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Commemorating the Good Friday Agreement (1998) and the Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001)

Lidija Georgieva, Naum Trajanovski and John Wolffe

Introduction

Northern Ireland and North Macedonia, situated though they are at opposite ends of Europe, have many superficial similarities. They have comparably sized populations: at the most recent census in 2002, North Macedonia had 2.02 million inhabitants; at that in 2011 Northern Ireland had 1.81 million; projections for 2020 are 2.08 million and 1.91 million, respectively.¹ Both have substantial minorities for whom ethnic and national identity is closely bound up with religion. In Northern Ireland, in 2011, 48.7 per cent of the population had a Protestant upbringing and 48.4 per cent (including those with hybrid identities such as British and Northern Irish) identify as British; 45.1 per cent had a Catholic upbringing while 46.2 per cent identify solely as Irish or Northern Irish (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2012). In North Macedonia, in 2002, 64.2 per cent of the population identified as Macedonian, 25.2 per cent as Albanian, 3.9 per cent as Turkish and 2.7 per cent as Roma, 1.8 per cent as Serbs, with the balance made up of smaller minorities (Georgieva, Memeti and Musliu, 2011). Here too religious identifications closely align with ethnic ones: 64.7 per cent of the population are Orthodox Christians, and 33.3 per cent are Muslims. There is also a small Roman Catholic community: the Pope visited the country in 2019 for the first time.

There are also significant historical parallels. Both states emerged in the turbulent first quarter of the twentieth century as parts of larger entities, the UK, and in the Macedonian case the Ottoman Empire and, afterwards, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. During that period both were shaped by the memory of experiences of heroic but failed rebellion, the Ilinden Uprising of August 1903 and the Easter Rising of April 1916, while Northern Ireland Protestants had a comparably emotive collective memory of the sacrifice of the two thousand men of the Ulster Division who died on the first day of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. These years also saw the partition of both Macedonia and Ireland, by the Treaty of Bucharest of 1913 which separated what was

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to become Republic of Macedonia and then North Macedonia from the southern part of Macedonia that became part of Greece and so-called Pirin Macedonia (Blagoevgrad Province), which became part of Bulgaria. The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 separated the six counties of Northern Ireland from the twenty-six counties that formed the Irish Free State and subsequently the Republic of Ireland. Most recently, both countries have experienced escalation of internal violent conflict, the Northern Ireland Troubles of 1969–98 and the relatively short-lived confrontation between the Macedonian government and the Albanian National Liberation army in 2001. Such long and deep historical memories continue to shape the legacy of the respective settlements of these conflicts, the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998 (GFA) and the Ohrid Framework Agreement of 2001 (OFA), which are the primary focus of this chapter.

Current research on peace agreements aims to broaden the scope of investigation by discussing their contextual, social and legal aspects, as well as the complex phenomena of political violence, and the scope of the state- and non-state actors involved in violent conflicts (for an overview, see Bell 2008). From a conflict resolution studies perspective, two major approaches are traceable as paradigms within the most recent scholarship: one which places the agency of the international community as a prime concern (Richmond 2014), and the other one which highlights the need for recognizing the local context (Newman et al. 2009). In both scholarly streams, the role of religion in violent conflict and in its resolution emerges as a key issue, although caution should be exercised in labelling a conflict as ‘religious’. It is thus a challenging task to identify and map the specific roles of religious actors in actual and discursive violence, and in complex wider conflicts, conflict resolutions, peacemaking and peacebuilding (Mayer et al. 2013).

This chapter draws upon these debates in exploring official and vernacular memories of the Good Friday and Ohrid Framework Agreements and post-conflict peacebuilding activities.² As part of the H2020 RETOPEA project, it draws on research on the various sociopolitical and commemorative features of the peace treaties within the project’s scope. RETOPEA also provides an interdisciplinary platform for comparing various cross-country developments concerning the social memory of the conflicts under discussion. We argue that one should look at the various commemorations of the two agreements in order to better understand the sociopolitical dimensions and bottom-up reactions in the post-conflict situation and in peacebuilding. This chapter presumes an analytic dichotomy between official and informal memory, with the former being understood as a set of state-sponsored or elite memory practices and policies, while the latter is focused on mapping the informal, bottom-up practices of remembrance and commemorating.

Memory, conflict, religion

Scholarly analysis of both Northern Ireland and North Macedonia has highlighted the importance of individual and collective memories in the state- and nation-building processes. Such theoretical approaches can be traced back to Maurice Halbwachs’s concept of the ‘social frameworks of memory’ first enunciated in the 1920s, but only



gaining widespread currency in the later twentieth century. Collective memory came to be seen as an important factor in the development of ‘imagined communities’ of an ethnic, national or transnational nature (e.g. Anderson 1983; Assmann 2010). While the literature has been largely dominated by social scientists and historians, a notable early contribution on Northern Ireland came from a primarily theological perspective (Falconer 1988). Since 1998, interest in both long-term collective historical memories (e.g. McBride 2001; Grayson and McGarry 2016) and the more personal recollection and commemoration of the Troubles by those who have lived through them (e.g. Conway 2010; Frawley 2014; Viggiani 2014; Smyth 2017) has gathered momentum. As for North Macedonia, Trajanovski (2020b) has recently examined post-2001 memory politics and memory regimes.

Most recently, contemporary debates in memory studies have shifted their focus from the initial Halbwachsian collective societal representations to the individual social actors’ agency and their discursive practices (e.g. Gensburger 2016). There has been a wave of research on ‘memory/mnemonic actors’ (for an overview, see Kubik and Bernhard 2014a; 2014b), ‘memory entrepreneurs’ (e.g. Kaiser 2012) and ‘memory agents’ (e.g. Zelizer 2014). In Central and Eastern European scholarship, Jan Kubik and Michael Bernhard developed a theoretical model of ‘memory regimes’ as the interplay of the ‘mnemonic actors’ in a given national, political, societal and cultural synchronic constellation. According to the authors, the ‘mnemonic actors’ are defined as the ‘political forces that are interested in a specific interpretation of the past’ (2014a: 4).

