Contestation, Memory, and Territoriality: Young People Encounters of Spatial Contact in Northern Ireland Divided Communities

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Abstract

Territoriality profoundly impacts people's encounters of contact and social identity driven by political contestation. A culture of amnesia is often enacted to support the political transition as was the case in Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998. On the other hand, rival ethnic groups burgeon their commemorative practices, which they perform daily, as part of their ethnicized memory and nostalgia. Such duality – ethnicized memory and amnesia – become regularly entrenched in the city's reconstruction, particularly in public spaces where the relevant spatial practices are maximized. This research uses semi-structured interviews with youth in Northern Ireland to reveal how people formulate their contact strategies painted by heavily 'mythologized' memories of the conflict. They experience territoriality as a form of 'cultural capital' handed to them from preceding generations. The paper questions the growing cultural diversification of societies in Northern Ireland that could develop transformative social relations of integration and belonging beyond groups defined by their memory, identity, and use of space.

Introduction

On the 3rd of April 2021, Northern Ireland was rocked by six continuous nights of violence, with 55 police officers injured in a level of unrest that had not happened in years. The turmoil and subsequent tensions among loyalist communities have escalated since Brexit checks came into force in January 2021. Under a broader unease in the unionist community, the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, one of four countries in the UK, has been threatened by the Brexit settlement (Hayward, 2020). The Loyalist frustrations were given political legitimacy when the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) launched an official campaign to have the Northern Ireland protocol scrapped. In particular, the consequences of Brexit in Northern Ireland had contributed to loyalist anger, having misled them into thinking there would be no checks on goods arriving from Great Britain. The youth, some as young as 12, were amongst those involved in violence in the streets of Belfast which saw around 600 people protesting in chaotic scenes. Some media headlines described the youngsters as the 'kiddie rioters' as they persistently triggered and engaged in further escalations of violence. The horrific footage aired showed young people throwing bottles and bricks at police officers while adults were 'standing by cheering and goading and encouraging [them] on as they wreaked havoc in their community" (BelfastLive, 2021). (Figure 1)

Northern Ireland shares an extended history of profound ethnic conflict. Until fairly recently, many of its cities lived with having endured a traumatic and violent ethnic and political conflict known as 'the Troubles'. This period of strife dates back to the mid-1960s when the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association took to the streets to demand equal rights for all (Bew and Gillespie, 1999). Religion is only one dimension to the conflict, as Northern Ireland has been branded a place exhibiting a deep-rooted clash of identity and division between Catholics/Nationalists and Protestants/Unionists. Many in the latter community saw the Civil Rights movement as a front for militant nationalists who sought to end British involvement in the

region and create an all-island republic. Peaceful street protests gradually gave way to widespread paramilitary violence: 'assassinations and assassination attempts, sniper attacks, bombings, bomb scares, street riots, civilian searches, and vehicle checkpoints had become part and parcel of life in Northern Ireland' (Muldoon, 2004:495). Despite attempts to address inequalities, communal conflict persisted for almost 30 years until paramilitary ceasefires in 1994 opened the way for the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and the creation of an elected Northern Ireland Assembly, based, for the first time, on shared governance.

Social segregation and the long-term legacy of religious clashes contributed to the informing, institutionalizing, and consolidating of several distinct and opposing cultural and religious traditions. Both communities experienced intrastate violence, but ethnonational groups played a role in harnessing their memory and supporting claims for territorial sovereignty and victimhood. Literature on the reproduction of segregation in divided cities looked at how 'ethnically segregated spaces became a fundamental spatial feature of the city' where the past became a legitimate vehicle for connecting with the uncertain future post-conflict, which increases the need to study its contested spaces (Lang and Mell, 2020; Boal, 2002). Nora's lieu de mémoire – memory space – acts differently to an intrastate conflict, where contested claims to local powers are strongly supported by remembrance practices (Nora, 1989). In that sense, memory performance seems to invoke prior temporality as a way to signal buildings, streets, and public spaces to commemorate traumatic events that constantly remind its associates of their grievances. Moreover, scholars have stressed the impact of the enduring trilogy of memory, space, and conflict on peacebuilding. McDowell and Braniff (2014), for example, noted the crucial role of memory during the healing process among post-conflict groups. The vital role of space and memory in building potential reconciliation is contested. There is an apparently powerful tendency to disregard the past and its memory scape at a societal level. For this, space and memory become critical fundamentals in the discussion of reconciliation during the post-conflict period. Implementing the reconciliation process usually enforces ways to execute policies of amnesia, as the rational path towards a political transition, whereas ethnicized memory thrives on the communal scale.

