



‘My Brother’s Keeper’? Inter-ethnic Solidarity and Human Rights

Alison Brysk* and Daniel Wehrenfennig**
University of California, Irvine

Abstract

Why and how do communities that have been victims of human rights abuse advocate for new, unrelated victims of ethnic persecution? Scattered but persistent inter-ethnic solidarity challenges materialist views of ethnic communities as interest groups, and highlights the importance of social learning and communicative action. In order to trace some promising pathways of inter-ethnic solidarity, we examine human rights campaigns on behalf of other beleaguered groups by American Jews, Northern Irish Catholics, and African-Americans. We find that necessary conditions of a structural base and social capital are activated by bridging narratives of human rights that promote Other-identification among unrelated groups. Analysis of such campaigns has the potential to improve our understanding of ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ as an alternative to competitive nationalism and a situated basis for universalist humanitarianism.

Why and how do communities that have been victims of human rights abuse advocate for new, unrelated victims of ethnic persecution? Scattered but persistent inter-ethnic solidarity challenges materialist views of ethnic communities as interest groups and shows the exception to the general pattern of in-group

* Alison Brysk is Professor of Political Science and International Studies at the University of California, Irvine. She is the author of *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina* (1994), *From Tribal Village to Global Village: Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (2000), and *Human Rights and Private Wrongs* (2005). She has edited *Globalization and Human Rights* (2002), *People Out of Place* (with Gershon Shafir, 2004), and *National Insecurity and Human Rights: Democracies Debate Counter-Terror* (with Gershon Shafir, 2007).

** Daniel Wehrenfennig is a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at the University of California, Irvine, where he specialises in international relations. His thesis focuses on the role of citizen diplomacy and conflict management, comparing Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine. His recent work has been published by *Peace Review*, *Communication Theory*, Lexington Books and the University of California Press. Beyond his studies, he helped organise an educational fact finding trip with Muslim, Jewish, and Christian UCI students to Israel/Palestine (the Olive Tree Initiative). He has also produced a documentary film for civic education in Malawi/Africa.

self-defense and withdrawal from the suffering of strangers. Projection of values, social learning, and communicative action are unexpected ways to overcome the bystander dilemma and mobilise human rights support.

The 'political economy of solidarity' is defined as the 'distribution of affections, resources, and energies' among identities, who can make claims upon them, and who has the authority to decide (Hollinger 2006:xvi–xvii) While inter-ethnic relations range along a spectrum of conflict and cooperation (Alex-Assensoh and Hanks 2000), competitive nationalism and cosmopolitan outreach represent the poles. In one classic definition, nationalism 'means, above all, that one may exact from certain groups of men a specific sentiment of solidarity in the face of other groups' (Weber 1994:22). On the other hand, cosmopolitanism 'promotes broadly based, internally complex, multiple solidarities equipped to confront the large-scale dilemmas of a "globalizing" epoch while attending to the endemic human need for intimate belonging' (Hollinger 2006:xvii). Such cosmopolitanism may range from a completely abstract universalism, in which the political economy of solidarity is based in all individuals equally, to a graduated set of concentric obligations to self, family, ethnic, and elective identity groups, and finally all human beings (Appiah 2005). By solidarity, we mean successful claims for resources possessed by the more established ethnic group that are relevant to the protection or empowerment of the currently oppressed ethnic community, whether financial, symbolic, political, or legal.

Solidarity is often constructed via overlapping circles of partial identification rather than homogenous appeals to universal principles (Appiah 2006; Rorty 1989). For example, during the emergence of the Latin American indigenous rights movement from the 1970s through the 1990s, Indians of the Americas received disproportionate support and critical infusions of resources from European ethnic minority groups – from Basques to Irish (Brysk 2000). Similarly, one of the earliest defenses of stigmatised Arab-Americans in the U.S. post-9/11 came from Japanese-Americans. The Japanese-American Citizens' League (JACL), established to combat legal discrimination against Japanese migrants, ultimately secured retroactive remedies for the abuses of World War II-era Japanese internment in the 1980s. Yet the JACL surprisingly *increased* and broadened its activities in the post-9/11 era, as an active legal challenger to the illicit detentions of Arab-Americans undertaken in the name of the 'war on terror' – with no direct implications for Japanese-Americans (Japanese American Citizens League 2007). What helps to explain these kinds of inter-ethnic campaigns and coalitions, as well as the three cases profiled below? We will argue that above and beyond necessary factors of outreach group social capital and some objective similarity among oppressions, solidarity is activated when and if a bridging narrative explaining common struggles is articulated and accepted by critical members of both groups.

Theoretical Framework

While prevailing theories of ethnic politics and international relations suggest that ethnic coalitions are based on interests and that persecuted groups are likely to

seek self-protection or exit, the existence of unusual but persistent cases of inter-ethnic solidarity suggests the possibility of social learning and Other-identification. In the conventional wisdom, ethnic groups are strategic interest groups who use group identities to compete for resources, power, and protection (Horowitz 1985). But a more multi-dimensional model depicts ethnic mobilisation as an interaction between symbolic and strategic elements, which is often constructed and projected across borders (Esman 1994). Indeed, some students of American politics – the heartland of interest group lobbying – nevertheless conclude that ‘research on coalitions suggests that shared political beliefs are the firmest foundation for interethnic and interracial coalitions’ (Sonenshein 2001:211). Similarly, a study comparing support for affirmative action policies that explicitly redistribute social resources shows that individuals’ political principles are the most important determinant of their support for privileging disadvantaged Others, with the self-interest of their own ethnic group the least significant variable (Lien and Conway 2000).

