

Civil Society beyond the State: The Impact of Diaspora Communities on Peace Building

Feargal Cochrane

Introduction

Civil society is frequently seen as a constituent part of effective peace-building within societies that are emerging out of violent conflict. The role of civil society is often seen as one of connecting grass-roots communities within countries to their political elites and helping to build mutually reinforcing dynamics that will strengthen political negotiations or peace settlements.

Much has been written about the role and impact of civil society both conceptually and empirically, in terms of how it should be defined and what it has achieved within deeply divided societies. However, the vast majority of writing in this area conceives of civil society as being either indigenous to the conflict zone, or external, in the form of international non-governmental organisations (INGOS). This article shifts the attention to a large but frequently unrecognised aspect of civil society, namely the Diaspora of the region. The argument put forward here is that while civil society exists outside the state, it is neither indigenous to, nor external from it. While Diasporas may exist physically outside the conflict zone, they have historical, cultural, economic and emotional ties to the direct actors in the conflict. Indeed, there may be cases where this aspect of civil society activism has a significant role to play in peace building efforts within regions emerging out of violent conflict. The empirical focus of this article is on the Irish Diaspora, specifically Irish-America and its impact on the Northern Ireland peace process.

There are three sections: The first section locates the concept of civil society and its role in peace building; the second section examines the nature of Diaspora communities as a constituent element within civil society; and the third section examines the positive and negative impacts of the Irish Diaspora on the Northern Ireland conflict and the peace process of the 1990s. The central argument is that analyses of the potential of civil society movements in peace building should pay greater attention to the potential of Diaspora communities to make a positive contribution to societies that are moving out of violent conflict.

Locating Civil Society

Within much of the current literature on conflict management and peace building, it is assumed that a functioning civil society is a prerequisite for a functioning and healthy democratic polity.¹ Those working and writing in the fields of conflict management and conflict transformation, seem intrigued by the potential of civil society, and often view it as a useful item in the tool-box for reducing or even preventing violent conflict.

The focus on the role of civil society in peace building has become common-place in recent years for Western governments eager to combat declining levels of trust and participation in the democratic process, and international organisations anxious to find some means of tackling protracted social conflicts and ethnic violence. Whilst it may have become more fashionable after the democratic changes in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 1990s, the concept of civil society has been a strong undercurrent in Western political thought for many centuries. "The only way by which any one divests himself of his natural liberty and puts on the bonds of civil society is by agreeing with other men to join and unite in a community" (Locke, 1690). In more recent times, both the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair have deployed the concept of civil society for vastly different ideological objectives in pursuit of progressive political change.

On the one hand this captures an important reality, namely, that the dynamics of political power go beyond the narrow level of the state and are woven into the other sinews of society and community, (churches, trade unions, business groups, NGOs, the media and even the family itself). On the other hand, the notion of civil society is defined so broadly that it risks being diluted to the point that it becomes meaningless.

The concept of civil society found a renewed currency during the 1990s. This was accompanied by two other features of the decade: the ending of the cold war and the evolution of democratic movements in Eastern Europe and the increase of ethno-nationalist violence and civil wars within state boundaries. The increased political space facilitated by the end of the cold-war provided the international community with the opportunity to intervene as a third-party in such conflicts. The changing nature of war in the 1990s, epitomised by the rise of ethno-nationalist conflicts and the associated impact on civilian populations, required it to do so. This set off renewed thinking within international organisations, the academic community, the media and NGO practitioners themselves, as to what role civil society could play in preventing, reducing or even resolving such conflicts. As Kaldor (2000) points out:

. . . the rediscovery of the term 'civil society' in Eastern Europe in the 1980s was first and foremost a response to the overbearing state, which had resonance in other parts of the world where the paternalism

and rigidity of the post war state was called into question. . . . The term ‘civil society’ and related terms such as ‘anti-politics’ or ‘power of the powerless’, seemed to offer a discourse within which to frame parallel concerns about the ability to control the circumstances in which individuals live. (p. 113)

The renewal of interest in the role of civil society during the 1990s also reflects a growing emphasis on conflict prevention given the failure of international efforts to intervene successfully in conflicts that had already broken out.² Miall (2000) has illustrated the way in which latent conflict has been prevented by civil society actors in conjunction with international agencies. Commenting on conflict prevention efforts in Macedonia in the late 1990s, Miall (2000) observes that:

. . . more direct impact on Macedonia’s potential for conflict was made through the efforts of the OSCE Long Duration Mission, the regular inter-ethnic dialogues supported by UNPREDEP, . . . and at grass-roots level the various initiatives and projects for inter-ethnic relations sponsored by Search for Common Ground, the Soros Foundation and other NGOs. Such activities undoubtedly contributed to fostering a moderate constituency on both sides, and to maintaining a dialogue, although their impact on inter-ethnic co-operation at the highest level is difficult to assess. (p. 41)

The interest in conflict prevention initiatives in the 1990s opened up a space for the more proactive involvement of civil society actors (such as NGOs, Churches, trade unions, the media, etc.) within such societies, as a bridge between the conflict parties and external agencies with the capacity to intervene. The *Carnegie Commission Final Report on Preventing Deadly Conflict* comments rather hopefully on the potential of civil society actors in de-escalating the scale of violent conflicts.