The production and performance of commemoration dictate the politics of the divided groups and harnesses the power of memory that haunts them from the past. For this, the conflict in Northern Ireland placed an unequal and devastating burden on its youth (Selim, 2015). These youngsters are sons and daughters of the 1994 ceasefire generation, who lived and witnessed traumatic violence and bereavement experiences (Kilkelly et al., 2004: Gilligan 2006). This also happened at a time when insecurity was a common feature aspect of everyday life (Harland and McCready 2012; Cummings, 2011; Harland 2011; Hansson 2005). Inheriting the memory of conflict encouraged the youth to develop their unique sense of ethnic identity - of being Ulster Protestant or Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland, amid a situation of political crisis and sectarian confrontation. At that time, Northern Irish youngsters faced unemployment, segregated educational systems, and increased ghettoized residential living levels. The 1990s discussions on the peace process, community differences, sectarian violence, and shared spaces were active, at times heated, and mostly drew on the youth's own lived experiences as well as their families' and communities' experiences (McGrellis, 2010).

This paper aims to interrogate how marginalized youth in divided societies imprint memory into public space to confront the paradoxical forces of amnesia and ethnic shared memory in relation to territory. The paper examines how their experiences and associations with their territories are often challenging and problematic compared to adults. Growing up in segregated enclaves with myths about the 'other side,' vitally provoked the youth's fear and anxiety. Simultaneously, the division became a part of their everyday lives as an ideology that could not be dismissed (Leonard

& McKnight, 2011; Cummings, 2011). They relate and reference past events with no memories of violence. Their only sources are history books and their families' eyewitness accounts which allow them to reflect on the nation's conflict. Indeed, the recent violence and attacks mirror some of this past which has not entirely vanished. Yet, the undeniable fact is that youth are still growing in a divided society where 'us' and 'them' beliefs are maintained and furthered.

This research was conducted through two phases of field interviews with youth aged 14 - 20 from the Fountain and the Bogside areas of Derry/Londonderry. Four community workers from each group were also included. The first phase covered semi-structured interviews with 20 young people (9 Protestants and 11 Catholics). The signification processes of their own interpretation and reflected spatial practices, which took the form of hostile attitudes towards the other group, were not always rationalized, but they occasionally contradicted views expressed by other interviewees, particularly when the male youth were part of a bigger peer group. The second phase of interviews comprised three focus groups of 4 - 6 members each. The latter was structured around the topics and themes identified by participants. This qualitative research intends to provide reliable accounts and in-depth analysis of young people living within divided groups who share hostile attitudes towards each other.

However, an embryonic form of negotiation is on the rise. Negotiation in this context articulates a framework of revolutionized spatial practices to bargain space ownership with the Others. The question this paper poses is whether the growing ethnic and cultural diversification of contemporary societies could transform social relations of integration and belonging beyond groups defined by their ethnic identity. In the coming sections, I will explain how territoriality in Northern Ireland's second-largest city - Derry/Londonderry - is primarily driven by the city's dense political history. I argue that even when communities engage daily, they still employ tactics to resist and challenge such realities by adjusting alternative means of spatial interaction. They formulate their ways of contact or segregation strategies influenced by memories of the Troubles and bloody incidents (Cairns, 2003). People gradually develop closed and integrated groups limited to their members while distancing themselves from the Others. Multiple dimensional discourses inform the paper through theoretical encounters and analyses of memory and social practices. The concept of intertextuality, developed by Fairclough (1992), draws from the role of past and contemporary history. Hence, this paper will provide accounts on how to place representation and territory have created 'manipulated geographies' interlocked with memory and history within contested cultural identity spheres. It will explain how narratives of past events inform the young peoples' practices, thus, observing these youngsters as competent social actors in their own right.