Thus, in order to account more fully for the transnational identity politics of inter-ethnic coalitions, we must go beyond the competitive and nationally-based ethnic politics literature to a constructivist, international approach. Constructivists suggest that communicative action can transform various parameters of world politics through the power of persuasion and the reconstitution of interests (Risse 2000). This occurs through a dialectical interaction between perceived self-interests and principled logics of identification with Others. In general, research on altruism shows the importance of Other-identification as a critical social psychological filter for mobilisation on behalf of persecuted minorities (Monroe 1996). More specifically, transnational ties for human rights campaigns are constructed through the communicative processes of identification with the Other, clear causal narratives of injustice and redress, and ‘branding’ of locations and victims (Brysk 2000, 2005, 2009) – bridging narratives that explain injustice and direct mobilisation to contest it. At times, this alternative pathway of political action may be generalised from individual activists in movements and campaigns to entire communities that mobilise on behalf of shared perceptions of common principles. Like nations, cosmopolitan inter-ethnic coalitions are ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983).

We argue that solidarity among oppressed ethnic groups is uncommon – although possible – because the geopolitical placement, historical trajectory, and national position of the more powerful group set a threshold of their availability for normative appeals. Fearon and Laitin (1996) suggest several effects of state strength and group solidarity that circumscribe these ‘necessary conditions’, combined with our own observations below. Overall, a minority group that is now rooted in a pluralist polity, secure from current threats, and relatively comfortable in the dominant society is more able and willing to consider the plight of newer or newly persecuted Others – and any renewal of perceived threat or persecution can disrupt even well-established ethnic partners. More secure and higher-status groups also tend to have superior communicative resources such as education and media access, which enable them to interpret and memorialise their own experience, gain awareness of the experience of distant neighbours, and

project appeals within their own dominant society, political system, and the international arena.

Once the structural threshold is crossed, in order for appeals to evince solidarity for current at-risk groups, several additional communicative action conditions must occur as sufficient conditions. First, there must be an effective exchange of information or direct communication. Second, effective forms of inner-group information processing are needed to mobilise group solidarity and to overcome potential collective action dilemmas (Arfi 2000). In this communicative process, leaders or organic intellectuals play a critical role in articulating a bridging narrative of inter-ethnic solidarity. For previously traumatised groups, the bridging narrative is an especially critical filter for inter-ethnic solidarity, to establish common causality and analogous prescriptions around traumas central to the group's identity. Bridging narratives depend on the elements of memory, analogy, and social learning (Edkins 2003). In order to identify with another struggle, a victimised group must be able to articulate an established history of its own persecution. That history must be available for analogy with another experience (Khong 1992; Lakoff 1990); it must not be perceived as wholly unique and must be describable in some generalisable terms. The analogy must be a good fit with the form of persecution suffered by the older victim community. Finally, the coalition partners must have compatible 'lessons of history' and prescriptions for the prevention of future traumas (May 1973).

The model outlined above is a demanding configuration of uncommon social circumstances, but it is not random – and it has played a consequential role in some leading social struggles. Therefore, we seek to analyse these struggles and their generalisability. In order to trace some promising pathways of inter-ethnic solidarity, we examine human rights campaigns on behalf of other beleaguered groups by American Jews, Northern Irish Catholics, and African-Americans. We have chosen solidarity efforts that vary in strength, character, and success; from Jewish grassroots mobilisation of the Darfur coalition to African-American legislative lobbying against apartheid to Irish Catholic pro-Palestinian symbolic solidarity. They also display a range of structural and communicative inputs of the dominant group, including different migration experiences, group cohesion, and current group status. While two are held constant in the U.S. political context, the Irish experience allows us to consider possible variations due to distinct political institutions and social structures. Although our cases overall share a 'most different systems' common outcome of solidarity by disparate partners, for contrasting within-case 'process tracing' we compare the American Jewish community's acknowledgment of the genocide in Darfur with equivocation over recognition of the Armenian genocide (Eckstein 1975).

American Jews: 'Never Again'?

American Jews are perhaps the leading case of a massively and chronically persecuted minority achieving security and success within one generation of immigration. One sociological study summarises the combination of economic, educational, and civic insertion of American Jews with the statistic that Jewish

individuals comprise roughly 40% of a list of the wealthiest Americans, 40% of American winners of Nobel prizes, and 40% of the partners of the leading law firms in Washington and New York (Lipset and Raab 1995:26–27). Seeking to transcend racist genetic or conspiracy theories of this phenomenon, a careful analysis traces the success of American Jews to a strong sociological fit between the skills derived from the historical combination of an economic ‘middleman minority’ and a diffusely literate religious tradition with the needs of America as a globalising pluralist superpower (Hollinger 2006:135–65). Moreover, American Jews quickly transformed a legacy of strong communal religious organisations into dozens of civic and promotional bodies (Mittleman, Sarna, and Licht 2002), gaining a high level of network ‘social capital’ (even compared with similarly professionally successful but less politically mobilised ‘model minority’ Asian-Americans).

Jewish community organisations quickly assumed a foreign policy orientation, in part due to ongoing diasporic uncertainties. By 1905, in response to a horrific pogrom in Odessa, 50,000 American Jews marched through the streets of New York – and the following year established the flagship American Jewish Committee, which by 1912 had secured the abrogation of an anti-Semitic U.S. treaty with Russia (DeConde 1992:70–71). However, unavailing appeals by well-situated and well-organised American Jews to rescue their brethren during the Holocaust planted a strong sense of the limits of assimilation and American civic universalism, evoking a back-up strategy of communal self-defense culminating in Zionism (Spiegel 2001).