Human rights, Track Two, and grass roots development organizations all provide early warning of rising local tension and help open or protect the necessary political space between groups and the government that can allow local leaders to settle differences peacefully. . . . The work of international NGOs and their connection to each other and to indigenous organizations throughout the world reinforce a sense of common interest and common purpose, and demonstrate the political will to support collective measures for preventive action. (Carnegie Commission On Preventing Deadly Conflict, 1997)

Michael Lund (1998) illustrates the synergy that has taken place in recent years between national and international actors in search of positive responses to conflict situations and NGOs in search of a role for their organisations:

More recently, peace settlements from Cold War conflicts and the ensuing peace operations (e.g. Mozambique, El Salvador), as well as the need to alleviate recently-arising bloody national conflicts (e.g. Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina) have compelled governmental bodies to take much more interest in a wider array of policy tools for post-conflict situations. These include not only peacekeeping, but also ex-combatant demobilization, displaced persons reintegration, police reform, civil society development, and peace commissions. New units at the World Bank and elsewhere are being set up and funds are flowing to mitigate conflicts and for post-conflict rebuilding from the wreckage. . . . In recent years, international NGOs in several fields – conflict resolution, humanitarian, development, democracy and civil-society oriented, and human rights – have increasingly stepped into the breach of early conflict situations through such methods as track-two diplomacy, human rights violations monitoring, local interethnic projects, and action alerts. (pp. 160-1)

The well known alphabet soup of international organisations (UN, EU, OSCE, NATO, WTO, etc), have determined a need and are eager to support a role for civil society organisations in preventing the outbreak or escalation of violent conflicts. A foray through the internet search engines of such international bodies produces a surfeit of online articles and speeches on the subject.³ The World Bank advocates civil society groups (or at least those of them it favours) as legitimate actors within the political process and sees a role for such groups in the processes of democratisation and development. “Peacebuilding and civil society have assumed a prominent role in public policy debates of the last two decades. A substantial discourse and practice have emerged in both areas. Today, no one questions that a vibrant civil society is critical in the pursuit of good governance, democratization and poverty reduction.” (World Bank, 2006, p. 2) The former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, put civil society at the forefront of his agenda in conflict prevention during his term of office, commenting that civil society organisations were one of the crucial building blocks in maintaining international peace and security in the modern world. “The United Nations once dealt only with Governments. But now we know that peace and prosperity cannot be achieved without partnerships involving Governments, international organizations, the business community and civil society. In today’s world, we depend on each

other.”⁴ Meanwhile, the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), emphasised the importance of developing civil society networks in its 2002 annual report: “The strengthening of civil society in countries in transition has always been a main focus of the ODIHR’s democratization activities. . . . The ODIHR has continued to establish a constructive dialogue, where needed, between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government or state representatives on legislation affecting civil society and on important human right issues.”⁵

When these agencies discuss civil society however, the focus tends to be on civil society as being either an internal or an external phenomenon, comprised either of indigenous NGOs working for peace, development or reconciliation, or external agencies providing humanitarian aid or political support to the region. Surprisingly little attention is given to the role of Diaspora groups that straddle the internal/external boundaries of civil society, or their potential for contributing to peace building within divided societies that have experienced violent conflict.

The focus below is precisely on the contribution from civil society actors who are physically beyond the conflict zone but attached to it in cultural, political and social terms.

Civil Society and the Diaspora

Migration has been a constant and influential feature of human history. It has supported the process of global economic growth, contributed to the evolution of states and societies and enriched many cultures and civilizations. Migrants have often been amongst the most dynamic and entrepreneurial members of society, people who are prepared to venture beyond the confines of their own community and country in order to create new opportunities for themselves and their children. (Global Commission for International Migration, 2005, p. 5)

Diaspora groups are clearly constituent elements of civil society and such people often take an interest in conflict and peace building efforts within their countries of birth. The argument here is that Diaspora groups are a central component of civil society and should be included in any analysis of its contribution to peace building. One obvious example of this comes from the media – through the number of newspapers created to service the appetite of Diaspora communities for information about what is going on in their place of birth. Such media outlets will frequently comment either positively or negatively upon political processes linked to violent conflict in the homeland and at efforts to end such violence through dialogue and negotiation.

