that long-form reports, such as features, are more suitable for constructive journalism than regular short news stories (Meier, 2018).

Critics of constructive journalism are worried that a solution-oriented approach will neglect conflict and negative news altogether (Aitamurta and Varma, 2018). Other criticisms focus on the objection to the idea of journalists being involved in activism, which violates the professional value of objectivity (Hermans, 2018) and the lack of conceptual clarity (Bro, 2019).

In short, constructive journalism can be summarized as an alternative form of producing news stories, involving "applying positive psychology techniques to news work in an effort to create more productive, engaging stories while holding to journalism's core functions" (McIntyre, 2015). It goes beyond the issue or problem that is being reported on and goes beyond the traditional setup of a story by answering not only the "who, what, why, where" questions but also "what is being done about it?".

The term solutions journalism is often interchangeable with constructive journalism. It could be seen as the broader category of constructive journalism (Lough & McIntyre, 2018). The Solutions Journalism Network, a nonprofit organization founded in 2013 to promote the practice, explains that "solutions journalism investigates and explains, in a critical and clear-eyed way, how people try to solve widely shared problems." According to the Solutions Journalism Network, four key elements make up a solution's journalism story: "examining a response and how it works, showing evidence of effectiveness, discussing limitations, and

surfacing insights to spur innovation" (*Who We Are*, 2024). For this thesis, the term "constructive journalism" will remain the main focus term for analysis and interviews with journalists.

Despite the promising elements of constructive journalism in people's perceptions of the world, there is still relatively little research on constructive journalism concerning reconciliation and post-conflict societies. This extends to Northern Ireland as well, where constructive journalism has been discussed in seminars and events but where no research has been done on how journalists view their roles in the process of reconciliation or whether constructive journalism has been used at all. Research has been done, however, on the role of media in Northern Ireland's peace process, which shall be discussed in paragraph 2.3.

2.2 Peace Journalism vs War Journalism

It was Johan Galtung who first coined the term "peace journalism" and offered a new approach to covering conflicts by reporters (1998). Galtung argued that the media usually takes the "low road" when covering conflict; that is, the reporting resembles a "military command" where the focus lies on a winner-loser outcome or a zero-sum game, with reported losses reported in terms of material or numbers killed (1998, 1). According to Galtung, war journalism draws on terms and stylistics from the fields of sports and court journalism (1998,1). He proposes a "high road" approach, which would focus on conflict transformation. For that, he offers several questions the "peace correspondents" should pose in their reports, with the focus on providing context about the origin of the conflict and leaving room to discuss the work of peace workers, people's grievances, trauma, and hatred on both sides (Galtung, 1998, 2). Furthermore, he emphasizes that peace journalism is not peace advocacy, as the goal of peace journalism is "serious professional reporting", whereas, in his opinion, peace advocacy should be done by conflict resolution experts (Galtung, 1998, 3). He concludes that it is vital to monitor the effects of peace journalism, for example, by measuring what kind of public accepts this form of journalism (Galtung, 1998, 4).

The notion that media can influence conflict transformation, or at least reconciliation, is shared by other scholars. The media can serve as an instrument in conflict resolution as long as the information provided is "reliable, respects human rights and represents diverse views" and only this kind of media can reduce conflict (Howard, 2003, 22 as quoted in Wolterink, 2006, 19). According to Hieber, there exists a consensus on the idea that the media can promote conflict "resolution, management, and reconciliation" (1998, 2). According to her,

there are two categories of media intervention in conflict situations. The first is traditional, which focuses on reporting for a general audience and avoiding inflaming the existing crisis. The second is an active approach, where the reports cater to specific audiences with a planned outcome in mind (Hieber, 1998, 2). Confidence-building and tackling misconceptions form the core of such active media interventions. Samuel Peleg uses conflict theory to explain the idea of peace journalism and how it can be used as a tool or even a third party in the process of conflict resolution (2006). According to Peleg, peace journalism is suited for constructive communication because of its characteristics and capabilities (2006, 2). He presents three dimensions in which peace journalism can reduce tension and contribute to a well-informed public:

1. A situational dimension, where the journalist provides context about interests and grievances about each side, avoiding the zero-sum game; 2: An attitude dimension should reduce or stop the process of dehumanization by emphasizing "fears, concerns, insecurities, mistrust, miscommunication, and ignorance. The goal is to depolarize society.; The third dimension involves escalation theory, where it is presumed that conflict never exists in a vacuum and the contending sides are usually trying to convince other parties to support them. Peleg claims that the media can decide how to broadcast news so that a hawkish mood and support for harsh actions can be diverted (2006, 10-11).

The Austrian Study Centre of Peace and Journalism, written by Kempf et al., devoted an extensive handbook of constructive conflict coverage, focusing on peace journalism (2003). The authors of this handbook argue for the media as a third party in conflict situations, acting as "facilitators of de-escalation" (Kempf et al. 2003, 83). The main objective is to ensure that the media avoids fanning the flames of conflict. A third party can help diffuse tensions by acting as a neutral facilitator and creating a space where the parties involved avoid antagonistic behavior. A third party can avoid polarization by "consistently furthering the perspective of peaceful conflict resolution and defending the justified concerns of both parties, they can keep conflict from turning into a zero-sum game" (Kempf et al. 2003, 84). According to the handbook, two types of peace journalism have emerged: peace/conflict journalism vs war/violence journalism, as proposed by Galtung (1998); escalation vs. de-escalation journalism, as proposed by Kempf et al. (2003). Whereas Galtung's approach focuses on the mechanism of news selection, the second approach deals with the psychological and cognitive effects of framing the news (Kempf et al 2003, 85). There are, however, "ground rules" for peace journalism. As presented in the handbook, these are:

“Ground rules of peace journalism:

• None of the parties has absolute standards of truth.
• Conflicts are always open to being conceptualized, either as a competitive (WIN-LOSE) or in a cooperative (WIN-WIN) process.
• Conflicts can take a constructive course only if they are conceptualized in the framework of a WIN-WIN model.
• War culture is biased towards WIN-LOSE interpretations.
• Peace processes must be based on creativity: they must give a voice to the voiceless”.
• Peace journalism must provide an alternative motivational logic and rechannel outrage at the enemy into outrage at war itself.
• Peace journalism must adopt an unconditional commitment to encompassing standards of truth” (Kempf et al. 2003, 85).

The prevalence of societal beliefs is a significant roadblock to peace journalism. Kempf et al. argue that reporters (also foreign journalists) are not prone to changing the frame of their reporting in a constructive way (2003, 98). Another complication is the effects of societal beliefs in a conflicted society. According to Bar Tal (1996), societal beliefs are cognitive ways in which a society in an intractable conflict tries to cope with the stress of insecurity. Such beliefs can be: the justness of one’s grievances and goals; a need for a strong leadership figure; or the belief in military measures to ensure security. Kempf et al. argue that such beliefs continue to exist even after the active conflict has ended (2003, 100). Journalists must realize that such beliefs are not going to end suddenly, and that diminishing such beliefs is a long process. A sudden switch in conflict reports, one that society is not used to, is not going to be effective. Especially at the height of a conflict (Kempf et al. 2003, 107). In post-conflict societies, stress and societal beliefs, such as the need for military conditions to maintain security and the general belief in one's own rights, are factors that need to be taken into account by journalists (Kempf, 2003, 101).

