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Frontier Wars: Violence and Space in Belfast, Northern Ireland

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Frontier Wars: Violence and Space in Belfast, Northern Ireland

Abstract
Belfast seems well known as a violent city; it has experienced a long history of turmoil related to the British invasion and subsequent division based on ethnicity as seen through religion. Although the profile of the city has improved, meaning rising tourism and income, the Belfast Agreement of 1998, as well as divisions between ethnicities continues to haunt the city despite an apparent end to violence, fighting and paramilitary activity. This paper explores the relationship between violence and space as exemplified in Belfast through the 'peacelines' which stand in interface zones between Catholic and Protestant residential areas. As well as being physical barriers, the peacelines are also symbolic of segregation as it manifests itself in other ways; through the ways in which people move through space and the ways in which bodies and identity are reflections of the city. The process of gentrification is also explored in the context of Belfast, with recent literature suggesting that class conflict exists alongside ethnic conflict.

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"The course of instruction treated subsequent historical conflict as the rift between a geographically inspired cultural-economic separatism and outside forces such as Christianity, British colonialism, and capitalism. These interlopers were depicted as undoing what geography had created. This ongoing confrontation was traced to sophisticated political concepts, but its polarised patterning repeated in other forms the geographic splintering of the Ice Age event." (Feldman 1991:17)

Belfast, Northern Ireland, remains one of the most segregated cities in the world (Murtagh 2008). Whilst violence may have been sidelined by politicians in the hope that it might be forgotten, in the borderlands of the city it is still very much a common occurrence. The aim of this paper will be to explore how violence is connected to space, with a particular focus on Belfast. Of course, many other cities are also divided – for example Jerusalem (Israel and Palestine) and Nicosia (Cyprus). However Belfast is an interesting case because its example is often used as a template for successful protection against sectarian violence, most notably US-controlled Baghdad after the invasion of Iraq

(Byrne 2012). The literature also reveals that the physical barriers between communities also belie division based on class and relative wealth as well as politics. There is also an indication that the perception of ethnic fighting and division is changing as new generations take on the burden of conflict.

The first section of the paper will look at the interface zones and peacelines as physical barricades to violence, using work by Feldman (1991), Anderson and Shuttleworth (2003) and Byrne (2012). Following this is a look at how perceptions of prior conflict and ethnic division have manifested themselves in the present day. There is a specific focus in this section on masculine identity, and reference is made to work by Roche (2012) and Lysaght and Basten (2003), both of whom suggest that historical violence has found new forms of expression in the lives of men who were not involved in the conflicts of the past generation. The remainder of the paper shifts slightly in tone in an effort to describe how gentrification has altered the nature of conflict, using work by Watson (2009) and Carter (2003).

Segregated Space in Belfast

The first 'peacelines' in Belfast were constructed in 1969 amid growing inter-ethnic conflict between Catholic and Protestant districts in the city in a period known – perhaps euphemistically – as "The Troubles". As Doherty and Poole (1997) point out, "The Troubles" were not the beginning of ethnic conflict in Ireland, but "the most recent outpourings from an intermittently active vent of violence that

was added to the already turbulent landscape of Irish political conflict by the arrival of immigrant British settlers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (1997:1). Doherty and Poole continue by stating that one of the legacies of the invasion is that in contemporary times, Irish society is still divided along the lines of 'settler-native' (1997:1), with the minority Catholic population being the 'natives' and the English/Scottish Protestants being the 'settlers'. Whilst most Catholics favour a united Ireland, the majority of Protestants wish to remain in union with the United Kingdom (Doherty and Poole 1997).

Feldman (1991) believes that the rise in sectarian violence in Belfast in the late 1960s resulted in huge relocations of working-class populations, with the main sites of movement being "ethnically mixed working class sectors of the city and those small ethnically homogeneous districts that bordered on the larger sectarian enclaves of the opposing ethnic group" (1991:23). Movement was either a result of the fear of impending violence, the result of actual violence or threats, or the residual effect of overcrowding that occurred as people moved to 'safer ground'. In the latter situation, people of differing ethnicity would often be forced from their homes to make way for inbound populaces (Feldman 1991).

