

RETHINKING THE IMPACTS OF EXTERNAL ECONOMIC FUNDING  
IN TRANSFORMING PARAMILITARISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND  
AND THE IRISH BORDER COUNTIES

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This article is based on extensive interviews conducted by one of the paper's authors in the summer of 2010. We aim to address the question of what to do with lingering paramilitarism following a peace agreement. To this end, we explored the role of economic funding of the International Fund for Ireland and the European Union Peace and Reconciliation funding (Peace III) in engaging with and transforming the influence of paramilitary leaders/members towards sustainable peace. Our analysis was focused on three major themes that emerged from the data, including decline in local support for paramilitaries and fears of renewed violence, commitment to community peace leadership, and transition from single identity to cross-community activities. We found that despite the socioeconomic development and cross-community contact projects initiated by the IFI and EU Peace III Fund, some communities remain deeply segregated in post-peace accord Northern Ireland. However, there are promising prospects for cultivating a culture of peace due to the agency of local peacebuilding actors and senior paramilitary leaders, as well as the goodwill of some former combatants to break through their own political and cultural barriers.

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## INTRODUCTION

The origin story of the Northern Ireland conflict is muddled at best. As far back as the 12th century, the Normans, led by Strongbow, invaded Waterford, Ireland, and set off a troubled relationship between Britain and Ireland.<sup>1</sup> A wave of conflict in Ireland occurred early in the 17th century, when the English Empire undertook to settle loyal Protestants from England and the Scottish Lowlands in Ulster, dubbed as the Plantation of Ulster.<sup>2</sup> The new inhabitants of militant Ulster were English-speaking Protestants, in contrast to the primarily Gaelic-speaking Catholic natives. Given the keen interest on the part of the British to control Ireland, a steady stream of immigrants increasingly flowed into the northern counties of Ireland.

The majority population in the Province of Ulster quickly became Protestant English, while the provinces of Munster, Leinster (except for around the Pale in Dublin), and Connacht remained heavily Catholic Irish. The next three centuries consisted of Irish rebellion and British counter violence and oppression including the 1691-1830 Penal Laws that divested Catholics from the land, their religion, public office, and the right to education. Ultimately, after the 1919-1920 War of Independence led by the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 was signed, officially partitioning the island.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than appeasing the significant minority (one-third of the population) Irish Catholic community in Northern Ireland, partition ignited a great deal of turmoil. Two prominent ethnonational groups evolved within the political realm of Northern Ireland. On one side was the Catholic, Nationalist, Republican (CNR) community. This group wanted to see the Irish isle as one nation, with Northern Ireland joining the Republic to form a fully independent and united Ireland. The other group was comprised of the Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist (PUL) community who desired for Northern Ireland to remain with the United Kingdom (UK). Political violence began to increase throughout Northern Ireland, and also in the Border Counties of the Republic of Ireland and the UK. This violence intensified after the 1969 failed civil rights movement and then further after the Bloody Sunday event in Derry in 1972 as rival paramilitary campaigns and state violence escalated the conflict to dizzying new heights.

The Republican cause was taken up by paramilitaries such as the Official IRA (OIRA), the Provisional IRA (PIRA), the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), the Irish People's Liberation Army (IPLO), and since the

1998 Belfast Agreement (BA), the Real IRA (RIRA), and the Continuity IRA (CIRA), just to name a few. Likewise, a number of rival Loyalist paramilitary organizations developed as well, namely the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Ulster Defense Association (UDA), the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), the Red Hand Commandos, and after the BA, the Orange Volunteers, Red Hand Defenders, and the Real UVF.<sup>4</sup> Understanding the transition from intense paramilitarism to a gradual commitment to peace by these groups requires an examination of their emergence and their role in the Northern Ireland conflict.

Coming on the heels of the twentieth anniversary of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA), this article addresses a gap in the literature, by focusing on these key questions regarding the rise and persistence of paramilitaries within Northern Ireland. We recognize that this paramilitarism is both a reflection of and a response to the real and fundamental political causes of the conflict. These causes include mutually exclusive political values/agendas, partition, and the Union opposition to a United Ireland.

In response to the economic exclusion and poverty, societal disharmony, trauma, grief, and grievances that were precipitated by the war in Northern Ireland, the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and European Union (EU) Peace and Reconciliation funding (Peace I, Peace II, Peace III, and Peace IV) were established in 1985 and 1995 respectively. These external funding outlets have provided the incentive for local community groups to pursue socioeconomic reconstruction and cross-community contact. The impact of the funding has been assessed in regard to certain aspects of local peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives.<sup>5</sup> However, the question of whether the funding was effective in challenging the ingrained practice of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of the Irish Republic remains largely unanswered.

Our analysis focuses on three major themes that emerge from the data: a decline in local support for paramilitaries and local people's fears of renewed violence, the emergence of peace leaders among the paramilitary groups, and their transition from single-identity to cross-community outreach activities. These three themes speak to the political causes of the conflict, the paramilitarism that it has engendered, and, importantly, a renewed interest by some of the paramilitaries and their communities to move beyond their sectarian divide and single-community activities through their commitment to the peace processes. Although there is a decline in paramilitarism since

the GFA, due largely to the work done by the civil society sector through the IFI and EU funding, there are still fears of insecurity, and patterns of crime and segregation, highlighting the need for cautious optimism in the generalizability of the findings of this article.

The first section of the article examines the nature and strands of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland. The second section presents the theoretical underpinnings of the three main themes. The third section examines the IFI and EU Peace III funding of peace and development projects in Northern Ireland. A discussion of the methodology used in this article is presented in section four. Section five engages our 120 respondents' views on the role of the IFI and EU Peace III funding in transforming paramilitarism in post-agreement Northern Ireland and the Border Counties through a reduction in support for paramilitarism and the fear of renewed violence, community leadership in peacebuilding, and the gradual acceptance of the viability of cross-community projects as panacea for the deep level of distrust between the conflicting groups. The final part of the article discusses our findings and conclusions.

#### PARAMILITARISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

After the 1956-1962 failure of Sean South's IRA's cross-border military campaign, the Republican movement immersed itself in Marxist politics in the pursuit of creating a workers republic that would integrate the PUL and CNR working classes on the island of Ireland.<sup>6</sup> In 1969 the OIRA was born out of this old IRA under the leadership of Cathal Goulding. A more northern influence created a split within the old IRA with the smaller robust Provisional IRA movement emerging with Sean McStiofan as its leader and with the PIRA becoming a direct opponent of the OIRA. PIRA was committed to a united Ireland by use of force with the expulsion of the British influence from the island.<sup>7</sup> Sean Costello led a more radical wing of the OIRA that eventually became the INLA in 1974 with its political wing, the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRPS). The INLA escalated its conflict into a vicious armed feud with the OIRA because it objected to its renunciation of the armed struggle, as the OIRA entered mainstream politics as the Workers Party or the "Stickies."<sup>8</sup> A vicious internal feud broke out in 1986 within the INLA after the Hunger Strikes, and the organization dissolved as a rump group calling itself the IPLO came to prominence.<sup>9</sup> However, the IPLO became involved with racketeering and the drug trade

and was eliminated by the PIRA.<sup>10</sup>

After the PIRA signed onto the 1998 GFA, dissident Republicans led by the hunger striker Bobby Sands' sister, Bernadette, and her partner Michael McKeivitt, founded the Real IRA that was responsible for the 1998 Omagh bombing and a number of minor attacks on the security forces.<sup>11</sup> In 2012, the RIRA merged with Republicans Action Against Drugs (RAAD) to create the New IRA and its political wing, the 32 County Sovereignty Movement.<sup>12</sup> The NIRA has had a number of military operations foiled by the security forces over the years as internal feuding hampers its operational capacity and activities. The NIRA was involved in punishment beatings and the murders of drug suppliers in Northern Ireland, as well as in Dublin and Limerick in the Republic of Ireland. Another smaller splinter group, the Continuity IRA, and its political wing, Republican Sinn Fein, emerged around the same time in protest against the PIRA's decision to abolish abstentionism (elected officials refusing to take their seats in Dail Eireann or the Irish parliament in Dublin).<sup>13</sup> The CIRA, led by Daithi O'Conail, went on the offensive after the 1994 PIRA ceasefire in a coordinated bombing and shooting spree targeting security forces personnel in Northern Ireland. The CIRA is also racked with internal dissension and division.<sup>15</sup> In 2005, the PIRA decommissioned its weapons as verified by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) led by Canadian General John de Chastelain, which also accounted for putting Loyalist paramilitary weapons beyond further use.

Sir Edward Carson created the UVF in 1912 to resist Home Rule for Ireland by force. The UVF became the Ulster Division that went to fight in France for the British Empire in World War I and where many Ulster PUL members fell in combat. The UVF then became inactive until 1966 when Gusty Spence killed a Catholic barman in Belfast in the wake of nonviolent protests by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). The UVF carried out many sectarian murders during the period known as "The Troubles," including the 1974 car bombings in Dublin, Belturbet, County Cavan, and Monaghan; the 1974 Miami Showband murders; and the 1994 Loughinisland County Down pub shootings during the football World Cup.<sup>16</sup> From 1975 to 1977, a Belfast UVF active service unit known as the Shankill Butchers led by Lennie Murphy, carried out some of the most grotesque sectarian murders ever committed in Belfast during the Troubles.<sup>17</sup> The UVF used its nom de guerre, Protestant Action Force, when it targeted

Republican volunteers and politicians, and CNR civilians. It did not wish to claim responsibility for the killings because the British government would then outlaw the organization as a terrorist group.<sup>18</sup> The Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) that included the UVF and the UDA, called a reciprocal ceasefire in 1994 when the PIRA ended its campaign of violence.

In response, a more militant splinter group from the mid Ulster UVF, the Loyalist Volunteer Force, led by Billy Wright (also known as “King Rat” and later assassinated in prison by the INLA) emerged and was involved in many sectarian murders that involved collusion with the British state as well as maintaining an ongoing violent feud with both the UVF and the UDA.<sup>19</sup> The UVF’s left leaning political wing, the Progressive Unionist Party led by David Ervine, Billy Hutchinson, and Dawn Purvis contested Belfast Assembly and UK elections, and played a key role in the negotiations leading up to the 1998 GFA. The UVF decommissioned its weapons in 2009, yet it continues to be embroiled in internal feuding and murders as well as vigilante punishment beatings and shootings within the PUL community especially in Belfast.<sup>20</sup>

Charlie Smith, Andie Tyrie, Glenn Barr, and John McMichael formed the UDA in 1971. The UDA organized and enforced the 1974 Ulster Worker’s Council Strike, a nonviolent civil disobedience movement that literally shut down services within Northern Ireland and eventually brought down the 1973 Sunningdale power-sharing executive between moderate Unionist and Nationalist politicians.<sup>21</sup> The UDA used its code name, Ulster Freedom Fighters, when carrying out attacks against known Republicans and members of the CNR community, such as the 1993 Greysteel “trick or treat” murders, because the UDA didn’t want the British government to treat it as a proscribed terrorist organization.

During the 1990s, a UDA active service unit from the Shankill Road, led by Mad Dog Johnny Adair, was responsible for some heinous sectarian murders in Belfast. Since the 1994 CLMC cease fire, some UDA members have been involved in racketeering, organized crime, drug dealing, and punishment shootings while others began to work with former Republican combatants in community development and politics. Notably, assassinated UDA leader, John McMichael’s son Gary, formed the now defunct Ulster Democratic Party, the UDA’s political wing in 1989. In 2010, General John de Chastelain’s IICD witnessed that the UDA had decommissioned its weapons.