Meanwhile the wider literature on memory and conflict resolution has generated insights relevant to both Northern Ireland and North Macedonia. The most active scholars propose novel methodological approaches and seek to determine the specific patterns and trajectories of social behaviour across different comparative contexts. In 2016, McGrattan and Hopkins explored the ‘roles that memory may play in overcoming division.’ This theme is also developed in a recent special issue of *East European Politics*, which builds upon earlier comparative research on the ‘relationship between identity and war’ while examining afresh ‘the dynamics of grassroots peacebuilding, and the language of sexualized violence in war’ (Harris and Baumann 2019: 404). Social memory, its politicization and securitization, its identity-building features, and its potential for social mobilization, becomes a basis for developing frameworks of interpretation for cross-national case studies. Harris and Baumann argue that ‘history and the memory of it are not necessarily the same – the events and dates may be the same, but the interpretation of the context within which they happened is ... the matter of politics’ (405). In similar vein, a 2019 special issue of *Innovation* journal addressed the subject through the concept of ‘memory wars’ (Pohoryles 2019). In his discussion of the ‘politically constructed mnemonic tensions in the years preceding Yugoslavia’s violent dissolution’, Taylor McConnel (2019) coined the phrase ‘memory abuse’ with reference to the ‘intentional manipulation of memory beyond an intangible threshold’. Recent scholarship has also explored memory activities in a variety of post-traumatic settings (e.g. Gray and Oliver 2004; Eyerma 2019).

Moreover, in both the case studies, religion has played a central role in the shaping of memory.³ Although the immediate causes of the Northern Ireland Troubles were more political and social than religious, the confessionally polarized views of the past

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that have shaped Catholic and Protestant identities on the island of Ireland were a key precondition for the conflict (Elliott 2009). Conversely, since the publication in 1988 of *Reconciling Memories* (Falconer 1988), religious actors have been prominent in the endeavour to establish a narrative that highlights peacemaking rather than division (e.g. Falconer and Liechty 1998; Brewer, Higgins and Teeney 2011). As for North Macedonia, religion was an identity-marker during the late Ottoman Empire (see Clayer 2007 for an overview). The demise of the empire at the turn of the last century and the rise of local nationalisms further impacted the way religious boundaries were set in the post-imperial Balkans (for an overview, see Pandevska 2012; Pandevska and Mitrova 2019). After the Second World War the formation of the Macedonian state within socialist Yugoslavia was followed by institutionalization of the religious life of the two major communities in Macedonia: the Orthodox Christian one, which established the separate Macedonian Orthodox Church in the 1960s, and the Islamic community, which was organized by the Sarajevo-based Reis-ul-ulema during socialist Yugoslavia, and the Skopje-based Islamic Community of Macedonia after the state became independent in 1991.

Ohrid Framework Agreement

Introduction

Unlike the other constituent states of former socialist Yugoslavia, the Republic of Macedonia only experienced the escalation of violent conflict in 2001, almost ten years after its officially declared independence in 1991. The seven months of armed confrontations between the Macedonian state security forces and the ethnic Albanian rebels of the National Liberation Army (NLA) were mirrored by a heated public debate on the reasons for the escalating violence (Ackermann 2001: 117–35). Hitherto, interpretations of the *casus belli*, the military operations and the settlement are predominantly centred around two axes: the growth of interethnic hostilities in post-Yugoslav Macedonia and the impact of the regional violent contestations in Kosovo and southern Serbia on the Macedonian state and society. Both these approaches, however, recognize the different sets of identity-markers between the conflicting sides: the language, ethnicity and religious affiliation of the major ethnic group in today's North Macedonia, Macedonians, and the largest minority group, Albanians, as well as the means of political accommodation of the multiethnic population in the newly formed state.

Religious affiliation – with the Macedonians being predominantly Orthodox Christians and the Albanians Muslims – was identified as a lesser factor in the emergence of violent conflict in 2001 (for an overview, see Bellamy 2002). Rather, religious affiliation was part of the wider process of ethnonationalization in the 1990s. In this decade, there were several calls for an Albanian secession, while the Albanian political parties highlighted the 1991 constitution as a main generator of discontent – stressing its nation-centred configuration and favouring of Macedonian cultural, religious and ethnic symbols. On the other hand, the ethnic Macedonian



political elites treated the non-voting of the Albanian MPs in the parliament and the organization of an Albanian plebiscite for independence in the early 1990s as proof of the Albanian citizens' disloyalty to the state *in toto*. These developments further challenged the ontological security of post-Yugoslav Macedonia and contributed to the hostilities in 2001 and the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA). The OFA was drafted in Villa Biljana, Ohrid, North Macedonia, in July and August 2001. It was concluded in Skopje on 13 August 2001 and signed by the president of the Republic of Macedonia, and the leaders of the state's major political parties, and brokered by representatives of the European Union (EU) and the United States.

From a present-day perspective, OFA is praised as an agreement that contributed to a ceasefire and stopped a full-scale civil war in the Republic of North Macedonia. According to historian Ulf Brunnbauer (2002), the violent conflict resulted in more than two hundred casualties and over **hundred** thousand exiled and internally displaced persons. Hitherto, OFA – or the 'new chapter in the development of Macedonian democracy' (Aleksovska 2015: 55) – has been primarily discussed from peacebuilding, political power-sharing and conflict settlement perspectives. It is argued that OFA paved the way for a constitutional reform adopted in November 2001, which was instrumental for developing the so-called 'Macedonian model of soft power-sharing' (Bieber 2008; Ilievski and Wolff 2011; Georgieva, Memeti and Musliu 2011; Horowitz 2014).⁴ The symbolic developments instigated by OFA were explored in recent scholarship, mostly relating to the 'Skopje 2014' project which was publicized in the late 2000s (see, inter alia, Frčkoski 2011; Bliznakovski 2013; Dimova 2013; Čupeska 2013; for an overview of the debate over 'Skopje 2014', see Trajanovski 2020a). The memory aftershocks of OFA and the 2001 conflict were discussed predominantly by foreign authors (see Ragaru 2008; Reef 2018), while several collections of oral histories of the conflict were published in the last decade (see the publications of Peace Actions and the Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution; also Stojanov et al. 2019). There has, however, been no systematic analysis of the memory regimes, bottom-up memory practices and state-sponsored activities relating to OFA and the 2001 conflict.