The organised American Jewish community has varied tremendously in its relationship to the persecution of similarly situated groups. During the 1960s and 1970s, U.S. Jewish organisations strongly supported the African-American civil rights movement, often adopting Biblical metaphors of Jewish enslavement in Egypt, but had a mixed record opposing apartheid in South Africa – with American Jews lagging behind the global Jewish community and South African Jewish peers. In the following decades, American Jews spoke out against refugee quotas for Cambodians and urged U.S. intervention in Bosnia, but were relatively silent on Rwanda (Galchinsky 2008:100–02). And the American Jewish community has been notoriously reluctant to criticise human rights abuses in Israel, only slightly mitigated by the recent emergence of a few dissident American Jewish organisations focused on Mideast peace.¹ Jewish American intra-ethnic advocacy for Soviet Jews during the Cold War appears to have served as a critical intermediate phase between inward-looking Zionism and cosmopolitan outreach to unrelated groups (Galchinsky 2008).

When Jews reached out across ethnic lines, leading Jewish figures in international law and multilateralist Jewish NGOs clearly adopted the message that Kantian cosmopolitanism was the ultimate guarantee of ‘never again’. American Jewish NGOs lobbied for forty years for the Genocide Treaty despite U.S. isolationism, under the aegis of the Ad Hoc Committee on Human Rights and Genocide Treaties, and helped to draft the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance (Galchinsky 2008:36). But this generic sensitivity was not enough to pull American Jews beyond the U.S. baseline apathy towards

Rwanda, in the absence of specific communicative action – in 1994 American Jews received little information about the rapidly unfolding genocide, which their own government refused to label as such.

Yet a decade later, the internationalist projection of ‘never again’ reached its apogee in an unlikely identification with distant victims of a barely comprehensible genocide in Sudan – as in Bosnia, claiming mostly Muslim victims. After years of retreat from internationalism over quandaries related to global condemnations of Israel’s human rights record, the American Jewish community rallied around the cause of Darfur. Information was available: the 2004 attacks in Darfur followed increasing publicity of the thirty-year North-South Sudanese civil war by American humanitarian groups, as well as increased media attention to African regimes linked to global terror following 9/11. Moreover, key community leaders articulated a bridging narrative; the Holocaust Museum sponsored the founding conference for concern about Darfur, and Nobel Laureate Eli Weisel explicitly labeled the conflict as a genocide. By 2004, the American Jewish World Service had established a coalition of 170 NGOs, the Save Darfur Coalition. The coalition lobbied President Bush for multinational intervention, raised over \$4 million, and led rallies throughout the United States. In parallel fashion, the Jewish press and numerous synagogues have publicised and raised funds for Darfur relief. Activists sport buttons that read ‘Never Again – Darfur’, and draw explicit comparisons to the Holocaust. A Jewish college student, the grandchild of four Holocaust survivors, raised \$250,000 from fellow students to fund African Union peacekeepers and established a new social action organisation, the Genocide Intervention Network (Galchinsky 2008:84, 103). The U.S. national Jewish students’ organisation, Hillel, sponsors weekly baking and sale of the highly symbolic Sabbath bread for Darfur relief at dozens of American universities.

On the other hand, the limits of inter-ethnic solidarity by American Jews are dramatically illustrated by the organised Jewish community’s equivocation over recognition of the World War I-era Armenian genocide, when a bridging narrative is trumped by a regression to perceived group self-protection. This gap clearly shows a triumph of nationalism over principle, as American Jews retreat to a diasporic identity and preferentially identify with Israeli foreign policy. It is deeply ironic, in that one of the lessons of the Armenian experience is the consequences of international passivity for the next victims; in this case, Jews. In planning the Final Solution, Hitler overcame his own generals’ concern over international reaction, stating: ‘*Who today still speaks of the massacre of the Armenians?*’ (Power 2002:23).

The foundation for American Jewish passivity was set by Israel:

Israeli officials sometimes engaged in realpolitik that prevented them from taking a universalist stance on genocide. During the 1980s, for example, Israel was attempting to build an alliance with Turkey. . . . So valuable was this alliance that in 1982, the Israeli government refused to condemn the Turkish genocide of Armenians, despite the existence of a sizable Israeli Armenian minority, and it acted to prevent an international genocide

conference in Tel Aviv from going forward because the conference contained a panel on the Armenian genocide. (Galchinsky 2008: 87)

Recurrent attempts by Armenian-American activists to appeal for Jewish support produced individual sympathy but organisational torpor, frustrating the Armenian community that sought to draw on the Jewish precedent to galvanise wider acknowledgement. The Holocaust Museum and Reform religious movement explicitly recognised the genocide, but key gatekeeper organisations such as B'nai Brith and the American Jewish Committee demurred. This chronic tension resurfaced in 2007, as a U.S. Congressional Resolution to recognise the Armenian genocide wound its way through the legislature – and some Jewish organizations actually worked to oppose the measure, on the grounds that it would threaten the U.S. and Israel's strategic alliance with Turkey.

On 21 August 2007, the ADL finally issued the following statement:

We have never negated but have always described the painful events of 1915-1918 perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire against the Armenians as massacres and atrocities. On reflection, we have come to share the view of Henry Morgenthau, Sr. that the consequences of those actions were indeed tantamount to genocide. If the word genocide had existed then, they would have called it genocide. . . . Having said that, we continue to firmly believe that a Congressional resolution on such matters is a counterproductive diversion and will not foster reconciliation between Turks and Armenians and may put at risk the Turkish Jewish community and the important multilateral relationship between Turkey, Israel and the United States. (Harris 2007)

The episodic inter-ethnic altruism of American Jews can be modeled by the clusters of factors we have suggested above: variance in structural availability and communicative fit. Overall, U.S. Jews easily surpass the threshold of community and material security, as well as organisational capacity and cohesion. In general, communication density is high, and the Jewish community can draw from several widely disseminated bridging narratives – from slavery to religious discrimination to genocide. Generally, this pulls American Jewish organisations up to a higher level of inter-ethnic solidarity than similarly situated Americans lacking Jewish historic appeals. Regarding Jewish Americans' disproportionate participation in the U.S. civil rights movement advocating for African-Americans, pluralistic rabbi and political activist Michael Lerner explains, 'It was for the underdogs, the Jews of that situation' (Lerner and West 1995:42).