Built by the British army, the peacewalls were originally meant as a short term measure, however many still remain despite an apparent end (at least on paper) to the conflict with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Strangely there is no consensus on how many peacewalls

currently exist – the Northern Ireland Office states 53, UK Prime Minister David Cameron stated 48 in 2011, and in 2012 independent research concluded that there were 99 (Byrne 2012). Regardless of how many lines currently exist, Shawn Pogatchnik wrote in a 2008 USA Today article that the number of peacewalls has risen rather than decreased since the end of the conflict. Byrne (2012) posits that this is despite previous attempts by government to reduce the physical embodiments of security policy, including the removal of checkpoints, army patrols, and the phasing out of the "ring of steel," which was designed to protect Belfast city centre from potential terrorist attack (2012:12-13). Murtagh (2008) suggests that in part this is because of the increasing divide between the rich and the poor: "a twin speed city has emerged in the last decade," he writes, "in which those with education and skills are doing well in key growth sectors whilst those without resources are increasingly corralled in 'sink' estates, stratified by poverty, segregation and fear" (2008:4). The peacewalls remain contested; a 2007 survey of residents near the walls found that the boundaries served to promote an air of safety and protection. However the same survey also found that the majority of participants thought that the walls should come down if circumstance favoured it, with only 17% of respondents wishing that the walls remained standing indefinitely (Macaulay 2008).

Peacelines and Violence

In a seminal and classic ethnography of violence in Northern Ireland written

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before the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, Feldman (1991) suggests that the interface zones themselves (at that time, at least) were "spatial construct[s] pre-eminently linked to the performance of violence" (1991:28). Feldman states that riots that occurred at interface zones (before the erection of formal barriers) were a customary way for setting boundaries, citing ceremonial marches as an equivalent gesture for the demarcating of space (1991). In 1968, peace walls were erected along some of the most notorious sites of sectarian violence, effectively separating the two ethnic groups. For Feldman though, the erection of these peace walls did little to halt violence, and if anything they possibly exacerbated the issue. He states "the politically charged interface ceased to be an expression of community identity and began to regulate community experience. Communities became hostages to their barricades and their ossified boundaries, if not actively violated by their spaces of inclusion" (1991:31).

Whereas the interface zones had been primarily a cognitive boundary based on knowledge of local geography, the peace walls were a formal separation imposed by the state. The interface zones were, in essence, contested space and although temporary boundaries were often erected by local residents these were easily broken down. The building of permanent, unbreakable walls was a state effort (either purposely or not) to define and bureaucratise violent space though 'making it safe'. As Hoffman suggests, "states undertake projects of distinguishing the legal from the illegal, the legitimate from the illegitimate, the licit from the illicit. States territorialise"

(2011:8). Feldman draws on Lacan (1977) when he posits that the effect of the peace walls was to reorganise space into a "mirror relation" (1991:35) whereby for each group, the opposite side of the barricade became seen as 'outside', and one's own side became a sanctuary (Feldman 1991). This organisation melds together several cultural strands so that they become indistinguishable and inseparable:

> "… the topographic, the tactical, and the ideological were fused into a mobilising spectacle which channelled the perception and performance of violent exchanges. Political representation and spatial order constituted a single interactive and mutually sustaining social structure for the reproduction of violence. The fusion of the historical and the spatial by new levels of symbolic investment generated the political autonomy of space… within this spatial metaphysic, political interest, utilitarian ideologies, and strategies of political manipulation could not be artificially separated from their symbolisation in topological coordinates." (Feldman 1991:36)

Feldman continues his discussion of the peacewalls by describing the 'sanctuary/interface/adversary' system which he believes should be understood as both a

top-down and bottom-up organisational and classificatory system. That is, that it was both the way the system was experienced and the way it was classified by the state (1991). By keeping violent interaction at the peacewalls, the sanctuary became "constituted by a space that was reserved for residence and kinship" (1991:36). Therefore the sanctuary/interface system was not simply a means of defence against the 'adversary', but also a method of containing confrontational violence in a specific place; "an explicit attempt to territorialise violence, to maintain the institution of the interface as the prescribed place of violence" (1991:37).

