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From Belfast to Bilbao: The Basque Experience with the Irish Model

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Abstract

This paper examines the *izquierda Abertzale* (Basque Nationalist Left) experience of the Irish model. Drawing upon conflict transformation scholars, the paper works to determine if the Irish model serves as a tool of conflict transformation. Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the paper argues that it is a tool, and focuses on the specific finding that it is one of many learning tools in the international sphere. It suggests that this theme can be generalized and could be found in other case studies. The paper is located within the discipline of peace and conflict studies, but uses a method from psychology.

Keywords: Conflict transformation, Basque Country, Irish model, Peace Studies

Introduction¹

The conflict in the Basque Country remains one of the most intractable conflicts, and until recently was the only conflict within European borders. *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) has waged an open, violent conflict against the Spanish state, with periodic ceasefires and attempts for peace. Despite key differences in contexts, the *izquierda Abertzale* ('nationalist left') has viewed the Irish model – defined in this paper as a process of transformation which encompasses both the Good Friday Agreement (from here on referred to as GFA) and wider peace process in Northern Ireland – with potential. How does the Irish model contribute to conflict transformation within the Basque Country, and what can this suggest about its potential to contribute to peace in other conflict areas?

This paper examines the experience of using the Irish model by the political actors in the *izquierda Abertzale* ('nationalist left'), a social movement in the Basque Country, and is located within peace and conflict studies. These actors were selected because they have in the past attempted to introduce a version of the Irish model through the 'Irish Forum'² in 1998, and have continued to look to Northern Ireland and Sinn Féin in their search for peace. The themes which arise from an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) highlight that

the Irish model is a tool of conflict transformation, more specifically a learning tool in the international sphere. The implications of this are that although the Irish model cannot be unvaryingly defined or directly transferred to other contexts, it can potentially contribute to conflict transformation elsewhere.

The paper is organized into five parts: first is a discussion regarding the Irish model before suggesting that it could be a tool of conflict transformation. This section provides a short overview of conflict transformation to create criteria against which to consider the Irish model. A short discussion regarding methods is followed by an overview of the conflict in the Basque Country and the search for peace. The paper then presents the themes which arose from analysis. The last section engages these themes with the criteria for a tool of conflict transformation to consider the implications of these findings before concluding remarks.

The Irish model and Tools of Conflict Transformation

Although elites often claim that the GFA has potential elsewhere (Clinton 2014; Obama 2013; Blair 2008; Hain 2008), these claims are problematic. O’Kane (2010) notes that the politicians or leaders making such claims often fail to define what they mean by ‘model’. This ambiguity makes it unclear to know what is meant by the Irish model, and whether it relates to the constitutional or institutional arrangements or the process by which these arrangements became a formal agreement. This is an important distinction to consider, as it influences which theories and aspects are considered by scholars. While O’Kane (2010) attempts to draw out a model based on conflict resolution/management theories, he finds that Northern Ireland’s peace process cannot be separated from its context. He also argues that there are

issues with theories which would allow it to be a model, highlighting that Zartman's (2000) theory of ripeness is based on subjective perceptions of actors rather than outside factors (O'Kane 2010: 244-5).

Despite this analytic difficulty, comparisons with Northern Ireland are made both by actors as well as scholars in terms of peace processes, political parties, ideologies and behaviours (Bew *et al.* 2009; Guelke 2006; Irvin 1999, 2000; Maillot 2005). Comparisons made by actors have a three-fold purpose of legitimizing new strategies, providing frameworks for decision making and setting examples of success (Guelke 2006: 375). O'Kane (2010: 239) concurs that actors in conflict compare '...either to equate their plight with others for whom international opinion was generally sympathetic...or to draw parallels that legitimised the state and partition'. The new worldview in the post-Cold War Era resulted in changing attitudes about peace and conflict around the time of the GFA. Because of expectations and a need to explore new endgames, conflicts attempting to find peace looked to their successful counterparts for inspiration and guidelines. The peace process in Northern Ireland was sometimes directed by actions undertaken by parties involved in the South African and Israeli-Palestinian peace processes (Guelke 2006; Ramsbotham *et al.* 2005). As a result, it came as no surprise that factors which helped produce the GFA were attempted not only in the Basque Country but also in Corsica (Guelke 2006; Letamendía and Loughlin 2006). John Darby (2008: 339) states that what was 'exceptional' about the Basques' attempt to imitate the Northern Irish peace process was only the 'degree' to which they modelled their plans on it in the Irish Forum. It was, in many ways, an affirmation of the GFA, and in particular the sections which focused on the principle of consent and the right to self-determination for the people of Northern Ireland. This suggests that these comparisons are common and are worth exploring,

and the *Abertzale* case is an appropriate departure point as it shows a strong interest in using the Irish model in its own context. While this literature may explain why borrowing and lending occurs, it does not explain the how the process of borrowing and lending actually functions which is what this paper discusses.