However, the Armenian dilemma shows how the massivity of the Holocaust trauma makes American Jews vulnerable to regress to a defensive mode of chronically incomplete assimilation that revives geopolitical insecurities, along with a related nationalist narrative of exceptionalism that 'burns the bridge' of the bridging narrative. Much debate in the Jewish community on the Armenian genocide revolved around the perceived uniqueness of the Shoah, disabling even now-secure inheritors' purely symbolic recognition of an objectively parallel experience (Rosenbaum 2001).

African-Americans and Anti-Apartheid Solidarity

Although African-Americans have been consumed with their own struggle for survival during most of their beleaguered tenure in the United States, defensive pan-Africanism did extend to true inter-ethnic advocacy by the 1970s – a mere decade after American blacks secured full formal legal equality under the 1964 Civil Rights Act. At the opposite end of the spectrum from American Jews, Africans were involuntary immigrants stripped of life, liberty, property, and education for over a century by their new society. America's forty million citizens of African descent remain the largest most persistently and broadly disadvantaged ethnic group in most categories of social resources: only 9.6% have a bachelor's degree (compared to around 15% for whites), while almost twice as many blacks live in poverty, disabling over 20% of the community (see table links by ethnic group from census data at http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en). Even the basic indicators of biological survival – infant mortality and life expectancy – show significant gaps, with black infant mortality around twice the national average and a life expectancy gap of almost ten years between black and white males (<http://social.jrank.org/pages/871/Who-Are-We-Life-Expectancy-by-Race.html>).

For the century following the end of slavery, a combination of violent prejudice, poverty, and continuing civic disenfranchisement under Jim Crow legislation isolated and demobilised the majority of the African-American community, blocking significant foreign policy advocacy well into the 1960s (DeConde 1992:108, 145). The destructive power of the legacies of slavery beyond simple racial bias in impeding group mobilisation by African-Americans is highlighted by the relatively higher social mobility and civic participation of Caribbean black migrants to the U.S., who were voluntary migrants with ongoing transnational ties to intact and literate societies (Alex-Assensoh and Hanks 2000). While there are numerous African-American national organisations, the major civic bodies such as the NAACP historically had only a sporadic foreign policy focus; the latent social capital of black churches eventually focused on civil rights at home, but they did not generally engage in international activity.

Like American Jews' post-Holocaust focus on reestablishment of Israel and defense of Soviet Jews, in the immediate aftermath of slavery the African diaspora's outreach concentrated on attempts to found a homeland in Liberia – the moral equivalent of Zionism. From the 1950s onward, some African-American churches and community advancement organisations did organise relief efforts and early petitions to the U.N. for the minority-ruled African settler states of Southern Africa, in association with anti-colonialist and non-aligned movements. This marks the beginning of true *inter-ethnic* solidarity, as most African-Americans' roots were in Western or Central rather than Southern Africa, and such primordial ties to an ethnic homeland had in any case been obscured or destroyed by forced relocation and slavery. Black Americans were not identifying with ancestral homelands, nor did they widely critique post-colonial African leaders' oppression of their own people; rather, U.S. blacks criticised white settler regimes' slavery-like and Jim Crow-like abuses towards unrelated 'fellow

Africans'. Until the anti-apartheid campaign, African-American *consciousness* and criticism of U.S. foreign policy was remarkably high and consistently anti-imperialist, but specific *coalitions* and impact were low (Krenn 1999) due to lagging community social capital.

Black American anti-apartheid activism took off during the 1970s, following a decade of educational and electoral reforms that brought significant numbers of African-Americans into policy-making circles; like American Jews, African-Americans had now passed the threshold of empowerment to advocate for other groups. Catalytic figures like Carter's U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young and grassroots organiser Randall Robinson linked normative appeals against apartheid to civil rights movement networks and values, and founded the new organisation Transafrica in 1976. By 1978, the organisation had 10,000 members (DeConde 1992:177). The bridging narrative involved frequent parallels between the U.S. civil rights movement and the struggles of South African blacks for legal equality. Key South African communicators Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu framed their conflict in parallel terms for a U.S. audience, and frequently stated that their struggle was inspired by the American civil rights movement.

Meanwhile, newly empowered black legislators established the Congressional Black Caucus, which quickly took up apartheid as its main international issue. Congressman Ron Dellums drafted an early sanctions bill at the request of South African black unions, which formed the basis of eventual U.S. restrictions, after over a decade of struggle.

The Black Caucus was also the source of the Comprehensive Antiapartheid Act of 1986 that transformed U.S. policy toward South Africa. This collaboration between congressional leaders and human rights activists was reflected in the Free South Africa Movement, which organized the arrests of thousands of demonstrators outside the South African Embassy in Washington D.C. in the early 1980s. During the demonstrations numerous African American Congressmen were arrested along with ordinary citizens and celebrities in the sit-ins outside the South African Embassy. (Nesbitt 2004)

Robinson, the Pan-African Liberation Committee, and the Harvard divestment movement also organised 1970s boycotts of Gulf Oil over Portuguese colonialism and later lobbied for more humanitarian action on Haiti (Robinson 1998), but without receiving the grassroots black support or U.S. policy response of the anti-apartheid campaign.