There is a substantial body of research on the nexus between media and conflict development (Orgeret 2016; Laplante 2009; Kempf 2009). According to Yamshon and Yamshon (2006), the media can positively influence reconciliation efforts after a violent conflict, just as negative media coverage can refuel the conflict. ‘Peace Journalism’ has been coined by

Samuel Peleg as “an attempt to redefine and reconstruct the role of journalists who cover conflicts” (2006, 1). The Center for Global Peace Journalism at Park University defines peace journalism as the choices reporters and editors make that improve prospects for peace by framing stories that “create an atmosphere conducive to peace and supportive of peace initiatives and peacemakers, without compromising the basic principles of good journalism” (Peace Journalism, an Introduction, p.1). The Center for Global Peace Journalism lays out 10 core principles of peace journalism (PJ):

“1. **PJ is proactive, examining the causes of conflict and leading discussions about solutions**. 2. PJ looks to unite parties rather than divide them and eschews oversimplified “us vs. them” and “good guy vs. bad guy” reporting. 3. Peace reporters reject official propaganda, and instead seek facts from all sources. 4. PJ is balanced, covering issues/suffering/peace proposals from all sides of a conflict. 5. PJ gives voice to the voiceless, instead of just reporting for and about elites and those in power. 6. Peace journalists provide depth and context, rather than just superficial and sensational “blow-by-blow” accounts of violence and conflict. 7. Peace journalists consider the consequences of their reporting. 8. Peace journalists carefully choose and analyze the words they use, understanding that carelessly selected words are often inflammatory. 9. Peace journalists thoughtfully select the images they use, understanding that they can misrepresent an event, exacerbate an already dire situation, and re-victimize those who have suffered. 10. Peace Journalists offer counter-narratives that debunk media-created or perpetuated stereotypes, myths, and misperceptions.” (Peace Journalism, an Introduction, p.1)

Some might argue that the role of the journalist should be that of a neutral disseminator and that proponents of peace journalism underrate values like objectivity, neutrality, and detachment (Loyn, 2003; Peleg 2007). However, Kempf argues that “the traditional tools of journalism are not sufficient to guarantee good journalism” (2007, p.3). He brings forward the universal notion that the media have a responsibility to “stand up to peace on their own accord” (2007, 3). For instance, the 1979 UNESCO Media Declaration states that "the mass media have an important contribution to make to the strengthening of peace and international understanding and in countering racialism, apartheid and incitement to war" (UNESCO, 1979, 102). In his earlier work, Kempf argues that traditional war journalism revolves around the questions of “who is the aggressor?” and “how can he be stopped”, which reduces the “societal discourse about the conflict to a zero-sum game and becomes a motor of conflict escalation” (Kempf, 2003, 16). War journalism, according to Johan Galtung, “has a bias

towards violence by virtue of focusing on events taking place in a conflict and their physical details like the number of people dying or the nature of weaponry used" (1998). Studies have found that war journalism is the dominant form in most journalism around the world, most of the time (Lynch, 2006; Lee and Maslog, 2005; Lee et al, 2006). This does not mean that journalists favor war or despair in any way. However, war journalism paints a rather oversimplified black-and-white image of a conflict, where violent solutions are presented as the only viable solutions (Galtung & Lynch, 2010). According to Annabel McGoldrick (2009), war journalism triggers more serious negative psychological feelings than peace journalism. In her research, she examines the psychological effects of exposure to news reports through the lens of war journalism and peace journalism. During in-depth interviews, respondents mentioned strong feelings of sadness and hopelessness after viewing or reading a story through a war journalism lens. While consuming the same story through a peace journalism lens, people reported feeling refreshing and hopeful (McGoldrick, 2009, p.10).

2.3 News media in Northern Ireland in the context of peace and violence

The Northern Ireland conflict, often referred to as "The Troubles", began in the late 1960s and took the lives of 3,489 people over a span of approximately 30 years. Although often seen as a religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants, the conflict was mainly political between nationalists and unionists and ended as a result of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement peace treaty (...). The Good Friday Agreement was signed by the British and Irish governments and resulted in a power-sharing government known by its Parliament name, "Stormont". However, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Northern Ireland's society remains deeply divided. "There is no area of social life in Northern Ireland which is not sectarianism, or structured in some way by sectarianism" (McVeigh, Rolston, 2007, p.16). This can definitely also be said of the media landscape in Northern Ireland.

There are several privately-owned daily newspapers, the three biggest being the Belfast Telegraph, the Irish News (catering to the Nationalist and Catholic public), and the News Letter (aimed mostly at Unionists and Protestants). Of the three newspapers, only the Belfast Telegraph reflects cross-community interests (Rice and Taylor, 2023, p. 146). There are also various hyperlocal newspapers/publications as well as online platforms, some of which are dedicated to political commentary like *Slugger O'Toole* or peace journalism (*Shared Future News*). The main broadcast outlets in Northern Ireland are BBC Northern Ireland (a division of the publicly-funded BBC) and Ulster Television (part of the commercial Independent Television), which pride themselves on their neutral and impartial stance and their role in

serving the public as a whole (Rice and Taylor, 2020, p. 10). There is a large body of academic work researching political communication, the role of public media, and government efforts to control the narratives (Valenti 2011; Rolston 2012; Rolston and Miller, 1996). This information control took on four different forms, such as the British broadcasting ban on airing interviews with 'terrorists'; public relations; intimidation; and self-censorship (Armoudian, 2011. p. 3). For example, the mainstream British media resorted to explaining the conflict to British audiences in oversimplified terms, resorting to ethnocentrism, according to Bill Rolston (2007, p. 347). Rolston argues this happened largely because an explanation of the conflict to the British public would require "painstakingly recounting the history of the relationship between the two islands, and would have led to complex and perhaps divisive explanations of colonialism, imperialism, sectarianism and state repression." (2007, p. 347). As this was too big of a task for the BBC, media coverage lacked explanation, and the prevailing stance on the conflict was that of the British government, which reduced the Troubles to 'mindless violence' and 'terrorism'.

In "Journalism of Opposition", Julia Paul argues that much academic research up to the Good Friday Agreement has conflated local, national, and international media on top of conflating broadcast media and newspapers (2018, p. 4). In her research, focusing on the work of local journalists in Northern Ireland between 2007 and 2012, she argues how local programs and journalists adopted a "democratic role" as they scrutinized the process of devolution and the lack of intervention by Westminster and Dublin. In her review of the program *Hearts and Minds*, which ran from 1998 to 2012, Paul notes how the program started a shift in traditional reporting in Northern Ireland. It was the first time that politicians from both sides were represented in debates, and the voices of both nationalists and unionists were represented (2018, p. 15).

The news media's role in supporting the peace agreement has been somewhat researched in academia (Armoudian 2011; Wolfsfeld 2004; Hieber 2008; Baker, 2005, Wolfsfeld 2001). During the peace process, media institutions largely incorporated a pro-peace framing, which resulted in combined editorials, stories, television programs, and even advertising campaigns (Armoudian, 2011). Gadi Wolfsfeld's research focused primarily on editorials in Northern Irish daily newspapers and compared them with editorials in the Middle East. Wolfsfeld concluded that newspapers in Northern Ireland generally supported the peace process, whereas the news media in the Middle East contributed to the failure of the peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians (in Armoudian, 2016, p.139). Interestingly, Wolfsfeld also

argues that journalists had to be cautious about supporting the peace process because this would be seen as biased reporting or even disloyalty: “the more polarized a society, the more likely the journalists are to come under attack” (2001, p. 31). Fawcett describes the shortcomings of an attempt at peace journalism by two Belfast newspapers, the nationalist *The Irish News* and unionist *The Newsletter* (2002), during one of the Orange Pride parades in the late 1990s. The joint editorial was supposed to ease tensions by publishing joint editorials during the annual marches of Republicans and Loyalists. According to Fawcett, both papers were stuck in their discursive frames: law and order for the Protestant paper and injustice for the Catholic paper. The need to report a story in a way that would come across as sensible, recognizable, and acceptable for the divided readers across the political divide made it difficult for journalists to offer deep analytical insight in their reporting (Fawcett, 2002, 219). Fawcett argues that the joint editorials that called for compromise were less effective because they did not fit the general narratives of both papers. Only in one case, after the murders of three Catholic boys, did both sides seem united in their condemnation of violence, and the joint editorial therefore fitted into the new narrative (Fawcett, 2002, p. 220). Going back to Wolfsfeld, he argues that once both the public and politics stopped looking at the peace process as a contentious and controversial term, the easier it became for the media to report on the peace process and even take a clear stand on the topic. This was also reflected in the joint editorials by The Unionist and The Irish News, mentioned by Fawcett, where the “culmination of the cooperation” eventually led to both newspapers asking their readers to vote ‘yes’ on the referendum for the Good Friday Agreement (2001, p. 33).

