

**“The person inside it has to be part of it”:  
Empathy, Post-conflict Heritage and  
‘Troubles Tourism’ in Northern Ireland.**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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**Abstract**

April 2018 will mark twenty years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Whilst defined by historic levels of peace, for the people living in Northern Ireland the past two decades have also been characterised by irreconcilable divisions over how to interpret the recent past, and rising levels of ethno-sectarian atavism amongst the nation's interface communities. The informal heritage sector is one area where these issues manifest, where contestations over how to represent the Troubles to outsiders, and within communities, are often described as a 'war by other means'.

This thesis explores the role of empathy in relation to Belfast's Troubles heritage, specifically in relation to the experiences of the 'troubles tourist'. Discussions of empathy's benefits for understanding the 'other' have already been advanced within heritage studies, however what is less acknowledged is its usage as a political tool, which maintains rather than overcomes structural inequalities and power relations. Combining semi-structured interviews with participant observation and autoethnography, this research moves through a range of registers on empathy, analysing discourses of innocence, kitsch, humour and authenticity in relation to the paramilitary museums and black cab mural tours that are a key part of post-Troubles heritage in Northern Ireland.

Through this approach, this thesis takes a more nuanced approach to empathy than is usually found in the literature, treating it as an amorphous and contingent way of engaging with the world that is deeply entrenched in local politics. In doing so, an original contribution to broader studies of empathy is made, which draws attention to the subtle ways in which it percolates through our social economy. This study also has implications for future engagements with Northern Irish heritage, extending questions about the relevance of empathy to the field, and pushing against the general absence of emotionality from approaches to Northern Ireland's past.



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**Abbreviations and Glossary of Key Terms.**

ATIC	Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre
Belfast Agreement	Also known as Good Friday Agreement. Signed in April 1998.
CRC	Community Relations Council
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party -- currently the largest unionist Party in Northern Ireland.
EU	European Union
GFA	Good Friday Agreement (also known as the Belfast Agreement)
HET	Historical Enquiries Team
HTR	Healing Through Remembering
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army – republican paramilitary organisation. Formed in 1974 as breakaway from Official IRA.
IRA	Irish Republican Army (also known as PIRA – Provisional Irish Republican Army) – republican paramilitary organisation formed in 1969 after split with the Official IRA
IRHM	Irish Republican History Museum
Loyalist/loyalism	An individual or group of individuals who use, or support the use of, paramilitary violence to maintain the union.
LVF	Loyalist Volunteer Force – loyalist paramilitary organisation formed in 1996.
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
Nationalist/nationalism	An individual or group of individuals who believe in a united Ireland and reject British rule over the North.
NICRA	Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association
OC	Officer Commanding
PSNI	Contemporary police force in Northern Ireland formed in 2001 after reformation of the RUC.
Republican/republicanism	An individual or group of individuals who use, or support the use of, paramilitary violence to achieve reunification.
Reunification	The removal of the partition between Northern and Southern Ireland to create a united Ireland.

RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary – Northern Ireland police force until 2001.
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party – nationalist Party in Northern Ireland
Sinn Féin	Political wing of the IRA and largest nationalist Party in Northern Ireland
The union	The political union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain
UDA	Ulster Defence Association – largest loyalist paramilitary group in Northern Ireland, formally a legal organisation until 1992.
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment – infantry regiment of the British Army.
UFF	Ulster Freedom Fighters – loyalist paramilitary organisation/ the armed wing of the UDA.
Unionist/unionism	An individual or group of individuals who believe in the maintenance of the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain.
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party – largest unionist Party in Northern Ireland until 2003.
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force – loyalist paramilitary organisation formed in 1966.

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So come, keep coming here.  
We'll recklessly set chairs in the streets and pray for the sun.  
Diffuse the gene pool, confuse the local kings,

infect us with your radical ideas; be carried here  
on a sea breeze from the European superstate  
we long to join; bring us new symbols,  
a new national flag, a xylophone. Stay.

**Sinead Morrissey 'Tourism'**



## **Introduction.**

On an overcast day in early 2016, a small team of contractors manoeuvred their trucks onto a narrow street in North Belfast in preparation for a demolition project which, although nominally centred around the destruction of an eight-foot brick wall, would soon be enthusiastically greeted by local and international media alike as a ‘momentous occasion’ (Moriarty, 2016) for Northern Ireland. Described by one local onlooker as Belfast’s own ‘Berlin moment’ (Black, 2016), a street party organised later that year to celebrate the wall’s demise was hailed by fellow attendee Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness as a ‘sign of progress’ for community relations in the city (BBC, 2016a), and an indication of how far the province had come in the years since the end of the conflict.