Although violence in Northern Ireland has subsided since the IRA ceasefire of 1994 and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 – in which the multilateral relationships between Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom were laid out – for many residents of Belfast, violence is still a day-to-day occurrence. Sluka (2009) believes that despite the Agreement, paramilitary activity still occurs, albeit at a much reduced rate, and that

> "… there is no peace in Northern Ireland now… the peace process has not been successfully completed… the prognosis for the future of the gun and political violence in Northern Ireland is not good. History and Ulster-Protestant political culture strongly suggest that the most likely future scenario is a resurgence of loyalist violence and a

> renewed paramilitary threat, rather than a real and lasting peace." (Sluka 2009:282)

Although Queen Elizabeth II visited Dublin in 2011 as a gesture of goodwill between the United Kingdom and Ireland, Sluka's analysis was proved correct by newspaper reports, including one by Adam Gabbatt and Henry McDonald in The Guardian dated 17 May 2011, of a bomb discovered on a bus on the day of the visit. In a Guardian article dated 16 May 2011, Vikram Dodd and Henry McDonald also report that threats were made to authorities in the United Kingdom of a bomb in central London. In addition to paramilitary activity, Anderson and Shuttleworth (2003) state that low level street violence is also a regular occurrence in Northern Ireland, particularly Belfast.

Anderson and Shuttleworth (2002) believe that left behind after the Agreement is the notion of 'territoriality,' stating "territoriality entails the use of bordered geographic spaces to include and exclude, to control, influence and express relationships of power. It is seen most strongly at national state level but also within regions and more informally or unofficially in local communities and neighbourhoods" (2002:2). In the case of Belfast, Anderson and Shuttleworth believe territoriality "depends on violence, or more immediately the threat rather than actuality of violence, for the enforcement of claims to territory and the exclusion of the 'enemy' may require relatively few violent episodes to induce the necessary fear" (2002:2). However they believe that in contemporary Belfast the consequences of violence are not seen in

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face-to-face combat but in the effect that historical violence has on the everyday lives of people not involved with it directly (2002). Anderson and Shuttleworth believe that whilst statistics concerning residential patterns in Belfast indicate that segregation has in fact worsened since 1998, patterns of employment suggest otherwise (2002). This is supported by research by Shuttleworth et al (2004), which proposes that non-residential relationships such as those formed at work and in clubs and societies were deemed more important than those forged in the residential sphere, whilst mixed leisure facilities also provided spaces in which members of apparently opposing ethnicities could, and did, socialise together.

Through this very brief look at the origins of the peacewalls and the relationship between different ethnic identities in Belfast, we can see that whilst the barriers were originally intended to stop violence, in fact they served to formalise, symbolise, and in some respects heighten, the differences between each side. Whilst politically motivated violence in Northern Ireland has certainly decreased since 1998, more recent research has looked at the effect of historical sectarianism on youth populations within Belfast (most particularly men), and it is that which we shall move to now.

Segregation and Violence

Space is immutably connected to the body. Bodies adorned in a certain way in certain spaces will look out of place, making them wholly visible to those who understand the signs. Speaking of the relation between body and space in Kinshasa, DRC, De

Boeck states "the manner of production of space and time in the city is thus inextricably connected with the production of the body. Body and society reflect and are mirrored in each other" (2004:7). In Belfast, this cultural understanding is the product of a specific history of bodies interacting in space marked out by violence. The ability to recognise bodily markers which connect an individual to a certain space has become a skill which is used almost daily. This happens in a variety of contexts which are not linked directly to sectarian violence but demonstrate how historical segregation expresses itself in the present day.

Lysaght (2002) proposes that working class males in Belfast are partaking in performances of particular kinds of masculinity. Relating this concept to the work of Feldman (1991) and his description of space connected to peacelines as ''sanctuary/interface/adversary,'' Lysaght proposes two slightly different performances within the sanctuary space and outside it. Within the sanctuary, Lysaght posits that performance is based on "hegemonic masculinity" (2002:54) in which males who choose to join paramilitary groups are perceived as being part of a dominant male group, the hegemony of which is reinforced through intimidation of non-members. This will often involve the questioning of the masculinity or heterosexuality of non-paramilitary males, and defining them as people "who avoided doing their duty, leaving it all up to us" (Lysaght 32002:54).

In contrast, Lysaght points out that males who choose to be non-combatants stress the individuality of their actions,

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stating that fights they are involved in are one-on-one and that they are not able to call on "the team" (2002:54) in order to afflict retribution. Lysaght also posits that in fact this form of action (calling on the team) is not an acceptable form of behaviour for paramilitary members: "though the 'team' could be used to teach the non-combatant a lesson, this form of violence is not valued in the official rhetoric of paramilitary organisations which privilege their position as community defenders and honourable men" (2002:54).