At the same time, the media are also accused of promoting division in Northern Ireland. For example, community leaders from various organizations in Northern Ireland would like to see the media as contributing to reconciliation efforts, but most hold negative views regarding the broadcast and press media in that aspect, as discovered by Rice and Taylor (2020, p.146). Overall, their research shows that community representatives “perceive the media in Northern Ireland to focus on conflict and therefore to make societal and political divides salient, rather than to engage in the kind of conflict-sensitive journalism that is advocated by ‘constructive journalism’ scholars” (Rice and Taylor, 2022). Moreover, they conclude that “there is a desire for the media to fulfill a more active and positive role in explaining post-conflict sensitivities and providing information during difficult times that helps bridge past differences” (2022, p. 18).

Hieber mentions that Northern Ireland lacks such active intervention from the media, caused by a "rigid interpretation of the role of journalism by reporters working in the province…The pushing of the peace process itself can be interpreted as being sectarian or partial" (1998, p.5). However, she mentions that the media in Northern Ireland were able to provide a platform for exploring "psycho-social issues" and for the outpouring of grief after a bomb attack in Omagh in August of 1998. She suggests, therefore, that the media might be the most effective after the active conflict has ended by helping the collective healing process (Hieber, 1998, 6).

Kirsten Sparre describes how the media became such a third party (perhaps unknowingly), when it facilitated talks between the Irish and British governments and Sinn Fein, the leader of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in 1994 (2001). Sparre concludes that by using "megaphone diplomacy", both sides kept the peace talks alive, not only for the opposing parties but also for the public. The process of talking to each other through the media ensured transparency, which allowed all parties involved to save face when agreeing to deals that would not have been accepted by their constituents had the agreements been a product of private meetings and a back-door policy (Sparre, 2001, 102-103). This media diplomacy was also described by Dov Shihar. However, he mentions that direct peace coverage does not enjoy a great deal of popularity, and its discourse is rarely used by the media (Shihar, 2000, p. 90).

2.4 Journalists' roles

The way media content is produced is closely linked to the way journalists perceive their role (Bartholomé et al., 2015). To examine the possible constructive journalistic practice in post-conflict societies, it is important to gain insight into how journalists perceive their role in society. In fact, Prager and Hameleers argue that journalists who try to incorporate practices of peace journalism in Colombia often try to self-reflect on their role in contributing to peaceful conflict transformation (2018, 12). This should include the pitfalls that come with reporting in a polarized and sectarian environment.

Recent studies have tried to shed light on this field of research. Biazoto's work on conflict-sensitive reporting in Brazil has explored the possibility of journalists actively contributing to alleviate violent conflicts while still upholding professional standards of ethical journalism (Biazoto, 2011). Harrison and Pukkalus argue that news journalism has an essential role to play in the rebuilding of peaceful cooperation in post-civil war societies (2023). They propose a "set of universal editorial guidelines supporting this civil

norm-building mission; guidelines that need to be adapted to local circumstances and culturally specific contexts by local journalists themselves" (2023, p.123). As mentioned in the introduction, Karen McIntyre and Meghan Sobel have investigated the role perceptions of journalists in Rwanda and the use of constructive journalism to promote peace (2018). The conclusion of this pioneering research into constructive journalism in conflict situations is that journalists in Rwanda not only used elements of constructive and solutions journalism to enhance peaceful relations in the country, but they also felt the obligation to contribute to national reconciliation. This interventionist aspect of journalism, such as promoting a particular idea, outcome, or value, is not a characteristic of Western journalists compared to journalism in developing societies and transitional democracies (Hanitzch et al.2011; Wong, 2004).

Research on the practice of transitional journalism in the Western Balkans shows how journalists consider their own roles broader than in traditional Western journalism (Anderson et. al, 2017). Although journalists in Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, and Croatia put a high value on traditional Western journalistic values such as that of a "detached observer" and reporting "things as they are", values like "influencing public opinion" and "advocating for social change" scored high amongst interviewed journalists (Anderson et. al, 2017, 622).

In their research on how political journalists in Northern Ireland perceive their role, Rice and Somerville note that their perspectives revolved mostly around normative ideals, such as that of a "disseminator", "investigator" and "watchdog" (2017, p. 98). Although impartiality was also often mentioned by journalists, Rice and Somerville argue that newspaper journalists in Northern Ireland seem to struggle with the concept as political ideology and identity politics often seep through into their writing (2017, p.99). Their findings suggest that:

"It is much easier for broadcast journalists than for newspaper journalists to prioritize the norm of impartiality; indeed, many of them work for media organizations (e.g., BBC, ITV) whose mission statements explicitly include and reinforce this concept. For most newspaper journalists, the sociopolitical environment comprising the two separate (Unionist and Nationalist) "spheres of legitimacy" (Sheafer and Wolfsfeld, 2009) has an impact on their journalistic role and their professional behavior, meaning they adapt their professional ideology to the particular political and professional context in which they operate" (Rice and Somerville, 2017, p. 100).

Armoudian (2018) explored how journalists struggled to report on news during the Northern Ireland conflict and peace process. This research shows that while "traditional media's norms, structures, and ideologies shaped newsgathering and story framing", their work was often complicated by personal traumas, peer pressure, and opposing narratives (2018, p.4). In other words, despite official declarations on beliefs and norms, no journalist exists in a political or cultural vacuum. In fact, Tandoc et al. argue that the perceived notion that journalists produce stories based on their perceived roles should be questioned. In their research on conflict-sensitive journalism in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia, and South Africa, Lohner et al. note that although watchdog and investigative roles are highlighted by journalists "when reporting on 'predominantly political' conflicts such as election campaigns and conflicts over the distribution of power, acting as agents for social change and agents for peace seem to dominate when reporting on conflicts over citizenship and minority rights" (2019).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an insight into the research and analysis methods, as well as an overview of the selected media outlets and journalists.

3.1 The Semi-Structured Interview

To gain insight into the role perception of journalists working in a post-conflict city, the semi-structured interview is the preferred method. Via interviews with journalists, their professional role perceptions can be extracted from the conversation and their opinions (Cassidy, 2005). Furthermore, journalists serve as excellent qualitative interviewees due to their professional experience in articulating their experiences clearly, with a feeling for expressing that which is most relevant (Besley and Roberts, 2010, 70, in McIntyre 2018).

According to Robyn Longhurst, semi-conversational interviews allow for the interviewer to explore issues that might be of importance to research in the form of a casual conversation (2010, 143). Interviews are the most commonly used methods of qualitative research in the social sciences (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013, 603), with semi-structured interviews being the most preferred interview type in qualitative research (Kitchin and Tate, 2000). Interviews can be placed along a continuum: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. In structured interviews, questions are fixed and predetermined, and they always follow the same pattern for each interviewee. Unstructured interviews are directed by the interviewee without a predetermined set of questions.

The semi-structured interview lies in the middle, as the tone is mostly conversational and the interviewed subject has a certain flexibility regarding his or her answers. Yet, the researcher has a topic list at hand to ensure a certain level of consistency in the case of multiple interviews (Longhurst, 2010, 145). The interview method, and especially the personal, face-to-face interview, has been discussed in numerous academic articles (Longhurst 2010; 2013; Bryman, 2008; Diefenbach 2009; Dunn, 2010). Since a face-to-face meeting is not always an option because of financial, geographical, or time constraints, some scholars resort to an online interview. Most research on this type of interview has been done through email interviews (Burns, 2010; Meho, 2006; Leech, 2002). However, there has also been a growing

body of research devoted to other internet technologies, like Skype (Deaking and Wakefield, 2013; Hanna 2012; Janghorban et al. 2014; Cater, 2011). Deaking and Wakefield write that Skype interviews have some drawbacks, for example, the loss of the human touch element (shaking hands) or simply people not showing up for a Skype meeting, or "*absentees"* (612). However, the advantages of being able to conduct an interview in real-time while being able to record both audio and video *and* the low cost of using Skype (it is available as free software), may overcome these drawbacks (Hanna, 2012, 241).