A close look at memory developments over OFA and the 2001 conflict is also critical for understanding the dynamics of religion in post-conflict North Macedonia. As observed by Alex J. Bellamy (2002: 120), 'religion has been something of a side issue in the Macedonian conflict, limited only to the demands that a reference to the Orthodox Church be removed from the constitution.' This was, in fact, accomplished in the OFA: the Agreement envisioned a Parliamentary Committee for Inter-Community Relations responsible for deliberation on issues concerning intercommunity relations, while freedom of religion and a recognition of other religious traditions alongside the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) were introduced by amending Article 19 of the 1991 Constitution.⁵ This resulted in MOC taking a critical stance towards OFA and a series of 'public exchanges' between MOC and the Islamic Community of Macedonia in 2001 (Latifi 2001). Religious affiliation, as an identity-marker in the post-conflict constellation, was instrumental for the engineering of what Ljubica Spaskovska (2012: 385) calls 'a specific *ethnizenship*' – or a citizenship regime where 'citizens realise their rights, duties and participation in the public and political sphere solely as members of ethno-national or religious communities'. This new citizenship regime also

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manifested as a particular ‘ethnocracy’ – in the words of Goran Janev (2011) – which delineates the ‘binary logic’ of the political representation of ethnonationalism and religion in the Macedonian public space in the aftermath of the conflict. The history of memory-related activities over OFA provides another critical standpoint from which to view these developments.

The initial reception

The initial public discourses over OFA in Macedonia illuminate elite sociopolitical tensions over the 2001 conflict. In the early post-conflict years public narratives usually related the settlement to the memory of the war and there was a lack of any distinct memory discourse regarding OFA itself. To contextualize, just days before the signing of the OFA and under a general ceasefire, a massive ambush took place in the vicinity of Karpalak (8 August 2001), taking the lives of ten members of the Macedonian security forces (which in turn resulted in the demolition of the Bazaar Mosque in Prilep, the birthplace of the victims of the Karpalak ambush). A further attack took place near Ljuboten (10 August 2001), when the Albanian rebels killed eight members of the Macedonian security forces. These two events profoundly influenced the memory of OFA in the following years, shaping both the top-down and the bottom-up commemorative practices in ways that will be discussed in the next section. Moreover, initially, settlement of the conflict was by no means complete – sporadic shootings in Albanian-populated areas occurred until 2003 (Dnevnik 2003), the law on territorial organization projected in OFA was only enacted in 2004 (Markovikj and Damjanovski 2018), and Albanian was not inaugurated as a second official language in the city of Skopje until 2005.⁶

In this context, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), an Albanian political party formed in May 2002 and largely made up of former National Liberation Army fighters, promoted itself as the main custodian of the memory of OFA and organized the only commemorative events to take place on the anniversaries in 2002 and 2003. The 2003 commemoration, at the winter resort of Popova Šapka, is the best illustration of how it represented the memory: without endorsement from the state or representation from the ethno-Macedonian political camp, the reception was attended by representatives of NATO, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and members of the diplomatic corps who praised the agreement in their media statements (Vest 2003). The two subsequent OFA commemorations, organized by DUI, were in line with this partisan promotion of ethnonationalism and exclusivism, taking place in Albanian-populated Raduša (2004) and the ethnically mixed town of Struga (2005). The fifth anniversary of OFA in 2006 was also marked by a partisan commemoration organized by DUI in Ohrid, the place where the OFA was negotiated. Teuta Arifi, vice president of DUI in the early 2000s, commented that ‘as every year’, the diplomatic corps, state institutions and members of all the political parties are invited without exception to the celebration as the party (DUI) ‘believes that the values of OFA are for all the citizens’ of the state (A1 2006). It is important to note, however, that the then Macedonian president, Branko Crvenkovski, organized a reception in Ohrid on the fifth annual commemoration of OFA, just a few days after



DUI's ceremony – the first ever state-sponsored commemoration of OFA in the state. The event was attended by the US ambassador in Skopje, Gillian Milovanovic, whose absence from DUI's event was interpreted as shifting American support away from that political party (Opetčeska 2006).

However, the failure of the ethno-Macedonian political camp to commemorate OFA in a structured manner did not amount to a complete omission to produce memory discourses regarding the Agreement. In this period, the favourable reaction of the international community to OFA helped the ethnic Macedonian elites to articulate a positive view of integrating Macedonia into Euro-Atlantic alignments as its only viable sociopolitical future. Hence in 2002, Boris Trajkovski, then president of the republic and one of the OFA signatories, stated that the Agreement was a significant 'step forward' towards the consolidation of the Macedonian interethnic balance (A1 2002a). This position was restated at several post-2001 ceremonies commemorating the Ilinden uprising on Republic Day, the major Macedonian state holiday since the state's inception in the aftermath of the Second World War. Trajkovski, affiliated with the centre-right VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity), was the major proponent of this discourse at the Ilinden commemorations, aiming to establish the annual Kruševo-based event as a platform for celebrating the state's regional Euro-Atlantic aspirations (Trajanovski 2020b). A failed initiative for a cross-border, Macedonian-Albanian organization of the Struga Poetry Evenings in 2005, an annual festival with a tradition dating back to the early 1960s, can be seen in the same light.