This brief discussion of the Irish model highlights the lack of a uniform definition to which actors can point, which begins to challenge the public discourse. Still, comparative politics points towards a phenomenon of drawing on other peace processes during endgames, and the *izquierda Abertzale* case demonstrates a close comparison with Irish republicans and their interpretation of the peace process. This would suggest that the Irish model should be defined for this paper as: a process of conflict transformation which includes outcomes from the GFA such as the constitutional arrangements but also the wider peace process. This paper focuses less on the power-sharing, institutional arrangements, as in the *Abertzale* understanding of the peace process these are not given much attention.³ Such a definition covers a wide period of history, up to and including the present, and highlights the long-term nature of conflict transformation. The time that it can take to reach an agreement such as the GFA, or even follow-on ones such as St. Andrew's, further suggests the difficulty one would face attempting to directly transfer the Irish model to another context. This paper argues that the Irish model should be classed as a tool of conflict transformation instead, so it is necessary to consider the assumptions of conflict transformation and what criteria a tool would have to meet.

Conflict transformation can be classed as a tradition within peace and conflict studies, that holds a unique vision of conflict and the role it plays in society while also favouring peace for all persons. Conflict theory which states that conflict lies at the heart of all relationships

(Deutsch 1991; Lederach 2003) plays a major role in conflict transformation. Conflict can even bring about positive change and personal as well as societal growth (Buchanan 2014: 23; Deutsch 1991: 27). Violent expressions of conflict are deemed unnatural, so conflict transformation places a heavy focus on the dynamics of conflict to seek out the possibilities for different forms of expression (Wallensteen 2012: 34). Transformation is not only about human needs or goals of actors but also includes addressing 'structural violence' (Galtung 1969), which are the dynamics and structures of society which may be inherently violent and contributing to conflict.

In addition to this unique view of conflict, conflict transformation shuns universal responses to conflict in favour of considering the context of each conflict. The result of this is that '...there is no single model of transformation. Rather there are multiple approaches...' (Ryan 2007: 2). Raimo Väyrynen (1991) identified four aspects of conflict transformation that can demonstrate whether conflict is shifting from one with destructive towards constructive dynamics. They are: actor, issue, rule and structural transformations. Actor transformation relates to either alterations within parties or 'the appearance and recognition of new actors' (Väyrynen, 1991: 4) and is rarely experienced in a complete sense: 'A complete convergence of societies belongs to the realm of theory, while in reality the internal transformation of actors is usually partial and limited' (Väyrynen 1991: 4). Issue transformation 'alters the political agenda of the conflict; it reduces the relative importance of issues on which antagonism exists and emphasizes the issues on which commonality prevails' (Väyrynen 1991: 5). Issue transformation operates separately from but can be connected to rule transformation which has to do with the terms of engagement between parties in conflict

(Väyrynen 1991: 5). Lastly are transformations that deal with the structure in which actors interact:

The external structure of conflict is transformed either if the distribution of power between actors significantly changes or if their mutual relations experience a qualitative change. Such a change may mean, for example, a significant increase or decrease in the extent of communication and interdependence between actors. It leads either to the actor's integration with or to isolation from other actors and the international environment (Väyrynen 1991: 6).

The four kinds of transformation can be observed within a given context or may be expressed by actors describing their experience.

One amendment to Väyrynen's typology is required. Isolation is problematic and my research argues that integration would be the only way to promote positive transformation. Conflict can either be escalated by how goals are expressed, or they can be transformed if the groups can move towards integration and interdependence. Interdependence promotes cooperation and relationship building between and within groups. Lederach (1997) originally imagined relationships and roles in peacebuilding as a hierarchical triangle and he further '...refers to the building of new or the rebuilding of broken relationships across the lines of division created through and by conflict as horizontal capacity' (Buchanan 2014: 28). More recently, however, he considered relationships as a spider web rather than triangle in *The Moral Imagination* (2005). What is beneficial about the spider web model is that it allows for greater integration and interdependence between actors and groups at different levels. While isolation may end violence, where there is a desire to promote relationship-building, groups and actors must be integrated and promote interdependence.

Conflict transformation is also used in conjunction with the goal of moving conflicting groups towards reconciliation. Reconciliation is focused on the restoration of a broken or

harmed relationship to a positive one where there is mutual respect and trust through processes of 'acknowledgement', 'forgiveness', 'justice in some form' and measures to prevent a relapse in the future (Santa-Barbara 2007: 174-176). Lederach (2005) also believes that peace becomes a long-term, ever evolving process which is promoted by the local community. Reconciliation is a long-term goal which requires time in order to embed within a post-conflict society.

From this, one can identify three key criteria to determine whether the Irish model can serve as a tool for conflict transformation, as it becomes clear that a directly transferred model would not contribute to conflict transformation. With a focus on transforming violent expressions of conflict, any tool of conflict transformation must firstly assist in bringing about a more peaceful expression of conflict, with peace understood in accordance with Galtung's (1969) concepts of positive and negative peace. Since conflict transformation places a focus on groups moving towards integration and developing relationships (Lederach 1997; 2003; 2005), the second criteria which can be drawn from the theory is that tools of conflict transformation must result in transformation in at least one of the ways identified by Väyrynen (1991) with the amendment that there must be integration and not isolation. Lastly, conflict transformation aims to promote reconciliation, so the third criteria of conflict transformation must contribute to reconciliation.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Conflict Transformation

The data for this paper comes from three interviews with members of the Basque nationalist left, the *izquierda Abertzale* that were conducted in the Basque Country in the spring of 2013. *Izquierda Abertzale* is a wide-reaching, umbrella term encapsulating social groups, trade unions, a political party, and a youth movement. The three men who were interviewed are members of the political party. While not a perfect term, this paper refers to this political party and these actors as the *izquierda Abertzale* or *Abertzales*. This is because the political party in question has experienced bans under Spanish counterterrorism laws. It has previously been known as *Herri Batasuna*, then revived as *Batasuna* and is currently *Sortu*, with current elected representatives serving as members of the *EH-Bildu* coalition. Interview subjects were selected for their leadership positions and for having a relationship with Sinn Féin, as the research seeks to understand how the Irish model has contributed to peace in the Basque Country. As a result the number of interviews is quite small, but the data which was collected was rich in quality and well-informed.