The identification of African-Americans with South African blacks, and their projection of this identity into American political discourse in the post-civil rights era, were clearly key to the success of anti-apartheid mobilisation in securing U.S. and global sanctions that contributed to the transition to majority rule in South Africa. The fact that this is an elective and selective process is suggested by American blacks' relatively low identification with Caribbean blacks sharing a similar history of enslavement, impoverishment, and current abuse. The difference is that South African blacks' troubles were based on a system of minority domination and legally inscribed discrimination that resonated with U.S. history,

while the chronic suffering of Haitians occurred under majority rule and corresponded more to structural, economic, and imperialist systems of domination rather than overt legislative racial discrimination.

Like the other groups profiled, American blacks could engage in inter-ethnic solidarity if and when they passed a structural threshold of empowerment. The sparse and selective nature of pan-African outreach can be explained by the time and sociological progress it took to build the narrative bridge to Others. Explaining the initial limitations on communicative action, African-American intellectual Cornel West compares cosmopolitan Jewish identities based in migration and urban roots and notes that for rural and racially isolated African-Americans, 'the quest for Black identity has rarely been trans-American in a substantive sense' (Lerner and West 1995:62). On the other hand, he follows Thomas' observations that both African-Americans and U.S. Jews share a 'nagging moral conscience owing to an undeniable history of underdog status and unusual slavery-to-freedom narratives in authoritative texts' (Lerner and West 1995:2; Thomas 1999) When this narrative is projected outwards as African-Americans came of age in U.S. society, pan-African activist Randall Robinson recounts a systematic consciousness-raising based on Other-identification – where the Other shared the common enemy of U.S. oppression:

I could see no real substantive distinction between my American experience and the painful lot of the Haitians, South Africans, Mozambicans, Angolans, Zairians, Afro-Brazilians, and other blacks in other places about whom I was reading. The American official hand was everywhere and invariably on the wrong side. (Robinson 1998:69)

Northern Irish Catholics and Palestinian Self-Determination

If American Jews sought to defend Others against their own trauma of genocide, and African-Americans mobilised to protect strangers against legalised racism, Northern Irish Catholics struggled for national self-determination – and identified with similarly situated Others. In that vein is it not surprising to find a key Sinn Féin international policy position to support people in struggle,

Sinn Féin has built up fraternal links with many struggles throughout the world. We actively campaigned against Apartheid in South Africa and maintain fraternal links with the ruling African National Congress. We support the Basque peoples right to national self determination and campaign against the illegal US blockade of Cuba. (Sinn Féin International Department)

While the IRA and later successor Sinn Féin made common cause with Kurds, Basques, and South African blacks, one of the strongest links has been with Palestinians – whose political situation closely parallels many aspects of the history of Northern Ireland.

Despite historic inequities, Northern Irish Catholics do possess a high level of social capital. Of Northern Ireland's 1.8 million citizens, 40.3% are identified as

Catholic and 24% as Nationalist (Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2007; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2008). The Irish Nationalist community in Northern Ireland has had a history of tremendous self-organisation and empowerment in the twentieth century, after they felt that institutions and authorities in Northern Ireland (under British rule) were favouring the Loyalist Protestants. The primary mission was to provide services and protection to their own population, to defend their homeland against British rule, and to expand their influence in the predominant Loyalist regions. In this process of mobilisation and outreach, the Irish Nationalist community has become very active as a political force and advocacy group – especially for other causes that resemble their self-identification as a nationalistic movement fighting against state terror and oppression.

The comparative international civil society study project, CIVICUS, documents the high social capital of the Irish Nationalist community in Northern Ireland. Over 60% of the population is part of a civil society organisation (with 36% belonging to more than one), and at least 56% volunteer at least once a year. There are many umbrella bodies and structures; about seventy-seven generic infrastructure organisations and 123 sectoral infrastructure organisations, which are seen by a strong majority as very effective in organising and mobilising civil society (78%). The civil society in Northern Ireland receives over 650 million British pounds a year, a significant amount given the smaller society size. Communication between civil society organisations (CSO) and governmental decision-makers is seen as very effective (CIVICUS 2006). This is also supported by extensive research by Wehrenfennig in 2006 and 2008, conducting over sixty interviews with key civil society and political leaders: 80% felt that there is a strong connection between the various levels of society in Northern Ireland, and that civil society has comparatively great political influence (Wehrenfennig 2008).

While all of these indicators show signs of a strong and well-organised civil society, this *social* mobilisation for the most part has been a response to a lack of *political* representation of the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland. Even with today's power-sharing government, many Nationalists still feel that their socio-economic status is not equal. This is exemplified in the ongoing debates on policing and the quality of government services in predominantly Nationalist communities (McDonald 2008). Northern Irish Catholics thus present an intermediate case of group capacity, with high mobilisation and capacity like American Jews, but low status and under-representation like African-Americans.

The Nationalist community's inter-ethnic coalition-building is thus distinct from other groups in western democracies. With the political stalemate and inability to engage in traditional international political advocacy, inter-ethnic support must arise from the well-equipped civil society structures. Involvement in international issues has been limited, in part due to a slow shift in community identity: from a victim and dependent group to an active advocate for change.

One of the strongest cases in international solidarity and coalition-building by the Nationalist community is the support of the plight of the Palestinians in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their struggle for national self-determination.