Outside of the sanctuary area – at the border and beyond – Lysaght believes that a different performance of masculinity takes place, in which hegemonic and subordinate masculinities become blurred. Stating that fear can be a way of expressing masculinity, Lysaght postulates that in areas external to the sanctuary, "behaviour… is guided by an essentialist reading of space and the people who inhabit it. It involves the adoption of an approach to personal survival that is guided by an assumption of threat regardless of paramilitary involvement or of the reality of patterns of known violence" (2002:57-58). In a similar way to that described by Roche (2012) and outlined above, males in particular become able to judge who is a potential threat based on characteristics such as age, gender, clothes, stature and the places that people are known to be associated with. Lysaght (2002) believes that this results in non-combatants adopting behaviour patterns similar to those of members of paramilitary groups. In this sense then, the peacewalls, as both symbolic and physical differentiators of space, also

impact on the identities of the people living amongst them.

In the context of violence and the perceived threat of violence, people themselves become part of the urban landscape. The threat of violence has an impact on how individuals will negotiate travelling through the city, and a study by Lysaght and Basten (2003) explored how individuals negotiate space perceived as violent, particularly how members of one side of the sectarian divide felt and coped when forced to cross space denoted as belonging to the other. They believe that although fear of violence is often portrayed as being dealt with in a one-time decision, i.e. moving out of the area, in fact supposedly violent spaces are negotiated on a daily basis (2003). The authors suggest that in Belfast although residents often claim that "there is little or no contact with neighbouring districts" (Lysaght and Basten 2003:6), in fact people have fairly detailed information about others who live over the divide. Moreover, this is not strictly limited to leading paramilitary figures but also extends to less high profile individuals (2003). What is clear is that whilst the peacewalls are intended to keep communities separate, in fact the opposite is true. Communities are defined in relation to each other, and moreover, there is regular contact between them. Because of the perceived historical differences between these groups, these interactions are often formed around violence.

Lysaght and Basten (2003) point out that the crossing of 'enemy territory' is not a rare occurrence; in fact it happens fairly

often. More detail is also given about the mingling of different ethnic groups. Based on detailed interviews, Lysaght and Basten suggest that there is frequent interaction between the Catholic and Protestant communities, for example in cross community schemes and confrontation surrounding sporting events. In the latter, rather than hooliganism the authors describe a situation in which the Rangers, a Protestant favoured football team won a match, and men in a Protestant pub telephoned a pub favoured by Catholics in order to taunt them by singing down the telephone.

Individuals develop coping strategies to deal with crossing territory denoted as belonging to the rival ethnic group, the most obvious of which is to avoid it completely. Parents will also instruct children on which parts of the city they are allowed to enter and which they must not (Lysaght and Basten 2003). The authors point out though that "access to shared services necessitates that many people must regularly enter into 'other' neighbouring districts. It may be possible not to use a library, but other daily activities are essential and leave people with little choice." (2003:8) In situations such as this, individuals make use of several mechanisms to reduce the visibility of their ethnic identity, such as not wearing specific items of clothing (e.g. football shirts or school uniforms) and not using certain language by which ethnicity could be identified. Names are often changed or not used, especially certain names that are easily attributed to a particular ethnicity, for example 'Mairead' is a typically Catholic name and 'Billy' typically Protestant (2002).

The authors also indicate that people travelling through areas belonging to the other ethnic group will also follow different paths each time they pass through in order to reduce the likelihood of being attacked (2002).

As well as travelling through space defined as belonging to 'the other', inhabitants of segregated spaces may also have to pass through areas that are categorically defined as 'no man's land', that is, not belonging to either group. Lysaght and Basten point out that in fact, this space becomes sectarianised as it is used, and specific behaviours emerge primarily as defensive strategies. For example, people from one group will walk on one side of the road and cross at a particular set of traffic lights. Knowledge of, and adherence to, these routinised behaviours means that the actions, and the people carrying them out, once more become invisible (2003).

Linking this back to Lysaght's previous work (2002), there is a common theme of people becoming part of the urban landscape, being visible through certain behaviours and markers (e.g. clothes) and invisible through others. The ability to do this, and to recognise others doing it, is a learning process (Roche 2012). It infers a close relationship between the body and the city – this certainly true in Belfast.