At a broader level, scholars and policy-makers have used Diaspora interventions in deeply divided societies for a variety of purposes, arguing either that they have a tendency to prolong or intensify ethnic violence or minority struggles for national liberation, or conversely, that they can make an important contribution to peace-building within war torn regions. As Østergaard-Nielsen (2006) points out: “There are plenty of examples of both types of diasporas to support either view. Importantly, different interpretations of diasporas depend on the view of the beholder. Irresponsible long distance nationalist for some are freedom fighters for others” (p. 2).

Like civil society itself, defining the conceptual limits of Diaspora communities is an inexact science and there is little to separate out the categories of migration. The word Diaspora is often used with negative connotations, to denote those displaced, banished, or otherwise removed, from their native place. Cohen (1997) has provided a useful taxonomy for Diaspora communities, suggesting a combination of the following features:

- Dispersal (often traumatic) from the homeland.
- Self-exiles in search of work, trade or colonial ambitions.
- A collective memory and myth concerning the homeland.
- An idealisation of the homeland.
- A return movement.
- A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a period of time.
- An uneasy relationship with the ‘host’ society.
- A sense of solidarity with co-members of the Diaspora in other states.
- The possibility of a positive experience in the host country

(Cohen, 1997, p. 180)

A similar typology has been put forward by Safran (1991, p. 83). Referring to the creation of transnational communities, Nicholas Van Hear (1998) suggests that the types of dispersal required for the creation of Diaspora communities may emerge from a combination of cumulative processes and specific crises (Van Hear, p. 47). Brubaker (2005) has remarked that whatever about its semantic or conceptual limits, there is plenty of it about, as the term Diaspora has proliferated in recent years within scholarly debate and beyond.

There has been a veritable explosion of interest in diasporas since the late 1980s. 'Diaspora' and its cognates appear as keywords only once or twice a year in dissertations from the 1970s, about thirteen times a year in the late 1980s, and nearly 130 times in 2001 alone. And the diaspora explosion is not confined to academic writing. 'Diaspora' yields a million Google hits; a sampling suggests that the large majority are not academic. As the term has proliferated, its meaning has been stretched to accommodate the various intellectual, cultural and political agendas in the service of which it has been enlisted. (Brubaker, 2005, p. 1)

But just who are the Diaspora and what potential do they have to contribute to civil society peace building within war-torn societies? As Cohen (1997) observes, the concept of the Diaspora varies widely and can include the active coloniser, the banished exile and others who inhabit a space between these two extremes. Migration and dispersal can be incremental and natural, a matter of strategic choice for the migrant (McDowell, 1996; Stark, 1991) or be a combination of compulsion and choice (Van Hear, 1998). However, what Diaspora communities share, is an "inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of a similar background." (Cohen, 1997, p. ix) While notions of this inheritance may vary greatly in strength, and be expressed positively or negatively, this ancestral genealogy exerts some emotional pull upon members of the Diaspora population.

More generally, Diaspora communities are the embodiment of the processes of globalisation, where transnational links and relationships are impacting on economies, political systems, social spaces and national cultures (Beck, 2000). In line with global trends in politics and economics, the sense of 'belonging' of Diaspora communities is not confined today within national borders, but is characterised by mobile, fluid and hybrid forms of communication that are capable of transcending geographical boundaries (Giddens, 1994). A note of conceptual caution has been introduced by Brubaker with his observation that the term Diaspora has become so diffuse that it risks being rendered irrelevant:

And then there are putative diasporas of other sorts: the dixie diaspora, the yankee diaspora, the white diaspora, the liberal diaspora, the conservative diaspora, the gay diaspora, the deaf diaspora, the queer diaspora, the redneck diaspora, the digital diaspora, the fundamentalist diaspora and the terrorist diaspora... The universalization of diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora. (Brubaker, 2005, p.3)

Regardless of the term's conceptual boundaries, the contention here is that Diaspora communities are key aspects of civil society that have the capacity to exert influence on the intensity and duration of violent conflicts in a manner that can help to build peace in their countries of birth. While the focus for analysis is often placed on the destructive potential of diasporas and their role in the continuation of violent conflict, the argument here is that if we problematize power beyond its coercive limits, the contributions of Diaspora communities to peace-building become more visible and dynamic. This potential is particularly apparent in the modern global age when the media is an accessible and relatively inexpensive way for Diaspora groups to become proactively involved in debates taking place in their homelands.