Some baseline cultural sympathies were set by anti-Semitism among the early founders of the Republican (Nationalist) movement at the turn of the twentieth century. Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Féin (the political wing of the IRA) published anti-Semitic articles in the *United Irishman*, a major Irish newspaper. Oliver J. Flanagan, a Dáil (lower chamber) member, in 1943 proposed to the house to 'rout the Jews out of this country'. However, the real inter-ethnic solidarity of directly getting involved with the Israeli-Palestinian struggle started with the 'brother in arms' solidarity during the Northern Ireland Troubles in the late 1960s. Living and training together in Libyan training camps, the IRA and PLO developed strong mutual support structures and friendships (as well as with the ANC from South Africa)² as fellow 'liberation fighters'. The PLO and the Nationalist community as a whole saw themselves mirrored in the Palestinian narrative of being engaged in a liberation struggle against a more powerful state and its machinery of terror and oppression (O'Conner 2008). One famous mural depicts an IRA affiliate standing next to a PLO affiliate with the overhead slogan 'Two Nations, One Struggle'.

But the kind of support has changed over the years, which is mostly attributable to the evolution of the Nationalist community and their struggle – as well as their self-understanding and bridging narrative frame. Today, after the Good Friday agreement and the political integration of Loyalist and Nationalist parties into one political system, support for the Palestinian cause of national self-determination has shifted from paramilitary to political advocacy, with very sophisticated civil society involvement and little negative anti-Semitism.

The political solidarity and support is spearheaded by Sinn Féin, the main Nationalist party in Northern Ireland. At the Northern Ireland Sinn Féin headquarters in West Belfast, a large Palestinian flag hangs next to the flag of Ireland in Gerry Adam's (Sinn Féin's president) main office. At a Sinn Féin conference in 2006, 'Women in International Struggle', one of the main speakers was a young Palestinian – and among the flags at the conference was that of the Palestinian Authority. When discussing international politics, Sinn Féin's leader made a point to continuously point out the Palestinian situation. 'Sinn Féin believes in the right to self determination and obviously that includes the people of Palestine', stated Adams, president of Sinn Féin and senior member of the Northern Ireland Parliament (Martin 2006).

This has created some spillover into the Republic of Ireland, which for a long time was very passive in international politics, but has followed the course of the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland to actively support the Palestinian struggle for national self-determination. Today, the Republic of Ireland, which has a much higher international profile and influence through its EU membership and growing economy, is seen as the EU country most critical of the State of Israel. Ireland has criticised Israel in its political expressions and pressed the EU to change its policies on Israel (Miller 2005:266).

Moreover, besides political support and advocacy there has been more concrete Northern Irish civil society solidarity for the Palestinian cause. Led by the very powerful Northern Ireland trade unions, a multilevel campaign was started to support the Palestinians and to oppose Israel by using economic pressure. Starting

in 2005, Northern Irish delegates started to lobby for the Palestinian cause of national self-determination at the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). Spearheaded by Northern Ireland trade councils, the ICTU passed a motion in 2006 condemning Israel for human rights abuses, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes. They started to lobby for a boycott and divestment towards the State of Israel and its business sector. This was passed at the annual ICTU meeting in 2007 and ‘undoubtedly [is] one of the strongest and most determined positions taken by any trade union congress world-wide’ (Trade Union Friends of Palestine 2008). These steps were then followed by IMPACT, the largest public sector union in Ireland in 2008.

Since then, the Irish trade unions have been rallying world-wide support for an effective BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement, similar to the one in response to the apartheid regime in South Africa. Already COSATU in South Africa, UNISON in the UK, and the Canadian public sector and post office workers have signaled their support, to name but a few (Mc Mahon 2008).

Further, public education campaigns to educate people in Northern Ireland about the Palestinian struggle for self-determination are conducted on an ongoing basis. By the invitation of numerous civil society organisations and private donors, many Palestinian speakers have been invited over the years to speak in Northern Ireland and to rally support in political tours around the region. Other prominent murals in Belfast and Derry depict slogans such as ‘Free Palestine’, ‘Boycott Israeli goods’, and ‘Our day will come’ [in Arabic and Irish].

But despite the current wave of strong political support and civil society action to further the Palestinian cause, the principled anti-Israel attitude has not translated into an animosity to the Israeli or Jewish people, as in the earlier years of paramilitary support. Incidents of anti-Semitism in Northern Ireland, while unfortunately increasing lately, are in general considered to be few and at a low level, according the latest report of the Stephen Roth Institute at Tel Aviv University in Israel, one of the worldwide premier institutes monitoring anti-Semitism (Stephen Roth Institute 2004). Also, based on their own challenging history with political violence, all Irish political or civil society groups denounce the use of violence as a way to deal with the Palestinian struggle for national self-determination. As Ruarai McKenna, a 21-year-old Catholic student at Queen’s University explains: ‘The Catholics that have made this alignment have not done this out of a justification of PLO actions, such as suicide bombings of Israelis, but have connected with similar issues in identity.’ In particular, the events of 9/11, which pushed the IRA to completely give up their armed struggle and decommission their weapons arsenal, have caused a strong condemnation of the violence following the Second Intifada in Israel/Palestine (Arthur 2008).

In the transformation of the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland from an oppositional group striving for independence to being part of the government and society-building, we can see an evolution in its inter-ethnic solidarity approach. Starting from a more ideological and strategic support of the Palestinian cause for national self-determination, mostly built on direct communication and interaction in the ‘freedom fighter’ training overseas, support has shifted to a more

identity-based political and social advocacy. Although still fueled by old friendships, this newer form of identity-based advocacy is built more around symbolic identification³ based on generalised overlapping historical narratives and less on direct interactions with Palestinians. Though politically supported, this inter-ethnic solidarity is driven by civil society advocacy, which has been empowered through its own struggle and reached a level in the last decade to be able to project its solidarity outside the country. In this process, the civil society has learned to use democratic mechanisms of advocacy, enabling it to become internationally relevant (Hemmer 2008). However, this identity change from being a victim to becoming a resource and support structure for others is only in its early stages. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Nationalist community experience in supporting causes outside of their boundaries is less developed than the American Jewish community or the African community; newer organisational structures for inter-ethnic solidarity building are just being developed and new causes being identified (Acheson 2008).