However, this forward-looking position did not prevail in the political domain in the early post-conflict years. A newspaper article on 13 August 2002, the first anniversary of OFA, neatly summarized the dominant atmosphere in the Macedonian political camp: 'the anniversary of the Ohrid-Skopje agreement will be remembered as a successful period of NATO's and EU's political-peacebuilding mission. The day of the signing of OFA is a historical date only because of the ceasefire. It will not be celebrated as a date of the reshaping of Macedonia' (A1 2002d). This period was also formative in the articulation of a critical perspective on the OFA in the Macedonian political camp, as can be illustrated by examining the memory discourses of the relevant sociopolitical actors. Ljubčo Georgievski, former VMRO-DPMNE leader and one of the signatories of OFA, claimed that it questioned the 'history of good inter-ethnic relations', while the Socialist Party, in an official statement in 2002, stated that the signing of the Agreement is nothing else but a 'shameful treason' (A1 2002c).⁷ Nikola Gruevski, minister of finance and prime minister in the second VMRO-DPMNE government (2006–16), which will be further discussed in the following section, also criticized the laws on territorial division and on self-government which OFA required. In his words, 'whether it will succeed or not, we will see, because there are still strong radical structures that see the Framework Agreement only as a means to reach another ultimate goal, which is called the realisation of some great dreams for another state (Albania), and that other state has territorial claims to the Republic of Macedonia' (A1 2002b). However, shortly after forming the second VMRO-DPMNE government, he changed his position and endorsed OFA as an important cornerstone for the future of Macedonia.

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Memory of the conflict and memory of the settlement

The year 2002 brought the second governmental change in the democratic history of North Macedonia. VMRO-DPMNE stepped down, and the centre-left Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) formed a government in a coalition with DUI. However, although easing some of the immediate political tensions, the new coalition did not significantly change underlying stances towards the OFA. From an analytical standpoint there was a dichotomy between the memory of the conflict and the memory of the settlement. The memory of the conflict took a local turn, with local communities, actors and agencies stepping up as the major carriers of memory—often openly opposed to the activities of the establishment. The annual informal commemorations of the victims of the Karpalak ambush were a particularly significant example: initiated by families of the victims, the event consisted of an Orthodox Christian religious service in Prilep, the birthplace of the victims, and a small ceremony of laying flowers and erecting a memorial plaque at the scene of the assassination, approximately 130 kilometres from Prilep. The first commemoration in 2003 began a two-decade-long struggle over the memory site. The memorial plaque was violently removed after the commemorations in the early 2000s, thus becoming a media event both before and after the commemorations. Several commemorative plaques were also erected in Prilep and its vicinity and, in 2013, two memorials dedicated to the Karpalak victims were set up in Prilep. In August 2019, it was announced that the Karpalak memorial site would get a new plaque (see Figure 7.1) after the state acceded to NATO and the anticipated ‘ease of the interethnic tensions’ (Andonov 2019).

A brief overview of the first two years of the Karpalak ambush commemorations reveals the initial positioning of the major memory actors. The new SDSM Minister of Defence Vlado Bučovski appeared to be the focal point of the debate. At the 2003 commemoration, Bučovski depicted the ambush as the ‘last attempt of the fools who thought that they could stop the peaceful settlement of the war-conflict in 2001.’ This speech can be read as an attempt to shift the initial victim-centred commemorative discourse to a formal endorsement of OFA. However, the families of the victims, as reported in the media, boycotted his speech at the memorial site, arriving at the destination two hours afterwards (Dnevnik 2005). Bučovski also promised a new memorial plaque following its violent destruction in the mid-2000s, a statement which was criticized by the veteran fighters in the Macedonian media as Bučovski’s government was perceived as sympathetic to the Albanian minority (e.g. Ristevska 2006). In the following years, the veteran organizations came to the forefront of the commemorations of the tragic events related to the 2001 conflict, often co-organizing them with the Macedonian army, the Ministry of Defence, and the Macedonian Orthodox Church. These ceremonies frequently served as a platform for expressing the demands of the organizations, criticizing selective justice, the improper treatment of the Macedonian war veterans and addressing various other sociopolitical concerns.

There was no state-sponsored commemoration of OFA until 2008, when one was organized by the secretariat for the implementation of the Agreement. This ceremony, however, was boycotted by both the VMRO-DPMNE former prime minister and the SDSM-backed president. In mid-August 2009, the secretariat again organized a



Figure 7.1 A commemorative plaque in Lenište near Prilep

Note: The inscription in Macedonian states that it is ‘dedicated to all the participants in the violent conflict in 2001–2002 as a sign of worthy respect’. Source: Courtesy Wikicommons.

ceremony in the Old Bazaar in Skopje, at which the new VMRO-DPMNE-backed President Ivanov praised the Agreement. In the course of his two presidential mandates, Ivanov argued that OFA was advancing a ‘Macedonian model of multiculturalism’ – a memory discourse that was promoted by several Macedonian artists in the late 1990s and was reimaged by the centre-right as a means of endorsing the OFA.⁸ More specifically, Macedonia’s Ottoman past was celebrated as a shared heritage and a model for multi-confessional tolerance.

On the eve of the OFA’s tenth anniversary in 2011 high-profile politicians maintained an affirmative stance towards the Agreement, in line with the state’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations. By contrast, less prominent politicians and experts still discussed the rationale, foundations and long-term impact of OFA. In the late 2000s the debate frequently revolved around the phrase ‘spirit of the Agreement’, regarded not merely as a ceasefire but as having as its main purpose the constitutional redesign of the republic of North Macedonia in the light of the 1991 republican constitution’s inability to settle the growing interethnic tensions in the state.

In the 2010s Macedonian universities and research institutes also started to produce memory discourses about OFA (before this period, only foreign think-tanks and

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NGOs based in North Macedonia had organized panel discussions and conferences on the OFA's anniversaries). For example, the tenth anniversary of the OFA in 2011 was marked by an academic conference held in the cities of Tetovo and Skopje by the State University of Tetovo, the South East European University and the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje. This event and the publications that followed in 2011 and 2012 had the ambitious goal of 'opening multidisciplinary research' on the OFA, despite the lack of a consensual discourse on the OFA within the academic community. In his introduction, the editor Blerim Reka, an international law expert, claimed that the OFA presented an opportunity for redefining the 'new political philosophy of the multi-ethnic state' (2011: 11).