Whilst in most cases walls (and their demolition) are rarely the stuff of journalistic dreams, the removal of the one that ran through the Ardoyne/Crumlin Road in Belfast signalled the demise, not only of a physical barrier, which for thirty years had kept two groups of Northern Irish citizens entirely separate from each other but, as some hopefuls postulated, the beginning of the end of the Troubles itself. As is so often the case in Northern Ireland, the excitement generated by the destruction of the Ardoyne wall was less about the physical constraints that it placed on the communities living around it (although these were still substantial), and more about its symbolic value. Far exceeding its material reality, the wall had become a dispiriting testament to the divisions and animosities that have plagued the Northern Irish nation in the two decades since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.<sup>1</sup>

The ‘Troubles’ is the informal term given to the thirty years of civil war that consumed Northern Irish affairs between 1969 and 1998. Involving some 300,000 members of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Good Friday, or Belfast Agreement, is the document that was signed by nationalist and unionist political representatives on April 10<sup>th</sup> 1998 to formalize the ceasefires in Northern Ireland.

British Army, and unknown quantities of guerrilla groups, the Troubles was a conflict that was as ideological as it was brutal, and as much about advancing oppositional visions for the nation's future, as it was about contestations over the past. During the thirty years that war raged in the province, some 3,700 of its citizens, combatants, and British personnel were killed, and a further 40,000 were injured (McKittrick *et al.*, 1999; Hayes and McAllister, 2011). Such figures are of course devastating in themselves, but when compared with the size of Northern Ireland's population, which peaked at 1.5 million in 2000, their impact on the province become even starker. Bernadette Hayes and Ian McAllister (2011) estimate that, were these numbers scaled up to match the population figures on the British mainland, they would actually account for 111,000 deaths and 1.4 million injuries, which would make the Troubles one of the most devastating wars ever fought by the UK government, with the losses incurred second only to those of the Second World War. Meanwhile, the long term effects of this period, in which 1 in 7 people directly experienced violence, and every fifth person suffered the loss of a close family member (Hayes and McAllister, 2011), have left Northern Ireland with the highest suicide rate in the UK (Office for National Statistics 2016), as well as world-leading levels of PTSD (Ferry *et al.*, 2011).

It was during these years, and at certain points in its aftermath, that the so-called 'peace walls' (one of which was in the Ardoyne) were erected at key points across Northern Ireland's cities.<sup>2</sup> Initially intended as a safe-guarding measure, designed to separate the working-class Catholic and Protestant populations who had taken opposite sides in an increasingly ethno-national war (Guelke, 2010), the number of walls in Northern Ireland have actually increased by a third since the end of the Troubles (Belfast Interface Project, 2011). At present, it is estimated that Belfast alone has 98 peace walls, with speculative figures suggesting the total for the entire province might range from anywhere between 109

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<sup>2</sup> 'Peace walls' are the names given to any physical barrier (whether brick, metal or otherwise) that are used to separate interface communities in Northern Ireland (Byrne *et al.*, 2012).

to 116 (Wilson, 2016). The presence of these walls, and several other factors (some of which will be discussed below), have contributed to the supposition that, in spite of the media's reaction to the demolition in the Ardoyne, Northern Ireland is anything but 'post-conflict'.

Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, community relations in Northern Ireland, although more stable than they were at the height of the conflict, are far from perfect. Although no longer always separated by peace walls, many working class communities in the North still live alongside interfaces, where the psychological sectarianism that has long determined relations between Catholic/nationalist and Protestant/unionist communities is given geographic expression in the segregated style in which they live.<sup>3</sup> Thus, whilst these communities may nominally be at 'peace' with one another, their levels of interaction are unusually low, and in many cases the fear, mistrust and anxiety that has long characterized their relationship prevents many individuals from becoming better acquainted with their most immediate neighbours (Shirlow, 2003; McGrellis, 2005; Murtagh and Shirlow, 2006; Jarman, 2006; Byrne *et al.*, 2015).