The Role of Diasporas in Peace and Conflict

When Diasporas are mentioned within the context of violent conflict, the focus frequently tends to be on their tendency to fund the continuation of warfare and their propensity to destabilise negotiations and peace-building efforts. There is recognition that large Diaspora communities have the coercive power to raise funds for weapons, or lobby in support of the political objectives of militant liberation struggles in their countries of origin. This view is quite pervasive within the 'new wars' literature associated with theorisations of 21st century transnationalism and neo-liberal global governance (Kaldor, 2001; Duffield, 2001, 2002).

War as a reflexive and network enterprise does not follow the traditional state based pattern of escalation, stalemate and decline; one cannot assume that exhaustion will occur in transnational wars. Access to external aid and global markets through the shadow economy, together with international recruits from refugee or migrant diasporas, or regional powers replenishing supplies in their search for advantage, all problematize the possibility of closure. (Duffield, 2002, p. 158)

Brinkerhoff highlights this subliminal link between migration and threat, which runs through much of the literature connecting Diasporas and conflict, within the context of the terrorist attacks in London in July 2005. "Recent events, particularly those in London in the summer of 2005, have called attention to – and generated much fear about -- diaspora communities and their potential impact in host societies and transnationally." (Brinkerhoff, 2005, p. 1)

Collier and Hoeffler's widely cited work *Greed and Grievance in Civil War* (2004) emphasises the destabilising impacts of migrant groups on the continuation of violent conflict. They focus in particular on the financial donations of Diasporas as a key variable in the continuation of violent conflict and suggest, that "a large diaspora considerably increases the risk of repeat conflict." (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004, p. 575) They also contend that there is a "substantial causal effect of the diaspora on the risk of conflict renewal." (ibid) Their analysis provides little comfort for those defenders of civil society involvement looking for peace-building potential within Diaspora communities. A 2001 report from the Rand Corporation, entitled; *Trends in outside Support for Insurgent Movements*, is equally reductionist in its analysis of the destructive potential of Diaspora communities: "Diasporas – immigrant communities established in other countries – frequently support insurgencies in their homelands. Despite being separated by thousands of miles, homeland struggles are often keenly felt among immigrant communities." (Byman et al. 2001, p. 41) From a more nuanced perspective, Terence Lyons (2004) highlights the obstacles in the way of Diaspora communities in Africa contributing positively to peace building efforts.

Diasporas – with their origins in conflict and their aspirations to return to the liberated homeland – often play critical roles in conflicts over territory and identity. They provide resources for parties engaged in conflicts back home and frequently have a particularly important role in framing the conflict issues. Diaspora groups tend to be less willing to compromise and therefore reinforce and exacerbate those dimensions that prevent constructive conflict resolution. (Lyons, p. 2)

While acknowledging the capacity of Diaspora groups to contribute to violence in their countries of origin and while accepting the arguments concerning Diaspora groups being slower to accept the political pragmatism often required for building peace processes within deeply divided societies, it is argued here that insufficient attention has been given to their more positive contributions.

It has been recognised by other scholars that Diasporas cling to the political and cultural certainties associated with the conflict, through a combination of sentiment, guilt or even ignorance of the contemporary situation. The Rand Corporation makes the reasonable point that "communities abroad often feel a genuine sympathy for the domestic struggles of their overseas kin. Sometimes these communities may also feel a sense of guilt because they are safe, while their kin are involved in brutal and bloody struggle." (Byman et al. 2001, p. 55) However, Zunzer (2004) warns against the tendency of some commentators to exaggerate this factor in the Sri Lankan case.

When scrutinizing the dimension of the political capacity of the Tamil diaspora vis-à-vis the political discourse in Sri Lanka, some authors have placed too much stress on feelings of guilt among refugees and the dominance of the political ideology of groups such as the LTTE in major host countries in the past. . . . But stressing the perception of a purely negative political dominance of the LTTE through the Tamil diaspora networks runs the risk of over-emphasizing the latter's homogeneity. In reality, the social formations of Tamil communities abroad are very diverse. (p. 26)

Despite his analysis of Diaspora communities as being homogenous variables for analysis, Collier (2000) makes a reasonable point about the barriers that face *some* Diasporas in coming to terms with political compromise. However, there is a broad-brush approach in this work that tends to under-emphasise matters of nuance, heterogeneity and diversity within Diaspora communities.

