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Naomi Hill

**Contested sites of Memory:
Segregated Space and the Physical Legacy of
the Troubles in North Belfast's Interface
Communities**

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**Segregated Space and the Physical Legacy of the Troubles in
North Belfast's Interface Communities**

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University of Bristol, Undergraduate Dissertation, 2010.

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Introduction

Physical space is fundamental to collective identities in Northern Ireland because much of the conflict and the way it has been remembered is situated in discourses of physical as well as political space. Graham suggests that it is the 'absence of agreed representation of place' that is the central theme in Northern Ireland's history.¹ This is manifested most starkly in residential segregation. Urban residential segregation is an enduring feature of the Troubles and is central to conflicting identities, based upon ethnicity. Ethnic conflict comprises opposing groups 'defined or set off by race, religion or national origin' or a combination of these.² In Northern Ireland segregation reinforced oppositional identities of Protestant and Catholic communities.³ The legacy of this is manifested, following the 1994 ceasefires, in the physical aspects of the cultural landscape and forms of commemoration centred on territorial space.

The centrality of physical space to the conflict is placed in its historical context by Boal's extensive work on residential segregation. This was a feature of Belfast from the plantation of Ulster in the seventeenth century but increased rapidly from the nineteenth century and is now at its peak.⁴ Murtagh's view is representative of a consensus between scholars who understand 'ethnic segregated space [to be] a fundamental spatial feature of the city.'⁵ This reinforced oppositional group identities by highlighting the difference between the two groups. Greely suggests the result of segregation was the creation of a 'sense of peoplehood, assumption of common origin,

¹ B. Graham, "The Imagining of Place: Representation and Identity in Contemporary Ireland." In B. Graham (ed), *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, (London, 1997), 193; see also B. Graham, "Contested Images of Place among Protestants in Northern Ireland." *Political Geography* 17, no. 2 (1998): 129-44.

² M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*, (New York, 1964), 27

³ These identities are referred to here simply as 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' but tend also to identify with Nationalist/Republican and Unionist/Loyalist identities, respectively.

⁴ At time of writing in 2000, F. Boal, *Shaping a City: Belfast in the Late Twentieth Century* (Belfast, 1995). 27

⁵ B. Murtagh, "Image Making Versus Reality: Ethnic Division and the Planning Challenge of Belfast's Peace Lines," in W. Neill et al (eds.), *Reimagining the Pariah City: Urban Development in Belfast & Detroit*, (Aldershot, 1995). 210; E Jones, *A Social Geography of Belfast* (London, 1960). 190-1

real or imaginary' on both sides.⁶ This leads on to a theoretical exploration of the notion of collective or national identity.

For Anderson, nationalism exists within an 'imagined community' because 'the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them.' Despite this, 'in the minds of each lives the value of their communion.'⁷ The value of the concept of community is in self definition; one group makes the distinction between itself and the Other. Cohen maintains that the key element of the community is 'the element which embodies this sense of discrimination, namely, the *boundary*.'⁸ This boundary is of central importance because a sense of solidarity or collective identity emerges from seeing the *in group* in relation to the *out group*. It is not simply that collective identity amounts to the 'recognition of cultural similarity or social contiguity'; rather it is a 'categorical identity that is premised on various forms of exclusion and construction of otherness.'⁹ The concept of the 'other' is particularly applicable to the Nationalist and Unionist communities in Northern Ireland. This is apparent both in the collective mentalities of both groups and as a physical feature of everyday life. Notions of identity are bound to the division of physical space in Belfast. These collective mentalities are particularly strong at the interface of Catholic and Protestant communities; for which Köték has given the label of the 'frontier'.¹⁰

A unique feature of interface communities is the development of formal structures for marking space; literal walls keep the interface communities apart. These walls are still maintained over a decade since the Good Friday Agreement and are a source of ongoing debate in a post conflict society. A recent poll reported by the Community Relations Council discovered that only twenty one percent of the residents in interface communities wanted the walls to be taken down in the immediate future. Sixty percent would be happy for the walls to come down but did not consider it safe enough at

⁶ A. Greeley, *Why Can't They Be Like Us?: Facts and Fallacies About Ethnic Differences and Group Conflicts in America* (New York,1969). 40

⁷ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London,2006). 6

⁸ A. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, (London,1985).12

⁹ A. Gupta and J. Ferguson, "Culture, Power, Place: Ethnography at the End of an Era," in A. Gupta and J. Ferguson (eds.), *Culture, Power, Place : Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, (London,1997). 13

¹⁰ J. Köték, "Divided Cities in the European Cultural Context," *Progress in Planning* 52, no. 1 (1999). 228

present.¹¹ Along with the sustained presence of political murals, these walls provide for a more nuanced view of the peace process and collective identity. They both provide markers of past and present conflict and are also fluid, contestable, and highly contentious sites of memory which shape the way in which Belfast's recent past is understood.

The study of interface communities has benefitted from a swelling body of research in recent years. Much of this follows the development of the anthropological and the geographical schools of thought.¹² The former adopted methods of research that included gathering qualitative data through participant observation.¹³ This has benefitted significantly from the development of the geographical school, which has expanded the methodology used to study interface communities, including mapping and quantifying residential segregation. The convergence of the two has enabled considerable progression, most notably through the work of Frederick Boal. He has charted patterns in urban residential segregation and documents the transition of demographic, economic and ethno-national change.¹⁴ Bollen's work assesses the role of policy makers and government involvement in developing the urban landscape.¹⁵ He has also contributed to the understanding of the 'double-minority syndrome'; whereby both communities see themselves as under threat.¹⁶ This work has established a link between the residential segregation and collective identity in a broad context. It proposes some general trends but offers no means of understanding the extent to which segregation permeates collective identities at an individual or community level.

This has been relieved somewhat by the emergence of studies of everyday life. Basten and Lysaght's work is a prime example. It enables us to understand the negotiation of space in interface communities for the 'ordinary' person.¹⁷ Jarman and Bell demonstrate that the impact of residential segregation and sectarianism is extended

¹¹ Community Relations Council, *e-bulletin* 1, no. 1 (2008).

¹² P. Doherty and M. Poole, *Ethnic Residential Segregation in Belfast* (Coleraine,1995).

¹³ See for example, F. Burton, *The Politics of Legitimacy: Struggles in a Belfast Community* (London,1978); J. Darby, *Intimidation and the Control of Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Dublin,1986); T. Wilson and H. Donnan, *The Anthropology of Ireland* (Oxford,2006).

¹⁴ Boal, *Shaping a City: Belfast in the Late Twentieth Century.*; F. Boal, "Territoriality on the Shankill-Falls Divide, Belfast," *Irish Geography* 41, no. 3 (2008).349-66

¹⁵ S. Bollen, *On Narrow Ground: Urban Policy and Conflict in Jerusalem and Belfast* (Albany,2000).

¹⁶ ———, *Urban Peace-Building in Divided Societies: Belfast and Johannesburg* (Boulder,1999).55

¹⁷ A. Basten and K. Lysaght, "Violence, Fear and 'the Everyday': Negotiating Spacial Practices in the City of Belfast," in E. Stanko (ed.), *The Meanings of Violence*, (London, 2003). 224-44

‘through a wide range and variety of routine and mundane decisions that people make in their everyday lives.’¹⁸ The participants were asked to map the Catholic and Protestant areas of Belfast. Findings showed that individuals in the community have devised ‘mental maps’ of their own neighbourhoods. Participants’ perceptions of social space were not independent of the influence of external factors such as their community backgrounds, socio-economic grouping, age, gender and the personal impact of the troubles upon the individual.¹⁹ Thus there are a variety of factors that influence the impact of segregation on people at an individual level. Living in a smaller community highlights difference and makes anonymity more difficult.²⁰ These aspects influencing the negotiation of mental maps and boundaries are predominantly constructed within physical space.

North Belfast provides a particularly beneficial point of entry for understanding the relationship between the cultural landscape and collective identity of interface communities because it is composed of a ‘distinct and atypical geographical complexity’.²¹ This is a result of historical processes of settlement, rather than a specific feature of the recent Troubles. Ardoyne, for example, originally grew as a mill village which housed religiously homogeneous communities of migrants from the countryside. As a result of the industrial revolution, the city of Belfast expanded beyond the mills. New areas between these villages were developed, which housed working class families. These new industrial settlements included the immediate vicinity of the new Falls Road and Shankill Road. Nineteenth century maps, particularly the 1837 Ordnance Survey of Ireland, show that the recently understood ‘interface’ areas exist on the periphery between Catholic and Protestant industrial settlements.²² Although areas such as Woodvale, the Bone and Ardoyne were built as specifically separated villages, their boundaries have been eroded by the pressures of settlement and the building of new houses. This process of settlement has led to contemporary descriptions of North Belfast as a ‘patchwork’ geography of working

¹⁸ N. Jarman and J. Bell, *Routine Divisions: Segregation and Daily Life in Northern Ireland* (Dublin,2009). 1

¹⁹ Jarman and Bell, *Routine Divisions: Segregation and Daily Life in Northern Ireland*. 6

²⁰ ———, *Routine Divisions: Segregation and Daily Life in Northern Ireland*. 10-11

²¹ N. Jarman, "Managing Disorder: Responding to Interface Violence in North Belfast," (Belfast,2002). 14

²² A. Buckley and M. Kenney, "Urban Space, Violence and Identity in North Belfast," in A. Buckley and M. Kenney (eds.), *Negotiating Identity : Rhetoric, Metaphor, and Social Drama in Northern Ireland*, (Washington,1995). 76

class Catholic/nationalist and Protestant/unionist areas.²³ In some areas residential segregation has resulted in large single identity zones, such as the Greater Shankill and the Falls Road areas. North Belfast is different in that it consists of a number of smaller single identity estates; it is the most fragmented part of the city which has resulted in more boundaries between single identity areas than anywhere else. As such it also has a large number of potentially contentious interfaces.²⁴ Although urban residential segregation has been an enduring theme of Belfast's history, this specific expansion of settlement during the nineteenth century forms part of a more acute historical process of defining space than had previously been experienced.