This evolution and influence of the bridging narrative in solidarity expression becomes very visible when comparing the international inter-ethnic solidarity of other causes by the Irish Nationalist community. The bridging narrative of self-determination 'by any means necessary' has now become the Irish model of democratic empowerment for oppressed nationalities. While the support for the ANC and the Anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa in the '60s and '70s supported the use of violence to achieve self-determination, the more recent support for the struggle of national self-determination of the Kurds and Basque emphasises the need for non-violence and democratic engagement. Manifested by the words of Francie Brolly, Sinn Féin Member of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly, at his speech at the International Kurdish Cultural Festival in 2007: 'You do not need war. You need to continue your great work in maximizing your representation in central and local government, as we are doing in Ireland' (Brolly 2007). To adopt the Northern Ireland model of political empowerment and change through political representation and grassroots mobilisation is now one of the main messages of solidarity sent to other groups struggling for national self-determination. As Peter Stitt (2008) notes 'maybe Kurdish and Turkish leaders ought to look more closely at the Northern Irish experience. The ballot box is stronger than the Kalashnikov when it comes to making a lasting peace'.

Conclusion: Constructing Solidarity

What do these stories of solidarity among far-flung fellow travelers teach us about the possibility for promoting peace and fostering human rights campaigns situated in 'rooted cosmopolitanism'? Inter-ethnic outreach *is* possible – but 'not under conditions of our own choosing'. A solid base of security and political incorporation permits a global vision and provides the social capital for advocacy to transform policy. This also means that fostering the empowerment of historically marginalised ethnic groups is not only just for the targeted minority; justice for historic victims may sometimes spill over later into long-distance amelioration of the plight of currently threatened populations.

The creation and communication of appropriate bridging narratives of human rights seems to be the definitive element that transforms this potential alliance into solidarity. This too implies that a more positive role may be possible for international human rights activism and education in transforming ethnic rivalry to inter-ethnic solidarity.

Beyond current generic programs to ‘teach tolerance’, rooted cosmopolitanism will be promoted by comprehending the specific histories of particular suffering – and the parallels among them. Communication is necessary but not sufficient to facilitate these coalitions, as the mixed success of programs that merely increase civic exchange attests. Bridging narratives do not automatically result from increased communication among groups; it must be structured and thematic communication that promotes diffuse Other-identification among community leaders or organisations with social capital or charismatic status.

What do Basques, Japanese-Americans, Northern Irish Catholics, African-Americans, and American Jews have in common with each other? What do they share with Latin American Indians, Arab-American Muslims, Palestinians, South Africans, and Darfurese? Only a particular history of suffering, and a universal capacity for communicative action to recognise one’s own suffering in the Other. Inter-ethnic solidarity constructs new layers of identity atop the old, as distant strangers become fictive kin to fight for global principles of human rights.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful for support from Professor Claire Jean Kim, Floyd Mori of the Japanese-American Citizens’ League, participants in the University of Pittsburgh conference ‘The International Human Rights Regime Since 9/11: Trans-Atlantic Perspectives’, and the Center for Citizen Peace-Building.

Notes

¹ These include the Jewish Movement For Peace, the transnational Brit Tzedek, and the new ‘J Street’.

² The Apartheid struggle in South Africa was another issue very much supported by the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland as well as the liberation movement by Che Guevara in South America; both, however, did not last as long as the Palestinian cause. But still today murals in the streets of Derry and Belfast show the support of the ANC and Che Guevara (Rolston 2009).

³ While the symbolic identification and support of the Irish National Community for the Palestinian cause already have been active for many decades, the Irish Loyalist Community recently started to visibly support the State of Israel. Though there have been some believers within the very religious circles of the Orange Order that they are one of the twelve tribes of Israel, the recent support for Israel is more along the motto ‘My enemy’s enemy is my friend’. As a newer development, one can now find many Israeli flags in some prominent Loyalist neighbourhoods around the country, sometimes facing the Palestinian flags of their Nationalist neighbours. However, despite its visible and ideological support, the Loyalist involvement and connection with Israel has been limited (no real political or society advocacy) and is far less than the support of the Nationalist Community for the Palestinian cause (O’Conner 2008).

References

- Acheson, Nicolas. 2008. Interview by Daniel Wehrenfennig, 24 April, University of Ulster, Jordantown Campus.
- Alex-Assensoh, Yvette M. and Lawrence J. Hanks, eds. 2000. *Black and Multiracial Politics in America*. New York: New York University Press.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2005. *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2006. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Arfi, Badredine. 2000. "Spontaneous" Interethnic Order: The Emergence of Collective, Path-Dependent Cooperation'. *International Studies Quarterly* 44 (4): 563–90.
- Arthur, Paul. 2008. Interview by Daniel Wehrenfennig, 16 November, Irvine, CA.
- Brolly, Francie (MLA Sinn Féin). 2007. Speech at the International Kurdish Cultural Festival in Gelsenkirchen (Germany), 1 September. Available at: http://hevalo.wordpress.com/2007/09/06/sinn-feins-message-to-the-kurdish-people/?referer=sphere_relat_ed_content/ (accessed 3 March 2009).
- Brysk, Alison. 2000. *From Tribal Village to Global Village: Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Brysk, Alison. 2005. *Human Rights and Private Wrongs: Constructing Global Civil Society*. New York: Routledge.
- Brysk, Alison. 2009. *Global Good Samaritans: Human Rights as Foreign Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- CIVICUS (World Alliance for Citizen Participation). 2006. 'Civil Society in Northern Ireland: A New Beginning?' Budapest: European Regional Office.
- DeConde, Alexander. 1992. *Ethnicity, Race, and American Foreign Policy: A History*. Boston: Northeast University Press.
- Eckstein, H. 1975. 'Case-study and Theory in Political Science'. In *Handbook of Political Science: Strategies of Inquiry*, ed. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Edkins, Jenny. 2003. *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Esmán, Milton. 1994. *Ethnic Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Fearon, James D. and David D. Laitin. 1996. 'Explaining Interethnic Cooperation'. *American Political Science Review* 90 (4): 715–35.
- Galchinsky, Michael. 2008. *Jews and Human Rights: Dancing at Three Weddings*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Harris, Ben. 2007. 'ADL Recognizes Armenian Genocide'. *JTA: The Global News Service of the Jewish People*, 21 August. Available at: <http://jta.org/news/article/2007/08/21/103755/adlgenocide> (accessed 8 January 2009).
- Hemmer, Bruce. 2008. 'The Democratization of Peacebuilding: Democratic Exposure and Externally Democratic Ideology of Peacebuilding NGOs in Northern Ireland and Bosnia'. *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 29: 71–111.
- Hollinger, David A. 2006. *Cosmopolitanism and Solidarity: Studies in Ethnoracial, Religious, and Professional Affiliation in the United States*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