Interviews were semi-structured and asked open questions about the GFA, the peace process in Northern Ireland and in the Basque Country, their relationship with Sinn Féin and what value the Irish model held for them. Interviews were allowed to go in different directions depending on statements made by the person speaking and if time allowed. This was in line with the recommendations of Aberbach and Rockman (2002: 674), who support the semi-structured or open-ended interview structure for elites, as they highlight that it works best when researchers are asking about complicated or lengthy themes.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as constructed by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) was used to code interviews. IPA is a method found in psychology and is rooted in phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, and ‘...is usually concerned with experience

which is of particular moment or significance to the person' (Smith *et. al.* 2009: 33). 'IPA is phenomenological in that it is concerned with individuals' subjective reports rather than the formulation of objective accounts' (Brocki and Wearden 2006:88). The authors define 'experience' using Dilthy's argument that any unit in time with meaning can be an experience and that multiple units over time are considered a 'comprehensive experience' (Smith *et. al.* 2009: 2). IPA is '...is committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context' (Smith *et. al.* 2009: 29).

In this research, the experiences under examination relate to the *izquierda Abertzale's* use of the Irish model in their attempts to end the violent conflict in the Basque Country. Themes from the findings are used to create a hypothesis which could be tested in other case studies, rather than attempting to make general claims at this stage. This approach is also in line with IPA's focus on the particular, as it is from the particular that general themes can be identified for theoretical development (Smith *et. al.* 2009: 31).

The analysis admittedly veers away from a traditional application of IPA as it engages with conflict transformation theory rather than psychology. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009: 5) accept that IPA can and has been used by other disciplines of the human and social sciences, but they argue that IPA is always '...psychological with a small *p*, as well as with a big *P*'. It would be inappropriate to undertake a psychological interpretation of the data as it is not the field within which the research operates. In addition to contributing to the wider debates on the Irish model, this methodology also suggests the adaptability of IPA to studies which are not necessarily psychological thereby, bridging the gap between theory and practice in peace and conflict studies.

Overview of the Basque Conflict

Attempting to date the start of the conflict in the Basque Country, requires recognition of the existence of a conflict between nationalisms (Rice 2013; Woodworth 2001) rather than a state security issue. Referring to the conflict as 'in the Basque Country' suggests that the conflict only has to do with the local actors in the region rather than involving the Spanish and (to a lesser degree) French governments. There are the additional challenges that narratives are politically charged and carry particular meanings within Basque society (Kappler 2013) and that identity in the Basque Country operates on a spectrum from 'Only Spanish' to 'Only Basque' with shades of in between also present (Moreno 2004). Moreno (2004: 36-40) discusses a dual identity which 'incorporates in variable proportions the regional (ethno-territorial) identity and the national (state) identity', and finds that the Basques along with the Canaries are the most likely to have a stronger regional affiliation than other parts of Spain. Bray (2004:61) notes that definitions of Basque identity are divided with no common identity shared amongst the political parties. These challenges impact on the political divisions and tensions between the Spanish and Basque political forces, which Teresa Whitfield (2014) excellently captures in *Endgame for ETA*. As this paper is concerned with the *izquierda Abertzale* experience with the Irish model, it is not possible to detail these divisions; however, it is important to acknowledge that not all actors in the Basque Country would agree with this narrative of the conflict, or the suggestion that the Irish model could contribute to peace.

For the *izquierda Abertzale*, the narrative begins with ancient privileges of autonomy – called forals – which were protected until after the Carlist wars when they were abolished.

Barrena (personal interview 22 April, 2013)⁴ told me that there is a conservative streak in Basque nationalism due to their allegiance with the Carlists and the Second Spanish Republic, although the *Abertzales* argue these allegiances were determined by a strong desire to protect the foral rights rather than a loyalty to the leadership (Barrena 2013). During the Spanish Civil War, the Basque Country was one of the last places to fall to Franco, who then went on to implement a national identity of Spanish based on the Castilian language and culture.

ETA began as an intellectual group, but a spiral of violence broke out in the 1960s. When Franco died and Spain transitioned to a constitutional monarchy, the Basque Country was granted the highest level of autonomy in all of Europe. While autonomy and restoration of the foral liberties was the goal before Franco, post-Franco left Basque nationalism wanted nothing short of independence. This new goal resulted in ETA continuing its armed campaign against the state. ETA's campaign has been denounced as no longer a war for liberation or resistance against oppressive measures but rather as terrorism against a democratic state (Whitfield 2014; Goikoetxeta 2013; Woodworth 2001). ETA has denied this claim, although the ending of other conflicts around the world in addition to the new geopolitical context of the War on Terror has made it more difficult to justify the legitimacy of violence (Maillot 2005).