Recent developments: Ambiguous memory

The promotion of exclusively ethnocentric symbols within the public domain remains one of the prevailing trajectories of the memory of OFA and the 2001 conflict in contemporary North Macedonia. Even as from 2008 onwards, official OFA annual commemorations were organized by the governmental secretariat for the implementation of the OFA, the ruling VMRO-DPMNE-DUI coalition kept promoting divisive discourses over OFA and the preceding conflict.

After Greece vetoed Macedonia's membership of NATO in 2008, the second VMRO-DPMNE government set the promotion of ethnonational Macedonian identity high on their political agenda. The climax of this identity politics was the memory 'Skopje 2014' project, an umbrella term endorsing the 137 monuments and memorial objects erected in the cityscape. The project was described as a 'monumental and spectacular turning point in official narratives of Macedonian national identity' (Muhić and Takovski 2014: 138). As part of the project, a monument to the members of the Macedonian forces who lost their lives in the 2001 conflict was erected in 2011, while several other similar monuments were established in other Macedonian cities at the same period (see Figure 7.2).

The Albanian community in North Macedonia started promoting what Paul Reef calls 'a separate Albanian monument repertoire' (2018: 474) of the 2001 conflict. In November 2008, Albanian news agencies noted that, on the occasion of the Day of the Albanian Flag, DUI and the Municipality of Čair (part of Skopje) opened the Museum of Freedom, which exhibits materials on the history of the Albanians – from the period of the so-called 'League of Prizren (1878–81), to the events of 2001, the formation of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the NLA' (Vreme 2008). In 2012, on the hundredth anniversary of Albanian independence, DUI opened a museum of the NLA and the 2001 conflict at Slupčane's cemetery complex. The museum, according to media reports, showcases wartime memorabilia and publications on the conflict (Makfaks 2012).

Several other monuments dedicated to the 2001 conflict, the Kosovo crisis and KLA were erected in Albanian settlements.⁹ In 2013, Ali Ahmeti, DUI's leader, opened a memorial complex dedicated to 'Mother Albania' in Zajas, while several years after the promotion of 'Skopje 2014', a parallel project was launched at the nearby Skenderbeg Square in Skopje. This square, located in the predominantly Albanian part



Figure 7.2 Monument ‘Macedonian Defenders’ in Skopje

Source: Courtesy Wikicommons.

of the city, now hosts a large mural depicting both ethnic Albanian historical figures and the radicals fighting for the minority cause in 2001 (see Figure 7.3). In 2017, the Kumanovo chapter of DUI announced that it would erect a monument dedicated to the NLA as a response to the city’s mayor, who was proposing to set up a monument dedicated to the Macedonian forces active in the 2001 conflict.

However, these exclusive approaches to memorialization were rarely translated into the political arena.¹⁰ Indeed during the 2010s political elites promoted reconciliatory discourses. For instance, the fifteenth anniversary of the signing of OFA in 2016 was marked by a conference on the subject of ‘OFA – a Challenge and a Guarantee for Integration.’ It was attended by Ali Ahmeti, leader of the DUI, and other high-profile politicians and members of the diplomatic core. ‘There was no way to avoid what happened,’ Ahmeti said in a statement, speaking of Albanian dissatisfaction since the time of the former Yugoslavia and the protests in Priština before the 2001 conflict. He

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Figure 7.3 ‘Skenderbeg Square’ in Skopje

Source: Courtesy Wikicommons.

thanked NATO and all mediators and statesmen for their efforts to address what he called ‘the unresolved problems of the time’.

On 14 December 2018, seventeen years after the 2001 armed conflict, the first joint commemoration of the civil victims took place in the village of Lipkovo. The leading figures in the commemoration were Stojanče Angelov, former general major of the Special Macedonian Forces, and Abedin Zimberi, former commander of the NLA Military Police. Both Angelov and Zimberi laid flowers on the graves of the civil victims and made public statements in favour of interethnic reconciliation. In Angelov’s words, ‘Even though we may have completely different views of past events, we should be ready to fight together for the future.’ This initiative well illustrates the present situation of the memory of the OFA and the 2001 conflict: a varied set of reconciliatory discourses are being promoted to the general public, while other, exclusive and ethnocentred narratives are maintained within the ethnic communities. Nevertheless, the Angelov-Zimberi initiative shows there is room for a different approach to the OFA and the conflict through a bottom-up dynamic, focused on the state’s multi-ethnic prospects.

The gap between ethnocentred memory discourses and reconciliatory initiatives is also observable when speaking with Macedonian youth. The focus groups with young people organized by the Macedonian RETOPEA team showed that the generation born in the midst or immediately after the conflict perceive Macedonian society as polarized along ethnic and religious lines, and they believe that this polarization has not changed in recent years. According to the young people interviewed, who are enrolled in separate educational institutions, there is also a lack of interreligious dialogue; moreover they see this issue as a consequence of educational policy. A positive sign, however, was the



ability of most of the young people to recognize the nationalistic content of syllabi – primarily in relation to history, religious history and ethics.

The Good Friday Agreement

Background

Unlike the OFA, which was rapidly drafted to bring an end to a short period of violent conflict, the GFA (also known as the Belfast Agreement after the city in which it was concluded on Good Friday, 10 April 1998) was the culmination of repeated and prolonged attempts to end the Northern Ireland ‘Troubles’, which had continued since 1969. The origins of the conflict lay in the historic polarization between the Protestant majority and the substantial Catholic/nationalist minority. The Protestants, politically known as Unionists or in more extreme form as Loyalists, saw the province as an integral part of the UK, whereas most Catholics, politically known as nationalists or republicans, hoped for the eventual unification of Northern Ireland with the independent Republic of Ireland. This underlying religious and political division was exacerbated by the particular terms on which the semi-autonomous Northern Ireland state was established in the early 1920s, with Protestants entrenching their political dominance at both regional and local level through manipulation of electoral boundaries and consigning representatives of the Catholic community to perpetual largely impotent opposition. Catholics were also under-represented in government service, especially at senior levels, and the police force was similarly dominated by Protestants. Although the consequent resentments and tensions were suppressed for decades, they exploded in the late 1960s in the context of the wider international civil rights movement. Initially peaceful Catholic protests provoked a backlash from Protestants. The situation rapidly deteriorated into violence, leading to the British army being sent on to the streets to restore order.