There are some general features of interface communities, which help to paint a picture of the issues behind the cultural landscape of such communities. Interface areas typically suffer higher than average levels of social and economic disadvantage. This includes higher rates of long term unemployment, poor health and lower levels of mobility.²⁵ Interface areas usually attract few industries and businesses and house very few commercial premises. Furthermore, there are fewer welfare services. Most specifically, where these resources are available they are less accessible since individuals on one side of the interface are typically reluctant to travel over to the 'other' side to gain access to them. These issues are a product of residential segregation but are at the same time a result of and contributing factor towards the presence of interface walls. These features are commonplace across interface communities in urban parts of Northern Ireland, including North Belfast. However, in many respects the problematic nature of interface communities in areas of North Belfast is more acute. Mary Kenney's ethnographic study of Ardoyne developed the understanding of a 'siege mentality' amongst residents. This is particularly useful for explaining the relationship between the historical process of settlement and the 'pattern of violence and ethnicity in Northern Ireland.'²⁶ She suggests that the effect of interface walls is 'only to seal off the ethnic groups more effectively from each other, to shut each side into its own area and to shut everybody else out.'²⁷ Kenney aptly

²³ Buckley and Kenney, "Urban Space, Violence and Identity in North Belfast." 73; M. Hall, *Beginning a Debate: An Exploration by Ardoyne Community Activists*, (Newtownabbey, 2003). 3

²⁴ Jarman, "Managing Disorder: Responding to Interface Violence in North Belfast." 21

²⁵ ———, "Managing Disorder: Responding to Interface Violence in North Belfast." 24-5

²⁶ Buckley and Kenney, "Urban Space, Violence and Identity in North Belfast." 73

²⁷ ———, "Urban Space, Violence and Identity in North Belfast." 88

demonstrates that the 'siege metaphor' is not simply a metaphor; it defines real events such as the reaction to internment in creating a 'no-go' area.

If then, the urban landscape can encapsulate such a 'siege metaphor', this makes a number of claims concerning the collective memory of the troubles. Memory is fundamental to the construction of history and understanding of the past. It has both an individual and a collective aspect. Connerton's conception of 'habit memory' is useful here. He suggests that remembrance is perpetuated through performance, which becomes more important than any initial context. This is the foundation of collective or social memory, as concerned with the development of habit memory over time within a collective body.²⁸ Individual memory is not separate from the context of social processes and is indeed shaped by them. Connerton suggests that this takes place through commemorative displays such as rites, rituals and re-enactments. Halbwachs suggested that memory is activated through 'landmarks' which act as prompts. Collective memory 'does not preserve the past but reconstructs it with the aid of the material traces, rites, texts and traditions left behind.'²⁹ Recent scholarship focuses on memory as externally and sometimes even politically shaped.³⁰ This process is responsible for the construction of particular narratives of the past and highlights the fluidity of human memory.

There is a great deal of literature dealing with the performative aspects of collective memory in Northern Ireland.³¹ Jarman in particular has focused on the parading culture as an important aspect of commemoration spanning Irish history.³² Very little of this work has, however, situated aspects of performative commemoration within a specific emphasis on material culture and uses of space. It is important to consider this as impinging on people in a sensory as well as symbolic manner. This is because collective memory does not exist in a spatial vacuum. For Middleton and Edwards the

²⁸ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge,2004).22-3

²⁹ M. Halbwachs, L. Coser (ed.) *On Collective Memory*, (Chicago,1992). 75

³⁰ H. White, "Afterward," in V.Bonnell et al. (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, (Berkeley,1999).316; P. Shackel, "Public Memory and the Search for Power in American Historical Archaeology," *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 3 (2001). 655-70.

³¹ I. McBride, "Memory and National Identity in Modern Ireland," in I. McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, (Cambridge,2001); A. Buckley, *Symbols in Northern Ireland* (Belfast,1998).

³² N. Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland* (Oxford,1997).2; N. Jarman, "Material Culture, Fabric of Identity," in D. Miller (ed.) *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter*, (London,1998).121-45.

process of collective memory (in their terms, ‘remembering together’) is an external process in which the physical environment both embodies and is shaped by the past.³³ This is based at a fundamental level on the premise that ‘people inhabit worlds that extend beyond themselves’.³⁴ In the ‘contest between varying accounts of shared experiences, people reinterpret and discover features of the past’ which later become ‘the content and context for what they will jointly recall and commemorate on future occasions.’³⁵ Thus individual and social memories are bound together and the material world plays a significant part in this process. Previous conceptions of memory as a purely internal process undermine the importance of the material world. Forty notes that it has been taken for granted that ‘memories, formed in the mind, can be transferred to solid material objects, which can come to stand for memories.’³⁶ This applies to material objects as well as the significance of particular locations.

Material culture aids such an understanding; artefacts are unique in that they are the only material traces of the past that survive in the present. Prown claims that this is because they ‘provide an authentic link to the past and as such can be re-experienced.’³⁷ The very endurance of material culture offers a means of linking the past to the present. Jones suggests that the principle question is not, as Connerton’s title suggests, ‘how societies remember’ but ‘how things help societies remember.’³⁸ As well as physical objects, particular settings serve as indices for memory. Jones criticises Sausseure’s preoccupation with language as essential for communicating meaning; he pays little attention to the material dimension of things.³⁹ It should not be assumed that language is the only form of human communication.⁴⁰ All too often meaning is imposed on objects and places arbitrarily by cultural convention. Rather, both of these need to be considered in terms of the current lived experience; as traces of past events. It is this aspect of material culture and the cultural landscape that

³³ D. Middleton and D. Edwards, ‘Introduction’, In D. Middleton and D. Edwards, *Collective Remembering* (London, 1990). 10-11

³⁴ A. Jones, *Memory and Material Culture* (Cambridge, 2007). 41

³⁵ Middleton and Edwards, *Collective Remembering*. 7

³⁶ A. Forty, "Introduction." In A. Forty and S. Küchler (eds.), *The Art of Forgetting*, (Oxford, 2001). 2

³⁷ Cited in Jones, *Memory and Material Culture*. 3

³⁸ ———, *Memory and Material Culture*., 5

³⁹ ———, *Memory and Material Culture*. 18

⁴⁰ R. Burling, "Primate Calls: Human Language and Nonverbal Communication," *Current Anthropology* 34, no. 1 (1993). 30; M. Nolan, "The Relationship between Verbal and Nonverbal Communication," in G. Hanneman and W. McEwan (eds.), *Communication and Behavior*, (London, 1975). 100

enables the exploration of the way in which artefacts and uses of space aid remembrance.

The use of material culture is a helpful tool for exploring the cultural landscape. This is because it incorporates the idea of the cultural landscape as more than merely the backdrop or stage upon which events unfold. They are, particularly in relation to Northern Ireland, a focal point of the Troubles and the basis upon which the memory of the conflict is built. Clark has illustrated this particularly well in her conception of material culture as akin to scaffolding; the material environment provides the support for the action.⁴¹ Furthermore, the concept of frame analysis provides a more nuanced way of conceptualising the role of material culture.⁴² Miller paraphrases Gombrich when he suggests that ‘when a frame is appropriate we simply don’t see it because it seamlessly conveys to us the appropriate mode by which we should encounter that which it frames.’⁴³ Thus the physical environment comprises such an important part of collective identity precisely because there are aspects of it we do not ‘see.’ As normative features of everyday life, the use of space at interface communities possesses the capacity to ‘fade out of focus and remain peripheral to our vision and yet determinant to our behaviour and identity.’⁴⁴ The historian’s purpose in this sense is to illuminate the meaning in aspects of everyday life that would previously be assumed to be neutral or invisible. Perhaps most fascinating about interface barriers, parades and murals in Belfast is their assimilation into a feature of ordinary life.

The development of cultural landscape studies follows along similar theoretical lines to that of material culture. Its proponents would suggest that the landscape should no longer be seen as a ‘transparent window through which reality may be unproblematically viewed’ but as ‘an emblematic site of representation, a locus of both power and resistance.’⁴⁵ Prior to the ‘cultural turn’ it was commonly assumed that landscape formed a ‘neutrally produced canvas’; an extended metaphor which could

⁴¹ A. Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again* (London,1997). 46

⁴² E. Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Harmondsworth,1975); E. H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Oxford,1979); I. Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick,2007). 4-5

⁴³ D. Miller, *Materiality* (Durham,2005).5

⁴⁴ Miller, *Materiality*. 5

⁴⁵ N. Moore and Y. Whelan, *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape* (Aldershot,2007). x

be 'primed and painted over by people but to which people are, in a fundamental sense, external.'⁴⁶ The recent trend away from this has enabled the landscape to be seen as essentially linked to cultural identity since communities locate their identities within them. They invest in landscape formation and have their identities 'metaphorized as landscape.'⁴⁷ This historiographical trend enables landscape to be understood as 'capable of generating contestation and conflict.'⁴⁸ This affords landscapes the role of constructing and maintaining collective identity. A weakness of some of the initial work in this field is its tendency to equate landscape with conspiracies of false consciousness controlled and manipulated by elites.⁴⁹ For example, Robinson and Hall's study of the Scottish Highlands concludes that those with power 'write their own landscapes in their own image.'⁵⁰ In contrast, Zerubavel considers landscape to be a product of 'mindscape', focusing on a more inclusive model in which everyone participates.⁵¹ The contentious possibilities of landscape have implications for the construction of the past. With respect to Ireland, Smyth suggests that communities 'rewrite history selectively and embed the myth in the landscape.'⁵² All this suggests that physical space, and landscape in particular, is intrinsic to the way in which collective memory and identity is formed and maintained over time.