In 1998, the Orange Volunteers (OV) was formed in reaction to the GFA and the Royal Ulster Constabulary's efforts to prevent the Orange Order from marching through the predominantly CNR Garvaghy Road in Portadown, County Down, every July 12 during the traditional Loyalist marching season.<sup>23</sup> The OV's members are responsible for shootings and bombings directed against CNR politicians as well as CNR businesses.<sup>24</sup> The Red Hand Defenders (RHD) also emerged during this same period. The RHD comprises of dissident Loyalists who oppose the peace process and who target CNR civilians including the murder of human rights lawyer, Rosemarie Nelson, and journalist Martin O'Hagan, as part of its strategy to instill fear within the CNR community in order to keep Northern Ireland British.<sup>25</sup>

In summary, the identity schism that has developed between the PUL and the CNR communities was and still is a driving force behind the Troubles and simmering unrests in Northern Ireland post-1998, with deleterious physical and psychological consequences.<sup>26 27</sup>

#### CULTURE OF VIOLENCE AND DECLINE IN LOCAL SUPPORT OF PARAMILITARIES

A culture of violence occurs in the context where war becomes a way of life or is normalized, rather than being seen as temporary or exceptional. Such context may be prompted by the frustration of basic human needs. Often, violence becomes the norm to compensate for real grievances, when the injustices both justify and instigate the use of violent means.<sup>28</sup> The legitimization of violence and its transmission through formal and informal education perpetuates the culture of violence into the next generations,<sup>29</sup> which may also encourage violence against certain groups.<sup>30</sup> For example, the use of police force against criminal offenders may become accepted by a community as part of the social contract.

Cultures of violence vary according to different perceptions of violence within communities,<sup>31</sup> their values, and their beliefs.<sup>32</sup> Similar to inner city gang cultures, paramilitary groups perpetuate violence and normalize it in the minds of (typically) young people by offering them role models and protection.<sup>33</sup>

Post-agreement violence in Northern Ireland can be analyzed through the lens of the culture of violence. According to Johan Galtung, internalization is a psychological mechanism often employed to justify direct or structural

violence, whereas certain elements of culture (for instance, national symbols) help to justify this belief. As Peter Shirlow and colleagues argue, structural violence emanating from the mutually exclusive political values/agendas of ethnonational groups regarding partition and the union opposed to a united Ireland in Northern Ireland, has excluded and marginalized social groups and promoted a culture of intolerance.<sup>35</sup> The protracted conflict has impacted the creation of a more “socially permissive environment”<sup>36</sup> to continue the use of violence when responding to crime or interpersonal conflicts in the post-accord period.

Despite the role of individual agency, the decisions of many young people in Northern Ireland to join paramilitary groups have also been influenced by the culture of violence, arising from the divisive political values of ethnonational groups in Northern Ireland.<sup>37</sup> Young people who grew up during the peace process (not during the active violence of the Troubles) join paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland to defend and pursue their political values, which include protecting or preserving their group (ethnonational) identity. Thus, the motivation for joining paramilitary groups is fundamentally political and a response to political conditions. In this case, those from PUL communities join their paramilitaries to defend the Union (and by extension their British identity) and those from CNR communities join their paramilitaries to achieve a united Ireland (and by extension to defend their Irish identity).

In analyzing the impact of paramilitary culture on peacebuilding and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, it is important to recognize that paramilitaries depend on the support of their communities.<sup>38</sup> Community support is vital for paramilitary groups to continue recruitment and receive other necessary resources to prolong their existence. Although some paramilitary organizations may not always act in the best interests of their community, they sometimes endorse those interests at least rhetorically.<sup>39</sup> In the post-accord period, this rhetoric is designed to demonstrate that paramilitaries act in the community’s best interests. In turn, paramilitaries have to respond to the changes within their community, transform their tactics,<sup>40</sup> and adjust to the post-peace accord environment.

During protracted conflicts, communities also learn to depend on paramilitaries for security and protection. For instance, communities may rely on paramilitaries for policing and defense from the rival group’s paramilitary forces.<sup>41</sup> In the situation of mistrust of state policing, people

perceive paramilitaries in the light of, if not a “better evil” then at least a familiar one.<sup>42</sup> Thus, paramilitaries are often in a position to control anti-social behavior among youth.<sup>43</sup>

The interdependence between a community and paramilitaries may produce a positive effect on conflict transformation.<sup>44</sup> The decrease in support for paramilitary organizations cuts off their financial and, most importantly, human resources. Additionally, paramilitaries struggle to recruit new members when they have little support within the community. Sustained discontent with the post-agreement reforms may promote support for paramilitary groups by their supporters to resist the peace process they deem as unfair. For instance, several CNR groups have seen the policing reforms as mere window dressing on a much more systemic problem.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, PUL paramilitaries have been known to push against organized housing integration campaigns.<sup>46</sup> Despite this, paramilitaries have also supported post-war peace accords through their participation as community leaders in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes, as the findings of this article reveal.

## COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND PEACEBUILDING

In societies transitioning from protracted violent conflict, community leadership becomes a point of vital concern. In Northern Ireland, this concern becomes particularly important considering the widespread influence of the paramilitaries throughout communities during the height of the Troubles. As communities work to secure sustainable peace, local leaders must emerge to help ease the transition away from a culture of violence and rebuild relationships within their communities.

Successful peace processes, where positive peace is not simply an ideal but actually a tangible goal, requires what Whitney Miller and Zachary Green call effective peace leadership. Peace leadership is an integrative concept that goes beyond a simple consideration of the skills and tactics employed by leaders to influence collectives. Leadership as an integrative concept includes the holistic appreciation of leaders, followers, and contexts.<sup>48</sup> Peace leadership is also a proactive endeavour, employing intentional practices to shift behaviours and ways of thinking.<sup>49</sup> Thus, effective peace leadership is not simply a process of engaging with the context and dynamics of a conflict, but rather it is an active process of shifting the conversations and actions towards a narrative, which is conducive to the development of

positive peace. Community leaders are required to recognize the intricacies of working within this wider framework and should carry the ability and legitimacy to engage with actors at the state and institutional level.<sup>50</sup>

At the local level, it is crucial for community leaders to embrace the post-accord period as an opportunity for building social capital.<sup>51</sup> Both within groups in the form of bonding capital, and most importantly between groups in the form of bridging social capital, community leaders must engage in processes that open the door for social cohesion, enhance public discourse, and provide overall benefits to the broader community.<sup>52</sup>

Local leaders have two key advantages over formal political leaders, further highlighting the local leadership role in the push for community-based peacebuilding. First, local leaders can develop personal relationships with their constituency and emphasize their accessibility and their commitment to peace. Second, local leaders have a degree of flexibility when it comes to policy solutions or responses to local issues, as they are grounded in a relatively small space that they know in depth, spatially, socially, and politically.<sup>53</sup>