Figure 1. Young people leading the riots on the Springfield Road close to the peace line in west Belfast.
Source: https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/belfast-news/kiddie-rioters-lured-street-violence-20347027

Roots of Contested Space in Northern Ireland

Many Northern Irish cities are defined by pluralism-related issues particularly related to 'rival claims of national belonging' (Gaffikin et al., 2010). The deep-rooted political division is also visible through borders and natural landscape, both material and symbolic. The fortified character in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry is embraced by the visibility of famous walls erected to defend Protestant and Catholic lives and properties. The division also regulated how the past is lived through collective memories of contestation grounded in its public sphere (Bollens, 2018). The Catholic community in Derry/Londonderry, for example, were excluded as a 'powerless majority hemmed into a ghetto outside the center of their own city, known as the Bogside; but also as a powerless minority trapped by a partition within a state-run by state enemies' (Farrell, 1980:92). Both cities' traumatic conflict had a significant impact on the 'spatial imposition and contestation of state power, remembered in highly politicized cultures of public commemoration' (Dawson, 2005:158). In 1688-89, Derry/Londonderry was transformed into a mythical place, 'forever memorable as an impregnable bulwark of British Protestantism, of civil and religious liberty (ibid.:158). Protests normally took the form of violent attacks on the Catholic ghetto on several occasions, which led the Nationalists to block the main entrances to the Bogside (a Catholic area) with defensive barriers declaring a 'no-go' zone known as 'Free Derry'.

Historic and iconic incidents added different geographies of ethnic separation, such as the Bloody Sunday in 1972 which remains an important event in the Troubles' escalation throughout Northern Ireland. A well-known incident occurred when a Civil Rights March against the internment policy of Catholic residents of the Bogside was banned from entering the city center. Angry young men began to fling stones at British soldiers; the upshot was that thirteen Catholic men were shot dead close to Free Derry Corner. A campaign, led by the victims' relatives, revived

a full investigation into Bloody Sunday events for many years. For them, events like this and many others have not been forgotten over time. In this regard, each community has very contrasting feelings: one side considers the event a significant abuse of human rights and inequality, the other criticizes it as a matter of exaggeration and waste of resources (Melaugh, 2010). For Catholics, Bloody Sunday brought outrage and grievance whereas, for Protestants, it brought glory and pride. Such beliefs primarily determine relationships and attitudes between the communities and impact the lives of the youth. These also have crucial implications for shaping each community's identity: Protestants were historically ranked above Catholics, a mindset that determined the way the new state of Northern Ireland, created in 1921, acted towards and treated its Catholic population (Conway, 2003). This, in turn, influenced how Catholics defined their identity in opposition to that of Protestants, thereby constructing a social world of two opposing identity categories of 'us' and 'them' (Kirby et al., 2002).

As is the case in Derry/Londonderry, binary opposition typically generates a community that scrutinizes the other, considering it a threat to its identity, and provides rational grounds for violence (White, 2001). In most cases, the only channels of mutual socializing materialize when each participates in violence or becomes a victim of it. Disturbing incidents like Bloody Sunday became imprinted in memory and 'the lens through which people think about themselves; their past, goals, and ideals', so they subsequently position their contact with the Other accordingly (Conway, 2003:17). These incidents led to the ongoing formation of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' widely determined by the past with its mental representation (Woodward, 1997). Yet, people are attached to events of the past in different ways (Hirsch, 1995). For example, Derry communities did not commemorate Bloody Sunday for a significant period of time after they had rejected a state-approved form of remembrance, yet narrating stories of sorrow and grieving remains formatted and exhibited in other ways. As a result, young people in Derry mostly learn about their history by hearing stories from their families and relatives and being exposed to *objects* that contextualize and spatialize conflict surrounding them everywhere e.g. murals and flags. Successive generations in Northern Ireland, in whom war became instilled, predominantly communicate the memory of disturbing incidents through street and granite monuments displaying their sorrow and the bravery of 'their' people; these monuments are cultural expressions used to demarcate ownership and claim public spaces (Side, 2014; Selim&Abraham, 2016; Mulholland et al, 2014).

For decades, young people have been exposed to and paid attention to numerous *objects* on a daily basis; through their school journeys, trips to and from the town center, amenities, and public parks. The high number of murals in the Fountain and the Bogside enable people to reminisce and remember their past. Ingeniously, those that built them utilized their everyday living spaces in the service of remembrance by using original photographic materials and sharp colors to create a sensitive and sensible aesthetic that appeals to passers-by. A well-known mural records the Catholic Bishop of Derry, known then as Fr. Edward Daly, waving a blood-stained white handkerchief on Bloody Sunday as others carry a seriously wounded young man through the streets of the Bogside. To this day, that mural remains an enduring image of the Troubles and perhaps stands out more than any other as a symbol of Bloody Sunday while also validating the Bogside community's identity as a subjugated social group.