If memory is shaped by uses of space at a fundamental level, then North Belfast's interface barriers, parades and murals must be studied as part of this process. They should be considered as more than merely a static backdrop on which the Troubles played out. More specifically, interface barriers and murals can be categorised as 'platial artefacts' since they are set within a distinctive space. These are particularly interesting since 'from platial artefact performance people obtain information on a

⁴⁶ T. O'Keefe, "Landscapes and Memory," in N. Moore and Y. Whelan (eds.), *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape*, (Aldershot: 2007). 3

⁴⁷ O'Keefe, "Landscapes and Memory." 9

⁴⁸ I. Robinson and T. Hall, "Memory, Identity and the Memorialization of Conflict in the Scottish Highlands," in N. Moore and Y. Whelan (eds.), *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape*, (Aldershot: 2007). 21

⁴⁹ S. Daniels, "Marxism, Culture and the Duplicity of Landscape," in R. Peet and N. Thrift (eds.), *New Models in Geography*, (London, 1989).196-220

⁵⁰ Robinson and Hall, "Memory, Identity and the Memorialization of Conflict in the Scottish Highlands." 34

⁵¹ E. Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* (London,1997). 112

⁵² W. Smyth, "Explorations of Place," in J. Lee (ed.), *Ireland: Towards a Sense of Place*, (Cork, 1985).

place's appropriateness for carrying out specific activities.⁵³ This is evident in the prevalence of inter-community violence at the interface but also forms the relationship between these artefacts and the contentious parading tradition. Interface barriers and murals are not only part of a collection of material culture; they also form an integral part of the cultural landscape of urban Belfast today. This is reinforced in collective identity through the use of commemorative rituals, particularly during the parading season.

This discussion aims to adopt methodology appropriate to its theoretical stance in studying material culture and cultural landscape. This will involve an exploration of both the form and the function of interface barriers and murals. Functionality works on a number of levels. These include the *technofunction*, *sociofunction* and *ideofunction*. Taking Schiffer's example of a chair, its technofunction, or intended purpose is for seating humans. It may possess a different sociofunction in manifesting the economic status of its owner. The ideofunction involves 'symbolising more abstract values or beliefs.'⁵⁴ In this instance the chair might happen to be the Pope's throne, carrying its own specific systems of signification. It is equally useful to distinguish between system and proper function.⁵⁵ Thus functionality operates on multiple levels, which must all be addressed in relation to the interface walls and murals. Furthermore, memory can be conceived to be 'embodied in the material traces of cycles of architectural alteration and repair.'⁵⁶ Thus the development of interface barriers and murals over time can shed considerable light on the memory of the Troubles.

The analysis here attempts to fuse together pre-existing work on urban residential segregation with an exploration of uses of space. Rather than a one way transfer of meaning, this work proposes that the cultural landscape and the uses of space are very much part of the active process of collective remembrance. Chapter one focuses upon the importance of parading culture as a form of territorial claim making for both sides of the community. This is an example of the centrality of performative aspects of

⁵³ Smyth, "Explorations of Place." 24, see also D. Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford, 1994).

⁵⁴ B. Preston, "The Function of Things," in P. Graves-Brown (ed.), *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*, (London, 2000). 29

⁵⁵ R. Millikan, "An Ambiguity in the Notion "Function", " *Biology and Philosophy* 4, no. 2 (1989).176-81; R. Cummins, "Functional Explanation," *Journal of Philosophy* 72, no. 1 (1975). 741-64.

⁵⁶ Jones, *Memory and Material Culture*. 22

commemoration and the assumption of continuity with the past in maintaining the legitimacy of collective identity. The second chapter comprises an examination of interface barriers in inner North Belfast, which have been mapped. It is intended that there be a strong emphasis on the methodology of material culture to achieve this, namely, the examination of the artefacts themselves. The final chapter continues in this vein, by exploring the post ceasefire political murals located in interface communities. It focuses on their uses as well as their value as images. Photographic representations of the interface barriers and murals will be situated within the main body of the text in order to illustrate most clearly the centrality of the cultural landscape to the study of collective memory.

Chapter 1: Performative Commemoration and the Parading Tradition

Parading has become an increasing focal point of conflict between nationalist and unionist communities. This is no surprise because it has emerged as a tradition for both. Fraser has highlighted five sources of tension over parading. These include territory, tradition, cultural identity, civil rights and politics. In his opinion the 'foremost of these is territory.'⁵⁷ This sense of territory is somewhat ironic; the agenda of achieving continuity within the parading tradition is irreconcilable with the fact of changes in settlement. The introductory chapter alluded to these changing patterns of settlement in North Belfast; on a broader scale these have meant that many of the Catholic communities that exist on parade routes today would not have existed along the original routes. This has resulted in a dilemma for parade organisers who have tried to plan 'authentic' routes. The relationship between territorial space, parade routes and collective identity is embodied in the escalation of violence at the interface during the parading season. Between 1996 and 1999 there were a total of 321 recorded incidents of violence at interfaces in North Belfast in the months of July. This is significant in comparison to the second highest of any other month, which totalled 225 incidents throughout the same period.⁵⁸ The issue of parading provides a clearer view of the centrality of ideas about space and territory to cultural identity in North Belfast; it also demonstrates the importance of tradition and ritual in proposing continuity with the past, which is an essential feature of collective identity. This chapter considers the importance of ritual and commemoration to collective identity, which is rooted in specific geographical areas in North Belfast. It provides an overview of the parading tradition for both communities, and explores the use of flags and emblems in contributing towards the sense of ritual surrounding parades. The latter half of the chapter turns more specifically to particular parade disputes and highlights their use in shaping the legacy of the Troubles; these reinforce the relationship between space and collective identity.

The social dimension of memory, or collective memory as it is referred to here, is active rather than static. Remembering the past takes place within a social context.

⁵⁷ T. Fraser, *The Irish Parading Tradition: Following the Drum* (Basingstoke, 2000). 6

⁵⁸ Jarman, "Managing Disorder: Responding to Interface Violence in North Belfast." 12

Central to the idea of ‘habit memory’ is Connerton’s idea that memory is perpetuated through performance.⁵⁹ This links the individual to the group since certain memories or narratives of history are transferred to members of the imagined community through specific actions. These include the performative aspects of commemoration. Commemorative ceremonies can occur in multiple forms including rites, rituals and re-enactments, which all encompass an element of ‘acting out’ or performance that is essential to the development of social memory. These often take place in a ritualistic manner on specific dates or during certain times of the year, for example during the Irish parading season. Rites often tend to be formal, ‘stylised, stereotyped and repetitive’; they are expressive acts deliberately designed to convey emotion.⁶⁰

The repetitive nature of commemorative ceremonies enable them to convey a sense of continuity with the past in an overt and explicit manner. The ritual, in Kertzer’s words, ‘discourages critical thinking’ because it confers legitimacy through the ‘naturalisation’ of particular behaviours. As well as enabling individuals to make sense of the world around them, rituals allow individuals to be ‘led to believe that the order we see is not of our own (cultural) making, but rather an order that belongs to the external world itself.’⁶¹ This is achieved by ‘ritually re-enacting a narrative of events held to have taken place at some past time.’⁶² Social memory is re-enacted, which means that it is both an active and a selective process. Connerton puts forward the importance of the idea of ‘representation as re-presenting, as causing to reappear that which has disappeared.’⁶³ This re-enactment is not merely symbolic; participants engage in articulating particular narratives of the past at a sensory and physical level.

Such ceremonies provide a collective forum for interpretations of the past to be shaped and reworked in light of present concerns. Halbwachs’ influential addition to the study of collective memory highlights that ‘the mind constructs its memories under the pressure of society... [This] causes the mind to transfigure the past.’⁶⁴ Commemoration is able to fill in the gaps in personal memory, or even substitute

⁵⁹ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*. 23

⁶⁰ ———, *How Societies Remember*. 44

⁶¹ D. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power* (London, 1988). 85

⁶² Connerton, *How Societies Remember*. 45

⁶³ ———, *How Societies Remember*. 69

⁶⁴ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. 51

certain memories for others.⁶⁵ This demonstrates that memory is fluid, and can be reinforced or challenged by the very nature of its social dimension. This is inextricably linked to social and collective identity, which has been explained as a 'kind of collective autobiography' rooted in a particular sense of the past.⁶⁶ This particular image articulates well the search for a sense of legitimacy on a larger scale. It encompasses the importance of the foundation myth in forming national identity.⁶⁷ In one sense this is not too distant from the nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland; both the Catholic and Protestant communities can be seen as propagating conflicting national identities. Yet this also applies more generally, since the interface communities can also be understood in terms of 'imagined community.'⁶⁸ The importance of tradition in forming a cohesive group identity is articulated well by Hobsbawm and Ranger's concept of 'invented tradition.' It is

...a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.⁶⁹

The success of parading in North Belfast in creating a cohesive sense of collective identity is based upon the legitimisation of tradition. Although the parading tradition has developed differently in both sides of the sectarian divide, it has come to fulfil a similar purpose in territorial claim making, which articulates broader conflict over culture, identity and power.