Diasporas sometimes harbour rather romanticised attachments to their group of origin and may nurse grievances as a form of asserting continued belonging. They are much richer than the people in their country of origin and so can afford to finance vengeance. Above all, they do not have to suffer any of the awful consequences of renewed conflict because they are not living in the country. (Collier, 2000, p. 14)

Such analysis misrepresents the behaviour of Diaspora communities by looking only at their negative impacts, rather than at their contributions to peace processes and non-violence. As Shain and Barth (2003) have remarked, Diasporas "are increasingly able to promote transnational ties, to act as bridges or as mediators between their home and host societies, and to transmit the values of pluralism and democracy." (Shain and Barth, 2003, p. 450) In contrast to the analysis of the Rand Corporation, Zunzer (2004) provides a more sophisticated and nuanced account of the Sri Lankan Diaspora's contribution to peace building: "stressing the perception of a purely negative political dominance of the LTTE throughout the Tamil diaspora networks runs the risk of over-emphasizing the latter's homogeneity. In reality, the social formations of Tamil communities abroad are very diverse" (Zunzer, 2004, p. 26). Berdal (2005) makes a similar point, noting that interest in the role of Diaspora communities in sustaining conflict in their homelands grew significantly following the events of September 11 2001.

The emerging wisdom on the subject, attributable in part to its prominence in writings on 'New Wars', is that diasporas are 'dangerous'. . . . The fact is that the impact of diaspora and migrant remittances on conflict is highly context-specific: it *can* fuel conflict but it can also act as a brake on violence and mitigate destabilising socioeconomic tensions and divisions within a society. . . . In most cases, diaspora remittances perform legitimate and, indeed, vital humanitarian functions. And, even during conflict, as the case of Kosovo appears to indicate, its role on the dynamics of conflict is 'ambivalent' and may evolve or even change radically in response to changes in political context. (Berdal, 2005, pp. 694-695)

More fundamentally, the analysis presented by those who collapse Diaspora communities into a consistent variable capable of quantitative measurement, misunderstand the nature of *power*. Such scholars interpret power as being a purely coercive force, often viewing it – even more narrowly – as primarily taking the form of financial subventions from Diasporas to their homelands, and they give insufficient attention to forms of power that are non-coercive.

Diasporas, like the wider civil society within which they are located, can often exhibit non-coercive forms of power and (under certain circumstances) they have the capacity to support peace-building efforts within deeply divided societies. In reality, Diasporas are a heterogeneous category within civil society with a diversity of cultural and political tensions and affiliations. "There are many diaspora groupings with different political and socio-economic aspirations, and as such the diaspora should be carefully disaggregated" (Mohamoud, 2006, p. 5).

Conceptually, power can be viewed through the lens of *influence* as well as through the capacity to exert *force*, and in certain circumstances the power to influence others can exceed the power to compel others. A case study of Irish-America follows (below) in order to illustrate the ways in which Diaspora communities have harnessed this form of power to great effect, contributing to peace-building efforts in the process.

The peace researcher Kenneth Boulding identifies three forms of power, *threat* power, *exchange* power and *integrative* (or *love*) power (Boulding, 1989, p. 25-9). In this model, threat power is understood by the capacity to force or compel in a coercive manner. Exchange power relates to a contractarian relationship based on tactical but non-emotional alliances for mutual benefit. Integrative power is based on the notion that some actors have the power to convince, attract and even co-opt others through intellectual, spiritual or even sentimental persuasion. From this perspective, integrative power has a more emotional and organic basis, where human relationships extend beyond fear or mutual respect, into friendship and even love. "Integrative power . . . involves the capacity to build organizations, to create families and groups, to inspire loyalty, to bind people together, to develop legitimacy" (ibid. p. 25). While scholars such as Collier and Hoefler focus on 'threat power' in their analysis of Diaspora impacts on violent conflict, they place less emphasis on the arguably more important contributions made by 'integrative' power. The argument here is that Diaspora communities possess *both* threat and integrative power, but in the Irish case at least, the latter has been much more influential and long lasting and has demonstrated the capacity of Diaspora communities to build peace within their former homelands.

Furthermore, it could be claimed that Diaspora communities have the capacity to intervene positively in peace-building efforts as interested third parties in a way that the internal conflict parties within civil society are unable to. The efforts made by Irish-America during the 1990s to sustain the Northern Ireland peace process, provides an indication of this capacity. It is not possible here to extrapolate too far beyond the Irish case, though other studies have alluded to similar examples within other contexts. Thomas Faist, (2002) who focuses on the securitization of migration after the 9/11 attacks on the US, refers to the impact of Diasporas on political reforms in Poland during the early 1980s:

Public and academic attention focuses almost exclusively on the negative consequences of transnational organizations and communities. This is surprising at first sight because such border-crossing groups can also be thought to, and indeed have, under propitious circumstances, positive effects as conduits for democratization and the spread of human rights. Consider the case of fourth- and fifth-generation Polish-Americans in the United States during the 1980s in supporting organizations such as Solidarnok in their struggle against the communist regime in Poland. Indeed, the export of democracy as a creative mix of exit from authoritarian regimes, and voice from abroad, carries more weight today than in the early decades of the twentieth century. (Faist, 2002, p. 9-10)

The discussion turns now to demonstrate, within the context of the Northern Ireland conflict, the ways in which the Irish-American Diaspora exhibited both the positive and negative aspects of civil society activism. This is put forward as an example of the nature of civil society beyond the state and the potential of Diaspora groups to use their influence to support the peace process that led eventually, in 1998, to the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland.