Over the course of the conflict, there have been various attempts to reach an agreement between the Spanish state and ETA, with Lizarra-Garazi and the Irish Forum being ones of particular note.⁵ The Lizarra-Garazi period of time is named after the village in Navarre where the Declaration of the same name was signed in September 1998. The document was the outcome of the Irish Forum, proposed by *Herri Batasuna*, during which

various nationalist parties and movements within the Basque society discussed peace processes in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the Irish Forum in the history of the Basque conflict or how it demonstrated an attempt at a transfer of the Irish model to the Basque Country. In a two-page document, they presented an analysis of the GFA as well as offering a path towards peace in the Basque Country by adopting similar steps to those taken in Northern Ireland. The Declaration was met with a ceasefire from ETA which lasted for 18 months before collapsing, with blame placed on various actors. Despite this failure, the Lizarra-Garazi Declaration and Irish Forum were key moments in the *Abertzale* conflict transformation journey.

The current scenario in the Basque Country is a unique one which cannot be classed as a formal peace process but rather as a process of conflict transformation. ‘We don’t have a peace process, in terms of a peace process with two sides talking’ (Urko Aiartza personal interview 30 April, 2013).⁶ Although the Basque context has moved towards peace – with ETA beginning a process of disarmament with international verifiers in February 2014 and announcing a move towards dissolution in the summer of 2014 – a lack of engagement between the State and the *Abertzales* will most likely not result in the necessary and sufficient conditions for an intractable conflict to move towards a process of reconciliation, which is the ultimate goal of conflict transformation.⁷ This means that issues surrounding prisoners, truth recovery and the past are allowed to fester within society. At the same time, the Basque Country is experiencing profound transformation of the conflict in the sense that the question of ETA’s violence has been removed from the context, and the legalization of *Sortu* has helped create space in the political arena for the *izquierda Abertzale* to engage. Indeed, it took Northern Ireland a number of years to reach the stage where the GFA became possible, so it

could be premature to be critical of the current scenario in the Basque Country for not reaching a similar stage just yet.

While the *izquierda Abertzale* have looked to Northern Ireland, there are those who are critical of adopting the Irish model in the Basque Country (Bew *et al.* 2009; Alonso 2004, 2001). Alonso (2004, 2001) ignores key historical developments in Republican strategies, including the 'greater linkages between' Sinn Féin and the IRA come the mid-1970s which are noted by Tonge *et al.* (2011: 7) or the impact the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike had on Republican attitudes towards electoral politics. Alonso's work is further coloured by his choice of some interview subjects; Anthony McIntyre, on whom he relies (Alonso 2004, 2007), is a well-known dissenting voice on Sinn Féin's entrance into mainstream politics and continues to be heavily critical of mainstream Republican decisions. His support of the argument that the IRA was defeated contradicts the military stalemate argument, or 'ripeness' (Zartman 2000, 2003), which others accept and support (e.g. Dixon 2012; Neumann 2003), and of which even critics have given due credit as a means of explaining 'top-down' interpretations of events (Tonge *et al.* 2011: 15). Bew *et al.* (2009) also offer their interpretation of the success of Northern Ireland to a defeated Provisional IRA, and that the Lizarra-Garazi Declaration was the product of a 'flawed and self-interested' (Bew *et al.* 2009: 250) understanding of the landscape in Northern Ireland that eventually made the GFA possible. This paper questions their findings, arguing that they come from a particular, conservative position that does not account for the evolution in the thinking of the *izquierda Abertzale*, particularly in light of events since 2010.

In addition to those critical of questions of stalemate, there are those who challenge the nature of the violence of ETA. As previously noted, while the Basque nationalists and

others within society do acknowledge the existence of a conflict in need of transformation as a reality (Whitfield 2014: 224), the others argue that there is no conflict but rather a terrorism, or security, issue. Sometimes, this discourse can be slightly sympathetic to ETA under Franco's oppressive regime, but following the democratic transition, ETA's actions have grown intolerable (Whitfield 2014; Goikoetxea 2013; Moreno 2004; Keating 2001). The War on Terror era also contributes to this discourse and framing, which supports the Spanish state's approach to the ETA problem by implementing the Parot Doctrine which instructs strict punishments for anyone convicted of being a member of ETA or of 'glorifying terrorism' (including a policy of dispersal which results in prisoners being housed in prisons outside of the Basque Country including as far as the Canary Islands), in addition to banning the political party Batasuna and other movements which fall under the *izquierda Abertzale* umbrella. This framing has also created critics of applying the Irish model, who argue that the contexts are very different due to ETA's political violence continuing during post-Franco democracy compared to Northern Ireland's violence occurring in a context where not all citizens had full rights (Goikotxea 2013).

Despite developments and a shift in the *izquierda Abertzale* towards a political strategy, the context of the Basque Country begins to suggest that a direct transfer of the Irish model would be inappropriate. This brief overview of the context of the Basque Country is one that is rather different to the Troubles in Northern Ireland, where there were multiple sides fighting with and against each other. Additionally, while the territorial question in Northern Ireland is in regards to unification with the Republic of Ireland, the *izquierda Abertzale* movement has sought the creation of an independent, united Basque Country which does not have a modern historical precedent in the same way as Ireland. These are

major contextual differences, which challenge the appropriateness of implementing an agreement in the same vein as the Good Friday Agreement. However, as was noted previously, the political actors of the *izquierda Abertzale* have had a long-standing relationship with Sinn Féin, and the Irish Forum publically demonstrated an intention to apply the Irish Model to their own context. This implies that, despite these contextual differences, there is some value to looking towards the Irish model. Here the paper begins to consider what this might be, based on the themes which came from coding.