Roche (2012) believes that although current violence in Belfast often has sectarian overtones, in fact it is often more related to rites of passage and the process of young people, especially men, in becoming "hardened" (2012:197). Roche suggests that

fighting is a learning process, "helping to cement a young man's sense of selfhood in relation to his own community" (2012:202). The author makes a distinction between 'high level' and 'low level' violence, with the former being related to political aims and paramilitary groups, and the latter to destructive behaviour by youths. In low level violence such as street fighting, insults based in sectarianism may be used to provoke or heighten a fight. More particularly, however, it is through understanding these markers and cues that help in connecting a fighting participant to his peers and also in presenting himself to the person he is challenging. Therefore knowing which insults to use against whom, and what reaction they will elicit, is often more important than the simple use of the words themselves. Young men also learn to identify individuals who may pose a threat as well as the locations to be avoided in order to circumvent conflict (2012). This is a present day manifestation of sectarianism as physically embodied in the peacewalls. "Like an extra pinch of gunpowder, sectarian cues are often used merely to give a situation a 'wee bit more pow'" posits Roche (2012:201), stating that "young people in Northern Ireland should be considered within the historical context of ethno-political conflict and violence that has surrounded them throughout their lives" (2012:207). This suggests that conflict provides an established tradition amongst young people in Belfast, which in many ways is reinforced by the continued separation of Catholics and Protestants. As Feldman suggests, "the past takes objectified

form in the immediacy of spatial cognition" (1991:27).

It is possible to see, then, that male identity, and the forms of masculinity that are displayed in Belfast, are often formed in relation to social divisions as embodied by the peacewalls. More recently, however, a new process of social division has also started to shape this violence: gentrification.

Changing Divisions

The city of Belfast has been changing over the past decade or so, particularly with the rise of a gentrified city centre. As Murtagh suggests, 'the rise of a new middle-class population, disproportionately Catholic, has colonised suburban neighbourhoods, already established wealthy areas, and the gentrified middle-city' (2008:5).

Whilst the gentrification of Belfast is an attempt to move away from its violent past, Murtagh believes that what is occurring is a commercialisation and commodification not only of the city centre as a physical space of consumption, but also of the violent past itself. "Here ethnicity and race are urban assets; a resource to be commodified rather than a problem to be treated" (Murtagh 2008:9). Murtagh posits that neutral, non-offensive images of the past are used to create a vision of Belfast as a safe city. Much of this is imagery is based on Belfast's industrial history, "with the Titanic Quarter and the Linen Quarter joining the Cathedral Quarter and the University Quarter to create connected, if at times unauthentic zones of navigable and safe places" (2008:9). Cebulla and Smith (1995) add that the issue is further confounded by

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the fact that in the process of gentrification, a collapse in Belfast's manufacturing industry meant a large proportion of Belfast's working class community were left dependent on state benefits whilst the city was restructured for a more affluent consumer.

One such attempt to 'reframe' violence through gentrification is described by Carter (2003). In an examination of how different forms of violence are praised or scorned in Belfast – namely boxing on the one hand, and street violence on the other – Carter states that a distinction should be made regarding the ethnic segregation in Belfast and the newer class-based segregation as embodied in gentrification. Carter explains that working class people are often not allowed to enter spaces such as the Odyssey, a shopping and entertainment complex – in Carter's terms a "bourgeois, cosmopolitan social space designed for secure conspicuous consumption" (2003:271). When working class youths are allowed access, they are usually subject to higher levels of surveillance. There is a similarity here with the recognition of markers of ethnicity (Protestant or Catholic). Carter points out that within gentrified spaces such as the Odyssey, specific attire must be worn and behaviour displayed in order to pass unnoticed by security guards, and that deviation from these norms (for example unruly behaviour or wearing soccer shirts) often results in those involved being ejected from the property (2003). In a similar vein to Watson (2009), Carter also suggests that working class youths are sometimes brought to gentrified areas such as the Odyssey so that they are able to

witness 'discipline' and to be part of what is considered a 'civilised' space – to be privy to "appropriate… middle class mores and values" (2003:270).

Gentrification has also changed the nature of violent behaviour. Tying in with the work of Roche (2012) as mentioned above, Carter believes that although street violence in Belfast displays elements of sectarianism, this is not the only aspect of fighting that is worthy of note. In an observation of one particular riot in the summer of 2002, Carter posits that although the Catholic boys who started the riot (by throwing rocks at a bus) covered themselves with a fabricated story about provocation by Protestants, in fact what they had done was to seek the attention of the authorities, who when they attempted to keep the two ethnic groups from engaging each other as is standard police practice, then had the violence turned against them (2003). "That some of Belfast's riots" muses Carter, "contain an element of the celebratory and playful nature of other spectacles was emphatically evident" (2003:261). For Carter, young people's communal violence is explicitly connected to both the past and the present. There is something of a 'trick' going on here. Whilst street riots are usually portrayed by those taking part as occurring because of a dispute between opposing ethnic groups, Carter points out that more often than not, the confrontations themselves take place between young people and the police. With sectarian violence so high on the agenda in Belfast (because of the city's gentrification) the authorities must react to it, but in doing so, they themselves become caught in a different demonstration: one that

speaks against the exclusion of working-class people from "an emerging cosmopolitan Belfast predicated on conspicuous consumption." Carter continues by stating that "their appropriation of public streets for their own agendas challenges bourgeois conceptions and uses of urban space in Belfast." (2003:276).