The Irish Diaspora

Mary Robinson became Ireland's first female President in 1990 and made the Irish Diaspora a corner stone of her term in office. Symbolically, she kept a lighted candle in her official residence to commemorate the Irish abroad and as a physical symbol of the connection between those remaining on the island of Ireland and those who had left for foreign shores. In 1995, Robinson addressed the Irish Parliament in a speech entitled 'Cherishing the Irish Diaspora':

At my inauguration I spoke of the seventy million people worldwide who can claim Irish descent. I also committed my Presidency to cherishing them – even though at the time I was thinking of doing so in a purely symbolic way. Nevertheless the simple emblem of a light in the window, for me, and I hope for them, signifies the inextinguishable nature of our love and remembrance on this island for those who leave it behind.⁶

The election of Mary Robinson to the Irish Presidency has often been seen as the starting point for a new phase of modernity in Irish politics and her focus on the Diaspora was emblematic of a period where Ireland looked outwards to Europe and the rest of the world as well as inwards to its own society.

The phrase 'Irish Diaspora' is normally used in conjunction with Irish-America and officially, the United States accounts for over 43 million Irish-Americans. The 1990 census in the United States showed that 43.7 million Americans (19% of the total population) defined themselves as Irish-American. (Arthur, 2000, p. 136; O'Hanlon, 1998, p. 13) While the political impact of Irish-America on US policy towards Northern Ireland should not be overstated, the seeds of its periodic political interest lie in the existence of an Irish-American lobby which, during particular pressure points in the conflict and during the peace process, has had an impact upon US government policy.

Throughout the course of the current conflict in Northern Ireland, several Irish-American pressure groups have played a very public role in lobbying the US government on issues relating to Northern Ireland. The latent interest in the conflict in Northern Ireland led to the formation of several Irish-American NGOs and a flow of money into militant republican groups within Northern Ireland. The *Irish National Caucus* (INC) formed in 1974, was a constant critic of British government policy in Northern Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s, and highlighted perceived human rights abuses carried out by the security forces.

The relative success of the INC as a Washington-based activist group illustrates the capacity of Diaspora communities to play more of a role than simply fund-raising or lobbying in pursuit of violence in their homelands. In this example, the INC pursued a non-violent agenda and arguably made a contribution to one of the central grievances of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland that fuelled the political conflict, relating to employment discrimination. Moreover, this example of peaceful activism by the INC led to the unintended consequence of significant reforms being introduced by the British government over fair employment criteria that has formed a corner-stone of its social policy agenda ever since. While the INC did not have the 'threat power' to coerce the US or British administrations to introduce these political reforms, it built constituencies of support and influence through its lobbying activities based on Boulding's conceptualisation of 'integrative' power. The activities of such NGOs attracted substantial international media attention and provide an example of how different aspects of civil society can connect effectively.

However, the INC was not the only face of Irish-American civil society during this period. The *Irish Northern Aid Committee* (more commonly known as Noraid), formed in 1970 and supported the aims (and methods) of republican paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. According to Guelke (1998) "between its founding and 1991 – when it ceased to report remittances – it officially remitted approximately \$3.5 million to Ireland to a Sinn Fein controlled charity that assisted the families of Republican prisoners." (Guelke, 1998, p. 203) While this was not a huge sum, it was supplemented with vital publicity and support for the Irish Republican cause on the international stage. Noraid fit quite neatly into Boulding's 'threat power' model, and played the part expected of them by those such as Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and the Rand Corporation, who see Diaspora communities as pre-disposed to fermenting militant violence and political radicalism in their homelands. "Financial assistance is by far the most common form of support that migrants provide to insurgent movements. Money, in contrast to material support, crosses borders with ease" (Byman et al., 2001, p. 59).