For the purpose of this thesis, keeping in mind these practical constraints, the preferred method of interviewing are semi-structured interviews with journalists situated in Belfast, conducted over Zoom. As this thesis heavily draws from McIntyre's and Sobel's research in Rwanda, the research methodology in this thesis follows a similar path to their approach (2018). As previously mentioned, a semi-structured interview style is used to interview a number of journalists that are within the scope of this study and until information saturation is achieved. Contrary to Lough's and McIntyre's research, in which only journalists who had been trained in solution journalism were approached, this thesis includes information from a more representative group of randomly chosen journalists. The goal is to gain a broad understanding of journalists' opinions on their roles and techniques in a post-conflict society.

A sample of journalists was found by scanning the biggest news media providers: Northern Ireland's three biggest newspapers (Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, and Belfast News Letter), an online news website, and the BBC division situated in Belfast. The social media pages and information provided by the media 'contact' section were used to approach the journalists. To maintain consistency with the participants' occupations, the journalists were chosen based on the following criteria: actively working as journalists, either employed on a contract or freelance basis, with no distinction between full-time and part-time journalists.
Non-probability sampling was used as it matches the qualitative character of this thesis, as described by Dworkin (2012). The sample of participants does not need to be representative or random, yet there is a clear logic for the inclusion of certain individuals. This is based on a mix of purposive sampling and quota sampling, as also mentioned by Dworkin (2012). The predetermined characteristics of interviewed individuals include their profession, which fits the quota sampling method, and some are chosen because of their in-depth knowledge of journalism. After initial interviews, a 'snowball' sample was used, with journalists pointing out other colleagues who would perhaps be willing to participate in the research. To avoid question order bias, where journalists less open-minded about various forms of journalism

might shut down the conversation about constructive journalism, initial questions are relatively simple. They are focused on personal opinions regarding the journalistic profession, with a build-up towards constructive journalism and other forms of journalism towards the end. See Table 1 for an extensive list of all interviewed journalists.

An important criterion for identifying journalists for the study was that the subject of their reporting was also taken into account. The reports and news stories of these journalists must have a background in social/political issues, as these are the themes that could potentially be approached from a constructive journalism point of view.

Participants were assured that all answers would be anonymous, and that the interview could be terminated at any point. Each participant was also asked to give consent to the interview being audio recorded. Furthermore, at the end of the interview, participants were asked whether they could be approached for a follow-up interview in case important questions arose during other interviews. In this case, these specific questions would have to be posed to all participants.

3.2 Selecting the media content database

The choice of media outlets and journalists was largely based on the goal of achieving a reasonable variety in the sample of interviewed journalists. Preferably, the journalists would be chosen from media outlets that are big enough to allow for the so-called snowball effect: one interviewee pointing out another potential candidate for the interviews. Additionally, besides the common varieties in news media, such as independent, commercial, and public media, there is one more dimension to consider, which is a reflection of the splintered Northern Irish society: the various nationalist (Catholic) or unionist (Protestant) newspapers. This factor was also taken into consideration by other scholars, for example Armoudian, who noted that the daily newspaper's audiences and leadership are "demarcated along lines of identity and ideology" (p. 141, 2016). This means that readers who identify as ideologically nationalist also tend to read newspapers with a Catholic background, whereas those who identify as unionists mostly read newspapers with a Protestant editorial line. Interestingly, the only daily newspaper in Northern Ireland that positions itself neutrally (to both communities) is the Belfast Telegraph.

With this in mind, the candidates for interviews in this thesis were sought from established unionist, nationalist, independent, commercial, and public daily newspapers, an online news outlet with a focus on constructive journalism, and the BBC division in Northern Ireland. The

research will mainly concentrate on journalists from Belfast. Belfast, Northern Ireland's capital city, has several newspapers and the BBC Northern Ireland division, making it the main public broadcaster in Northern Ireland. The city bears signs of sectarianism, both in mental and material form. In Belfast's newsrooms, people who are not immune to the divisions present in the local society produce news. The combination of a functioning media environment with access to the internet, TV, radio, and press, as well as a seemingly polarized post-war society, makes Northern Ireland's news landscape a suitable and interesting case to investigate.

Factual overview of the media outlets

- Belfast Telegraph, a daily newspaper published in Belfast. This traditionally Protestant-leaning newspaper appeals to both Protestant and Catholic communities (McLaughlin & Baker, 2010). The paper had a circulation of 31,340 in 2019.
- The Irish News targets the Catholic/republic community of Northern Ireland, with a reporter circulation of 32, 315 in 2018. It is the country's "largest selling morning newspaper (Irish News).
- Shared Future News is an online publication "dedicated to providing news, information, and personal stories on the topics of peacebuilding, reconciliation, and diversity."
- BBC Northern Ireland is based in Belfast and it is the main public broadcaster in Northern Ireland. It provides a broad range of programs and services across radio, television, and online (BBC). It currently employs around 650 staff.

Table 1

Overview of interviewed journalists

Participant	Job title	Employer
Journalist 1	Political correspondent	Irish News
Journalist 2	Freelance journalist	Contributed to: The Belfast Telegraph, The Times, Irish Times, BBC, Ulster Television
Journalist 3	Head of News and Current Affairs	BBC Northern Ireland
Journalist 4	Former political editor, currently freelance journalist	BBC Northern Ireland, Irish News
Journalist 5	Crime and investigative journalist	Formerly Epoch Times, currently Noteworthy.ie
Journalist 6	Editor, self-employed	Leads Shared Future News
Journalist 7	Head of undergraduate journalism. Columnist.	Ulster University, Irish News

3.3 Method of analysis

To be able to extract useful data from the interviews, all audio recordings were transcribed verbatim using the Amberscript software. The audio files were first automatically transcribed by the software, after which a second round of transcription was done by hand.

The transcripts were then subjected to several rounds of coding to be able to derive useful data. Thematic analysis was a widely used method in qualitative analysis, during which the researcher actively "detects identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers" (Taylor and Ussher, 2001). Thematic analysis "provides an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data" (Braun and

Clarke, 2006). This method is valuable as it provides insight into the participants' beliefs, experiences, and attitudes (Daly and Reed, 2022).

For the coding phase, a software program called "Delve" was used to analyze the data. The transcribed text was searched for particular themes from which specific codes could be derived. A deductive approach was used, as the initial round of coding was based on research questions and the existing research framework. In the last round of coding, the inducting method was used to check for any narratives or ideas that were not preconceived but emerged from the raw data itself.

To analyze the transcripts, descriptive and in vivo coding methods were used. Several rounds of coding were performed until data saturation was achieved.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings are presented based on the themes and terminologies that emerged from personal interviews with journalists, which in turn help to answer the three research questions:

***Q1**: How do journalists and editors in Belfast view their roles as journalists in the context of a negative peace in Northern Ireland?*

***Q2:** How do journalists perceive the media's role in peacebuilding?*

***Q3**: Do journalists in Belfast report making use of constructive journalism techniques, like conflict-sensitive reporting, peace journalism, or solutions journalism?*

4.1 Introduction

Between January 2023 and May 2023, seven journalists were interviewed via Zoom, with the shortest interview lasting 30 minutes and the longest 90 minutes. The qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in 87 pages of text, from which 291 snippets (quotes) were distilled, five relevant main themes were characterized, and 59 codes and subcodes could be derived.The themes that emerged were:

1. View on profession in a post-conflict environment and reconciliation
2. Roles of media in a post-conflict environment
3. Media focus
4. Journalism techniques
5. Obstacles in journalism: business models and violence

The first rounds of analysis uncovered the following key results within the above-mentioned themes: (1) Most journalists describe their roles as defined by traditional roles; observant, objective and informing the public; (2) Most journalists agree the media can play a role in peacebuilding, but generally stories about peacebuilding are used sparingly due to time and financial constraints; (3) Several journalists mentioned serious dangers related to reporting on sectarian violence, discouraging them from writing in-depth stories about (political) violence; (4) Most journalists had limited knowledge of the term “constructive journalism” but mentioned terms like peace journalism and solutions journalism and shared their opinions on these forms of journalism; (5) Journalists affiliated with public service journalism held

universal journalistic ideas like “objectivity” more highly than journalists working for privately owned newspapers; (6) The topic of activism, whether asked directly or as a topic that emerged organically from the conversation was mostly seen in a negative light (7). The interviews also shed light on the decision-making process in the newsroom and what makes a ‘good’ story. A mix of financial concerns and biases about the public emerged as deciding factors in this process.