Learning not Applying: Exploring the Abertzale Experience of the Irish model

The paper now turns to presenting the themes found in the interviews. Interviews were coded in full with emergent themes identified before approaching the next transcript. Once this process was complete, each transcript had its emergent themes considered for connections in order to create 'Super-ordinate themes' in line with IPA methodology (Smith, *et al.* 2009: 92-100). The first super-ordinate themes are temporal ones, defined by the events of the Lizarra-Garazi Agreement period of time and the current peace process which began with ETA's most recent ceasefire in 2010 (and more formally launched in 2011 with the Aiete Conference and Declaration after which came a re-affirmation of the permanency of ETA's ceasefire). Under these two themes came other super-ordinate themes which focused on the Irish model and its influence in the Basque peace process at that time. These themes were compared across interviews, in order to begin to interpret the experience of the Irish model. It becomes clear that in the time between the Lizarra-Garazi Agreement and the current scenario, there was a shift in how the *Abertzales* utilized the Irish model in their own attempt to find a resolution to their conflict. This shift includes not only a focus on the wider Irish

model as a process of transformation but also how it has been used as a learning tool instead of as something to be applied.

While interviews did not ask about Lizarra-Garazi directly, it was a significant moment in all three interviews. During coding, the key themes which came out of these sections of transcript were: Lizarra-Garazi as a turning point, Lizarra-Garazi as a product the Irish Forum, the GFA as inspiration and Lizarra-Garazi Declaration as an application of the Irish model.

The Lizarra-Garazi Declaration marked a major turning point in the Basque conflict because it began to suggest a new way of approaching conflict for the *izquierda Abertzale* and ETA. Gorka Elejabarrieta (personal interview 9 April, 2013)⁸ noted that prior to the Irish Forum and the Declaration:

...the methodology of our movement was that there was a political conflict going on in the Basque Country. That in order to solve that political conflict, there should be a negotiation process, but that negotiation process should take place between ETA and the Spanish state.

This was the framework for the back channel talks which occurred in the late 1980s in Algeria ('the Algerian Connection') which failed to produce an agreement. There was a move towards engagement with other political and social actors in the Basque Country (Elejabarrieta 2013) because of this initial failure. This is reflected in the signatories of the Lizarra-Garazi Declaration which included predominantly – although not entirely – nationalist political parties, trade unions and social groups. This change in “methodology” or strategy was a product of the local context, although the wider international context was also shifting with the collapse of the Soviet Union and other liberation movements around the world reaching peace agreements (Elejabarrieta 2013). The Lizarra-Garazi Declaration highlighted a lesson the *Abertzales* learned from Northern Ireland: political conflicts require political solutions

(Barrena 2013). It was the beginning of moving towards 'a new paradigm' within the Basque Country (Aiertza 2013), but it also marked a change in how the *Abertzales* saw Sinn Féin and Northern Ireland. Aiertza (2013) notes, '...there was a shift on the way we were looking to the Irish struggle because basically until that it was just a kind of solidarity of peoples in struggle'. This issue suggests that while there were key internal factors which were influencing the move towards the Lizarra-Garazi Declaration occurring within the Basque Country, the GFA did carry some influence in the sense that it was part of a shifting international context and it also challenged the nature of the relationship between Sinn Féin and the *Abertzales*.

Although the Lizarra-Garazi process is a turning point that accounts for the local context, the fact that Lizarra-Garazi was a product of the Irish Forum confirms the heavy influence of the GFA on this process. The significance of the Irish Forum cannot be denied, and much like the Lizarra-Garazi Declaration was mentioned in all three interviews. Herri Batasuna proposed the forum (Aiertza 2013) during what was a very difficult time for Basque nationalist politics after the kidnapping and killing of a *Partido Popular* (PP) councillor by ETA (Barrena 2013). The forum brought together different parties to study the GFA (Barrena 2013) with the goal of "...import[ing] the lessons from Ireland to the Basque Country" (Elejabarrieta 2013). Sinn Féin members came and explained their peace process at the forum (Aiertza 2013; Barrena 2013; Elejabarrieta 2013), which potentially marks the start of public knowledge transfer on conflict resolution. From this discussion 'evolved' (Elejabarrieta 2013) the Lizarra-Garazi Declaration. The Declaration as a product of the Irish Forum demonstrates how influential the GFA and peace process in Northern Ireland was for the Basque conflict in 1998.