However, less attention tends to be given to the financial assistance provided by Diaspora groups for non-violent objectives. In the Northern Ireland case, more US dollars have been donated for peace than have ever been given for violent purposes. As an example, the *International Fund for Ireland*, (IFI) established in 1986 by the British and Irish governments in the wake of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of the previous year, obtains a significant share of its funding from the United States. The IFI focuses upon cross-community development and reconciliation projects in both parts of Ireland, giving priority to initiatives that encourage cross-border cooperation. Since its inauguration in 1986, the IFI has spent in the region of €603 million on over 4000

projects. This dwarfs the financial power of Noraid and other radical Irish-American groups who have funded political violence in Northern Ireland. While it could be argued that funding to the IFI was the result of federal government grant aid rather than direct remittances from Diaspora groups, this was itself a product of the integrative power of those within the Irish Diaspora who lobbied the administration to help develop an economic 'peace dividend' in Northern Ireland.

However, it was not only *financial* capital that was provided through Noraid's activities but *political* capital also. Despite being a relatively small group, Noraid activists were gifted publicists and managed to generate significant media interest, especially during times of political crisis in Northern Ireland. Noraid managed to help internationalise the political conflict in Northern Ireland and provided the Provisional IRA with vital international support for their claim that their 'armed struggle' was a war of national liberation rather than domestic criminality as the British government depicted it during the 1970s and 1980s. Martin Galvin, Noraid's Publicity Director during the 1980s, was the subject of an exclusion order by the British government, banning him from entering the UK for most of the 1980s. Galvin publicly ignored this ban on several occasions and used it to generate negative publicity against the British administration of justice in Northern Ireland.

The *political* capital of migrant communities is often overlooked by commentators who focus simply on the coercive potential of Diaspora groups and their capacity to fund violence through financial capital. The case of Irish-America is instructive in this regard, as Noraid's political capital was at least as important to militant Republicans in Northern Ireland as their fund-raising power. Guerrilla warfare of the kind engaged in by paramilitaries in Northern Ireland can be maintained with relatively modest means, small arsenals of weapons, and infrequent financial support. Scholars and policy-makers who focus their attention on the destructive coercive potential represented by the financial capital of civil society groups such as Diaspora communities, should bear in mind that in the Northern Ireland context, the most violent period in the conflict was during the early to mid-1970s. This period witnessed a low-tech, high-impact bombing campaign, which required little financial capital to sustain it. The vital component required to pursue this violence was political capital, namely tacit support from the communities out of which the paramilitaries were drawn. While the Provisional IRA used intimidation and fear to coerce its own community, this would not have been sufficient, on its own, for it to operate effectively over such a long period. In addition to its use of force, the IRA used its political capital to create feelings of loyalty, community and political legitimacy – however misplaced these values appeared to outside observers. The Provisional IRA instilled among its 'volunteers' and wider support network, a loyalty to their ideological cause and to the Republican movement itself, which ultimately proved impossible for the British government to shake through coercive military means.

Beyond civil society groups such as Noraid and the INC, other groups within Irish-America played significant roles in the Northern Ireland peace process during the 1990s. *Americans for a New Irish Agenda* (ANIA) emerged in 1992 and lobbied Bill Clinton before he became US President over the political situation in Northern Ireland.

It is clear that the Irish-American Diaspora played a critical role in interceding between militant Irish republicanism and the Clinton White House and it is reasonable to conclude that without the intervention of the Irish-American Diaspora, the Northern Ireland peace process would have been much more problematic. It is with these types of interventions that Diaspora communities can demonstrate their positive potential as peace-building agencies within civil society, though these roles are frequently ignored by those who see Diaspora groups as harmful to peace and stability and who limit their horizons to their destructive impacts.

The Irish-American Diaspora actively sought to engage with militant Irish Republicanism in order to convince it to adopt a peaceful democratic agenda. It did this through direct political dialogue with Sinn Fein and by opening up avenues of communication between Irish Republicans and the Clinton administration. More directly, corporate Irish-America provided an example of how a Diaspora's financial capital could be used to build peace rather than fuel violence. Following the IRA ceasefire in 1994, Sinn Fein formed a US-based lobby group, *Friends of Sinn Fein* and opened a party office in Washington the following year. This move was financed by Chuck Feeney of the philanthropic NGO *Atlantic Philanthropies*, an Irish-American billionaire who was active within ANIA and part of the new wave of lobbyists who focused on the importance of US engagement in the *process* of conflict resolution rather than traditional pre-determined outcomes associated with Irish-American lobbying of the 1970s.

It can be seen within the context of the Northern Ireland case study, that the Irish-American Diaspora were the facilitators of movement by the Provisional IRA and they played a major part in the choreography of the peace process in the 1990s. Niall O'Dowd, publisher of the *Irish Voice* newspaper in New York and a key player in connecting Irish-America and the Clinton administration to militant Irish Republicanism, has commented on the importance of the quiet mediation by key figures from within the Irish Diaspora. The following comment refers to the role of Bill Flynn, (former CEO of *Mutual of America*) in facilitating and encouraging dialogue between the conflict parties in Northern Ireland.