The youth in Northern Ireland interpret their social and spatial interaction practices according to mental images of the ingrained conflict. It is observed that direct communication between qualitative subjects becomes the end of the spectrum to which history leads people to become manipulated as passive objects in the absence of qualitative richness descended from proclaiming their complex distinctiveness (Selim, 2015). 'In time, rooted and long-lasting violence tends to become a norm of the everyday reality, where individuals acquire defensive skills that live in them' (Apter,1997:1), although violence is now occurring on much lower levels than in the past (Apter,1997:1). The youngsters frequently perceive the objects as metaphors to express their feelings and thoughts about inhabiting and living beyond their territories and gradually incorporate these objects and metaphors into their everyday encounters (Interview). Over time, the identity of contested spaces becomes visualized and personalized by objects, which unknowingly inform mutual contact and practices of the people of that part of the city.

Space, Encounter, and Contact with the other

In post-conflict societies, place and its territorial significance both symbolize a critical challenge to effective endeavours on conflict transformation (Ryan, 2016; Bekoe, 2016). The place is vital since ethno-nationalist identities are inevitably destined to a precise territory of a 'discursive or material value' (McDowell, Braniff, Murphyc, 2017: 194). The physical walls and divisions still define the territorial borders of numerous nationalist policies. The symbolic characteristics of a place significantly provide meaning and contribute to a sense of ownership among its members (ibid). In addition, academic scholarship on inter-ethnic encounters and spatial integration raised questions about 'spaces of interaction' to empower reminiscent encounters amongst different social groups (Askins, 2008; Amin, 2002; Laurier and Philo, 2006). Theories on the contact hypothesis introduced by Gordon Allport (1954) developed an interactive relationship among social groups to increase meaningful engagement and minimize prejudice. Developing close and mature bonds with other people does not necessarily entail expressing emotional appreciation, but showing indirect contact also increases constructive attitudes between groups (Kwan, 2000). Individuals predictably disclose mixed feelings when referring to the opposing others, and therefore, their encounters will be different. Research in ethnicity practices also supports numerous arguments on the credibility of recording, monitoring, and analyzing mutual contact to count as positive/negative encounters. Although notable success in tackling political violence problems is evident, post-conflict communities are still struggling to improve their inter-ethnic relationships to display a shared identity that can transcend the twin problems of sectarianism. We also still witness how ethnic groups tend to maintain high intergroup isolation levels regardless of proximity to geographical localities, which shows that fear pulls young people outside their comfort zones (Schnell and Yoav, 2001).

Young people typically engage in public spaces, on the streets, and at church halls, etc. Many of these localities are governed by challenging relationships among groups/ individuals, allowing limited new possibilities and opportunities for integration (Ibid). For this reason, social contact between groups is not sufficient on its own to generate integration but could 'entrench group animosities and identities' (ibid., p.971). In some cases, contact zones intermittently exhibit tolerant contact as they were intended to, but also reproduce segregation in one form or another (Matejskova & Leitner, 2011; Sennett, 2005; Abdelmonem & Selim, 2019). Alan Bairner and Peter Shirlow (2003) argue that the sectarianization of place in Northern Ireland had a profound impact on recreational facilities, for example. They explain that fearing the Other, whether based on imaginary scenarios or personal experience, is critical in prohibiting people from outdoor

interaction. They construct their contact zones that are both embodied and metaphorical, fostering interconnections in the simple representation of bound geographic worlds. Contact zones became 'territorialized by particular groups, and steeped in surveillance, or they were spaces of transit with minimal contact between strangers' (Amin, 2002:967).

Henceforth, how could the expanding ethnic and cultural diversity of societies gear towards better integration amongst communities defined by their ethnic identity? To answer this question, Ash Amin (2013) notes that such political form is symptomatic of disintegration in social cohesion and requires the communities' action. To avoid falling into the trap of 'socially de-contextualized individualism', Marco Antonsich (2010) notes that constructive contact is immensely bonded with identity. Belonging should be explained through various perspectives such as personal emotions and sense of being 'at home' in a place, to be in a position to 'construct, justify, or resist forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion' (ibid.:644). Amin (2013) also calls for what he calls the 'politics of the commons' which creates space for practicing rituals, cohabitation, 'a welfarist bio-politics and other collective interventions that might strengthen civilities of indifference to difference'. However, appreciating the city's diversity is particularly pertinent to encounters between ethnically divided groups in contact zones, especially when coming together. And it will undoubtedly be mediated by the ability to take part through common grounds that enable multiplicities to be practiced (ibid.).