The influence of the GFA can be divided into two categories, the first being the Agreement as 'inspiration' for negotiations in the Basque conflict. This theme is an abstract

one that came from two of the three interviews. Elejabarrieta (2013) shared an anecdote of an early meeting between Sinn Féin and the *Abertzales* which left them convinced that their peace process would be simple and quickly developed in comparison to Northern Ireland, but their engagement with the GFA proved them wrong and showed them how dialogue can work in the most difficult of conflicts. Barrena noted, “And the Good Friday Agreement brought some light to the Basque situation because it initially showed that even coming from very tough situations, solutions were possible through dialogue, inclusive positions and the use of politics” (. These sections of transcript suggest that although Northern Ireland was seen as more intractable than the Basque Country, their ability to reach an agreement in their peace process encouraged the *izquierda Abertzale* to transform their own conflict. The peace process in Northern Ireland offered inspiration due to the fact that because of their relationship with Sinn Féin, the *Abertzales* were able to observe closely the work leading up to the Agreement (Barrena 2013). This served as inspiration as it suggested some of the challenges a movement may face when entering into a non-violent, political strategy. Northern Ireland nearly served as a “laboratory” (Barrena 2013) in that the *Abertzales* were able to watch the events occurring. The GFA, as inspiration for negotiations in the Basque conflict, again confirms that there was a major influence at this period of time coming from Northern Ireland, although inspiration can only encourage persons to act within their own scenario.

In the Lizarra-Garazi period, however, the Irish model served not only as inspiration but also for its application in the Basque context. As already discussed, the Declaration was a product of the Irish Forum, which was focused on the facts and contents of the GFA with the goal of implementing parts of it in the Basque context (Barrena 2013). The focus of the

discussion during this time was “on the facts that happened” (Aiartza 2013), in the Irish context and what might work in the Basque context. Although the Declaration was only two pages in length, the second page was a plan for implementing lessons from Northern Ireland entitled ‘Potential application in Euskal Herria’. While this section of the agreement contains multiple phases which are less about the contents of the GFA and more about the unconditional and inclusive nature of the talks that created it, a sub-section entitled ‘Keys of resolution’ includes the need to ‘respect the plurality of Basque society’ in order ‘to make democracy more profound in the sense that it gives the citizens of Euskal Herria the last word to decide the future, and the parties respect the decision’. These ‘keys of resolution’ are clearly translations of the GFA’s recognition of a person’s right to British, Irish or both identities, as well as the method of a referendum to determine the future status of Northern Ireland and the principle of consent. (These keys are acknowledged in points 4 and 6 under the ‘Factors that propitiated the Peace Agreement in the north of Ireland’ section of Lizarra-Garazi). Both the interviews and the text of the Declaration support the Irish model as application theme during this period in the Basque process of conflict transformation.

The Lizarra-Garazi Declaration may have failed to bring a lasting peace agreement to the Basque Country, but it does play a key role in helping researchers understand the influence of the Irish model to conflict transformation. The GFA had a major impact in the Basque Country by helping bring about a turning point and an agreement rooted in the study of it. Furthermore, it functioned as an inspiration for further discussions, while also possessing the potential to be applied in a different conflict. The paper will return to these themes in the following discussion section, but now it is necessary to turn attention to the current peace process in the Basque Country to prove the value, albeit different, of the Irish model.

As previously stated, the current scenario strays from the traditional notion of a peace process. The current peace process, or 'political process' (Barrena 2013) undertaken by the *Abertzales* is very much at this point in time a unilateral one. It is based on the belief that while the Spanish and French Governments refuse to engage, the *Abertzales* can still bring the Basque Country towards a scenario where the question of independence is not fought with weapons but with electoral politics (Aiartza 2013; Barrena 2013; Elejabarrieta 2013). There is a real commitment to shift towards a "totally unarmed, totally democratic strategy" (Barrena 2013), rooted in the permanent ceasefire of ETA in 2010 which was based on a unilateral decision made by the entire *izquierda Abertzale* movement (Elejabarrieta 2013; Aiartza 2013; Barrena 2013). In addition to the agreed method of reuniting Ireland established in the GFA, this current process has parallels to the September 2014 Scottish referendum (Elejabarrieta 2013). With the failure of the Lizarra-Garazi Declaration, it would be understandable for the *Abertzales* to have abandoned their analysis of the Irish model. This is not the case; rather, the themes suggest that the Irish model still plays a role in the Basque Country but with a different approach towards it, serving as a precedent from which to learn. The themes reveal a new purpose for studying the Irish model and give a sense of the Irish model as a precedent of conflict transformation, the Irish model as a learning tool and the Irish model as one of many international precedents or learning tools for conflict transformation.

The approach that the *izquierda Abertzale* now take when studying the Irish model demonstrates an important focal shift from their previous attempts at conflict transformation which have drawn from it. All three interviews raised objections towards the direct application of the model:

There is no one-size-fits-all formula [to conflict resolution] (Elejabarrieta 2013).

...and I think that sometimes people think that you can more or less do what they did. And that doesn't work (Aiertza 2013).

...transplantation of solutions from countries to countries, that doesn't work (Barrena 2013).

While the Lizarra-Garazi Declaration was never a complete transplantation of the Irish model, it did have a greater emphasis on mimicking steps and aspects of the peace process and the GFA than these three quotes suggest. A shift of focus has been a key development over time, as Aiertza (2013) noted, "...we have passed from...an understanding or learning of the Irish process in terms of facts, history, dates, terms, agreements and so on to try to understand...the driving forces behind this, which basically could be useful to us.". These "driving forces" aid in the development of their "own process" (Barrena 2013), although there are elements from the Irish model such as the Mitchell principles which have been borrowed (Aiertza 2013). This approach does not mean that there is a complete resistance towards using steps taken in the Irish model, but those which are deemed applicable are traditional tools of conflict resolution which cannot be deemed unique to Northern Ireland. They include "...dialogue, negotiations...[these] principles are valid for every process we believe" (Elejabarrieta 2013). This shift in how the *Abertzales* approached the Irish model highlights the significance and contribution it can make, albeit in a more indirect way as a tool of conflict transformation.

