

Power, Maria (Hrsg.): *Building Peace in Northern Ireland*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2011. ISBN: 978-1-846316593; 238 S.

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This edited volume of eleven essays, plus an introduction, is a useful contribution to a growing literature on aspects of the Northern Ireland peace process. Unlike many other studies which focus on the high level political negotiations and the process of institution building, this volume focuses on the role of varying sections of civil society in helping to consolidate the peace during a time of transition. The book thus contains essays that explore the role of women's movement, churches, integrated education, loyalist groups and former prisoners as well as exploring the wider dimensions of the peace process with essays on the role external aid, cross border work as well as considering the limitations of the wider policy framework in which such groups have been working.

Most of the essays take a sympathetic, but not uncritical, view of the work of civil society and collectively they seek to highlight the broad range of work that is often under-considered in the literature on societies moving away from armed conflict. To quote from Power's introduction 'Now that the political structures have been implemented, emphasis needs to be placed on relationships between communities and peacebuilding work focused on dealing with the sectarian divisions within society in required.' However, a number of papers in this volume highlight the difficulties of undertaking such work in the absence of political leadership and without a clear understanding of what such work is desired to achieve.

As with many edited volumes, the essays vary in both quality and focus, which results in an uneven end product. One is left with a sense of a partial and fragmentary view of the role played by civil society but without a clear delineation of the larger framework or the greater whole. The predominant focus of the volume is the period since the cease-fires and the signing of the peace agreement (broadly since 1995–1998), but with a num-

ber of the papers taking theoretical or general perspectives on 'civil society' and two essays (on the work of the churches and the women's movement) taking a much longer perspective to sketch work undertaken from the early years of the conflict in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there is limited concrete discussion of the actual range and type of work undertaken by civil society to help build peace. A concluding chapter that drew together some of the themes addressed by the different authors would have been a useful counterpart to the introductory scene-setting.

Various papers discuss the role of government and international bodies in providing policy direction and support for the wider work on the ground, but they also highlight the lack of coherence among the political elite at both local and international level in developing a strategic framework for consolidating the peace, and even in having a real sense of what might need to be done once the framework for institutional reform was put in place. An example of this is the absence of any formal strategy for dealing with the presence of paramilitary groups beyond the demand for decommissioning of weapons. Although, as the chapters by Etchart and McEvoy & Shirlow discuss, some steps have been made from below, but this remains an unsteady and erratically supported process. This lack of any clear leadership, which continues in the absence of any formal policy by the devolved government, means that many grass roots groups simply had to adapt their practice to fit a regularly changing set of funding priorities and has in turn resulted in plethora of 'good practice' which has been developed through pilot schemes which are rarely transformed into mainstream activities. This in turn makes it difficult to effectively assess the actual impact of different sections of civil society in building the peace.

The introductory chapter makes reference to the need for a clearer understanding of the concept of peacebuilding if there is to be a long term and sustainable peace. In this chapter Power highlights the importance of moving beyond the minimal conditions for peace, which is the ending of armed violence, to address the conditions that caused the conflict in the first place, and she notes

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that while political violence has largely been ended in Northern Ireland, the divisions between the two communities and the levels of inter-communal segregation remain high, and in some regards have increased over the last fifteen years. As one author asks – does this mean civil society peacebuilding has actually made some things worse?

The problem is that different groups and sectors have different aspirations for the future of Northern Ireland and are following different route maps. Unfortunately the lack of coherence about what was needed and still needs to be done to build peace in Northern Ireland at a policy level, is reflected in the diversity of perspectives in the various chapters in the book. While a number of the authors use the term peacebuilding to frame their discussion few clarify their interpretation and understanding of it, and many also use other terms such as peace process, transition, conflict transformation and community relations as an alternative.

Only Buchanan's chapter on policy frameworks has a clear discussion of the different theoretical approaches towards peacebuilding. She highlights the differing expectations underpinning terms such as conflict settlement, resolution and transformation and argues that only a programme of conflict transformation with horizontal and vertical relationships to promote fundamental social change will be able to address the root causes of the conflict. In contrast the absence of a coherent policy direction suggests that the political establishment are content with a more narrowly focused process of conflict settlement, involving the devolution of power but without any commitment to address the deeper social problems.

Building peace is always a complex and unique process, while it is possible to share lessons and experiences, every society will to some extent need to reinvent the wheel to ensure that it fits the local context. This volume highlights some of progress made in building peace in Northern Ireland and also some of the weaknesses of the past long decade. It illustrates the importance of looking beyond the political elite in developing and implementing a programme of building peace after armed conflict, and implicitly confirms the

need for long term commitment and perspective if the process of transition is to lead to a sustainable peace and a democratic society.

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