Smith (2002) believes that whilst gentrification started as "a seemingly serendipitous, unplanned process that popped up in the postwar housing market" (2002:439) it has now become part of the development strategy of many cities worldwide, and "the agents of urban regeneration thirty-five years later are governmental, corporate, or corporate-governmental partnerships… [urban renewal is] ambitiously and scrupulously planned" (2002:439). In this sense, whilst early forms of gentrification were self-governed, gentrification as it exists today is, in many ways imposed on poorer urban areas.

Exploring the resistance to gentrification and the reaction to that resistance, Smith explains that gentrification is seen as 'taking back' or 'revanching' the urban landscape from people who do not deserve it:

> "The emergence of the revanchist city… was not just a New York phenomenon: it can be seen in the anti-squatter campaigns in Amsterdam in the 1980s, attacks by the Parisian police on homeless (largely immigrant) encampments, and the

importation of New York's zero-tolerance techniques by police forces around the world. In Sao Paulo, highly repressive tactics applied to the city's street people are rationalised in terms of the 'scientific' doctrine of 'zero tolerance' emanating from New York. In all of these cases, the new revanchism was explicitly justified in terms of making the city safe for gentrification." (Smith 2002:442)

With this reclamation of cities comes a sense of 'by any means necessary'. The middle class will mobilise any force they can against the working classes who are overtaking 'their city'. Gentrification is a process of making cities liveable, but who they are made liveable for is debatable, since Carter suggests "cities have always been 'liveable' for the working classes" (2003:257). In Belfast, the reaction to this process can be seen in a 'reinvention' of sectarian violence by the working class; a reinvention which mirrors that of the middle class. However whereas the middle class are both capitalising on and sweeping away violence, in this context the working classes are using it as a tool to address the authorities in a different manner.

Conclusion

The literature shows that there is an immutable connection between violence and space. People learn to become visible and invisible depending on their locale and the threat of violence. This is a learned

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experience, and one that is based on decades of segregation. The space around the peacewalls has itself become an area defined not by peace, but by violence. This is evident from the local classification of these areas in terms of conflict – "sanctuary/interface/adversary" (Feldman 1991). The terms 'sanctuary' and 'adversary' imply a fundamentally vicious relationship in that one is diametrically opposed to another – 'the other'.

More recent work infers a different relationship between ethnic groups in Belfast. Whereas it is assumed – and often told – that there is very little interaction between Protestant and Catholic groups, the opposite seems to be the case. In addition, direct conflict between ethnic groups is being reconfigured by young people, especially men. Historical conflict has, at least in part, become a language through which modern day street fighting is articulated. The labels of past troubles become a way in which to incite a person to fight, or to gain an advantage in a struggle that has already commenced. Learning the labels that can add some 'pow' in turn become a way for young people to establish their identity amongst their peers (Roche 2012).

More than that though, historical violence is being reconceptualised by young people as a method of expressing discontent against state efforts to simultaneously 'brush over' and capitalise on the Troubles. As Carter (2002) suggests, this notion of violence becomes one in that Protestants and Catholics are almost working together in a performance that is not directed against the other ethnic group, but is directed more towards the state. Although the two groups are aggressive towards each other, it is a rage designed to ignite reaction in state forces such as the local police. This is an incendiary remark in itself, although the literature is leaning in that way – for example Carter (2002) speaks about how Protestant and Catholic groups will often blame the other for starting a riot when in fact they are to blame themselves, and the intended vehicle for their violence are state forces. Whilst this cannot be seen as the basis for every violent act in the city, it should not be ignored as the basis for some of them.

While gentrification is often promoted as an attempt to combat poverty, in fact it frequently does the opposite – exacerbating the problem and moving it somewhere else, somewhere out of sight. In Belfast this is particularly problematic because the process involves the commodification of a long history of violence, and in many ways it feels like an irreverent progression. Perhaps though, by isolating and coming to terms with this troublesome past, a solution might be found.

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