Identity, Memory and the *Intertextual* Space

People's social relations and identities were represented by the synchronisms of spaces and discourses, whereas 'people's lives, networks, and identities were patterned geographically and discursively across different sites of activity, e.g. work, home, community' (Tajbakhsh, 2001: XIII). Spaces are shared, divided, and organized by cultural practices and their products, such as buildings and settlements. The broad interpretation and regulation of space establish or reshapes social relationships and hierarchies and constantly shifts subject positions (cf. Keating, 2001). Tajfel's (1979) social identity theory explains how people have a fundamental need to belong and possess a certain sense of self through group participation. Tajfel proposes that groups to which people belong are an essential source of pride and self-esteem because they provide their followers with a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world. Yet, to uplift our self-image, we tend to enhance the group's status to which we belong – for example, saying 'my community is the best in the city'. Groups can also increase their self-image by discriminating and holding prejudiced views against the Other group, to which they don't belong. They seek out negative stories of the Other, thereby enhancing their self-image (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This explains why Nationalists and Unionists communicate their legendary battles, such as the Bloody Sunday, through *lieux de memoire*, or sites of memory, which are parts of the built environment and places containing distilled reminiscences of the past objectified in the murals in housing estates, painted curbs, and flags (Nora, 1998; McBride, 2001).

My aim is to draw attention to *text*-represented spaces shaped by mutual relations and boundaries. They commonly presuppose discrete and structured delimitation and- within their boundaries- a coherent internal structure. This could be described as spatial composition or, rather, as hypotactic structures of inter-spatial relationships. These spatial compositions articulate and segment textually represented spaces and constitute their hierarchy, as well as dictate how people interact within the space. For example, people mobilize in the city in different ways and in different imaginaries, which form the boundaries between one space and another or between different kinds of spaces, whether material or cognitive. As such, intertextuality is cognized as the

practice of transposing, juxtaposing, and blending heterogeneous semiotic spaces, not only those represented in the textual world, like murals and paintings but also those evoked by linguistic and genre forms on the textual surface. Intra-textual space also contributes to a significant part of the imaginary since it is repeatedly attached to recurring elegiac images that carry archetypical ideals to organize the subject's awareness of the past and future.

Sites of memories in Northern Ireland epitomize history-related *texts*. In contrast, when expressing aspects of identity and contact, young people give them new meanings and interpretations to transform them into new texts. In a way, participants observe the reproduction of unique intertextual networks that manifest their feelings of prejudice and anger towards the other community (Leonard, 2010). The original *texts* are usually informed by adults' perceptions of the past or actual participation and involvement in one event or another related to violence or the struggle for freedom and civil rights, eventually becoming masters of the narrative. Despite Belfast and Derry/Londonderry now being relatively free from violence, young people still rely on their parents' accounts to better explain themselves and their hostile attitudes (Interview 10). For those involved in violence, the reproduction of histories constructs an opportunity not to feel regretful for what they may have done, as long as a senior member of the community did so in the past. This displays the vertical dimension of intertextuality in relations between actions and their original accounts in space (Kristeva, 1986:36, in Fairclough, 1992:103). Fathers' and sons' *texts*, for example, become interconnected and associated with each other to back their current practices, which become heavily informed by past formulas of bravery and pride, despite playing only a very marginal role in this narrative (Apter, 1997:11).

However, Northern Ireland's young people face excessive forms of prejudice, which can sometimes develop into serious outdoor violence. We still hear stories from both communities being reconciled with the current situation and basing their conclusions on what they have listened to from history: 'Irish and English don't like each other, and we will always have clashes, that's how we see it' (Interview 3). Indeed, statements like this explain why people's memories of the past still shape and legitimize their future relationships (Schröder and Schmidt, 2001:8). The intertextual repeatability of textual wreckages of the Troubles repeatedly arose in words used by the Bogside youth, even though, as teenagers, none of them had witnessed what the Other side did in the past (Porter, 1986:35). They also interpreted violent events, although not those in which they have participated, into the present struggle's social and spatial texts and how it has shaped relations amongst them (Apter, 1997).