The parading tradition has been a recurring feature of European history. Their origins can be traced back to the church and the trade guild processions of the middle ages. Parades are 'a widespread if not universal ritual used by groups in all sorts of contexts to ensure that their existence is both remembered and taken into account.'⁷⁰ They have often been used to legitimise the power of the ruling elite following the rise of the nation state. This is of relevance to the conflict in Northern Ireland since much of the

⁶⁵ ———, *On Collective Memory*. 46

⁶⁶ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*. 70

⁶⁷ See, for example, E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780 : Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge,1992). 10; A. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford,1999). 60-1

⁶⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 6-7

⁶⁹ E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge,1983). 1

⁷⁰ Fraser, *The Irish Parading Tradition: Following the Drum..* vii

conflict addresses questions over the right to govern. The capacity for proposing legitimisation and continuity with the past has ensured the survival of the parading tradition in Northern Ireland.

Parading traditions in Northern Ireland have a longer history and provide a much more common feature in unionist culture. Of the 3342 parades recorded in 2004-05, 2525 (76%) could be described as loyalist, whilst only 195 (9%) were nationalist.⁷¹ Loyalist parades are most frequently associated with the Orange Order, formed in 1795 and named after King William III, Prince of Orange, who confirmed Protestant Ascendancy by defeating the Jacobites at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. Orangeism enjoyed official legitimacy when it became part of the establishment with the creation of Northern Ireland as a separate entity in 1921. The Twelfth of July, which commemorated William III's victory at the Battle of the Boyne, was celebrated as an annual public holiday incorporating parades. The significance of parades for the Protestant community rests in the provision of collective opportunities to recall a perceived shared history and the public affirmation of loyalty to Great Britain through the shared monarchy. They are useful as displays of both solidarity and status.⁷² The abolition of Stormont in 1972 undermined this sense of legitimacy and Orange parades became oppositional. 'Blood and Thunder' bands, comprised of working class youths, replaced the pipe and military bands as the use of parades adapted to meet the contemporary crisis of identity within Orangeism. These parades are both performative and commemorative in that they encourage active participation; bunting is hung between houses and kerbstones were painted red, white and blue in working class areas.

Whilst parading has persisted as a, albeit evolving, tradition for longer in loyalist communities, it is important not to ignore it as a recently developed tradition for nationalist groups. Jarman has demonstrated that, although this has been little recognised, from the 1890s until the First World War parading was as much a feature

⁷¹ M. Hamilton, "*Strategic Review of Parading in Northern Ireland: Views of Key Stakeholders*," (Belfast, 2007). 12

⁷² Fraser, *The Irish Parading Tradition: Following the Drum*. 2

of the nationalist community as it was for the loyalists.⁷³ Nationalist celebrations of the Fifteenth, Lady's Day (15th August) have been comparable to the Twelfth for the loyalist community. The prevalence of such parades declined after the partition of Ireland. Parades have been used as a commemorative ritual for both communities but much of the controversy is centred on the unequal treatment of such displays, with the authorities deciding to reroute nationalist parades much more readily than their loyalist counterparts.

An important feature of parades is the use of flags and banners. These form a vital role in the performative nature of commemoration through their prominent place as cultural and territorial markers, particularly during parades. Over a hundred large banners are carried by the various lodges during the Twelfth of July parade in Belfast every year. Lodges and bands carry a large number of flags, which form a significant part of the ritual. These play an active role in developing a sense of belonging, especially when used in rituals such as parades. They possess the ability 'to create a sense of occasion and highlight the importance of an event, and in turn they are honoured by being included in a special function.'⁷⁴ Flags and banners add a sense of formality and legitimacy to a parade as well as functioning as a marker of both identity and territory. It is essential to see the spatial function of these flags and banners as paramount to their social meaning. This draws upon Fish's idea of the 'interpretive community', in which people turn to particular cues in order to make sense of the world around them.⁷⁵ This can be understood in an almost literal sense with regards to the utilisation of flags and banners within specific geographical locations, which imposes a connection between specific places and the underlying social meaning of such displays.

It is true that individuals may legitimately be part of multiple communities.⁷⁶ Parades are of particular importance as one of the few public forums with the ability to unite

⁷³ N. Jarman and D. Bryan, "Green Parades in an Orange State: Nationalist and Republican Commemorations and Demonstrations from Partition to the Troubles," in T. Fraser (ed.), *The Irish Parading Tradition: Following the Drum*, (Basingstoke, 2000), 95

⁷⁴ C. McCartney and L. Bryson, *Clashing Symbols? : A Report on the Use of Flags, Anthems and Other National Symbols in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1994). 9

⁷⁵ S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? : The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, 1980). 14

⁷⁶ H. Tajfel, "Social Stereotypes and Social Groups," in J. Turner and H. Giles (eds.), *Intergroup Behaviour*, (Oxford, 1981). 148-9

all the various divisions from within the Protestant and unionist community. The parading tradition allows 'social, political and religious differences [to be] tentatively ignored in the interests of a united celebration of history, culture and power.'⁷⁷ This ability is mainly due to the unifying presence of flags and emblems, which convey only simple messages. They have been described as the 'emotional shorthand' for wider issues such as national pride, and have an immediate and direct impact.⁷⁸ This means that individuals are able to hold their own particular beliefs, which may be situated on a broad spectrum of loyalism, unionism or Protestant culture. Although ideals vary within the group, participants are able to simultaneously retain their own specific values whilst still supporting the general meaning evoked by the flag. Individuals are happy to march behind particular flags and banners because it allows them to demonstrate a general idea 'without a need to argue over their exact meaning.'⁷⁹ Thus these symbols perform a cohesive function through their simplicity and fluidity. The result is the definition and inclusion of a broader collective identity which sets itself in opposition to the 'other', on the basis of conflicting meanings associated with an opposing flag. The shorthand symbols of flags polarise oppositional group identities because their meanings are understood as contradictory to the other.

Flags are tied to ritual and collective memory because they have come to embody history and tradition for their owners. The shared meanings of such symbols have the ability to deeply offend the 'other' community, but giving up the flag is equated to abandoning heritage of the in group. This leaves both communities feeling that their heritage is under threat by the use of flags and emblems in the parading traditions of the other community.⁸⁰ Jarman has demonstrated the importance of tradition through the material dimension of uses of flags, banners and bannerettes for the unionist community. These form a 'material repository of the Orange tradition'; they have come to represent the role of the textile industry in creating prosperity and affluence,

⁷⁷ N. Jarman, "For God and Ulster: Blood and Thunder Bands and Loyalist Political Culture," in T. Fraser (ed.), *The Irish Parading Tradition: Following the Drum*, (Basingstoke, 2000). 159

⁷⁸ McCartney and Bryson, *Clashing Symbols? : A Report on the Use of Flags, Anthems and Other National Symbols in Northern Ireland*. 9

⁷⁹ Jarman, "For God and Ulster: Blood and Thunder Bands and Loyalist Political Culture." 159

⁸⁰ McCartney and Bryson, *Clashing Symbols? : A Report on the Use of Flags, Anthems and Other National Symbols in Northern Ireland*. 54

which reinforces a positive ‘memory’ of the British connection.⁸¹ These flags and banners are steeped in their own rituals and are sacralised through unfurling ceremonies and so adopt a symbolic element within specific contexts. Furthermore, this is related to ideas about physical space, territory and power since the use of flags in specific locations has the ability to threaten as well as reinforce collective identity. So far this exploration of flags and banners has focused on their symbolic nature but must be placed *in situ*; the remainder of the chapter considers the specific conflicts of parade disputes.

The contentious politics of parade disputes highlight the centrality of ideas of territory to collective identity. Both the number of parades and the quantity of disputes surrounding their routes increased considerably following the 1994 ceasefires. The situation at Drumcree in 1996 is commonly used as a reference point, which both illustrates the strength of feeling about parades and has since fuelled the debate over ‘the right to march.’ Conflict arose over plans made by the Portadown District Loyal Orange Lodge (LOL 1) to parade to and from the Church of the Ascension at Drumcree on the Sunday morning before the Twelfth of July celebrations. The dispute involved the Orange Order and the Garvaghy Road Residents Coalition, comprised of local Catholic/nationalists who opposed the plans for the parade to pass through the predominantly nationalist town. For the Orange Order this displayed a great deal of contempt towards its traditions. Conversely many Catholics felt the parade to have a strong tone of triumphalism and felt deeply offended by the anticipation of its presence in ‘their’ area. The result was widespread rioting and disorder; localised trouble at interface areas during the summer gave way to extensive rioting and confrontations with the police by September. Events at Drumcree demonstrate the inextricable link between territorial conceptions of space and collective memory based on a sense of shared history. These all reinforce and inform collective identity. These themes are evident in Ian Paisley’s speech outside Drumcree Church during the peak of the conflict:

If we cannot go to our place of worship and we cannot walk back from that place of worship then all that the Reformation brought us and all that

⁸¹ Jarman, "Material Culture, Fabric of Identity." 121-2

the martyrs died for and all that our forefathers gave their lives for is lost to use forever. So there can be no turning back.⁸²

Paisley's speech further demonstrates the ability of parades to address contemporary political agendas through arousing ideas of historical legitimacy. Thus parades have formed the 'focal point for contestation about access to public space and the nature of the Northern Ireland polity.'⁸³ Even though Drumcree (as the events are commonly known) took place in Portadown, it provided a benchmark by which future disputes across Northern Ireland could be measured.