Relevant quotes from the interviews in the following paragraph will help to illustrate these findings.

4.2 Q1: How do journalists and editors in Belfast view their roles as journalists in the context of a negative peace in Northern Ireland?

Theme: Professional Perspective in a Post-Conflict Environment

All interviewed journalists held similar views of their roles to the universal roles of a journalist, which appear in international studies (2010, Hanitzsch et al.). Journalists mentioned concepts like ‘keeping people informed’, ‘shining a light in dark places’, and ‘holding power to account’. Another common topic that respondents identified as a shared universal value is the commitment to factual reporting and objectivity. When asked whether a journalist from Northern Ireland could view their profession differently than a journalist from a country without conflict or a post-conflict situation, the most common answer would be that the roles and responsibilities are quite the same, except that journalists in Northern Ireland deal with deep political violence:

“A journalist in the Netherlands should be behaving the same way as a journalist in Northern Ireland and vice versa, you know, so if there's a, I don't know, drug issue, a homeless issue, or whatever, it's worth investigating in the same way. The challenge—it's just a greater challenge if you're dealing with deep political violence. However, you don't have to report the actual violence. There are things behind it, like sectarianism and social and economic inequalities. With the shortcomings of public policy and the inadequacies of community relations policy, there is plenty to explore. And I wouldn't expect a journalist to behave any differently, you know?” (journalist no. 6).

Journalists have highlighted certain responsibilities when it comes to reporting in Northern Ireland specifically. Whether it is paying attention to the emotions of those they interview or simply being aware that what they say or write might be reflected in a real-life situation:

"And whether post-conflict or not, it does bring it into sharper focus when you are in a post-conflict conflict or post-conflict situation, because you know there are consequences that you may see because of what you say on air. You know, there could be, people could react that in an adverse way… during the Troubles that weighed heavily on a lot of journalists" (journalist 4).

"Sometimes you don't know what's going to happen before you knock on a door, as to what somebody's going to say: "Get out." I don't want to talk about this. Stop intruding on my private grief", or whether somebody actually wants to share with the world what's happened to them" (journalist 4).

A few journalists highlighted the need for sensitivity, for example, when reporting on crimes that happened in the past: *"For example, some people I know on social media, one thing that they very frequently include is photographs: old photographs of newspapers, newspaper reports with bodies, photographs of bodies lying beside the border…. Really, really horrific pictures. "And I don't think that has its place"* (journalist 5). Such sensitivity regarding the families of victims is also seen in reporting cultures in other societies with a violent past, such as Kenya (Lohner et al, 2019, p. 38).

One journalist mentioned the responsibilities of reporting in Northern Ireland specifically, where being careful about language is needed to prevent 'hyping up tensions' or actual bloodshed: *"Obviously you have certain responsibilities. So if, you know, you get a warning from an illegal organization that a bomb is planted somewhere, you are going to pass that on to the police and try to avoid future bloodshed. So to that extent, you have a responsibility there"* (journalist 4).

Journalists were also asked to describe their style of engagement in their work and whether their involvement is more observant (related to the traditional Western idea of journalism) or active (a role more commonly accepted by non-Western journalists). An explanation was given about the terms. The "active" journalist was described as interventionist, involved,

socially committed, and advocating for a particular outcome or social change. There is an active focus on ideas for conflict resolution, representing all sides rather than just politicians and/or the police. The observer type was described as dedicated to objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality, disseminating news as it is. A few respondents staunchly swayed towards the observant type, citing objectivity and 'telling the story as it is' as main reasons: "*But my own brand of journalism, I always prided myself on being neutral, being completely neutral, being just straight*" (journalist 7). One journalist working for a nationalist newspaper identified with the active type, explaining that "politics informs my journalism" and "objectivity is a myth" (journalist 1). Another journalist chose an in-between option, with a committed style of journalism combined with objectivity as a desired outcome:

"*I think there's a type of committed journalism that fits into that perfectly well while still maintaining a balance. Because the important thing, of course, is not that you say, Well, there was this loyalist atrocity and there was this IRA atrocity. And then, over and above it all, there was the army, the police, and so on. You don't have to mention all those in the same piece, but you do have to be completely objective and balanced in your style and your views, not just to up the ante"* (journalist 5).

However, an element of constructive journalism—representing all sides, not just politicians/police—seemed to be important for all interviewed journalists. There is a strong feeling that a journalist needs to tell the story of all those involved, which, for example, includes the victims or survivors of a crime or past crimes related to the Troubles.

4.3 Q2: How do journalists view the role of the media in peacebuilding?

Theme: The role of media in peacebuilding in Northern Ireland

When asked about how journalists view the possibility of the news impacting society, journalists agreed with the notion that "the duty of each journalist is to keep in mind the possible impact of news on society". In fact, one journalist noted, "*I'm still mystified at how journalists don't think that the words that they use don't influence how it's consumed, because politicians do this to a fine art form"* (journalist 6).

Journalist 7 was aware of how different media frames can positively influence society, for example, by putting "*pressure on the government or on political parties to act or can sway the*

public in the way they vote." The same journalists also noted that the media could at the same time negatively influence society, especially in Northern Ireland: *"There's always something bubbling under the surface in Northern Ireland and it doesn't take that much to kind of make it explode. And sometimes our media can help with that."*

When commenting on the on media's role in peacebuilding processes, a few journalists acknowledged that the media does play an important role:

"Obviously the media and the way it presents debates will influence public opinion about important matters in politics, and that includes peace-building processes of the kind that we had here in Northern Ireland"(journalist 4).

Journalist 6 reflected on the Northern Irish media's involvement in the run-up to the Good Friday Agreements and the cooperation between *The Irish News* and *The Newsletter,* noting that, looking back, not all journalists were still happy with their pro-peace stance at the time:

"There was a colleague of his who also admitted that he supported the Good Friday Agreement and likewise called on people to support it, but—probably a buyer's remorse - he now has a slight tinge of regret in that because he doesn't see. The agreement, as you know, hasn't delivered the kind of peace, reconciliation, and dealing with the past that he had hoped for." (journalist 6)

"Media can obviously influence any peace process. Professional journalists will deny that they should or that, you know, that they have that kind of power. ... I mean having three daily newspapers overtly endorse the agreement and calling on their readers to endorse it. I mean, it doesn't get much more plainly advocated than that. But it does. I'm just saying that it did make some journalists uncomfortable in hindsight. So that's worth noting." (journalist 6)

Despite accepting the idea that media can influence society and the peace-building process, except for opinion pieces, not much room is being given to the idea of advocating for a certain cause. The focus should be on reporting the facts, and journalists seemed averse to the idea of promoting a solution or political outcome. While recounting how the media reported on the Peace Process, one journalist who worked for the BBC noted:

"It is not our job to promote anything. Our job was to tell the facts. Our job was to do public service broadcasting and journalism, which involved every twist and turn of the peace process. We looked at it; we examined what the politicians were saying. We looked at what

was in front of us. We put out there to the public the information that was coming forward, i.e., the agreement, what had been agreed, what hadn't been agreed, the counterarguments about the controversial parts of it, like prisoner releases, you know, which were pretty controversial at the time, and all that, you know. But our job is—that's journalism. We look into that. We put the information out there; we analyzed it, but we weren't cheerleaders for it, and nor should we ever be." (journalist 3).