The Troubles' current discourse seems to have primarily shifted in favour of the Catholic community and provides a compelling resource to be drawn from. In Derry/Londonderry, visitors and sightseers visit the Bogside to look at famous murals and visit the Museum of Free Derry, which mainly provides a different restructuring of texts conditional to other relations of power. In Belfast, paramilitary murals on the Newtownards Road (a loyalist area) have featured strong messages of resistance to the Irish republican cause. One example is the 'Ulster's Freedom Corner' which is considered to be one of the most remarkable murals due to the emotive and evocative messages it displays. We also observe that the social confines of young people from the Bogside are not significantly constrained: 'with the discourse of past suffering of their community providing a backing and considerable numerical superiority in comparison to the Fountain the position of power, at least for the first sight' (Conway, 2003:21). Violence often starts as a minor altercation between young children but may quickly escalate to a full-scale riot. Therefore, the range of socio-spatial practices between groups linked to segregation becomes unpredictable. The question here is how could both segregated communities acknowledge sharing and using public spaces on a daily basis without jeopardizing their safety and emotional wellbeing? Do they share

travel routes to schools, public transport, and access to essential services? The demographic decline of the Protestant population living on the west bank of the Foyle River in Derry/Londonderry, for example, paralleled a 'reduction in violence that led to re-engagement with the shopping areas in the Cityside' (Shirlow et al., 2005:4). Protestants were willing to interact regularly and socialize with non-Protestants, but they remained *culturally* uncertain, leading to higher marginalization levels and a sense of inequality (ibid.). (Figure 2)

(Figure 2) Paramilitary mural on the Newtownards Road, Belfast

Territoriality and Collective Belonging

Despite the robust and long-lasting visibility of barriers, gates, and high walls separating Catholics and Protestants living in physical proximity, they regularly aggravate judgments regarding engagement and interaction in public spaces. Young Protestants living in the Fountain estate in Derry live with relatively low-income or unsecured employment forms. They regularly cited community-based narratives of social disparity, injustice, and victimhood, acknowledging that these issues collectively allow minimal contact with Catholics living nearby in the Bogside area. Their fear of communication is also controlling their mobility patterns. The fact that the estate is composed solely of housing units, except for the school, the youth club, and the church, and lacks essential services, has escalated the situation. The estate has 'no newsagents, cafés, or restaurants within its catchment area, so they are forced to travel for a longer trip outside the estate to reach basic amenities' (Interview). Several basic shops were open in the past; however, 'the migration of many people from the Fountain to the Waterside led to their closure' (Interview).

Under stressful settings of communal anxiety, young people find it hard to have mutual respect for and integration with groups they perceive as a threat. Being prejudiced could become an asset for some individuals by presenting them as victims of their failures. It also provides them with a conferred interest in favouring intolerance, even if a radical progression in individual encounters with the Other is seen. The community influence in the Fountain, for example, leads to a negative perception of the Bogside youth: 'If we are from the Fountain… we know that we would never become friends with them' (Interview). Somehow, they refuted the Catholic community's opinions,

scornfully expounding the matter of Bloody Sunday, the causes of riots in the late 1970s, and the hunger strikers who died for no reason (Interview). A group of teens did not dismiss the Hunger Strikes of 1981 as intrinsically wrong. Still, being loyal to their community and the sense of togetherness, they interpreted the *text* from the past to be in favour of belonging to their people – 'the British soldiers and the British citizens' (Interview). The youth believed that feeling themselves to be the victim of prejudice is not a problem: 'they are 'still making themselves victimized' (Interview).

The Local media and TV programs regularly condemn sectarian acts in accordance with the widespread official discourse of peacebuilding and reconciliation. On the 8th of April 2021, two days after the riots in Belfast, the media portrayed the young protestors as the main reason for the street violence's escalation. The protestors urgently required stick provisions in place such as 'educational visits and residential provision (overnight stays) when there is significant risk of harm or criminalization of children and young people…. These measures were intended to safeguard and ensure the welfare of young people and to divert them from becoming involved in risk-taking and dangerous behaviours' (Interview, BelfastLive, 2021). Many of the young people interviewed gradually started to draw up their views based on this discourse, and some even found themselves obliged to exert a direct influence over others (Interview). In the discourse of political violence, the anti-state position is what stipulates that protests be held, its logical causes, and a 'discourse community' (Apter, 197:5). Yet, in Northern Ireland as a whole, the principle stays the same; 'young people are encouraged to participate in confrontations and certainly do not face criticism from their community (interview).