Returning to the specific case study of North Belfast, the area has endured a 'cycle of violence' which was sparked by the wider issue of parade routes.⁸⁴ Such tensions have been a feature of the Troubles but have endured since in spite of the developments of the peace process. The particular 'patchwork' nature of communities meant that tensions tend to remain high even after the violence that accompanies a specific dispute has ceased. One particular incidence of public disorder resulted from conflict when the Tour of the North Parade, organised by the Orange Order, was granted permission to pass through Clifton Park Avenue on 22 June 1996. Jarman describes the scale of civil unrest which accompanied this territorial dispute:

There were nightly protests and riots around at least six major interfaces and lesser disturbances occurred elsewhere. Roads were blocked, vehicles hijacked and communities placed under siege; members of the 'other' community who lived in the wrong area were threatened and sometimes physically attacked in their homes; private houses were attacked and burnt; people were forced to abandon homes and belongings, taking only what they could carry; schools and business premises were attacked and burnt; the police were stretched to the limit and officers were attacked on numerous occasions; petrol bombs were used in large numbers and at a number of locations plastic bullets were fired.⁸⁵

These events have had an enduring effect on both sides of the ethno-sectarian divide in North Belfast as well as across Northern Ireland. Although the Tour of the North was the only parade that caused such problems in North Belfast in 1996, it has been

⁸² Ian Paisley, 10th July, 1995, cited in D. Bryan, *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition, and Control* (London, 2000). 2

⁸³ Hamilton, "Strategic Review of Parading in Northern Ireland: Views of Key Stakeholders." 6

⁸⁴ Jarman, "Managing Disorder: Responding to Interface Violence in North Belfast.", 7

⁸⁵ ———, "Managing Disorder: Responding to Interface Violence in North Belfast." 7-8

followed by tensions in recent years. In the summer of 2000, for example, conflict emerged over parades which passed along the Crumlin Road between the nationalist communities in Ardoyne and Mountainview. Further tension mounted at both republican and loyalist parades in the White City and Whitewell area as well as at loyalist band parades in Ballysillan and Westland.⁸⁶ All of these incidents have contributed to perpetuating a sense of mistrust between both communities in the local area. The nature of responses to such parade routes highlights the efficacy of parades to polarise collective identities of both nationalist and loyalist communities. The disputes, as with the parades, take place annually and as such easily reinforce memories of the confrontations of previous years. The ritualistic nature of these parades and the disputes that accompany them are embedded in shared memories of what have become historical landmarks like Drumcree.

This chapter has demonstrated the importance of the parading tradition in creating the impression of continuity with the past, and in turn, historical legitimacy. These are tools used to influence contemporary collective identities through presenting direct but also ambiguous symbols which enforce particular narratives of the past. The result has been the polarisation of collective identities of nationalist and loyalist communities. The planning of parade routes in certain areas reinforces an acute sense of territoriality, again, with the impression of historical continuity based upon specific locations. This has heightened ethno-sectarian tensions, particularly at the interface, which is characterised by the cyclical escalation of interface violence during the summer months of the parading season. This has demonstrated the significance of a strong sense of place in reinforcing particular collective memories of the past. There are other less seasonal means in which this has been achieved, namely the use of interface barriers and murals as markers of territory and identity. It is to this focus that the next chapters turn.

⁸⁶ ———, "Managing Disorder: Responding to Interface Violence in North Belfast." 15

Chapter 2: Interface barriers and Territorial Division

Interface communities are sites of contested memories and collective identities. This is evident in the scale of sectarian violence in these areas. Interface walls are 'flashpoints' for sectarian conflict. This is particularly the case in North Belfast, where the sheer quantity of interfaces in such a small area has produced the highest concentration of sectarian violence and troubles related deaths throughout the conflict.⁸⁷ Incidents of violence seem to be as a result of conflict over both local and national issues. A recent report found that it is the 'complex interplay between local and national, between contemporary activities and historical events, between social processes and political practices' which is responsible for the enduring violence of interface areas.⁸⁸ Contemporary disturbances in North Belfast highlight this relationship between collective memory and ideas of physical space. Kenney's ethnographical approach to studying North Belfast has indicated that residents of Ardoyne understand conflict over space in their community as typical of Northern Ireland as a whole; they see Ardoyne as a 'microcosm in which Irish history is acted out.'⁸⁹ Thus ideas about physical space in Ardoyne fit into a much broader collective memory of Irish history; the physical structures of interface walls must be studied within this context as representative of much more than present day security concerns.

Interface walls can be used to trace the development of conflict in Northern Ireland from the beginning of the 1970s. They form an enduring feature of the cultural landscape; they are at the same time material artefacts and part of life for interface communities today. Interface walls survive today as a result of a complex combination of processes. They have historically been financed by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) since they relate to matters of security, although the Housing Executive is responsible for their maintenance. The Belfast Region Senior Planner, when asked about the peace walls in 1994 commented that:

⁸⁷ M. Fay, M. Morrissey, and M. Smyth, *Northern Ireland's Troubles : The Human Costs* (London, 1999).

⁸⁸ Jarman, "Managing Disorder: Responding to Interface Violence in North Belfast." 14

⁸⁹ Buckley and Kenney, "Urban Space, Violence and Identity in North Belfast." 75

We erect and maintain peace walls. This is usually done in response to tenant pressures although the Northern Ireland Office finally make the decisions....It is not our job to force communities to live in peace together or accept the removal of a wall. That is a much bigger job than housing.⁹⁰

Following the ceasefires, the building of more permanent structures was accepted as solidifying segregated space. It must be understood that this was not recognised as a planned or welcomed policy approach but continued as a reaction to local community pressures. This process of the development of interface walls is indicative of the fact that the cultural landscape is a source of as well as a repository for meaning. Whereas once a centralised strategy adopted by the RUC and British Army, the construction of barriers increasingly became a response to local concerns. Thus there was a shift from central government to community based concerns as the impetus for the erection of interface walls. Rather than seeing interface walls as impositions, interface communities have presented the biggest opposition to removing them. This reflects the complexity of the cultural landscape and differing meanings attributed to it over time. Thus it forms a valuable source for understanding the importance of interface walls during the troubles and their centrality to collective identity today. These barriers are the most dramatic embodiments of urban community conflict and provide the primary means through which this can be explored.

This study considers the sixteen interface barriers in inner North Belfast. There are a further four located in Ballysillan and Drumnadrough. These have been omitted in order to provide a better illustration of the complexity of the specifically compact geographical area of inner North Belfast, in particular the area between Crumlin Road and the M2 motorway. The barriers are mapped in the Appendix. The mapping process is somewhat interpretative in that there may be differing conceptions of what constitutes an interface 'wall.' This depends largely on whether emphasis is placed on the physical form or the cultural function of markers of space. In reality these are inextricably linked. Therefore it is necessary to take an inclusive rather than exclusive approach, since the material form of interface 'walls' is itself indicative of particular ideas and processes. These barriers are officially built or maintained physical structures used to prevent access or obstruct the line of sight between the two

⁹⁰ B. Murtagh, *Ethnic Space and the Challenge to Land Use Planning: A Study of Belfast's Peace Lines* (Newtownabbey, 1994). 39

communities. The development of different designs and styles of interface barriers is reflective of the development of the Troubles and can be understood broadly, although not uniformly, to have taken place within three phases. Particular designs have been adopted to address specific concerns in certain areas but it is possible to observe a broad trend in interface design which acknowledges a sense of the development of the perceived necessity of interface walls. These loosely defined phases form the analytical framework for discussing the changing nature of attitudes towards physical space as well as the memory of the historical processes which aided their development.

Interface walls first emerged as ‘peace fences.’ These were corrugated iron fences and steel palisade structures. These structures were often initially constructed as barbed wire fences. They were put in place by the British army in order to reduce sectarian rioting shortly after the onset of the Troubles in 1969. For the most part these have been superseded by more permanent structures. This first phase is important to mention in order to acknowledge the ‘biographical’ dimension of the structures from phases two and three that stand today.⁹¹ It provides a connection between temporary and permanent physical barriers. Association with the latter is the basis upon which collective memory resides most strongly. Although memory itself is fluid and changing, the cohesiveness of collective memory depends upon creating a sense of timelessness. This is aided by the structures created during the second phase of development. This phase saw the erection of permanent peace walls. This took place throughout the escalation of violence associated with the hunger strikes in the mid 1980s. A number of these are still standing today: for example, those at Woodvale Road, Elimgrove Street, and Torrens Crescent.

The design of these walls makes their function, even in their slightly differing forms, very recognisable. Brick walls have been a popular form of interface barrier and add a sense of permanence to the conflict. This can be seen through the obtrusive wall at Elimgrove Street (Fig. 1.1), which continues well beyond the frame of the photograph but is concealed by some overgrown vegetation.⁹²

⁹¹ I. Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things : Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, (Cambridge, 1986). 66

⁹² Images in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, are courtesy of Google Maps.



Fig. 1.1 A brick wall runs along the rear of properties on Oldpark Avenue. It continues all the way to Cliftonville Road. *Interface Map No.8*

The five metre high brick wall which runs along the rear of houses on Alliance Avenue (Fig 1.2) is at one of the most recognised flashpoints of the conflict, providing a barrier to the Glenbryn estate. Although this wall is somewhat obscured from the view of the general public, it provides a territorial marker for locals, who form the vast majority of people in this largely residential area.



Fig. 1.2 A five metre high brick wall with reinforced steel panels runs along the back of properties from Ardoyne Road to Deerpark Road. *Interface Map No.4*. Image courtesy of Frankie Quinn, © Belfast Interface Project.

Similar walls, not visible to the general public, are situated behind houses on Rosapenna Street through to the end of Rosevale Street (Fig. 1.3). Although situated behind houses, these have a similar effect on residents to the more obvious and recognisable brick walls along Oldpark Road (Fig 1.4) and Antigua Street (Fig 1.5).