Another journalist said to take pride *in being neutral, being completely neutral, being just straight. This is what's happening. This is what this side has said. This is what this side has said. Here's all the information. Here's an expert source that they've brought in their expertise. And here's another quote. Put it all together and put it out there"* (journalist 7). The same journalist thinks that journalists need to *"leave all your beliefs and whatever it is that you're fighting for in real life as a citizen, you have to almost give them all up and you have to go and tell the story and not take a side or take one side or the other."* (journalist 7). The term 'activism' was not seen in a favorable light as well, with one journalist noting that: *"If that person was to be an activist every single day just spouting their opinion or taking every news story and putting their own spin on it, that's becoming a polemic. ... I think any journalist who calls him or herself a journalist wouldn't, at least shouldn't, call themselves an activist."* (journalist 6).

When asked whether journalists could be proponents of a specific situation or approach by the police or government, the respondents seemed to shy away from the concept of actively favoring an idea in their reporting. For example, when asked about peacebuilding, the interviewees seemed reluctant about the idea of journalists actively supporting peacebuilding efforts:

"I don't think that journalists have any part to play in peacebuilding whatsoever. They shouldn't do it anyway. But because it's not our job, we're witnesses, we're neutral bystanders…. make of it what you will, because it's not my job to, and never thought that it was my job to, sway anybody in any different direction or in my news journalism, sway anybody in any direction."" (journalist 7).

"It is not our job to promote anything. Our job was to tell the facts. Our job was to do public service broadcasting and journalism, which was every twist and turn of that peace process. We looked at it and examined what the politicians were saying. We looked at what was in front of us. We put out there to the public the information that was coming forward, i.e., the

agreement, what had been agreed, what hadn't been agreed, the counterarguments about the controversial parts of it, like prisoner releases, you know, which were pretty controversial at the time, and all that, you know. But our job is—that's journalism. We look into that. We put the information out there; we analyzed it, but we weren't cheerleaders for it, nor should we ever be." (journalist 3)

Journalist 6 made the observation that reporting on peacebuilding stories does not fall in the same category as actively advocating for peace:

"Shared Future News is a collection of peacebuilding stories. And I would argue against advocating for peace. Um, it's not like that. It's more like, "No, we're just reporting on peacebuilding." There is peacebuilding going on, you know, and we're just trying to report on it, that's all."

Theme: Media focus

When asked about their view on existing media narratives in Northern Ireland and the current political situation, respondents paint a picture of a highly complex and fragile situation, with media favoring violence and "whatever generates clicks". On the political situation, one journalist characterized the current situation as "Balkanized":

"I don't think we can talk about post-conflict, you know, because we still have a conflict. It's a political conflict now but it's still a conflict. Um, it just doesn't manifest itself with, you know, killings and bombings every day. You know, the conflict is still there. The tension is still there. We're you know, we're almost in many ways Balkanized"(journalist 1).

There appears to be a lot of media attention given to the historical violence, with cases being brought to court over what happened during the Troubles:

"Like I said, a lot of things are only coming to light now that wouldn't have come to light during the Troubles. So there's quite a lot of court cases going on, like massacres that happened years ago. And you know, solicitors are representing families of loved ones who were killed. Um, and atrocities either, you know, carried out by a paramilitary group or by the British authorities, the British army" (journalist 2).

Journalists also highlight that social issues do not get enough media coverage (journalist 5) and stories that focus on 'community stories' are underrepresented: *"There are so many stories here. There are so many different nationalities living here. And I don't think their issues get covered to a proper extent. All kinds of social issues as well."*

So what stories do qualify as newsworthy? Stories that are negative tend to get better coverage. Respondents also noted that what qualifies as 'news' relies heavily on the unexpectedness of the story, meaning if they are unusual, significant, or contentious:

"Let's be honest, a lot of news is doom and gloom. But, you know, the journalists are always on the lookout for a nice story, a good news story, and an uplifting story—a story that kind of lifts your spirits a little bit. You know, something different. That's what news is. It tells people's stories. It's things that are different, telling people things you don't know. (journalist 3)

This can include peace-building stories as well, as mentioned earlier in the historical overview of news media coverage in Northern Ireland on page 16. As soon as the notion of "peace" became a realistic ending to the conflict, the media adopted the narratives into more positive stories about peace:

"Quite often with journalism, you're looking for something that changes the situation. So you don't want to tell your audience everything is the same as it was yesterday, don't you? ... And actually, when you started reporting ceasefires and peacebuilding, that was massive news, not just in Northern Ireland but further afield. So that was a kind of peacebuilding thing that was massive because people were saying, Well, could this change, you know, in the same way that, you know, when the Cold War ended, that was massive? It was a positive move, but it was also a change in the status quo" (journalist 4).

This did not apply to the BBC, which catered to a much broader audience: "*Well, we would have had a difficulty if we decided the BBC is going to campaign for the Good Friday Agreement, because obviously then we would have had 30% of our audience who pay their taxes or in our case, their license fees towards public service journalism, and we wouldn't necessarily have been serving them"* (journalist 4).

However, the tide seems to have turned again, with stories on peace not being particularly popular or ‘sellable’ according to the journalists:

“But I think one thing that nobody has ever thought is particularly sexy, if you excuse the term in terms of news values, is looking at communities which are getting together, communities who are working to promote peace or promote social issues” (journalist 5).

“And very often the resources involved in extracting a story from that sort of, you know, peace-building ideas, you know, it sounds very feature- y, very soft … if you were to pull statistics from somewhere that suggest, you know, that peacebuilding is being successful. Right. Whereas if you do statistics that show, you know, that unionism is in decline, you know, by 2050 we'll have a united Ireland. Okay. Uh, that sort of thing. You know, that's the story. If some Tory figure, for example, because, as you know, you don't expect the Tories to predict a united Ireland,. If they predict a united Ireland, then you get a story about that flying. Okay. In Irish, that's an Irish news story. Okay. But if somebody's saying, well, I think we'll have peace by 2050. It just doesn't have the same resonance. And, as I said, trying to draw the story out of, you know, peacebuilding work. Demands resources. And just when it's on the page, it just doesn't have the same impact.” (journalist 1).

Another journalist explained that sectarianism still influences the editorial choices in newsrooms. Especially in local newspapers, where readership is still largely divided between nationalist and unionist supporters, popular stories focus on the negative narratives about “the other ". Such politicized stories, for example, such as the banning of the Irish language being spoken in a unionist school, tend to be popular:

“And that's the sort of story that goes great for us because it's this illustration of, you know, unionism as backward men, as, you know, just bigots that won't, you know, someone speaking Irish or indigenous language, you know, it just shows how politicized it has been” (journalist 1).

He adds: *We're again looking to relaunch ourselves digitally and it'll be about getting clicks. And those clicks derive from what is basically sectarianism.* (journalist 1)

4.3 Q3: What do journalists in Northern Ireland say about using constructive journalism techniques, like conflict-sensitive reporting or solutions journalism?

Theme: Journalism techniques

When probed on their general knowledge of constructive journalism and whether it could be applied in Northern Ireland, it appeared that those journalists who already had theoretical and academic knowledge of this form of journalism were optimistic and even saw a need for this kind of journalism. One journalist acknowledged that young people are no longer following the news, and constructive journalism could help change this:

"But I think the danger is that traditional journalists, if nothing changes, will miss out on understanding why people under 40 aren't buying the story. They're just not buying it. And on the other hand, if you can train up a new cadre of journalists who appreciate and are willing to explore and implement constructive journalism whenever and wherever they can, you know, to anyone willing to literally buy it" (journalist 6).

Whether it could be applied in practice depends much on the "business models". In fact, one journalist claims it could not be applied to Northern Ireland in the near future because "*the readerships are pretty well established"* (journalist 6). Resources and funding are generally named as obstacles to implementing constructive journalism in newsrooms across Northern Ireland:

"I think that there is scope for that kind of, of journalism and um, uh, you know, that's a perfectly valid way to go about things and maybe move towards consensus rather than simply always rehearsing an argument, you know, but that that kind of approach may be, it also probably requires time, because it's, if you like, a more sophisticated and format, which requires a little bit more resources" (journalist 4).