The division in Northern Ireland manifests itself in the present with similar acts of violence, incivility, and discourtesy between both communities, which turns into naturalized acts of everyday encounters. In the past, Derry/Londonderry celebrations of the siege, originating in 1690, were frequently a source of trouble and a celebration of Protestant unionist identity. The ceremony 'constitutes a dialogue, more or less a silent game of chess, enacted in the streets to remind people that, despite the Catholic majority in Derry, the city continues to be Protestant territory' (Kockel, 2010:27). The Loyalists took up the commanding position during the parade, which often evokes intimidation and threat. Catholics in the Bogside also organized a small number of commemorative parades like the Easter Rising ceremonial and Proclamation of the Irish Republic in 1916, which was reinforced by 'a rigid, unwritten law that Catholics could not march within the city walls, one enforced with violence by the police (Dawson, 2005:158). However, much progress has been made in the last few years between the Bogside residents and the Apprentice Boys to ensure a safe and smooth marching. This was agreed in 2014 when the new Maiden City Accord protocol was set up by the Loyal Orders 'to promote a dignified, respectful parading culture'. The annual march was frequently a source of trouble, but the Accord provided 'a real way forward, both for the Loyal Orders and for the entire community (Interview). Another example is the annual Orange Order Parades on July 12 that takes place in many Northern Irish cities. In Derry/Londonderry, the event starts from the Waterside, passing by the Diamond area in the city center. A large number of young people attend the annual parades and are not restricted from celebrating their culture' (Interview 8). Yet, we still see that parades always require a heavy police presence to keep tensions between the kids at bay (Interview 7). Community workers also collaborate closely to ensure that young people from the other side are kept busy with activities organized during that time or are taken on field trips away from any possible trouble (ibid.) (Figure 4).

There are certain levels of imbalance caused by the physical locations of both the Fountain and the Bogside communities and their relationships. The fact that basic amenities are located at some distance from the two estates highlights one form of instability and uncertainty. The result is that

errands must be made at certain times of the day and, for some people, only in a group, which once again reveals a more robust version of the moral and political metaphor represented by siege. The gate's closure in the Bishop Street wall at night also fuels a siege metaphor, whereby temporal and spatial dimensions of freedom are denied, and residents are 'hemmed in' and only allowed 'out' during the day (Interview). As one teenager explained, 'The gate's physical presence is irreplaceable to alleviate tensions… as long as the walls are still there' (Interview 4) (Figure 5). Indeed, the current economic climate in Derry/Londonderry is preventing new facilities from being brought into the Fountain, which is leading people to be eager to increase free mobility without fear of attack from their Bogside neighbors.

The Reproduction of Contested space

The city centre of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry were further invested into with peace process politics through the dynamics of regeneration and gentrification, and while undergoing extensive post-conflict reform. The city rebranding echoed the peace process by promoting the creation of shared spaces through the removal of symbols of division and conflict (Rallings, 2014). Through constructing class rather than ethnic solidarity, the aim was to shift the city's middle-class from local to global interests: 'from traditional industrial production to flexible post-modern methods of accumulation' (Carter, 2003:256). The twisted shape of the Peace Bridge erected in 2011 was designed as a structural handshake across the Foyle, creatively built to tackle the problem of separate communities by creating a genuine and unique shared space. The new bridge across the river was a constructive materialization of stimulating diversity in Derry/Londonderry. Such forms of regeneration, as scholars refer to as 'ethnocratic reconstruction', attempt to materialize memory and identity as objects of public attention, seeking ways of constructing 'emotional attachment to places and periods from the past as a means of building civic and community solidarities (Shirlow, 2006;101; Nash & Williams 2011:100). Although the construction of the bridge was intended to improve connections on both sides of the river intending to create new patterns of movement for both groups that can improve social interaction and experiences of a different culture, this did not take place. In fact, when a visit to the Peace Bridge was planned in 2013 for club members, some boys from the Bogside community were waiting at notorious interface areas, and violence broke out (Interview). In such cases, victims of this violence feel offended, disrespected, and powerless to the extent of being subject to administered and politicized mobility across the city.

Numerous regeneration ventures in Derry/Londonderry have focused on revitalizing post-industrial decline, improving employment rates, and integrating the city into the global tourist market. Local people taking into account that certain places are associated with a dissonant past oppose these initiatives. In fact, projects like this across Northern Ireland were blamed for generating 'a degree of forgetting' (Switzer & McDowell, 2009). It was claimed that the charming and modern aesthetics implemented 'seek to induce historical amnesia' and wipe the city's past not only by removing the memory and scars of trauma violence but more profoundly by erasing the physical traces of the Troubles-related acts that have occurred in the past in many parts of the city (ibid).