This alternative approach means that, rather than serving as inspiration and application, the Irish model has become a precedent for action. It is an example of what

challenges might arise when attempting conflict transformation (Elejabarrieta 2013) as well as how a referendum can work across multiple jurisdictions (Barrena 2013). The Irish model, as well as the South African TRC and transition from apartheid, lend themselves to other areas seeking to transform their conflicts, as Elejabarrieta (2013) stated:

...before there was nothing, and now there is [a] wide branch of academic perspectives, international institutions that deal with such issues. Different processes that have had a good result, to which you can look, learn and then do your own homework and do your own process.

The Irish model serves as precedent not only in the Basque country but also ‘for conflict resolution in contemporary history’ (Barrena 2013).

And deeply connected to the Irish model as precedent is the Irish model as a learning tool. It is a learning tool because, firstly, it is an example which can be studied and, secondly, there are lessons which can be drawn from the narratives of actors’ experiences with it. The Irish model continues to promote the idea “...that from inclusive talks, good things and good deals and agreement...can arise” (Barrena 2013). An analogy offered by Barrena (2013) was learning to drive. If a person could have someone in the car who knows how to drive, “somebody that has learn[ed] from others and knows also how to [teach]...it’s much easier.”. The learning process here is interactive, with someone sharing their expertise and offering advice which another can decide how best to use. This raises the second aspect of the Irish model as a learning tool: some of the specific lessons Northern Ireland has given the Basque Country. Some of these lessons do engage with similarities in context, such as the questions of the right to decide, the principle of consent and partition. A majority of these lessons, however, are not unique to the Irish model, such as keeping everyone on board, internal cohesion, determining “which elements are just tactical and which are principle” (Aiertza 2013) and the management and practice of democracy (Barrena 2013). Even were these

unique to the Irish model, they require careful consideration of the local to the point that they would have to be “transliterated” rather than “translated”.

Lastly, the Irish model is not the only precedent or learning tool in the international sphere at the disposal of *Abertzales*. As was already suggested, the South African case has also proved useful for them at times when the Irish model could not. An example of this would be how to respond to having the political party banned. Sinn Féin was never banned, but the African National Congress (ANC) and *Batasuna/Herri Batasuna* were. The Irish model could not lend itself in this instance, but the ANC and their experiences were a helpful precedent (Aiertza 2013). Despite much advice and support from Northern Ireland and South Africa (Aiertza 2013; Barrena 2013), the *Abertzales* can still look to other precedents of transformation to engage in the practice of adopting and adapting ideas and steps taken (Aiertza 2013). Across the international spectrum, there are expert opinions which can offer “recipes” which are both “self-made and copied” (Barrena 2013).

Comparing super-ordinate themes in the Lizarra-Garazi period with those of the current peace process in the Basque Country reveals the evolution of the *Abertzale* experience with the Irish model. While the Lizarra-Garazi period can be classified as a focus on the facts that led to and of the GFA, the current context is a more holistic study of the Irish model. Inspiration and Application have been replaced by Precedent and Learning. The influence of the Irish model is less visible and less direct now than it was during Lizarra-Garazi, but it still has proven beneficial for the *Abertzales* to draw upon as they develop their own process unique to their context.

What these themes suggest for the Irish model

The data presented here both confirms and challenges existing positions regarding the use of the Irish model in other contexts. The findings confirm Guelke's (2006) argument about a three-fold purpose for comparison in that even if strategies and decisions require a sincere consideration of the local context, they must be rooted within it. While the findings would suggest that although the Irish model cannot be removed from its context (c.f. O'Kane 2010), it still provides some assistance to actors elsewhere. This assistance does not appear as a clear, neat model which can be directly transferred; rather, it serves to guide and offer suggestions which may or may not be used depending on the decisions made by the actors involved. These findings challenge critics who say that contexts are too different or the *Abertzales* misunderstood the Irish model (Bew, *et. al.* 2009; Alonso 2004) for it to be used, rather the approach towards the Irish model by the *Abertzales* considers differences in context.

Since actors will look at the events and the agreements of the peace process while seeking solutions to their own conflict, the Irish model can and will most likely be defined in many different ways. The challenge of defining the Irish model is further compounded by the fact that these actors see the Irish model through the experiences of different actors from Northern Ireland. As White (2013: 4) notes, 'Various groups involve[d] in the Northern Ireland peace process learned very different lessons'. Thus, had interviews been with different actors, the themes identified could have been different, which would have suggested a different understanding of the Irish model being used to draw lessons. The Irish model can only contribute to peace if the actors seeking conflict transformation consider their own context. Differences in context are not a problem with using the Irish model, but ignoring them is.