Fig 1.3 A brick wall reinforced with steel mesh runs along the back of houses on Rosevale Street. It continues out of shot along Rosapenna Street and Oldpark Road. *Interface Map No. 10.* Image courtesy of Frankie Quinn, © Belfast Interface Project.



Fig 1.4 A newer looking brick wall, built in the 1990s, runs along Oldpark Road. *Interface Map No. 7*



Fig 1.5. A brick wall, reinforced with steel fencing, obscures the line of sight from Antigua Street to Crumlin Road. *Interface Map No. 6*

The steel mesh used at Woodvale Road (Fig. 1.6), and Torrens crescent (Fig. 1.7), which continues along the top of the metal fence on Elimgrove Street, is characteristic of interface walls built during and after the 1980s. It could be expected that this mesh provides more openness and a more natural feel than the brick walls discussed above, particularly that on Elimgrove Street. On the contrary, they have become commonly associated with interface walls. Thus their sociofunction is deeply connected to more abstract values; this ideofunction reinforces a prison like atmosphere of exclusion and further reinforces ethno-sectarian division. In fact the use of steel mesh alongside vegetation has often created a much more opaque barrier than expected, like that on Woodvale Road (Fig. 1.6), which was created to obstruct the line of sight between Twaddell Avenue and Brompton Park. These structures add a sense of permanence to spatial divisions because their solidity has enabled them to endure over time. More importantly, they completely stop access between the two communities at the interface. The function of these walls is clear and unmistakable; in varying ways these structures dominate the urban landscape and force passersby and local residents to engage with the purpose of their being.



Fig. 1.6 A low brick wall and gate reinforced with steel mesh obstructs the line of sight between Brompton Park and Twaddell Avenue. *Interface Map No. 3*



Fig. 1.7 A steel wall, reinforced with steel meshing, prevents access between Torrens Crescent and Wyndam Street. *Interface Map No. 9*

The use of interface walls by the public is demonstrated through a section of the mesh wall which stretches the length of Mountainview Parade. The section, observable in Figure 1.8, has been disguised by local residents through large trees. This

demonstrates an attempt to reconstruct the landscape of their garden and conceal an unsightly reminder of the recent conflict.



Fig. 1.8 The corner section of an interface barrier, mostly concealed by trees, at the junction of Mount Park and Mountainview Parade. *Interface Map No. 1*

Figure 1.9 shows the other side of the divide, which displays more accurately the original design of the structure itself. The lack of attempts to improve the aesthetics from this side demonstrates that the treatment of such artefacts differs not only from interface to interface but from different sides of the same line. Here the interface appears more obtrusive and unnatural than the row of trees in Figure 1.8. Thus there is a dynamic relationship between the interface walls and the environment they are set in. This lends itself to multiple forms of use by local communities; these contemporary uses are often independent of the original intended function of the wall itself but can equally impinge on their impact upon remembrance of the conflict.



Fig 1.9 The unobstructed steel mesh barrier as seen from the other side of Mountainview Parade. *Interface Map No. 1*. Image courtesy of Frankie Quinn, © Belfast Interface Project.

As well as the permanent and often severe looking walls, a third phase of construction took place after 1994. Despite the paramilitary ceasefires and the ongoing peace process, building barriers within interface communities persisted as the favoured response to conflict. The change in nature of these walls solidified the shift from understanding the peace walls as permanent rather than temporary features of the landscape of interface communities. Newly erected barriers were designed to have a more inconspicuous impact on the cultural landscape. For example, the street fence and ‘road closed’ sign on Flax Street (Fig. 1.10) could easily be mistaken by an outsider as a temporary measure to enable road maintenance or the redevelopment of the area. For those more familiar with the area, particularly the members of the local community, this barrier is an obvious feature of the ethno-sectarian divisions in Belfast.



Fig. 1.10 A black steel street fence restricts access to Flax Street from Crumlin Road. *Interface Map No. 5*

At some interface lines a compromise has been made to soften the effects of permanent denial of access between the two communities. In a number of locations gates are permanently shut to restrict access but an additional pedestrian gate is opened at certain times of the day or times of the year. This is the case along Duncairn Gardens at Hallidays Road (Fig. 1.11) and Adam Street (Fig. 1.12). This pedestrian access provides a means of crossing into the other community but also illustrates a lack of control of space by the local community; the gates are opened and closed during particular times and some remain permanently shut.



Fig. 1.11 A brick wall restricts access between Duncairn Gardens and Hallidays Road. A metal gate provides pedestrian access. *Interface Map No. 14*



Fig. 1.12 A metal gate restricts access from Duncairn Gardens. A side gate allows pedestrian access at certain times. *Interface Map No 15*

A further categorisation of interface barriers built after the ceasefires consists of alternative structures, rather than walls in the conventional sense. This has included less visibly intrusive redevelopments such as designing new road layouts and using commercial premises as ‘buffer zones’; the latter is observable along Duncairn Gardens in close proximity to the interface wall on Adam Street. The row of derelict houses on Woodvale Road (Fig. 1.13) has been included in this study because they are illustrative of cultural territorial markers, highlighted by the positioning of a Union Jack flag upon a lamppost. It is important to note the significance of such a flag next to a buffer zone as marking the entrance to a predominantly loyalist area. Thus interface barriers are not restricted to walls in the conventional brick and mesh sense. The fact that, until recently, these houses were left derelict with no plans for redevelopment demonstrates that such barriers can be ones of deliberate neglect as well as purpose built structures. Of course not all unconventional interface barriers are caused by careful neglect; on Henry Street (Fig. 1.14) a low gate barrier has been put in place. In fulfilling its usual function such a gate would typically be opened to allow through traffic at certain times. This particular gate is permanently closed and, its ideofunction, like that of Flax Street (Fig. 1.10) remains unknown to those unfamiliar with the nuances of the local area.



Fig 1.13 A row of derelict houses on Woodvale Road has until recently been left with no plans for redevelopment. The Union Jack flag denotes territorial claims. *Interface Map No. 2*



Fig. 1.14 A low gate barrier is permanently closed. It restricts access between Henry Street and York Street. *Interface Map No. 16*

The wide range of interface barriers here provides just a small segment of such structures, which can be sighted at flashpoints across Belfast. They highlight the diversity of material culture between locations even in a small geographical area. Despite this, these barriers all have the same primary function; they are all both products of and reinforce urban residential segregation and ethno-sectarian conflict.

Whether they have been altered or maintained over a long or short period of time, their existence shapes the legacy of the Troubles through their significance as an established, and seemingly permanent, feature of North Belfast's cultural landscape.

The impact of these interface barriers as markers of residential segregation upon the lived experience varies from person to person. Yet Jarman and Bell's attitudinal survey demonstrates the far reaching impact of segregation on the entire interface community. Individuals had developed 'mental maps' of their own areas detailing which areas were to be avoided and which were safe.⁹³ These 'mental maps' differed slightly from person to person depending on factors such as age, gender, community background and socio-economic group. Whilst Jarman and Bell have demonstrated that the experience of segregation possesses an element of fluidity, the permanence of the interface walls has reinforced territorial boundaries and solidified the temporal realm of ideas of difference. The less aesthetically intrusive barriers which have been erected since the ceasefires, such as the low gate on Henry Street, have contributed to a 'more fractured mosaic' of territory.⁹⁴ This has led to the need for increasingly complex 'mental maps' and suggests that different forms of barriers have diverse effects on both the cultural landscape and collective identity. Despite the growing intricacy of such 'mental maps', Jarman and Bell's recent attitudinal study has demonstrated that these ideas of territory and physical space persist as a particular feature of interface communities. These 'mental maps' are shaped around physical landmarks such as the interface barriers discussed above. This highlights their importance in reinforcing the legacy of the Troubles as permanent, which in turn aids the development of a more cohesive collective identity.

⁹³ Jarman and Bell, *Routine Divisions: Segregation and Daily Life in Northern Ireland*. 6

⁹⁴ ———, *Routine Divisions: Segregation and Daily Life in Northern Ireland*. 9

Chapter 3: Post-ceasefire Murals

The display of murals in working class areas of Belfast has become an enduring feature of the Troubles as well as a means by which its legacy is shaped, both in Northern Ireland and in an international arena. Belfast's murals are still most densely situated close to interface areas and provide territorial markers for those who encounter them. The use of murals has evolved considerably in the years following the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994-6, which reflects the change in legacy of conflict and the way it is remembered and understood both internally and externally. The dramatic increase in murals since that time has specific implications for the construction of collective identity. This can be seen in terms of the preservation of murals as a functioning part of political culture as well as for the growing heritage and tourism industry. The murals must be confronted first and foremost as objects rather than simply visual images. This chapter considers the way in which murals have been used and reproduced, often for commemorative purposes, to convey specific narratives of the past and thus to shape collective memory.

Whilst the painting of murals has been a particularly pervasive feature of recent Irish history, there has until recently been a significant oversight in scholarship, which has tended to treat them only as visual representations. For example, Rolston's earliest work focused almost exclusively on the symbolic content of murals in Northern Ireland and neglected to give adequate treatment to them as material artefacts.⁹⁵ There has been increasing acknowledgement of the 'semiotic dynamic' between mural and site; this involves the images 'taking meaning from their location' and 'the location in turn having a differing significance because of the paintings.'⁹⁶ This two way dialogue between artefact and place is borrowed from ideas about the cultural landscape. The impact of murals on the cultural landscape has benefited from the theoretical developments of cultural geography and material culture. A specific point to mention here was alluded to in the introductory chapter; Gombrich's notion of an appropriate frame as unseen to its inhabitants. Whilst the impact of murals upon North Belfast's

⁹⁵ B. Rolston, *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland* (Belfast, 1992).