There are a number of developed and existing sources of community leadership. The former includes a process of training and developing community members in an effort to empower burgeoning leaders at the local level.<sup>54</sup> Youth development provides a promising opportunity for leadership potential. John Ungerlieider argues, “well facilitated peer dialogue allows teens a safe space to share personally, analyze issues, address conflict, and envision themselves as leaders taking social action.”<sup>55</sup> Youth leadership training presents an opportunity to not only develop a new crop of leaders, but also focuses on the members of society that are already the most vulnerable to nefarious influence from those wishing to retain power through violence and discord. Thus, it is important within conflict zones to develop programs aimed at training youth and other members of society, in dialogue skills, leadership tactics, and other appropriate dispute resolution methods.<sup>56</sup>

A particularly interesting source of existing community leadership during peace processes can be found in a somewhat unlikely group of individuals, former combatants. There has been growing appreciation for the positive potential of former paramilitary combatants to play a constructive leadership role at the local level of peace processes.<sup>57</sup> State institutions and police services may struggle to gain legitimacy within local communities in post-accord settings, yet, “former combatants have much more influence in the communities because they have cultivated this relationship [with the

community] for decades.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, former combatants can play a key role in mitigating terrorism threat within communities while working for social change. In Northern Ireland, former Loyalist and Republican combatants are working together in cross community development work.<sup>59</sup>

James McAuley and his colleagues suggest that former combatants (speaking specifically about Loyalists) represent a useful source of local community leadership in the development of the peace process at the PUL grassroots level in Northern Ireland.<sup>60</sup> They suggest that the majority of paramilitary violence now is contained to dissident Republican groups (such as the CIRA and the RIRA). But in the PUL community, “former prisoners have been engaged in a process of change and have utilised the organisational capacity of paramilitary groups in reformulating skills, ideas, knowledge, and abilities into various channels of conflict transformation and positive community roles around, for example, restorative justice, campaigns against anti-social behaviour, and other positive inter and intra-community approaches.”<sup>61</sup>

In contrast, Aaron Edwards and Cillian McGrattan are far more sceptical of the role former combatants can/should play in the Northern Ireland peace process.<sup>62</sup> They acknowledge the vital role non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) have played in the peace process by building cross-community links and fostering a new vision of shared space within Northern Ireland. However, there is a fear that the concept of “peace” within Northern Ireland is poorly defined, resulting in a meta-conflict around the narratives of peace and the past pursued by different organizations.<sup>63</sup> Thus, NGOs and CBOs have tended towards a maximalist concept of peace, which often includes bringing terrorists (former combatants) into the process. Edwards and McGrattan fear that bringing these former combatants into the process leads to “re-marginalising and re-silencing the victims of their crimes.”<sup>64</sup>

Thus, despite the connection between studying peace and living peacefully, such transformation can be difficult to achieve in practice. For example, learning about peaceful histories cannot be done without acknowledging and addressing past injustices. This may be a painful process that poses a threat (imagined or real) to group identities. The culture of violence is often sustained by that threat, which unites the group around a “monolithic identity.”<sup>65</sup> In Northern Ireland, there is a contentious issue when it comes to transforming the culture of paramilitary violence regarding whether IFI

and EU funding should be sustained by single identity peacebuilding work.

Identity polarization is a challenging issue within divided societies. The dyadic nature of the ethnonational identities within Northern Ireland, mirrors the unique challenges seen in other divided societies as well. Due to the complexity of identity formation however, identity change, while admittedly challenging, is not an impossible pursuit within divided societies.<sup>66</sup> Shifting identity away from the dyadic framework that perpetuates identity-based conflicts can occur by embracing the complexity of identity and seeking opportunities for cross-cultural (or cross-identity) engagement and interaction.<sup>67</sup> We must recognize though, that individual variance within identity groups can also shift based on the context within which it occurs. This complexity requires careful consideration in unpacking the ramifications of identity formation and reformation within divided societies.

#### SINGLE IDENTITY AND/OR CROSS-COMMUNITY CONTACT PROJECTS

In the context of building peace in the post-peace accord setting, it is important to understand what efforts are being made by both communities to reach out to the other and reconcile their differences. Additionally, it is key to recognize how the IFI and EU funding have provided opportunities for such coalitions to develop. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that while some grassroots actors believe that peacebuilding and reconciliation should encompass harmonious socioeconomic development projects that can bridge the sectarian divide,<sup>68</sup> others prefer single identity projects that cater to their group needs and aspirations.

Single identity projects in Northern Ireland are often justified on the basis of the deep sectarian divide that has characterized intercommunal life in the country. The understanding is that bridging sectarian divides would entail an appreciation of one's sense of self and group identity. Single identity projects are aimed at engaging individuals from within one community to first build their own capacity, confidence, and skill-sets, and to challenge their in-group prejudices of the "other" in readiness for cross-community work.<sup>69</sup> Such thinking, however, assumes that the Northern Ireland conflict is solely hinged on cultural hatred and prejudice. Moreover, it is not always clear whether single identity work actually assists communities to transform their prejudices of the "other" or merely deepens in-group favouritism and out-group bias and hostility. It is also not clear when and where single

identity projects end and when cross-community projects should begin.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, it is disputable whether there are clear-cut single identities, considering the different factions and variance within the PUL and CNR communities. Thus, there is an on-going debate within peacebuilding practice in Northern Ireland as to the suitability of single identity work as an antecedent to cross-community work, or as an end of eradicating violence on its own.<sup>71</sup>

The general disposition of many community development officers that were interviewed for this study is favourable to cross-community contact projects, which encourage “cross-cutting cooperation and contact between opposing groups, and cultural initiatives to challenge the heritage of past hostility”<sup>72</sup> as pathways to reconciliation, integration, and peace. The engagement of local paramilitary leaders in cross-community work in Northern Ireland is, on the one hand, motivated by the lack of urgency on the part of politicians to move the “administrative, political, and security agenda forward,”<sup>73</sup> and on the other hand, the goodwill of grassroots actors, including former paramilitary members, who are utilizing the financial support of the IFI and the EU to design programs that will regenerate socioeconomic activities and consolidate the gains of the BA.<sup>74</sup> Given its potential benefits for strengthening societal cohesion and bridging the sectarian divide and distrust among the different paramilitary groups, some scholars and a majority of our informants are calling for more funding to be invested in cross-community projects.<sup>75</sup>