"You know, who's going to fund this, this kind of deeper journalism? You'll get some cynical editors sort of thinking, well, that's not what people want anyway… And that you can get people, you know, within and without your community to respond to your stories. The financial model for that is tricky because that'll always fail a commercial model" (journalist 6).

"I mean, most ethical journalism has been focused on books. At the moment, there simply isn't a market. For us, although there are people doing such wonderful work and there really are, we're not really getting it. It's not getting the attention it deserves at all" (journalist 5).

"Well, there isn't any interest in investigative journalism in Northern Ireland anymore. I mean, the papers are crumbling as newspapers worldwide are crumbling" (journalist 5).

One journalist gave an example of having done reports in the style of peacebuilding and peace journalism, as described in his own words:

"I have myself done, um, if you like, peacebuilding stories. I did a long radio documentary, which was about attempts by Northern Ireland politicians to pass on some of the lessons they'd learned from peacebuilding to their counterparts in Iraq and so on, and I would have covered them. Politicians from Northern Ireland are going out to South Africa, meeting Nelson Mandela, and trying to learn lessons there. And that would have featured in one of the radio documentaries I did" (journalist 4).

"There's some friends of mine that are involved in peace journalism, and they prefer to call it ethical, responsible reporting. It was peace journalism's sexier term." (journalist 5).

Other journalists seemed either neutral or weary of terms like constructive or solution journalism. One journalist's interpretation of constructive journalism led her to the following analogy, by which she expresses her apprehension about this type of journalism:

"But you would never directly come out and say," This is what I'm doing. I'm raising awareness for whatever the bees, the bees, or whatever is becoming extinct. And I, as a journalist, have to make sure that this doesn't happen. Because I'm a journalist, I don't have to make sure it doesn't happen. I'm not a bee activist or an anti-fox activist or whatever, because in doing that, in fighting for something and finding a solution for something, it sort of betrays your... It kind of puts off your integrity a little." (journalist 7)

"Journalism is journalism for me, and, you know, you start branching off. Peace journalism. You're not a journalist anymore. Are you campaigning for peace? You know, it's. The journalist is a journalist. He can have expertise. They can have specialist knowledge, but as journalists, at the end of the day, they're there to tell stories and they're there to analyze information, find out information, and hold people accountable. That's what they do" (Journalist 3).

Some journalists explained that the term peace journalism has a 'bad reputation' in Northern Ireland:

Because of what you think of it in terms of oppositional theories and binary oppositions, you know, if you aren't a peace journalist, you must be a war journalist, you know, and I think that really gets up people's noses, including mine. (journalist 5)

Another journalist concludes that this is the reason constructive journalism could have a chance in Northern Ireland, unlike peace journalism: "*So something like constructive journalism arguably is viable as a core discipline across all journalism; the whole world should be doing constructive journalism, honestly. But I'm more optimistic about constructive journalism than peace journalism"* (journalist 6).

Theme: Paramilitary influence

It is worthwhile to mention that the dangers facing journalists from gangs and paramilitary activity have had a profound influence on some of the interviewed journalists. In fact, journalists noted that there's been "a massive increase of threats and intimidation of journalists" in the last few years.

Particularly for those journalists writing for local newspapers and independent online outlets, the dangers of reporting on the ground have a profound effect on their mental health. One journalist recalls severe stress due to receiving disturbing threats to her own life and that of her son, which caused her to quit investigative reporting and focus more on daily news:

"I can't even tell you how many times I've been to the police to report threats I've received on social media and nothing has been done, including the man who threatened to rape my newborn son … Police came to my home six times to tell me that my life was in danger from these paramilitaries" (journalist 2).

Sadly, during the initial writing stage of this thesis, a young journalist named Lyra McKee was assassinated in Londonderry in 2019. During riots in the city, a gunman, believed to be a member of the New IRA, killed her. Lyra McKee wrote numerous long-form articles on social inequality in Northern Ireland, as well as the legacy of the Troubles.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Discussion

This chapter provides a conclusion based on the findings presented in the previous chapter. The conclusion is followed by an in-depth discussion and interpretation of the findings, concluding with the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

5.1 Conclusion

This research shows that journalists in modern-day Northern Ireland mostly view their roles as dictated by traditional Western values for journalism, such as keeping the public informed and "shine light in dark places," while remaining objective. The fact that these journalists operate in a post-conflict environment with a still deeply (politically) divided society does not mean that journalists are proponents of actively promoting peace or reconciliation processes. Overall, all journalists believed that there should be no difference between a journalist reporting from Northern Ireland and a journalist reporting from a country without (recent) violence or a post-conflict situation. However, journalists from Northern Ireland do acknowledge that the deep political violence in their country provides a unique challenge to their work. Sectarianism, paramilitary violence, economic inequalities, and trauma from the past are elements that journalists in Northern Ireland must learn to navigate. This is reflected in their work, as many journalists highlighted the need for responsible and sensitive reporting, such as when talking to victims' families (in the past and current days), depicting victims of violence in photographs, and informing the police about potential bombings. Interestingly, there appeared to be a slight difference in opinion on objectivity between journalists working for public media like the BBC and reporters working for newspapers, which have a divided readership. Journalists affiliated with the BBC held the notion of objectivity and non-activism more highly than their colleagues reporting on political violence for their local newspapers, with one journalist even claiming that politics does inform his journalism.

Journalists generally believed that reporters should stray away from (peace) activism in their work, despite acknowledging that media can influence society in positive ways. Most respondents were aware of the media's involvement in the peace process at the end of the conflict in Northern Ireland, but opinions on this approach were neither applauded nor condemned. Regarding the current political situation and the problems caused by sectarianism, most journalists still believed that journalists should not be involved in any peacebuilding whatsoever. Journalists appeared apprehensive about the possibility of

“forcing” a particular idea or outcome on the audience. Though reporting about a solution to an issue was not viewed negatively per se, the idea that a journalist clearly positions himself/herself within the issue is not accepted. Some journalists do engage in reporting on peacebuilding stories, but the goal is not to advocate for peace. Rather, the goal is to allow for a space where such stories can be collected, purged of activist ideals. Some journalists also appeared sympathetic towards the idea of reporting stories on communities getting together, but they also noted that these stories often are not “clickable” and do not sell the papers.

This research further found that journalists in Northern Ireland do not explicitly use constructive journalism techniques in their reporting. In fact, among the interviewed journalists, only a few respondents held in-depth knowledge of constructive journalism when asked about it directly. Those respondents did, however, believe that it would be useful for Northern Ireland reporters to incorporate this form of journalism into their work. Journalists did several times refer to terms like “peace journalism” or “solutions journalism” when discussing forms of journalism in a post-conflict society. When discussing other topics, such as their own journalism techniques and the influence of their stories on the public, it can be concluded that in this specific sample of journalists, only a few seem to incorporate such techniques. This mostly entailed specifically reporting on peacebuilding stories from local communities, which entails the solutions component, and being aware of how sensitive topics might affect their readership.

In addition to the conclusions made about research questions RQ1-RQ3, it can also be concluded that most journalists would like to see more resources being spent on investigative stories and in-depth reporting. This could include more stories about past violence victims, as well as stories about current-day inequalities and community politics. All journalists, however, note that business models and divided readerships largely dictate the funds allocated to certain stories and stories deemed as “clickable”. This could be a significant obstacle in incorporating constructive journalism into the newsrooms, as this would, amongst others, require funds being allocated to training and workshops, more time-consuming reports that include solutions and context, and moving past the ruling mentality on news: “if it bleeds it leads”.

5.2 Discussion

This thesis contributes to the literature on journalists' perceptions about their roles in a post-conflict society, specifically in Northern Ireland. Additionally, this study contributes to developing research on constructive journalism in a post-conflict environment. The implications of the findings from Chapter 4 are discussed below.