⁹⁶ N. Jarman, "Painting Landscape: The Place of Murals in the Symbolic Construction of Urban Space," in *Symbols in Northern Ireland*, ed. A. Buckley (Belfast, 1998). 81

cultural landscape is often conspicuous, it is common that the people who live their rarely take notice of them.⁹⁷ This does not mean that murals retain some illusive quality, but that members of the local community are less conscious of their effect on informing their social identity. Whilst this appears somewhat paradoxical, it attests to the assimilation of murals into everyday life. Despite their striking messages, murals have come to constitute a naturalised feature of the sites they inhabit; this is a product of as well as a contributing factor towards the strength of collective identities.

Murals are a particularly interesting feature of ethno-sectarian division in Belfast because they have been used as unambiguous and bold markers of territory. Use of murals in this way has intensified following the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994. There has been an increasing number of murals which are visible in the line of sight from neutral areas. This has led to the polarisation of the categorisation of 'us' and 'them' which is implicit in the existence and content of the murals. It has, in Jarman's words, transformed 'areas where Protestants lived' into 'Protestant areas.'⁹⁸ This alludes to the significance of murals as explicit territorial markers; as such their sense of permanency is problematic since territory changes hands during the course of time. The presence of murals on territorial boundaries has signified an attempt to politicise neutral spaces and reclaim space for the community. Murals often ensure that certain places are understood in terms of which 'side' they are on; this is particularly the case with murals which draw upon the recent past of the Troubles and act as local memorials to those who died for their cause.

Murals are different from other visual sources, such as paintings, because their existence at a fixed location alludes to a sense of permanency and timelessness. With visual sources historians are able to consider the multiplicity of interpretations that they convey. The ability to understand murals as artefacts and as material culture allows for an awareness of an additional dimension, that they are open to 'multiple forms of use, reuse and abuse.'⁹⁹ This chapter pays most attention to murals that were created after the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994, since these marked the beginning of attempts to convey attitudes towards the legacy of conflict. It analyses these murals

⁹⁷ J. Sluka, "The Politics of Painting: Political Murals in Northern Ireland," in C. Nordstrom and J. Martin (eds.), *The Paths to Domination, Resistance and Terror*, (Oxford, 1992). 190

⁹⁸ Jarman, "Painting Landscape: The Place of Murals in the Symbolic Construction of Urban Space." 84

⁹⁹ ———, "Painting Landscape: The Place of Murals in the Symbolic Construction of Urban Space." 81

not primarily through categorising particular themes of visual representation but organises them in terms of the way they have been used. This must be dissected further to focus more specifically on two types of 'reuse' and their ability to perpetuate shared memories of the recent past. These include those murals which have been moved and those which have been repainted. Before this can be done with any precision it is important to consider the origins of political murals for both the Protestant and Catholic communities.

The tradition of painting murals emerged in the early twentieth century as part of unionist popular culture. This period of instability for the hegemony of British rule saw images of King William III and other Orange symbols painted on the gable walls of working class areas of Belfast. Visual displays, more broadly, have been part of unionist culture from the beginning of the nineteenth century; flamboyant displays of flags, flowers and bunting have historically adorned houses as part of the Twelfth celebrations every year. These have been understood as fulfilling a similar function to national monuments in other societies.¹⁰⁰ Wooden, metal or floral arches were installed as the focal point of the community celebrations. These displays are only intended as temporary and disappear with the end of the marching season, and as such 'encode a restricted range of largely uncontested meanings.'¹⁰¹ In contrast, murals provided a much more permanent marker of space with the capacity to be visible for a number of years before either maintenance or degeneration. As with parades, unionist murals have focused predominantly on the historical legitimacy of British rule. This is evident in that the most popular theme to be found within the Protestant tradition has always been William or Orange at the Battle of the Boyne. Other themes which have emerged in Protestant murals are the sinking of the Titanic, the Battle of the Somme and the coronation of King George VI in 1937. These deliberately underlined the British connection, which has in turn been reinforced through the involvement of murals in parading rituals. This has enabled the symbolic content of murals to take part in the performative nature of commemoration, which evokes a sense of timelessness. This in turn further reinforces the legitimacy of the British state for the unionist community.

¹⁰⁰ B. Rolston, "Politics, Painting and Popular Culture: The Political Wall Murals of Northern Ireland," *Media, Culture, and Society* 9, no. 1 (1987). 7

¹⁰¹ Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland*. 210

The painting of murals as a feature of Catholic or nationalist political culture is a more recent trend than for the Protestant community. It emerged during the Republican hunger strikes in 1981 but has endured since. The lack of a mural tradition is in part a result of the ethno-sectarian division itself as well as a marker of cultural difference. Murals were accepted as an established feature of Protestant culture and an entitlement for the Protestant community; this liberty was not extended to the Catholic community. The likelihood of prosecution for painting walls, which was seen as vandalism, ensured that mural painting remained absent from the political culture of the Catholic community. Thus it is no surprise that the tone of mural painting from the 1980s has often captured a 'culture of resistance' within nationalist communities, particularly as they have become a powerful and effective form of propaganda.¹⁰² The majority of Republican murals have been painted at Easter or on the anniversary of internment on August 9th but are much less seasonal than their loyalist counterparts. During the Troubles they provided means by which to challenge the establishment and convey contemporary political messages to the local community. In response to this came a resurgence of mural painting in unionist communities which formed the 'reactionary product of a dominant hegemonic culture' as a result of the emergence of murals within republicanism.¹⁰³ Thus murals became important sites of conflict and visible markers of territorial boundaries which have been reproduced at a constant rate even after the Good Friday Agreement.

The temporary nature of early Republican murals as responses to immediate concerns is evident in the observation that mural painters 'seemed remarkably nonchalant about the lack of durability of their products' since they were created as 'political statements, not works of art.'¹⁰⁴ This practice has changed dramatically following the ceasefires, and more specifically after the Good Friday Agreement. Murals have become professionalised; they are now legitimate political practices for both sides of the ethno-sectarian divide. The ceasefires coincided with the appearance of murals in areas which had previously not exhibited any, for example, the emergence of a UVF mural at Mount Vernon (Fig. 2.1).¹⁰⁵ This is a good example of the way in which murals have been used as memorials to locate the legacy of the conflict within a broader

¹⁰² Sluka, "The Politics of Painting: Political Murals in Northern Ireland." 190

¹⁰³ ———, "The Politics of Painting: Political Murals in Northern Ireland." 190

¹⁰⁴ Rolston, *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland*. vi

¹⁰⁵ Images of murals are courtesy of Dr Jonathan McCormick

ideological context. It depicts a silhouette of a soldier of the 36th Ulster Division, UVF flags and names of First World War battlegrounds. The focal point is a banner which reads: 'Lest we forget: For God and Ulster.' The fact that the original mural, created in 1998, was repainted in 2005 demonstrates attempts to maintain this sense of continuity with the past. The legitimisation of the mural as a site for commemoration is achieved through the use of a small but conventional monument which is situated immediately in front of it. Such new post-ceasefire murals have tended to be more outward looking than their predecessors, whilst still acting as sites of commemoration for the local community. Whereas historically murals were designed from within and for the very local community, post-ceasefire murals have increasingly tended to 'look out beyond the community and into the wider society.'¹⁰⁶ This transition is only properly understood by adopting a framework which allows murals to be treated as cultural artefacts as well as visual images.



Fig 2.1 A UVF mural at Mount Vernon

¹⁰⁶ Jarman, "Painting Landscape: The Place of Murals in the Symbolic Construction of Urban Space."
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The relocation of certain murals demonstrates a deliberate and conscious attempt to conserve a particular memory of the past in spite of the developments of the contemporary world. Ideas of landscape and territory shift over time, with changing patterns of settlement as well as redevelopment schemes. Figures 2.2 and 2.3 demonstrate the relocation of a loyalist mural in North Belfast. The original, initially located at Mount Vernon Drive was moved to Shore Road in 2001 after the Housing Executive planned to redevelop the area. The local UVF agreed to the demolition of the flats on the condition that a new wall was built for the mural to be reproduced. This is indicative of the importance of murals as tools to shape collective identity and territorial control. The slogan, which still reads: ‘Prepared for Peace, Ready for War’ sends a message that transcends the armed struggle. The sinister image of this mural has been withdrawn from its original context; a visibly working class street with painted kerbstones which is visually set within the Troubles. The repainted version, which still stands today, is clean and crisp. More importantly, it is professional and detached from the residential area it once occupied and is now exhibited on a purpose built wall safeguarded behind a fence. This provides a greater sense of personal detachment from the image, but its slight inapproachability also enables it to be sacralised as a monument by those who deemed it valuable enough to reproduce.



Fig. 2.2 Original mural located at Mount Vernon Drive.



Fig. 2.3 Mural relocated to Shore Road in 2001.

A more frequent means of increasing the longevity and depth of the collective memory forged through murals is through renovating and repainting them. This often grants the illusion of physical permanency as well as signifying the importance of certain murals in maintaining collective identity. Murals are essential to this process because they denote control over a specific locale. The restoration of murals demonstrates the acceptance and reinforcement of its message. Many of these restored murals, particularly in the region around Ardoyne, increasingly celebrate cultural life rather than contemporary political events. The nationalist mural in Figure 2.4 is the restored version of the original mural created in 1997 which depicts the mythological queen, Eire. It is situated close to the interface on Flax Street in Ardoyne and the caption reads: 'Meon an phobail a thogail trid a chultur.' This translates as 'The people's spirit is raised through culture.' The restoration of this mural in 2001 suggests the importance of the nationalist collective identity, which is expressed in much more benign imagery than the paramilitary murals. The imagery has changed but the strength of an underlying collective identity remains. Furthermore, the mural is still

able to command a sense of space and territory even though not associated with paramilitary violence.