## THE IFI AND EU FUNDING

Established in 1986 by the British and Irish Governments after the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA),<sup>76</sup> the IFI was initially a top-down liberal financial intervention that was financed by the United States alongside Canada, the EU, New Zealand, and Australia to support economic development programs and resuscitate the economy of Northern Ireland and the Border Counties.<sup>77</sup> The IFI was subsequently expanded to promote cross-community understanding and integration among working class PUL and CNR communities who had endured economic hardship and social deprivation as a result of the Troubles.<sup>78</sup> Brianna Masciel reports that the IFI has supported about 5,800 projects and created 55,800 jobs since its establishment.

EU financial support began with the Peace I Programme (€667 million from 1995 to 1999). The programme was meant to consolidate the positive

response to the opportunities presented by developments in the Northern Ireland peace process, beginning with the cessation of violence by the paramilitary groups in 1994.<sup>80</sup> Peace II (Peace II - €995 million from 2000 to 2004; Peace II Extension - €160 million from 2005 to 2006) and Peace III (allocated €225 million from 2007 to 2013) were created to foster peace and reconciliation.<sup>81</sup> Considering the ingrained sectarianism in Northern Ireland,<sup>82</sup> the EU Peace funding (I and III) supported single identity initiatives to prepare groups for cross-community activities, even though some preferred the confines of their communities. In 2014, Peace IV was introduced by the EU to address the need for more peace and reconciliation programs in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties, mainly targeted at addressing the plight of young people.<sup>83</sup>

Both IFI and EU Peace monies constitute an integral facet of the liberal democratic peacebuilding model, which verges on a top-down exclusionary approach to peacebuilding. However, Patlee Creary and Sean Byrne have pointed out that decentralization has also been a central feature of the EU Peace Fund in Northern Ireland in that the fund was disbursed by “intermediary funding bodies, sectoral partners, district partnerships, and county council task forces in an effort to ensure maximum participation of community groups in the target areas.”<sup>84</sup>

In contrast, Olga Skarlato and her colleagues note that the results of the foreign aid programs in Northern Ireland have been rather a mixed bag.<sup>85</sup> On the one hand, the external funding has facilitated the creation of shared spaces to build community relations and promote human rights. On the other hand, it has intensified the saliency of group identity and increased segregation in several communities.<sup>86</sup> In any event, however, the funding has paved the way for community development projects that would not have been possible otherwise, even though the legacy of paramilitarism, as evidence in the activities of dissidents, remains a challenging hurdle in the path towards sustainable peace.

## METHODOLOGY

This article is based on expert interviews conducted by the fourth author with 13 funding agency development officers and 107 community group leaders during the summer of 2010. The respondents, some of whom were also witnesses of conflicts in their communities, shared their views regarding the peacebuilding and reconciliation projects funded by the EU Peace III

Fund and IFI in Londonderry (Derry) and five Border Counties of the Republic of Ireland and three in Northern Ireland—Armagh, Cavan, Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, and Tyrone. Various peacebuilding and reconciliation projects and organizations focus on the issue of transforming the culture of violence inspired by the political agendas among ex-paramilitaries from PUL and CNR communities in Northern Ireland.

The study adopted a grounded theory approach. Hence, some specific ideas and theories emerged repeatedly from the data on how our respondents' projects have impacted paramilitarism in Northern Ireland. These entail the dwindling support for paramilitarism and fears of renewed violence, commitment to community leadership and peacebuilding, and the transition from single identity to cross-community contact projects. These ideas were gleaned from respondents' views on specific questions regarding the role of the EU and IFI funding in promoting peacebuilding and reconciliation among and between different ethnonational communities in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of study participants.

#### THE IMPACT OF THE EU AND IFI FUNDING IN TRANSFORMING THE CULTURE OF PARAMILITARISM

This section documents respondents' views on how peacebuilding projects funded by the IFI and the EU provided incentives for people, particularly ex-paramilitaries, to transform their sectarian dispositions that have sponsored violent conflicts in Northern Ireland and the Border counties of the Irish Republic.

##### *Decline in Local Support to Paramilitaries and Fears of Renewed Violence*

One of the questions that was posed to respondents had to do with their fears and worries about the future. In response, the majority of participants named the escalation of violence as the most common concern despite the measures by the EU Peace III program and the IFI in creating a culture of peace in Northern Ireland. This is how one of the respondents from Derry connects this fear to the culture of violence in Northern Ireland:

ELLEN: I have a fear a huge fear that we keep the violent culture going instead of rather as peacebuilders now saying that there is a different way we can be with each other, how do we

think differently, how do we think in our commemorations remembrances that [don't] create a violence of the past but rather how we might reshape peace for within future.

Participants explain this fear as symptomatic of the romanticized violence and entrenched sectarian attitudes of the older generation, which have been transmitted to children by families despite peace education at school. This is what Michael, from Derry, had to say on the issue:

MICHAEL: So we have an institutionalized structure for peacebuilding now, so we have legislation, we have funding but in terms of the emotional different engagement, it is not doing that, because we see the children at the primary schools, eight and nine-year-olds, they still have a fairly entrenched attitudes that they have received from their parents ... so low level sectarianism all the time, perpetrated by little boys all under the age of sixteen, all the time used as a device for community control, because the community in the Fountain is fairly much under paramilitarism, and the Bogside is not.

However, most of the respondents seem to agree that the support for paramilitary activity (by young people in particular) is impacted by structural components, such as poverty and unemployment. This is how, for instance, a community project director in Derry describes the reasons for young people joining paramilitaries:

TOM: [For] the people who are on the deprived side of things [it is] much more glamorous to be a paramilitary than just to be unemployed, a no-hoper, as the saying goes ghettos in Chicago or wherever you want to go that the drug dealer is the role model for young men.