Although the army’s presence was initially welcomed, it was soon perceived by Catholics as an occupying force, an impression reinforced by heavy-handed tactics, above all the fatal shooting of fourteen unarmed civil rights demonstrators in Derry/Londonderry on ‘Bloody Sunday’, 30 January 1972. By this time violence had become endemic and was pursued by both Catholic and Protestant paramilitary groups, notably the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force. There was a seemingly endless cycle of bombings, assassinations, random sectarian killings and assaults, which by 1998 had left over 3,600 people dead and tens of thousands injured or bereaved. The violence sometimes spilled over to other parts of the UK with IRA attacks on targets in England, notably the attempted assassination of the prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, and other members of her government in the Brighton bombing of 1984. The first serious attempt at a settlement, the Sunningdale Agreement of December 1973, rapidly broke down in the face of Protestant/Unionist intransigence. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of November 1985 suffered a similar fate, as a compromise that proved unacceptable to hardliners on both sides.

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By the early 1990s, however, the mood was changing. There was growing revulsion against violence that seemed to perpetuate a futile stalemate, while the increasing electoral success of the IRA's political counterpart Sinn Féin encouraged Irish republicans to feel that they might eventually achieve more through the ballot box than through guns and bombs. The Downing Street Declaration of December 1993 committed the British and Irish governments jointly to search for peace based on the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. During 1994 the paramilitary groups declared ceasefires and, despite some continuing violence, momentum began to build towards a negotiated settlement. It received increased impetus following general elections in mid-1997 in both the UK and the Republic of Ireland, with the newly appointed prime ministers, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern, both firmly committed to securing a deal. The final rounds of talks in the spring of 1998 were nevertheless prolonged and tortuous. They were chaired by a leading former American senator, George Mitchell, and the US president, Bill Clinton, was also actively involved in efforts to persuade the Northern Ireland parties to reach a compromise.

The resulting GFA consists of two documents, an agreement between the Northern Ireland political parties and an international treaty between the UK and Irish governments as joint guarantors of that settlement. The central compromise was a commitment that Northern Ireland would remain a part of the UK unless and until the people of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland voted in referenda for a united Ireland. A devolved Northern Ireland assembly and government would be reinstated – having been in abeyance since the early 1970s – but rather than restoring control by the Protestant majority, there would be a power-sharing executive with the Protestant/Unionist first minister having a Catholic/nationalist deputy. Other provisions included commitments to secure the decommissioning of the arsenals of weapons held by the paramilitary groups, to review and reform the police service to address its perceived sectarian bias, and to establish structures to advance equality and human rights (for a fuller albeit summary account of the Troubles and the events leading up to the GFA, see Fenton 2018: 15–80).

Implementation and commemoration

The GFA faced the immediate obstacle of ratification by referendums on 22 May in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. While positive outcomes were never seriously in doubt, the campaign preceding the votes exposed the degree of continuing opposition to the settlement, notably from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) led by Revd Ian Paisley, who had since the 1960s combined religious conviction and political rhetoric in diehard opposition to any concession to either Catholicism or Irish nationalism. Then on 15 August 1998, dissident republican paramilitaries opposed to the GFA planted a car bomb in the town of Omagh killing twenty-nine people, the highest death toll in any single incident in the Troubles. The dual challenges of political intransigence, primarily on the Protestant/Unionist side and continuing rogue paramilitary activity, primarily on the Catholic/nationalist/republican side, continued to delay full and successful implementation of the GFA (for a survey of political developments between 1998 and 2018, see O'Kane and Dixon 2018). The



early years after 1998 saw a cycle of short-lived attempts to sustain the power-sharing arrangement, which then collapsed amid mutual distrust and recrimination. Unionists feared that a renewal of paramilitary violence would be used to exert political leverage, and so insisted that the commitment to decommission IRA weapons must be honoured before they would co-operate further. The process, overseen by a Catholic priest, Alec Reid, and a Methodist minister, Harold Good, eventually began in late 2001, but distrust of the IRA's intentions persisted until it was reported complete in 2005.

Hence at the time of the fifth anniversary of the Agreement in April 2003, both the power-sharing executive and the assembly were suspended. The occasion was therefore a cause not for celebration but rather for exhortations to complete unfinished business. Ahern, Blair and the US President George W. Bush issued a joint statement to that effect (*Irish Times* 9 April 2003). Unionists were noticeably silent, but Irish nationalists such as the Sinn Féin leader in the Irish parliament and participants in a conference of the Connolly Association in London also urged the need for further progress (Sinn Féin 2003). A rather different note, however, was struck by Nicholas Frayling, a senior Church of England clergyman who spoke of the need for repentance, crucially by the British for their actions in Ireland over the centuries. Frayling advocated a truth and reconciliation process on the lines of the one recently conducted in post-apartheid South Africa. In his opinion there was a need for 'working through history together' if there was to be meaningful reconciliation in the future (*Irish Democrat* 2003).