Fig. 2.4 Restored version of original mural painted in 1997.



Fig. 2.5 Mural painted in protest at the Holy Cross dispute in 2001.

There are further examples of the restoration of murals in North Belfast, but the most striking illustration of interface tension and collective identity being articulated through murals is the Holy Cross dispute. The conflict took place in 2001-2 between parents of school children who attended Holy Cross Primary School. The school is situated on the 'wrong' side of the interface wall, which meant that Catholic parents needed to cross the boundary in order to take their children to school. This led to an escalation of tension and outbreak of public disorder during 2001. In protest, a mural was painted by members of the nationalist community and located on Ardoyne Road (Fig. 2.5). The caption reads: 'Everyone has a Right to Live Free From Sectarian Harassment', 'Arkansas-57, Ardoyne 01.' The conflict, aided significantly by the mural, has become a recent historical landmark for nationalist collective identity. It has been legitimised through the link to events at Little Rock High School in 1957 and the American Civil Rights Movement. This has been sustained and reproduced through the recent repainting and maintenance of the mural. The location of this mural is important; it is situated within the cultural landscape of the local community who experienced the Holy Cross dispute. Furthermore, its assertion that the issue is 'Black and White' reinforces oppositional narratives of the past and in turn, the commemorative style of the mural shapes collective identity along the same lines.

The Holy Cross dispute has demonstrated that murals are actively involved in shaping the legacy of the past and the nature of post-conflict transition. Murals frequently act as assembly points for gatherings, at strategic points on parade routes or markers of ethno-sectarian territorial boundaries. The capacity of murals to shape local identity is clear in their ability to reinforce ethno-sectarian divisions, particularly at the interface. This is a point further attested to by their use as a means of promoting a pluralistic identity. Their ability to reinforce divisions can be channelled to bring interface communities together. This has led to them being employed to promote a shared sense of identity. This can be understood through their use in cross community initiatives, which will be drawn upon in order to offer some concluding remarks about the nature of the legacy of the past that is being explored through current practices.

Conclusion

The collective memory of the Troubles is shaped by the everyday encounter of physically obtrusive material artefacts as well as established cultural practices centred on territorial notions of space. These are all linked by the allusion to a sense of permanency or a perceived continuity with the past, which is essential to the cohesiveness of collective memory and shapes collective identity. The efficacy of interface walls and political murals in reinforcing collective memory has resulted in recent attempts to employ them in forming a pluralistic identity to bring together both sides of the ethno-sectarian divide. The growing tourism industry is a key example of this. Cultural tourism has commoditised these material artefacts; murals in particular have become increasingly popular since 1994. Responses to this demand has included the publishing of a walking tour guide of 'Republican Belfast', which points out a number of key locations along Falls Road.¹⁰⁷ These tours have proved as popular with residents of Belfast as with foreign tourists. The Belfast Telegraph articulated that local people relished the 'voyage of rediscovery of their own city'.¹⁰⁸ The tour busses and walking tours have somewhat opened up previously 'no-go' areas to outsiders. They have allowed the city to be reconnected, even if only temporarily as a result of a tour route.

Recent cross-community initiatives, particularly the *Re-Imaging Communities Project* have sought to use these contested sites of memory to bring the oppositional communities together. This project plans to replace the material artefacts at 'flashpoints' with 'positive images which reflect the community's culture.'¹⁰⁹ New murals, celebrating a shared cultural identity, have been painted to replace the previously paramilitary ones. One of these murals is situated on the interface wall by the Glenbryn estate; it is located at the junction between Alliance Parade and Alliance Road (Fig. 3.1, *Interface Map No. 7*). It promotes residents of note from North Belfast and attempts to create a sense of shared cultural heritage. This serves as a reminder of the importance of the cultural landscape, not just for providing a setting or a 'frame'

¹⁰⁷ R. Kerr, *Republican Belfast: A Political Tourist's Guide* (Belfast 2008).

¹⁰⁸ *Sunday Life*, 9th April, 1995

¹⁰⁹ Belfast City Council, *Re-imagining Communities Project*,

for actual events but as an important part of the process of making history and redefining collective identity.

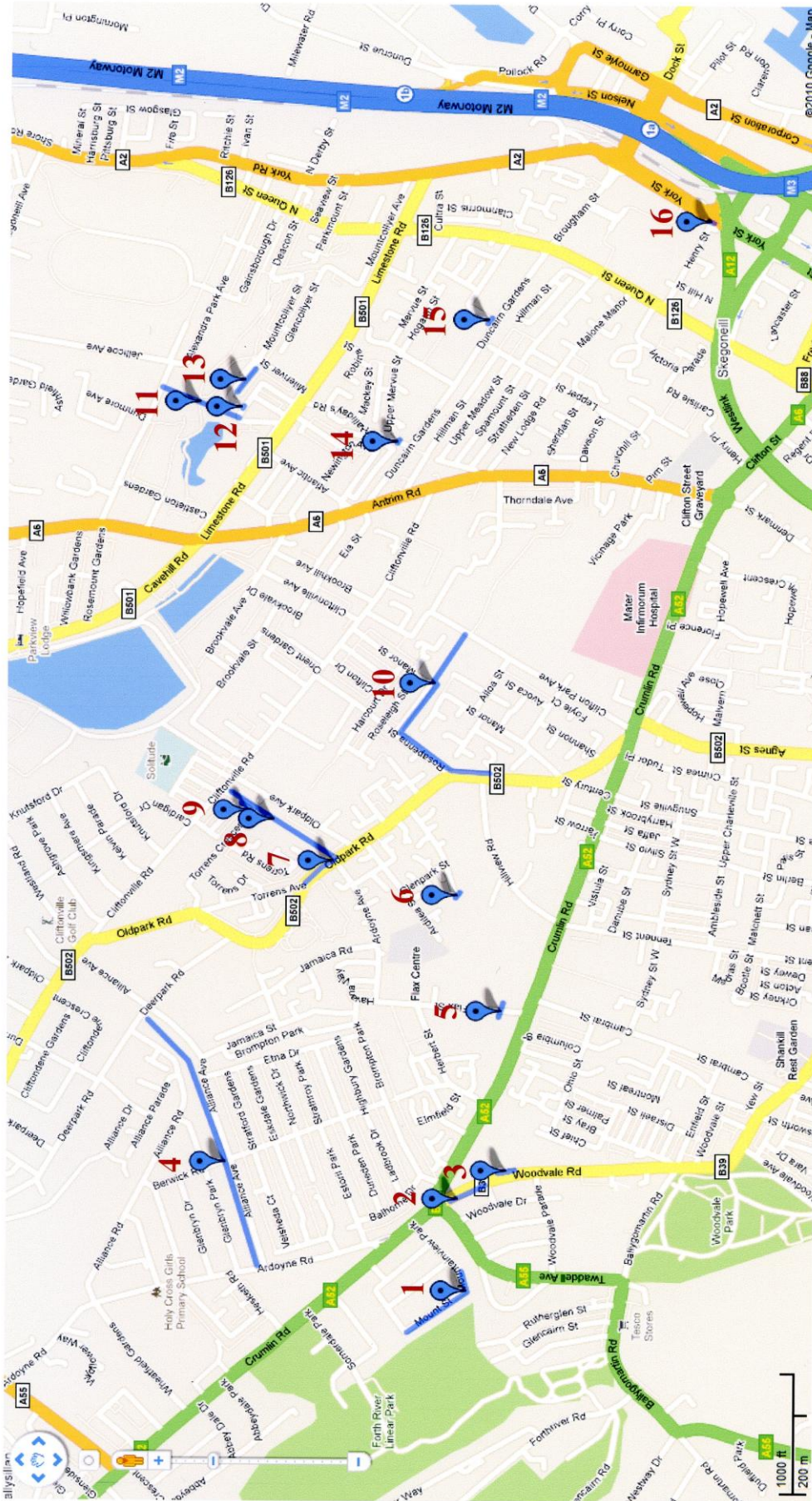


Fig 3.1 A Cross-Community mural at the Glenbryn estate. It depicts shared symbols for a pluralistic community: the Titanic, Belfast Castle, Sir James Galway, Dame Mary Peters and Wayne McCullough.¹ *Interface Map No.7*

It is hoped that these schemes help to blur the lines of ethno sectarian divisions and promote a pluralistic sense of space and belonging. However, the existence of such interface walls and the new murals painted there convey two contradictory messages; the celebration of a shared culture is negated by the very desire for these walls to remain. It remains to be seen whether this *re-imagining* will result in the *re-imagining* of communities away from ethno-sectarian identities on anything other than a superficial level. Whatever the outcome, it is clear that the cultural landscape has played a formative role in the process of developing collective memory and social identity and persists as a tool for shaping the legacy of the Troubles.

Appendix

Interface Map Showing Interface Barriers in Inner North Belfast



Appendix

Appendix: Interface Map Showing Interface Barriers in Inner North Belfast. Map courtesy of Google Maps.

- 1. Mountainview Park
- 2. Woodvale Road
- 3. Woodvale Road
- 4. Alliance Ave/Glenbryn Park
- 5. Flax Street
- 6. Antigua Street
- 7. Oldpark Road
- 8. Elm Grove Street
- 9. Torrens Crescent
- 10. Rosapenna Street
- 11. Alexandra Park
- 12. Mountcollier Street
- 13. Mountcollier Street
- 14. Hallidays Road
- 15. Adam Street
- 16. Henry Street

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