Despite the continuing recruitment of young people into the paramilitaries, the majority of our participants believe that the return to the Troubles' level of violence is impossible. Some point out that support for paramilitaries in the wider community has diminished significantly. As one research participant from Derry argues:

SAMUEL: It's just harder to do it [recruit] because young people are ... seeing themselves differently in their environment I believe without any research evidence but that's what I believe as someone living in this world ... you might still have pockets

of resistance and pockets of violence but it won't be like a full on war you know so it's like really small separatist movements.

The declining support for paramilitary groups was sometimes explained by factors like the unifying effect of violence on communities. This is what Jack from Derry had to say on the issue:

JACK: My sense is that acts of violence by such groups ... have the opposite effect than it intended for the most part. It actually unifies communities across sectarian divides. ... So I think that ... the criminalization and the marginalization of such groups will continue ... the future will have an element of violence but it will be marginalized from the centre.

Some of our respondents also believe that another reason that may decrease violence in the future is that the youth may become more open-minded due to local peacebuilding initiatives. For example, a director of a community project in Derry perceived that the more contact that young people have with each other the better peacemakers they will become as adults:

JIM: What we are saying is that if young people are actually meeting each other on a regular basis or adults on a regular basis respecting each other then the chances are that it will never go back to what happened.

Another director of a community project in Derry echoes Jim's optimism that if the focus on peacebuilding continues, those kinds of violent activities would cease

PAMELA: If there is a focus on peacebuilding I think that through time that will cease because there is no future, there is no future in it, we have a more equal society now, we have elected representatives, we have a devolved government, we now have the policing and justice devolved, we have our own minister for justice.

Nevertheless, the diminishing support for paramilitaries does not necessarily mean the transformation of the culture of violence in Northern Ireland. Even if young people are less eager to join paramilitary groups, they can still be engaged in violent interactions. The culture of violence transcends paramilitary activity and manifests itself in other daily interactions. Jack from Derry notes the following:

JACK: On the one hand you can say, oh, I think the paramilitary threat is going to be marginalized yet in another way that culture of violence and manifestations of violence whether it's domestic or violence against women or immigrants, violence against gays ... that's perfectly acceptable, it is perfectly acceptable in this day and age to discriminate in legislation to discriminate in practice to discriminate in doctrine against ... you know gays and lesbians.

Thus, when thinking of the culture of violence in Northern Ireland, Jack's view is that:

JACK: We're not just looking at sectarian violence we're looking at the structures of violence that now apply very effectively to all those different communities.

Jack's imagery of the future of Northern Ireland underscores Anthony Oberschall's view that the culture of violence in Northern Ireland has turned inward,<sup>87</sup> becoming linked to other forms of structural violence and criminality caused by poverty, the drug trade, and gang violence.

Respondents agree that the deeper structural and cultural impediments to peace cannot be removed rapidly, which supports John Paul Lederach's view of conflict transformation as requiring a long-term commitment.<sup>88</sup> The overwhelming concern about the potential drift back into political violence by dissident Loyalists and Republicans despite the decrease in local support for paramilitary groups highlights the endurance of a culture of violence in Northern Ireland. Without being adequately addressed, this deeper structural level can become a source of paramilitary recruitment in the future.

### *Community Leadership and Peacebuilding*

As discussed previously, a key element of the external funding within Northern Ireland and the Border Counties is an effort to assist communities in shifting from a culture of violence towards a culture of peace, based on the integration of both communities. Thus, it is important to consider how individuals and organizations engaged in community peacebuilding manage the challenges presented by the historical and present-day influence of paramilitaries within local communities.

Several interviewees spoke directly about the importance of designing programs to deal with the current surge of paramilitarism within communities. One community program leader in Derry noted the following:

BETH: Have no doubts that the paramilitaries are still recruiting, have no doubt that the paramilitaries have some influence in parts of communities and that we need to look very strongly at the correlation between poverty and paramilitaries and until those big elements are being talked about and dealt with ... my aspiration and my vision will become more shadow and more difficult.

This concern highlights the importance of community organizations stepping into communities to take on the difficult circumstances and break the circle of deprivation. Beth's organization works directly with paramilitary leadership and sees their inclusion in the process as a necessary component of the important work they do on a daily basis within communities:

BETH: We very much see peacebuilding as being about a journey and we see it about bringing people with us on a journey that enables them to discover what peace means to them and how they live with it in the community ... we now find ourselves working with the most prominent paramilitary group within the community and for me personally it has been the most remarkable journey.

Another community project director in Derry also notes the areas of concern within both communities:

TOM: I think we need projects to stop or divert young people from getting involved with paramilitaries, it's no coincidence that most of the trouble is in the most deprived areas, you know you don't get much trouble in the leafy suburbs. ... You know that the places where the paramilitaries are strongest are the most deprived areas so it's not rocket science I think it needs to be worked on improving people's economic jobs and a lot of things, so I think [economic aid] helps in that direction.

Tom highlights a major concern for community peacebuilders that paramilitaries feed off the helplessness and lack of opportunity felt in the most economically deprived areas within Northern Ireland. Therefore, programs aimed directly at servicing those areas pose a great opportunity to cut off a main component of the recruitment supply of the paramilitaries.

Bill from Derry reiterates this sentiment, commenting on the risk for young people within both communities:

BILL: Armed violence sadly is exciting to some types of young people especially if they don't have jobs and they don't have a future, and ... they believe that you know what's happened is a sell-out, which is what senior Republicans who are opposed to the peace process have been telling them that this is a sell-out of the old tradition of your heritage.

Thus, circumventing the power of paramilitaries within deprived communities is a complex and challenging endeavour. However, with the help of the EU Peace III Fund and IFI monies, peacebuilding programs are able to target these communities and address major issues that are presenting roadblocks to the widespread diffusion of the peace process into all communities.