The British and Northern Irish governments have long had plans in place to improve relations, and most recently declared that they would aim to remove all peace walls by 2023 (Northern Ireland Executive, 2013). However, although there are signs that community relations are improving, and indicators in some areas that this may become a reality in the future, the general picture is still dim, with 30% of interface residents in 2015 suggesting that they did not want their nearest wall to come down any time soon (representing an 8% increase on the total from the previous year) (Byrne *et al.*, 2015). More worryingly than this are the results of a survey released by Brendan Murtagh and Peter Shirlow in 2006, which

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<sup>3</sup> An 'interface' is the term given to the 'common boundary line' that separates nationalist and unionist communities from each other, which often accompanied by a physical barrier, or peace wall, share histories of exposure to high levels of violence during the conflict, and socio-economic deprivation in the present (Belfast Interface Project, 1998, p.4). Shirlow, Murtagh and Graham (2008) have estimated that the majority of the Northern Irish population currently live in areas that are either 80% Catholic or Protestant.

indicated that whilst ethno-sectarian atavism may have decreased amongst some older members of the population, it was rearing its head again amongst 16-24 year olds, many of whom are too young to have ever had any direct experience of conflict related violence.

The existence of these cleavages makes fertile ground for the exploration of empathy in relation to Northern Ireland, which popular and academic literature has often fetishised for its supposed ability to overcome social division, prejudice, and promote peace (Rifkin, 2009; De Waal, 2010; Bazalgette, 2017). Of particular interest in this thesis is the way such cleavages play out in Belfast's informal heritage sector, and empathy's potential to overcome or reinforce them is the main focus of the argument. A proliferation of community sponsored engagements with the Troubles has resulted in a highly contested, and emotionally-driven heritage landscape in the North, which is often described as representing a 'war by other means' for those citizens resistant to the current state of peace (Campbell, 2000; Gilligan, 2003; McDowell, 2008a; Hartnett, 2011; Brown, 2014). Analysing the way that empathy plays out in the midst of such cultural wars provides an opportunity to think more deeply, not just about the possibilities it creates for connection and dialogue, but also its entrenchment in the social politics of division, creating scope for a more critical and nuanced engagement with its effects than is currently offered in the academic literature.

The primary purpose of this thesis will be to map out empathy's limitations as they arise in relation to Northern Ireland's Troubles heritage. Whilst the primary site of engagement will be a considered selection of museums and black cab mural tours in Belfast, it is hoped that the analysis contained here will still provide illustrative examples that can inform broader debates on the role of Troubles heritage in Northern Ireland. In approaching the fieldwork and research for this thesis, the following research questions were considered:

- What is the state of Troubles heritage in contemporary Belfast?
- What role does empathy play in the politicization of Troubles heritage? How (and for whom) is empathy cultivated and withheld through Troubles heritage, and how is it expressed?
- What is the impact of tourism, and tourist emotions, on the development of both Troubles heritage, and the types of emotional engagements at these sites? How does the presence of tourists around key interface areas shape the emotional landscapes of these communities?

As indicated by the last question, where as much of the focus to date has been on the impact of Troubles heritage on the communities that produce it (Crooke, 2001; Graham and Whelan, 2007; Rolston, 2010; Crooke, 2010; Rolston, 2012; McAtackney, 2013; Viggiani, 2015; Hocking, 2015; Crooke, 2016), this thesis offers a departure from the norm by considering such practices within a wider network of global relations, specifically in relation to tourism. The benefits and motivations of this approach will be explored in more detail in Chapters One and Three, however this rationale is in part an attempt to get beyond the stale biculturalism of the ‘two-communities thesis’ that Debbie Lisle (2006) argues has tended to dominate work on the conflict so far.

The other reason for considering Troubles heritage within a globalized context is that doing so also reveals the networks of power that have been central to empathy’s formation as a cultural project. Mediated through my own autoethnographic experiences as a tourist in Northern Ireland, widening the scope of Troubles heritage to focus specifically on ‘troubles tourism’ (*Cultural Tourism Strategy*, 2006), allows me to break down empathy as a concept, and engage with it as a multi-staged, multi-relational process with significant limitations,

rather than a poorly-defined, utopian solution to social division and conflict. In this way, this thesis will also be marking out fresh territory within the literature on heritage and empathy, which to date has tended to take the latter approach in treating empathy as a pre-formulated register that has measurable outcomes and effects, rather than as a complex and deeply situated mode of engagement with the past.