In a post-conflict environment, perspectives on the journalistic profession

An analysis of semi-structured interviews with journalists from Northern Ireland supports the theory that journalists in Western society do not identify with an interventionist approach to journalism in which a certain social outcome is desired. Despite operating in the context of a negative peace in Northern Ireland, local journalists generally do not associate their role with contributing to social reconciliation. In comparison with previous research on the use of constructive journalism in Rwanda by McIntyre and Sobel (2018), which shows that local journalists adhere to the universal interpretation of a journalist's role while also believing in the mission to contribute to reconciliation, journalists in Northern Ireland seem not to be inspired by a similar mission. This could be explained by the established traditional Western form of news journalism in the UK, which includes Northern Ireland. When discussing the topic of objectivity, the answers of one journalist working for the Irish News stood out among others. He admitted that politics and even ideology do influence his own journalism. This shows that journalists in Northern Ireland, as anywhere else, do not operate in a vacuum and are not immune to the socio-economic environment they live and work in. This aligns with previous research on journalists in Northern Ireland during the active conflict (Armoudian, 2018).

Journalists did acknowledge that reporting in Northern Ireland does require a certain level of sensitivity and even responsibility. Some elements of constructive journalism—representing all sides, not just politicians/police—were mentioned by journalists, as they believed that a journalist needed to tell the story of all those involved, such as the personal recounts of victims or survivors of a crime or past crimes related to the Troubles. This element of constructive journalism, which calls for more inclusiveness in perspectives and opinions, is one of the six requirements of journalistic reporting, according to the Windesheim School of Journalism (Gyldensted and Hermans, 2018).

Media's role in a post-conflict environment

Interestingly, interviewed journalists did believe that the media can influence public opinion and acknowledged the fact that the media played a role in supporting the Good Friday Agreement. In the run-up to the Agreement, some journalists in Northern Ireland were actively involved in encouraging the public to vote “yes”, despite some of these journalists now regretting not being more critical of the Agreement itself, as mentioned by one journalist during the interview process. The stark difference between the willingness of the media to be more actively involved in reconciliation and the peace process during the end of the 1990s and journalists now largely opposing this activist stance is in line with previous research by Hanitsch et al. (2011) mentioned in the literature review. According to this research, journalists are more willing to promote change when there is a more urgent need for it. There appears to be a specific window of time in which journalists feel the need to promote change, such as reconciliation. Once the most intense and active part of the conflict is largely over, the population becomes more accepting of the idea of a peaceful solution, including stories in the news promoting reconciliation, as mentioned by Gadi Wolfsfeld (2008). This was also the case with Northern Ireland, when the incentive to take an interventionist stance by the media was paired with the need for change. Topics like peace and reconciliation led the front pages in the run-up to the Good Friday Agreement. Now, 26 years after the Agreement, it appears that the media in Northern Ireland no longer views reconciliation as a “hot” topic.

Media focus

The fact that the media rarely pays attention to peacebuilding does not, however, mean that journalists are neglecting stories related to social issues or stories that highlight reconciliation efforts. Two journalists mentioned working on programs involving conversations between victims and perpetrators, but overall, they note that more attention is still given to stories of conflict and contention, like deeply divided politics and paramilitary and gang violence. Stories about reconciliation and peace are deemed “soft” and only gain more value when they highlight a certain unexpectedness.

One journalist also co-founded an online outlet reporting on peacebuilding. Interestingly, this journalist specified that writing about peacebuilding efforts does not mean advocating for peace. As previously mentioned, research by Rice and Taylor (2020) shows that local community leaders are critical of mainstream media, accusing them of sustaining the legacy

of conflict and blocking debates about future developments in Northern Ireland. This study does confirm the general idea that, except for incidental programmes and independent online news outlets, journalists in Northern Ireland do not consider reconciliation a priority or the task of a journalist.

Journalism techniques

Peace and war journalism are two contentious terms, according to the interviewed journalists. Respondents appeared to avoid being labeled as peace of war journalists, and this is reflected in the fact that not one journalist described themselves as being proponents of using a particular journalism technique. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, a few journalists had more theoretical knowledge of constructive journalism, yet not one journalist received training in this form of journalism. In fact, journalists generally did not mention specific guidelines from their newsrooms on operating in the specific environment of Northern Ireland: with gang and paramilitary violence and the legacy of the Troubles. A few journalists did mention having done a peacebuilding story or know colleagues who practice “ethically responsible journalism”. One journalist mentioned privately joining a tour with fellow journalists in the Balkans to learn about reconciliation stories from their colleagues. This shows that for journalists, expressing interest in or even practicing a form of constructive journalism appears to be a personal matter. The six elements of constructive journalism as mentioned in academia, such as solutions, future orientation, inclusiveness and diversity, empowerment, context, and co-creation (Van Antwerpen and Fielding, 2023; Hermans and Gyldensted 2019) could not be extracted from the answers given by the interviewed journalists, except for inclusiveness and diversity. As mentioned in paragraph 5.2.1, journalists in Northern Ireland do pay attention to including voices from the political and social spectrum.

Obstacles in journalism: business models and violence

One of the main problems often mentioned by journalists is the business model for newsrooms and producing news that sells. Journalists frequently mentioned the lack of resources and time needed for long-form articles, with editorial choices being made mainly based on what topics will ‘appease’ the readership.

While it might be too early to connect the evolution of constructive journalism in Northern Ireland with the violence experienced by journalists, whether physical or verbal, it could be

said that developing forms of journalism that require more investigative effort would be stunted by violence against journalists.

The results of this study also show that cultural views on journalistic practice, as well as the later stage in which a (political) conflict has evolved, can both affect journalists' willingness to look beyond traditional conflict reporting. As a result, it is worthwhile to investigate the practical, financial, and cultural implications of integrating constructive journalism, as well as any other non-mainstream forms of journalism, such sensitive or positive journalism, into newsroom strategies.

5.3 Limitations and Further Research

While this study offers a starting point for future research into journalists' roles and constructive journalism in Northern Ireland, the generalizability of this study is limited due to the relatively small sample of interviewed journalists. A number of journalists reporting on political and social issues were not available to be interviewed. To gain more insight into the mindset of modern-day journalists in Northern Ireland, a broader spectrum of news practitioners could be examined. For example, journalism students and journalists who practice ethically responsible journalism could be approached and asked about their role perceptions.

As constructive journalism in Northern Ireland remains a relatively unexplored field, further research on the topic is desired. This includes specific research on the public impact of constructive journalism, as well as further research on the motivations and professional beliefs of journalists working for various news outlets. As this study relies solely on interviews, a qualitative content analysis of existing newspapers, programs, and online media outlets could provide insight into the journalism techniques used by journalists in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, as this thesis has briefly touched upon marketing issues and violence towards journalists, it would be useful to explore the effects of such factors in the development of constructive journalism in Northern Ireland.

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Appendix I | Interview Questions

1. What is your profession/ how are you involved with journalism, how long have you been a journalist
2. What kind of news do you cover?
3. How would you define the ideal role of a journalist?
4. Do you think the news media can influence public opinion regarding the peacebuilding process? What should the role of media be in Northern Ireland?
5. What do you think is the role of journalists in northern Ireland? Should it be different from journalists' roles in other democracies/countries with no recent armed conflicts?
6. When telling stories related to the conflict in Northern Ireland, Do you think the media create stories that focus more on conflict or peace building and possible solutions?
7. What impact do you think your stories have on the public? Do you ever consider the impact of your work? For example, do you think your viewers/readers are left with a positive feeling / neutral/ hopeful/ pessimistic
8. How would you describe your journalistic practices? Is your journalism more active or observant? Choose from two types of journalist

   Active: one interventionist, involved, socially committed, advocates for a particular outcome / social change. active focus on ideas for conflict resolutions, representing all sides, not just politicians/ the police.

   Observant: The other dedicated to objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality, disseminating news as it is.

9. Have you heard of Constructive journalism or peace Journalism? What are your thoughts on using constructive or Solutions journalism in the context of peacebuilding?