Gary, a program director from Derry, is working directly with disaffected groups, such as paramilitaries, seeking to bring them into the peace process conversation. However, his goal is not to "fix" their way of thinking; rather he takes a similar approach as mentioned previously by McAuley and colleagues.<sup>89</sup> Instead of focusing on shifting ideology, programs can focus on changing behaviours towards a more constructive form of engagement. Thus, Gary's organization focuses on inclusion because of the important role of the paramilitary in the peace process. He describes their approach as follows:

GARY: Here is a group of people who are not [on] board the peace process what is it we need to do to bring these people on board with us. Not about them changing, it's about what is it we need to do to encourage them to come on board. It would be great if they all thought like us but at the minute they are not so what is it we need to do rather than they need to do, because we have to show good example and encourage them.

An EU Peace III consultant working in the Border Counties echoes the sentiment discussed previously by McAuley and colleagues regarding the role of former combatants in the peace process.<sup>90</sup> The consultant notes a program successfully capturing the potential leadership role of ex-combatants in the peace process. The project includes ex-prisoners from the UDA, UVF, Provisional IRA, INLA, and Official IRA.

RAY: The EU provided that funding like the ex-prisoner structure was a smart way I suppose of setting up effectively ex-combatants groups but being able to call them something else,

because it gave you the structure you had the people sitting in there, you had a group, you had an organisation and around that they ... had the creditability at the local level in their own constituencies, they had the links and then they were able to act as that channel of communications during the peace process [and] negotiations and I think now they are playing a key role in working at local level say along interfaces where they are in direct contact with each other to soothe things down during the tension and when young guys are out fighting and rioting during the marching season.

This project echoes the individual work being done by another former paramilitary member, who now works as a teacher and mentor within his community in Derry:

GEORGE: [I] got my head down in teaching and working with young people in youth club at night and trying in my own way at that time to try and just get them out of that mentality of no jobs, we don't care, you know a negative sort of mentality to try and get them into something positive to drive them to inspire and get on and achieve something better, and I'm still doing that, so have I been successful, in a small way maybe with individuals. But the work has to go on that work can't stop, it has to go on and government [has] to find the means to keep it going.

Community leadership is vital to the success of establishing long-term peace. As peacebuilding programs include and empower local leadership, the grassroots peace process becomes more robust and stable. This in turn, helps to further encourage the holistic societal transition from a culture of violence to a culture of peace.

### *Single Identity and Cross-Community Contact Projects*

Our respondents debated on the viability of single identity and cross-community projects—funded by the IFI and EU—in transforming the culture of violence and bridging the ethnonational divide in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties.

George from Derry shared how some people, particularly ex-paramilitaries, were initially unconvinced of the potential of cross-community projects to transform their relationship with other communities:

GEORGE: You have to look at it honestly and say that there are some people that haven't done any good at all because they are entrenched in their own positions and they don't move out. And I have experienced that with an ex-IRA person who on a cross community joint project didn't, they didn't engage positively his whole engagement was negative you know so, but he was only one out of a group of twenty, you have to look at it realistically well there is a small number.

Considering the lack of openness by some ex-paramilitaries to participate in cross-community work, a community project director from Derry underscores the importance of single identity work in de-escalating conflict:

LIAM: They [IFI and EU funders] are very comfortable to support single identity work as well, because there is still even after all of these years, there are still groups where you need a period of sustained single identity work to build confidence and build capacity before they are in a position to start engaging in cross-community work.

Other respondents were not as receptive of the idea of single identity work or single identity communities for that matter. A director of a community group in Derry perceives single identity communities as highly sectarian in nature:

GARY: Sectarianism has been the glue that has helped cement sectoral type single identity communities. We need to look at how to bridge the gap and begin to understand each other. If I ask people to give their first thoughts on, what was 1916 about, you will get a Unionist group talking about the battle of the Somme and a Republican group talking about the 1916 rising, ask each of those groups do they understand from where each are coming from and you discover they don't.

Gary further highlights the relevance of cross-community work in enabling both communities to bridge their divide by sharing how he played a role as a mediator for ex-paramilitary groups in a cross-community project.

GARY: There was this role played by mediators such as me that worked with some of the paramilitary groups on the ground making contact with each other particularly at times when there has been a major incident to make sure there is going to be no

retaliatory action. ... I had the pleasure of facilitating a meeting between some of the main Loyalist paramilitary groupings and one of the main republican paramilitary groups where we eventually got them in to look at some of the historical aspects of our conflict which eventually led to one of the groups calling a ceasefire and decommissioned some of their weapons.

Further, Jack, from Derry, highlights the tendency of people who are engaged in single identity work with ex-paramilitaries to homogenize such groups, making it hard to get at the heart of the distinctive issues faced by each group.

JACK: The one thing that I would flag for you that I think is highly problematic is the tendency not to draw that line between Loyalist and Unionist, so in fact now there's a term that's being used which is PLU Protestant Loyalist Unionist, so I'm working in the PLU unit wow, wow, wait a second that is a problem because you have just homogenized three very, very different groups. ... So if we are looking at single group work then we have to be explicit we have to be crystal clear about the intra-group dynamics the political balances and to understand how those interests compete against each other and where the space within the PLU community intersects with that space within the Nationalist Republican Catholic.

Another director of a community partnership project in Derry noted the following in his story:

BARRY: I think we have to be very grateful to the IFI and the European Union for the funding, of course. ... It is not peace money that stopped the conflict here, what stopped the conflict here was an overwhelming sense of the mass of people in both communities for peace, the carnage was unreal people looked at it and said Jesus this can't go on ... the fact that the Republican movement was prepared to lead the way among the so called paramilitary groups whatever you want to have it whatever side all of that. It wasn't peace money that made this peace ... if it was all taken away tomorrow the peace doesn't depend on it.

A majority of our respondents believe that despite the internal differences and skirmishes among and between both cultural communities

in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties, there is some element of goodwill within the ex-paramilitary groups who are willing to engage the “other” in cross-community activities, though such projects have had little success in addressing deep issues of sectarianism and xenophobia.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Thus far, we have noted the long and rather tumultuous history of Northern Ireland. In the modern era, the discord in Northern Ireland peaked from the 1960s to the 1990s in a devastating period known as The Troubles. Due in part to a mutual decision by several of the Loyalist and Republican paramilitary organizations to declare a ceasefire in 1994, a new era in Northern Ireland’s history was ushered in with the signing of the 1998 BA, despite the rejection of the process by dissident groups from both the PUL and CNR communities. In the years following the agreement, Northern Ireland’s politicians, communities, and citizens have struggled with the legacy and lingering influence of paramilitary activity. Yet the rapid growth of grassroots peacebuilding initiatives in communities and the people’s own goodwill and readiness to embrace such activities throughout Northern Ireland, have infused the region with a sense of hope.