By the time of the tenth anniversary, however, prospects had improved. The St Andrews Agreement of October 2006 (named after the Scottish town where the talks were conducted) paved the way for a restoration of the assembly and the executive in May 2007. Remarkably, Ian Paisley of the DUP and Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin developed a successful working relationship as first and deputy first ministers. In June 2007 the need to address the painful legacy of the Troubles was recognized by the setting up of the Consultative Group on the Past, co-chaired by Robin Eames, the former Anglican archbishop of Armagh, and Denis Bradley, a former Catholic priest. The commemorations in April 2008 reflected this more positive mood: the *Irish Times* editorial (10 April 2008) hailed the GFA's achievement of embedding an 'ethos of mutual recognition, respect and toleration in inter-community and inter-state relations' while Prime Minister Ahern affirmed that 'we have closed the bloody chapters and opened a new chapter of reconciliation and renewal' (Ahern 2008). There were, however, discordant notes: Paisley and his fellow DUP ministers were notable for their absence from a commemorative symposium in Belfast, and the *Irish Times* felt that the Agreement's promise of 'community reconciliation, solidarity and inclusiveness' was yet to be fulfilled. The continuing obstacles to full reconciliation were painfully exposed in early 2009 when the Eames-Bradley group reported. They made a number of thoughtful recommendations regarding processes for addressing the hurts and divisions of the past, but these were drowned out by the furore caused by their proposal that the nearest relative of *all* those killed in the conflict should receive a payment of £12,000. For Unionists, the implied moral equivalence between republican paramilitaries, British soldiers and Protestant civilians was wholly unacceptable. This reaction ensured that the attempt to establish a truth and reconciliation process in Northern Ireland on South African lines failed to gain momentum.

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Paisley stepped down as first minister in June 2008, and his successors failed to establish the kind of warm relations with McGuinness that had led to the duo being known as the ‘chuckle brothers’. Nevertheless, the power-sharing executive now survived for a decade until it collapsed in early 2017 due to McGuinness’s own resignation over a failed energy scheme for which he held the DUP responsible. Meanwhile the fifteenth anniversary of the GFA in April 2013 took place in a climate of relative political stability. While acknowledging that much remained to be done, the UK prime minister, David Cameron, issued a statement hailing it as the platform for building a ‘new confident and inclusive Northern Ireland’ (Prime Minister’s Office 2013). In Belfast, at an event for young people, the UK secretary of state for Northern Ireland Theresa Villiers shared a platform with the Irish Foreign Minister Eamon Gilmore (Irish Foreign Ministry 2013). Villiers initially sounded complacent, highlighting the UK government’s achievements in Northern Ireland since 1998, but she went on to express concern at the continuing legacy of sectarianism that was transmitting itself to young people who had grown up since the Agreement. Gilmore was more challenging, highlighting the need for mutual respect between different traditions and calling on his youthful audience to consign the politics of the past to the past. Alluding to the so-called peace walls that continued to separate polarized communities in Belfast, he acknowledged that deep divisions continued and urged his hearer to break down the walls in their hearts.

The most recent significant anniversary, the twentieth in April 2018, occurred against a much-changed and substantially bleaker political landscape. Not only had the assembly and the executive now been suspended for over a year, but the UK’s vote to leave the EU in the referendum of June 2016 was straining relations with the Republic of Ireland, and raising serious practical questions about how to maintain the open border between the two jurisdictions that was an essential precondition for the settlement. A further complication, following the UK general election in June 2017, was the British Conservative government’s dependence on the DUP to maintain its fragile majority in the Westminster parliament, which undermined its ability to act as an honest broker in Northern Ireland.

April 2018 saw a variety of public statements, newspaper articles and interviews by both present-day leaders and surviving participants in the 1998 negotiations. The most high-profile event brought many of these together for a conference at Queen’s University Belfast (2018) on the actual anniversary of the GFA. The speeches were preceded by a moving film that combined footage of 1998 with reflections from present-day young people, from university students to small children, on their appreciation of growing up in a peaceful Northern Ireland and on their hopes for the future. The forward-looking theme was pursued by the Irish foreign minister, Simon Coveney, who stressed the importance of remembering how things had been before 1998 and the continuing need to make progress on the legacy of the past. He called for a fresh spirit of renewal and reconciliation. Former prime ministers Ahern and Blair shared a platform with former president Clinton and senator Mitchell. Their emphatic joint message was that the Agreement had been a hard-won triumph of the democratic process. It was not perfect and could not on its own solve all of Northern Ireland’s problems, but it had brought vast improvements and remained an essential foundation for further progress.



Successive speakers urged unremitting efforts to restore functioning of the devolved government and emphasized the vital importance of avoiding a hard border if the achievements of the last twenty years were to be sustained. The conference's sense of a vital unfinished task was also echoed in a joint statement by the Anglican and Catholic archbishops:

The peace we have today took a great effort to achieve; it will equally take risk, and leadership at all levels, to maintain. It is therefore our sincere shared prayer that this anniversary will help to rekindle a spirit of opportunity, healing and hope for lasting peace which is now needed more than ever. (Church of Ireland 2018)

Commemorating and perpetuating conflict

The above events and pronouncements commemorating the GFA were elite activities, bringing together protagonists from 1998 with current political leaders and a supporting cast of academics, journalists and religious leaders. The importance of influencing the young was emphasized, but direct interaction with them was limited.

At a more popular level, in Northern Ireland as in Macedonia, commemoration of the past took very different forms. These related not only to the Troubles of the later twentieth century but also to much more distant history. In particular, Protestant Orangemen continued to assert their right to march and celebrate on 12 July to mark the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, the decisive victory of the forces of the Protestant King William of Orange over his Catholic rival James II. The sacrifice of the Ulster Division at the Battle of the Somme in 1916 is also commemorated on the 'Twelfth', as this too occurred in early July. At the time of GFA in 1998 there were acute tensions associated with the Orange parade to the church at Drumcree near Portadown, because the Orangemen had recently been banned from returning along their traditional route in order to avoid provoking Catholic residents. In July 1998 up to twenty thousand people gathered near Drumcree church, and although most were peaceful some violence ensued. Similar events followed in the next few years (Pickering 2009). Although the Drumcree protests gradually subsided in the early 2000s, Orange marches in Belfast and elsewhere have continued to be a source of ongoing tension.

Since 1998 the desire to commemorate the more recent Troubles, especially those who died in them, has led to the erection of numerous memorials. For example, on the Catholic/republican side there is the Clonard Martyrs Garden in Bombay Street, Belfast, unveiled in August 2000, off the Falls Road in West Belfast, in an area burned by Protestants at the outset of the Troubles in 1969 (see Figure 7.4).