With regards to the three key criteria for tools of conflict transformation presented at the start of the paper, the Basque data presented here clearly supports the Irish model as tool for their processes of conflict transformation in terms of first and second criteria outlined at the start of this paper. The data has further highlighted that the Irish model serves as a precedent and a learning tool. In the Basque context, actors have differentiated between the goals of the movement and the methods. As a precedent, methods can be adapted and changed without losing the goal. This has provided for them a means to transition towards a nonviolent approach in which they are fully engaged in the democratic structures of the Basque Country. In other words, there is a clear example of rule transformation here. Structural transformation has also occurred because of the integration of *Sortu* as a legitimate, legal political party. While the *Abertzales* may believe that *Euskal Herria* is the best option, they are willing to acknowledge that this has to come about by the will of the people. This acknowledgement promotes respect for the other's position, but it also requires direct, nonviolent engagement with the other. The creation and recognition of *Sortu* could arguably be classed as an actor transformation. While *Sortu* is an extension of the political party which existed in the past, its legalization means that these actors can return to full participation in the political sphere. Issue transformation is the only aspect which has not yet been met in the Basque context, although by adopting a long-term, conflict transformation approach to the goal of an independent Basque Country, the immediacy of the issue – that is, the necessity of ensuring a path towards creating *Euskal Herria* – is reduced.

Reconciliation cannot be said to have been met at this stage. This could be for several reasons other than the Irish model not being a tool of conflict resolution, including the fact that full reconciliation has not yet been achieved in Northern Ireland. 'Full' in this context

means that a national, corporate form of reconciliation has occurred. A lack of full reconciliation, however, does not mean that no reconciliation has occurred at the grassroots or inter-personal level. Since conflict transformation takes a long-term, generational view of conflict and sees transformation as a dynamic, on-going process, there could come a time when one of the precedents of the Irish model is how it addressed the challenge of reconciliation. Additionally, the Basque peace process is admittedly unique and still in its early stages; to expect reconciliation from the Basque Country is inappropriate at this stage. Time will confirm or deny whether this criterion has been met.

Concluding Remarks

The *Abertzale* case has shown that direct transfer of the Irish model does not work, but this does not mean that there is no value in the Irish model. The Irish model serves as one precedent in the international sphere. It can be studied from different points and various approaches, and lessons can be learned from such studies. As the Basque case highlights, however, the Irish model took years to develop in its own context and is still an ongoing process. It does not work as a panacea, but rather offers suggestions. Because these suggestions are offered by the sharing of experience and suggestions, an understanding of the Irish model will vary based on context and actors involved.

The Irish model should be considered a 'tool' of conflict transformation, one which can contribute to creating a peaceful scenario as it allows actors to reconsider their strategies and transition to more democratic, nonviolent ones. This interpretation promotes the integration of marginalized actors and allows for them to engage with those of a different

political persuasion in a nonviolent way. While the Irish model has not contributed to reconciliation, it continues to evolve and has yet to address its own process of reconciliation. Lacking such a process is a weakness of the Irish model, but it need not be a permanent one. Additionally, the Basque Country is not at a stage where reconciliation can be considered.

I have acknowledged and considered that there is a limitation on these findings which relates to the ability to generalize the findings of this study which is part of the nature of IPA studies. It is also based on how this paper focuses on particular actors rather than the wider Basque society. What this paper can do is contribute directly to debates about the Irish model and the Basque Country, while also arguing that this case study raises the need for further investigation and research on how peace processes are experienced in different contexts. The themes arising from the analysis have suggested that the *Abertzale* study of the Northern Irish peace process is not unique, and that their close study of the Irish model is a common practice in processes of conflict transformation. While interesting and worthy of consideration, these points lay beyond the scope of this paper, but are acknowledged with the hope of further investigation in time. Despite this limitation, IPA has proven itself useful in this research and suggests that IPA can be adapted for researchers whose interests lie beyond the field of psychology.

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² The 'Irish Forum' was proposed by the political party *Herri Batasuna*. Together with other political parties and social groups such as trade unions, the forum met to discuss the peace process in Northern Ireland and the contents of the GFA in order to consider how it could be applied to the Basque Country.

³ This claim is rooted in interview transcripts and begins to highlight that the Irish model cannot be uniformly defined, as consociationalism is sometimes suggested as the model.

⁴ From here on references to personal interviews with Barrena will be listed as Barrena (2013).

⁵ It is worth acknowledging that there were other attempts to reach an agreement between the *Abertzales* and the Spanish State. These are the talks which occurred in the 1980s in Algeria, and the Loiola-Geneva process where a series of secret talks which took place at the Shrine of St. Ignatius of Loyola (Loiola in *Euskara*) in Gipuzkoa and in Geneva. Sinn Féin members did take on the role of facilitator and mediator during the latter, which ultimately collapsed shortly before an agreement could be reached. In interviews, this process was

only mentioned briefly and not with the same detail or weight as the other two attempts for peace. The Algerian Connection was barely mentioned, perhaps because it pre-dates the Irish model. These two processes are not forgotten but rather not relevant to this discussion and therefore have been left out of analysis.

⁶ From here on references to personal interviews with Aiartza will be listed as Aiartza (2013).

⁷ While some research use the various terms for conflict settlement (management, resolution and transformation), this research considers conflict transformation to be different from the other approaches due to its different attitude towards conflict in daily life and its emphasis on a long-term approach. For further reading on this debate, see Botes, J. 2003. 'Conflict Transformation: A Debate Over Semantics or a Crucial Shift in the Theory and Practice of Peace and Conflict Studies?'. *The International Journal of Peace Studies* 8[2].

⁸ From here on references to personal interviews with Elejabarrieta will be listed as Elejabarrieta (2013).