The peacebuilding initiatives in Northern Ireland have been sustained over the years through EU Peace and Reconciliation and IFI funding. We explored how these initiatives have impacted Northern Ireland’s culture of paramilitary violence using three major themes that emerged from the narratives of our respondents. Four key points flow from this analysis. First, it was clear from the conversations with the respondents, that leadership was a key issue of concern when it comes to the peacebuilding process. This was highlighted in the respondents’ concern that a lack of local leadership opens the door to renewed paramilitary activity and support at the local level. Additionally, there was a belief exhibited from the respondents that the development of new leadership (whether in the form of former combatants or otherwise) is a central component to the peace puzzle within communities. As communities within Northern Ireland and the Border Counties continue to work towards securing a lasting peace, leadership within those communities becomes a paramount concern. Rather than allowing dissidents to retain influence and leadership roles within the community, there is a focus on identifying and developing new (and old) leaders who will help guide the transition from a culture of violence towards a culture of peace, leading to

the integration of both communities.

Many respondents noted the lingering influence of paramilitary leadership within communities, thus highlighting the importance of grassroots projects and programs aimed at diminishing any negative influence from these sources and instead utilising them in the pursuit of sustainable peace. Whether it is working directly with former combatants or providing new opportunities for youth in economically deprived areas, the grassroots peacebuilders represent a crucial component in the attempt to push out the paramilitaries and welcome in positive peace.

Second, on the relevance of single identity and cross-community work in transforming Northern Ireland's culture of violence, most of our respondents spoke positively of the impacts of cross-community work on transforming the sectarianism of ex-paramilitaries. However, some of our respondents view single identity work as a necessary tool for building confidence within the paramilitary groups. This is because avoidance was seen as the hallmark of The Troubles, when people "came to view physical and social separation as guarantors of security in daily life and view cross-community relations as burdened with uncertainty and potential trouble."<sup>91</sup> Yet, as we have pointed out, one obvious danger of single identity work in Northern Ireland pertains to its potential to portray a false image of the ex-paramilitary groups who, although they may appear to share similar interests and needs, are quite different from each other.

For example, the Unionists and the Northern Ireland PUL community as a whole "are a heterogeneous group."<sup>92</sup> The Loyalist community equally comprises various paramilitary groups of different factional leanings including the UVF, UFF, the RHC, the OV, and the LVF. Thus, being Protestant or Catholic does not entail a common identity.<sup>93</sup> This internal group dynamic among Northern Ireland's ex-paramilitaries underlines the importance for donor actors, peacebuilding agents, and researchers in Northern Ireland who are pursuing cross-community or single identity programs to pay heed to intragroup discord and avoid diluting the unique interests and expectations that these groups may have of the peace process and the future of their society.

Third, the views of some of our respondents implied that some of Northern Ireland's ex-paramilitary groups are eager to reconcile with their former adversaries. Given this, it is conceivable that the IFI and EU peace funding were largely effective because they were bolstered by the willingness

of some of the paramilitaries to embrace peace and transform their societies. In this way, the funding merely enabled the renewed goodwill of the paramilitaries to break down their sociocultural and political barriers. Such goodwill could both be a product of war fatigue and a renewed realization that peaceful coexistence may be much more beneficial than continued violence and segregation. It is also conceivable that some of them may have reached a “mutually hurting stalemate,”<sup>94</sup> and felt that the time was ripe for reconciliation. This indicates that embracing reconciliation and lessening the appeal to a violent culture “can be viewed from the cost side of the conflict.”<sup>95</sup> This situation is accurately explained by William Zartman and Alvarro de Soto who argue that conflicting parties are sometimes forced to resolve their conflict when “they feel trapped in an uncomfortable and costly predicament.”<sup>96</sup> Moreover, they may also have lost trust in the capabilities and willingness of their political leaders to sustain the GFA.

Finally, the decline in local support for paramilitary activity was also seen as a major force in de-escalating and discouraging paramilitarism in Northern Ireland. Although sharing similar fears of a return to violence, some of the respondents agreed that local support for paramilitaries had decreased significantly. This decline reflects the change in attitudes toward paramilitary violence and implies that peace initiatives may have been successful in challenging this particular component of violent culture. The shift in attitudes toward paramilitaries and perceiving violence committed by them as a negative within the community, has become a necessary component in attempts to promote a culture of peace in Northern Ireland.

However, a long-lasting transformation demands structural change,<sup>97</sup> which, according to most of the interviewees, is yet to happen. Continuing marginalization of young people supplies new, potential recruits for dissident Loyalist and Republican paramilitary organizations and gangs. Some respondents were optimistic about the prospects of youth changing their attitudes; others believed that without ending sectarian institutions like segregated schools, and addressing poverty, unemployment, and inequality, the culture of peace would be impossible to cultivate. Peace research reinforces this latter view by arguing that the failure to provide economic opportunities in the post-peace accord period induces violence and criminal behaviour by marginalized young men.<sup>98</sup>

Based on our overall findings, we argue that the contributions of the IFI and EU Peace III Fund have aided in transforming the culture of

paramilitarism in Northern Ireland. Additionally, the funding sources are of immense importance in having initiated and sustained grassroots programs that have challenged and transformed the ingrained sectarianism and violence among paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. Respondents also acknowledge the agency of local peacebuilding actors and paramilitary leaders, as well as the goodwill of ex-combatants to break their own barriers and create the culture of peace they want for themselves and their society regardless of the external donor monies. Thus, while communities in Northern Ireland are still faced with the lingering effects of the Troubles, the combined impact of the agency of local peacebuilding actors and paramilitary leaders, the donor monies, and the goodwill of some ex-paramilitaries to reconcile with their neighbours portray a sanguine prospect for the integration of aggrieved communities and the cultivation of a culture of peace in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties going forward.

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