- Horowitz, R. 1985. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Japanese American Citizens League. 2007. 'It's Time to Restore Law and Justice', 18 September. Available at: http://www.jacl.org/public_policy/pdf/09-18-07RestoreLawAndJustice.pdf.
- Khong, Yuen Foong. 1992. *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Krenn, Michael L. 1999. *The African-American Voice in U.S. Foreign Policy Since World War II*. New York: Routledge.
- Lakoff, George. 1990. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lerner, Michael and Cornel West. 1995. *Jews and Blacks: Let the Healing Begin*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Lien, Pei-te and M. Margaret Conway. 2000. 'Comparing Support for Affirmative Action'. In *Black and Multiracial Politics in America*, ed. Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh and Lawrence J. Hanks. New York: New York University Press.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin and Earl Raab. 1995. *Jews and the New American Scene*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Martin, Susan Taylor. 2006. 'In Ireland, a Roadmap from Terror to Truce'. *St. Petersburg Times (Florida)*, 19 March.
- May, Ernest R. 1973. *'Lessons' of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, Rory. 2005. *Ireland and the Palestine Question, 1948–2004*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.
- Mittleman, Alan, Jonathan D. Sarna, and Robert Licht, eds. 2002. *Jewish Polity and American Civil Society: Communal Agencies and Religious Movements in the American Public Sphere*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- McDonald, Henry. 2008. 'Policing Deal Ends Standoff at Stormont'. *The Guardian*, 18 November. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/nov/19/sinn-fein-dup-stormont-coalition> (accessed 8 January).
- Mc Mahon, Eamon. 2008. 'Irish Trade Union Delegation Report Criticizes Israel, Governments'. *The Electronic Intifada*, 23 September. Available at: <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article9850.shtml> (accessed 8 January).
- Monroe, Kristen Renwick. 1996. *The Heart of Altruism: Perceptions of a Common Humanity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Nesbitt, Francis Njubi. 2004. *Race for Sanctions: African Americans Against Apartheid, 1946–1994*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). 2008. 'Registrar General Northern Ireland Annual Report 2007'. Available at: <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/demo/graphy/default.asp50.htm> (accessed 9 January 2009).
- Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey. 2007. Available at: http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2007/Political_Attributes/UNINATID (accessed 8 January 2009).
- O'Conner, Paul. 2008. Interview with the author, 18 May, Pat Finucane Center.
- Power, Samantha. 2002. *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*. New York: Basic Books.
- Risse, Thomas. 2000. "'Let's Argue!': Communicative Action in World Politics'. *International Organization* 54 (1): 1–39.
- Robinson, Randall. 1998. *Defending the Spirit: A Black Life in America*. New York: Dutton.
- Rolston, Bill. 2009. "'The Brothers on the Walls': International African Solidarity and Irish Political Murals'. *Journal of Black Studies* 39 (3): 446–70.

- Rorty, Richard. 1989. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenbaum, Alan S. 2001. *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*. 2nd ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Sinn Féin International Department. Available at: <http://www.sinnfein.ie/international-affairs> (accessed 28 November 2009).
- Sonenshein, Raphael J. 2001. 'When Ideologies Agree and Interests Collide, What's a Leader to Do? The Prospects for Latino-Jewish Coalition in Los Angeles'. In *Governing American Cities: Interethnic Coalitions, Competition, and Conflict*, ed. Michael Jones-Correa. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Stitt, Peter. 2008. 'PKK, Terrorist or Freedom Fighters?' *Kurdish Aspects*, 16 February. Available at: <http://www.kurdishaspect.com/doc021608PS1.html> (accessed 3 March 2009).
- Spiegel, Steven L. 2001. 'Israel and Beyond: American Jews and U.S. Foreign Policy'. In *Jews in American Politics*, ed. L. Sandy Maisel and Ira N. Forman. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Stephen Roth Institute. 2004. 'Anti-Semitism and Racism Report for Ireland 2004', Tel Aviv University.
- Thomas, Laurence Mordekhai. 1999. 'Suffering as a Moral Beacon: Blacks and Jews'. In *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Trade Union Friends of Palestine. 2008. 'Irish Union Passes Motions in Support of Palestine', ICTU statement, 5 June. Available at: <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article9586.shtml> (accessed 28 November 2009).
- Weber, Max. 1994. 'The Nation'. In *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wehrenfennig, Daniel. 2008. 'Conflict Management and Communicative Action: Second Track Diplomacy from a Habermasian Perspective'. *Communication Theory* 18 (3): 356–75.