Despite the frustration that the City of Culture initiative did not directly increase employment opportunities, the city generated new intercultural narratives, which were applauded by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council launched in the 1970s (Nolan, 2014). The events demonstrated that government and policymakers aimed to enforce the role of the renegotiation of culture in wider debates on future relations between communities and on promoting social equality. The existence of barriers in Derry/Londonderry provided safety and security during times of tension, and drew hard lines of segregation; yet, they remain physical signs of paranoia and fear of the other side. But we are witnessing bold and courageous mindsets for change and integration, with both sides of the conflict mostly anxious to move on with their futures. To address contestation and progress with peace, there is a need to create new dialogues and spaces of encounter in order to change the perception and social use of space in divided cities. As Henri Lefebvre (1991) advocates, it is vital to magnify the different readings and interpretations of the

city, i.e., provide multiple narratives. Such diversity will contribute to the city's refashioned centrality to create spaces of encounter and differences which certifies the full habitation of spaces for all. For this, it is crucial to revolutionizing our understanding and practices in making spaces communal and accessible in order to tolerate the memories associated with their future emotional belonging.
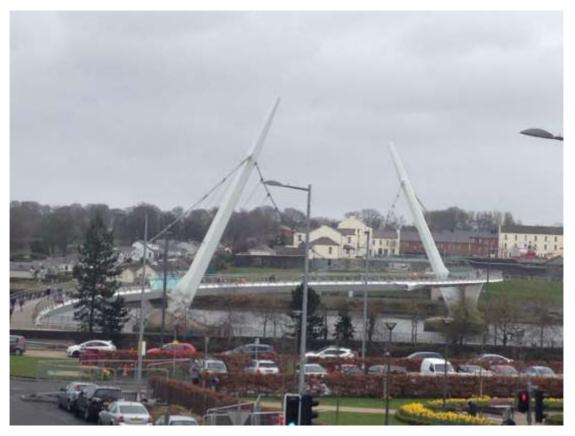

Figure 3. The Derry/Londonderry Peace Bridge, 2011

Conclusion

The paper's central inquiry examines how territoriality is highly problematic in areas defined by ethnic conflict and whether a model of transformative social relations of integration is essential for the young people's future in Northern Ireland. Despite the seemingly paradoxical nexus between nostalgia and forgetting through the numerous political efforts to erase traces of the conflict, the abiding memory of the traumatic past is still transcending from one generation to another. It was also found that young people until today, deliberately or unintentionally practice territorial behavior driven by their memories, identities, and unlived experiences. In most of their testimonies, the young people repeatedly referred to territoriality and physical space where they experienced the city's public sphere's significance as an appropriate medium to practice diversity and celebrate differences with the *Other*.

While Northern Ireland's segregated communities' transition to peacebuilding has been slow and not without political or social challenges, the peace process negotiations shed some progressive turn in young people's lives for 'crossing the lines of division' (McGrellis, 2010). The shift in the political landscape 'contributed to their [young people's] biographical narratives of community, affiliation, identity, and perceived opportunity in ways that either reflected new

optimism and confidence or enduring fear and suspicion' (ibid, 764). It also endorsed practical opportunities of physical mobility into the Other's premises to support stronger social bonds and relationships (Caballero, Edwards & Smith, 2008). On the other hand, the lives of the youth in Northern Ireland have been constructed through fragmented lenses as [they] are recipients of partially, unresponsive, and often irrelevant policies whereby the youth are not perceived as societal agents of political change. Although they did not encounter the war themselves, Youthstill experience the ongoing repercussions and reproduction of conflicting accounts. For a long time, they have been witnessing the war's unfolding imprint, not only through sectarian and political enmity but most notably through the city and its built form.

While it's imperative to rebuild spaces of sectarian violence into shared spaces, this requires a critical praxis that is not limited to accommodating shared communities or the memory work of rival ethnic groups. Research on urban planning in divided societies provides several essential policies at the structural level (Bollens, 2018). Simultaneously, non-sectarian actors can engender new ways of understanding how these spaces can be used through memory work. Therefore, the city's right demands drastic movements to re-establish public space to fight against 'specialized space and a narrow localization of function' (Lefebvre, 1991;382).

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