Though the full details will never be revealed, there was more honesty and straight talk, and indeed, progress at the *Mutual of America* meetings with prime ministers, ministers, party leaders and paramilitaries than in any other political forum. It was a rare and unexpected gift from Irish-America which had always been portrayed as a deep shade of green when it came to Ireland and incapable of nuance. [Tom] Moran and [Bill] Flynn instead developed a non-partisan approach, which gave every side their opportunity to speak and be heard. There were no qualifiers or restrictions on speakers, merely a hope that they were open to dialogue from the other side. Both men dug deep financially to make sure that all speakers had equal access. It was the kind of commitment rarely seen but deeply appreciated on all sides. (O'Dowd, 2005, p. 13)

Having been convinced by ANIA and the Irish government that progress was possible, Clinton pushed the Northern Ireland peace process to the front of his foreign policy agenda and became personally involved in the multi-party talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998. It would be reasonable to conclude that without the intercession of the Irish-American Diaspora as a mediating influence between the Provisional IRA and the Clinton administration, the US government would not have played the pivotal role it did in helping secure the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

The suggestion here is that the Irish-American Diaspora played this role by gradually building its relationship with Sinn Fein and the IRA in Northern Ireland and with the Clinton administration in Washington. It had little coercive power to speak of in this respect and relied on the values of influence, integrity, loyalty and trust, rather than compulsion, threat or force. The key issue for other cases is to determine if, and where, the potential exists to develop power of this type, building virtuous circle relationships between the Diaspora and their homeland communities in pursuit of peace and stability.

Conclusion

It has been argued here that Diaspora groups are an integral element of civil society with the capacity to impact both positively and negatively on peace building efforts. It is also suggested that in the case of Northern Ireland, the Irish-American Diaspora have played a broadly positive role in supporting negotiations and the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. While it has to be acknowledged that they also helped perpetuate violence through fund-raising, supplying weapons and providing international political support for militant Republicanism, this pales in comparison to the amount of money supplied in pursuit of a 'peace dividend', from the Diaspora itself and from a US administration seeking to provide economic support to the political process.

Clearly, positive Diaspora contributions to their homelands generate less attention than their more violent interventions. Nevertheless, and as illustrated above, Diasporas are politically diverse communities that do not fit easily into linear categorisations or quantitative analyses.

The example of the Irish Diaspora may of course be unique. However, it is unlikely that there are *no* overlapping dynamics with other cases elsewhere. A first step in determining whether a potential exists within Diaspora communities to make a positive contribution – to the reduction or end of violence in their homelands – is to understand them better.

Feargal Cochrane is Director of the Richardson Institute for Peace Research in the Department of Politics and International Relations at Lancaster University UK.

Notes

¹ Throughout the 1990s, the literature on conflict management/resolution has been replete with references (of varying depth) to the role of 'civil' or 'civic' society organisations in reducing violent conflict. See for instance practitioner publications such as the Aspen Institute's *Conflict Prevention: Strategies to Sustain Peace in the Post-Cold War World*, (Aspen Institute, Washington, 1997) The UNESCO report *From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace* (UNESCO, 1996) The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, *Preventing Deadly Conflict: Final report with executive summary* (Washington, D.C., 1997). Berghof Handbook of Conflict Transformation (Website URL: http://www.berghof-handbook.net/std_page.php?LANG=e&id=11). See also academic literature such as Kriesberg's *Constructive conflicts: From escalation to resolution*, (1998); Lederach's *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies* (1997) and Ramsbottom et al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (2005).

² As Stephen Ryan points out, "the large scale 'peace-enforcement' operations in Bosnia and Somalia, authorized by Chapter VII of the [UN] Charter, demonstrated the limitations of the UN's role. The failure of the UN to stop the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 added to a growing chorus of criticism directed at the organization" (Ryan, 2000, p. 114)

³ As an example, an internet search during the preparation of this article resulted in 106,000 hits for the phrase 'civil society' on the UN's web site.

⁴ Annan, K. from UN web site (URL: <http://www.un.org/issues/civilsociety/>)

⁵ OSCE Institution Activities 2002 (2002, 71) http://www.osce.org/publications/sg/2003/10/13548_273_en.pdf

⁶ President Mary Robinson 'Cherishing the Irish Diaspora' Address to the House of the Oireachtas, 2 February 1995. See Irish Emigrant at: <http://www.emigrant.ie/emigrant/historic/diaspora.htm>

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