There is a cluster of memorials at Free Derry Corner (Londonderry) including the original memorial to the victims of Bloody Sunday, which was renovated around the time of the twenty-fifth anniversary in 2007, a memorial to ten republicans who died on hunger strike in 1981 at the height of the Troubles and the Museum of Free Derry, opened in 2005 (Conway 2010). Protestant counterparts include memorial gardens built by the Ulster Defence Association in Sandy Row and Roden Street, Belfast, both opened in 2006. These memorials associate the deaths of Loyalist paramilitaries in the Troubles with the historic sacrifice of the Ulster Division on the Somme (Viggiani 2014).

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Figure 7.4 Clonard Martyrs Memorial Garden

Source: Photo by John Wolfe, 25 April 2018.

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An impressive new memorial to the First World War dead, erected on the Protestant Shankill Road in West Belfast in 2009, implies a similar continuity. Both communities also adorned walls in their respective territories with murals reflecting their distinct interpretations of history and the Troubles. The example in Figure 7.5, also on the Shankill Road, commemorates the centenary in 2012 of the Ulster Covenant, in which most of the Protestant population had pledged themselves to diehard resistance to a proposed devolved parliament in Dublin beginning the chain of events that led to the division of the island of Ireland in the 1920s.

Contemporary events also stirred divisive popular reactions, notably the decision of Belfast City Council on 3 December 2012 to cease to fly the Union Flag throughout the year, and instead only to fly it on eighteen officially designated dates. This merely brought Belfast into line with usual practice in other parts of the UK, but in the eyes of Protestant Loyalists it was an unacceptable concession to Irish nationalism. There were prolonged street protests, which although non-violent, were disruptive of normal life and indicative of ongoing Protestant resistance to even limited compromise, particularly in working-class communities that were still suffering high levels of deprivation and unemployment and felt left behind by the growing prosperity of other parts of Northern Ireland (Jarman 2019).



Figure 7.5 Mural on the Shankill Road

Source: Photo by John Wolffe, 28 May 2019.

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It was understandable that those who had lived through the conflict, especially former paramilitaries and those close to them, were reluctant to let go of past attitudes. Hence more than twenty years on from the GFA Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided albeit largely peaceful society. Attention has therefore focused on the prospects for change through a younger generation who have grown up since 1998. However, although some young people, such as those featured in the film shown at the 2018 anniversary event, take a very positive view of the future, wider attitudes are mixed. Despite some slow progress in developing integrated schools, over 90 per cent of Northern Ireland children continue to be educated in institutions with student bodies that are almost exclusively either Catholic or Protestant (Morrow 2019: 25). Although there are projects to foster collaboration between schools of different traditions, unless and until they enter university or the workplace most young people are unlikely to have much social or other contact with 'the other side'. In a 2018 survey, 66 per cent of Northern Ireland young people (between eighteen and thirty) thought discrimination and prejudice were still a problem to a 'great' or to 'some' extent. They were alienated from the political process, with only 10 per cent giving a positive trust rating to the Northern Ireland assembly and only 11 per cent to the Westminster parliament. There was also nervousness about future economic prospects, with 90 per cent concerned about a lack of jobs for young people (Connolly et al. 2018: 21, 27, 32). There is a risk that the alienation and boredom consequent on youth unemployment could become a breeding ground for renewed sectarian conflict. Hence a recent report on addressing sectarianism in Northern Ireland placed a particular emphasis on the young, including mentoring and intergenerational engagement, fostering youth leadership and participation, and ensuring schools have shared programmes with other communities. It also stressed the importance of investing in youth work (Morrow 2019: 42–5). While the passage of time indeed offers hope that the politics and conflicts of the past will eventually be consigned to the past there is no room for complacency.

Conclusion

Both Northern Ireland and North Macedonia retain high levels of religiosity. In Northern Ireland in 2011, 83 per cent of the population identified with a religion, a lower proportion than the 94 per cent who had had a religious upbringing, but still an overwhelming majority (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2012: 3). In North Macedonia in 2012, 90 per cent of the population identified as 'religious persons' (Zdravkovski and Morrison 2014: 241). In both countries, populist right of centre political parties – the DUP in Northern Ireland and the DPMNE in North Macedonia – have sought legitimacy through alignment with dominant religious groups – Ulster Presbyterians and Macedonian Orthodox Christians. Hence the continuing polarizing effect of rival religious identities at a popular level has inhibited any aspirations they might have to bridge divides and facilitate inclusive collective memorialization of the peace settlements. Although religious actors have been involved in some significant peacebuilding initiatives in Northern Ireland, in general religion has been subordinated to political agendas much more than it has shaped them.



Against this background, organized commemorations of the settlements have tended either to be elitist and academic – such as the conferences held by Macedonian universities in 2011 or that by Queens University Belfast in 2018 – or obviously partisan – such as the Connolly Association conference in London in 2003, or the DUI event in Ohrid in 2006. Official attempts to hold more inclusive commemorations, notably those by the secretariat for the implementation of the OFA, have largely founded on the rocks of political partisanship and popular apathy. On the other hand, physical memorials and museums recalling the conflicts themselves have had more popular resonance. Such material commemoration of past violence is disturbing for those who want rather to celebrate peace, but it may well have a cathartic function for those who might otherwise be tempted to resume hostilities. It offers them a sense that justice has been done to the past, and that they can now look to the future as in the joint commemoration at Lipkovo in December 2018.

It is evident therefore that in both societies the building of peace and acceptance of diversity based on the respective peace settlements of 1998 and 2001 is a long-term process. It is accordingly crucial to look to the formative influences on young people and to foster education systems that promote mutual understanding and tolerance even when they still unavoidably separate children on religious lines. The cultivation of a balanced understanding of recent history that questions divisive collective memories and affirms consensual ones can make an important contribution to this process.

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