### **Empathy: Definitions and Terms.**

Empathy, Amy Coplan (2011a, p.3) writes ‘has received an enormous amount of attention in the past few decades, appearing in the popular press, political campaigns, and in the study of a wide range of topics’, and yet is still plagued by ambiguity and mischaracterisation. For Coplan (2011a, p.4) ‘the number of competing conceptualisations circulating the literature has created a serious problem for the study of empathy by making it difficult to keep track of which process or mental state the term is being used to refer to in any given discussion’, and she acknowledges that although individual researchers seek to tackle this by offering up a very specific definition for empathy in their work, this is further complicated by ‘the fact that researchers approach the examination of empathy with differing, often incommensurable approaches’. Certainly, it is one of empathy’s many ironies that as Jean Decety and William Ickes (2009, p.vii) observe, although our biological capacity for something akin to empathy has a ‘long evolutionary history [...] the word empathy has a relatively short history, being not much more than a hundred years old’. Quite how the term has evolved and been used in contemporary accounts will be covered in more detail in Chapter Two, however for now it is important to note some broader distinctions and uses of empathy that are relevant for its application to a post-conflict setting.

Firstly, although similar to other emotional and social processes such as sympathy and compassion, empathy is usually distinguished from these by its nature as an outward, rather than purely inward, projection of feeling. ‘Sympathy’, write Nancy Eisenberg and Paul Miller (1987a, p.292) is most often understood as a ‘feeling for’ another, entailing emotions

that are similar, but not necessarily the same as those being sympathized with, whilst empathy is a ‘feeling with’, and often implies a cross over between the experiences of the empathizer and empathized, as well as some degree of exchange between the two. Compassion meanwhile is most often conceived of as a weaker version of both these reactions, which akin to pity, is sometimes entirely at odds with the immediate concerns and emotions of the emotional target, and which Ariella Azoulay (2008) has condemned for its depoliticizing effects. Such terms are often used interchangeably within the literature, further contributing to the general confusion that surrounds them all. It is empathy, however, that has become the especial focus of the recent turn towards emotionality in the academy, and which is most often credited with radical social transformations.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly, within popular culture the virtues of empathy are extolled everywhere. From the politicians who refer to it in their speeches (Pedwell, 2012a), through to the much-celebrated launch of a new ‘Empathy Museum’ in the UK, empathy is consistently treated as a revolutionary way of conducting ourselves in relation to others, as well as a solution to ‘global challenges such as prejudice, conflict and inequality’ (Empathy Museum, 2016). On June 13<sup>th</sup> 2017 ‘Empathy Day’ was launched in the UK by social action collective the Empathy Lab, who argued for its ‘urgent’ need in the wake of the Brexit vote (Empathy Lab, 2017), and set the #empathyday hashtag trending on Twitter. Meanwhile, Forbes ran an article in 2013 extolling the virtues of empathy in the workplace (Boyers, 2013), whilst a number of other articles that emerged across 2016 and 2017 speculated on whether Donald Trump had ‘kill[ed] empathy in politics?’ (Cillizza, 2017). A corporate development business recently set up in the UK creates ‘empathy roadmaps’ for its clients, guaranteed to result in ‘an increase in performance and loyalty both amongst staff and customers’ and

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<sup>4</sup> Whilst this thesis makes a clear effort to distinguish between the usage of ‘empathy’, ‘sympathy’, and ‘compassion’ in the wider literature, there are some cases where authors refer to processes that they attribute to one of the other two, but which are actually more relevant to empathy as understood here. In these instances, these authors’ utilization and explanation of ‘compassion’ or ‘sympathy’ may also be used to further the debate on empathy.

offers to measure empathy levels in any given workplace and ‘systemize’ it for future productivity (The Empathy Business, 2017). What such popular usage of and engagement with the term reveals is that empathy has ceased to be a mere biological, or psychological dimension of who we are, and has achieved the status of a socio-cultural object, which put to a variety of uses and ends cannot, as Carolyn Pedwell (2014, p.xv) observes, be entirely separated from the ‘neoliberal and neoimperial logics’ that define relations in the modern world.

Empathy’s resurgence in popular culture has made it particularly compelling amongst practitioners and academics working on conflict, who often suggest that it can be used to overcome historic divisions and reconcile the most fervent of enemies (Kelman, 1998; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002; Halpern *et al.*, 2004; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008; Rifkin, 2009; Wilson *et al.*, 2009; Zembylas, 2013; Rosler *et al.*, 2015). And yet, on the other side, there are some equally strident voices drawing attention to empathy’s inherent conservatism, and arguing that it engenders a deep capacity for cruelty that cannot be studied separately from the social structures and power dynamics that necessitate it in the first place (Prinz, 2011; Pedwell, 2012b; Clohesy, 2013; Bloom, 2016). Many of these debates will be unpacked further in Chapter Two, however for now it suffices to say that, whichever perspective is taken on empathy, there is little doubt that its over-utilization has contributed to what Carolyn Pedwell (2014, p.1) describes as its ‘ambivalent grammar’ in the academy. Certainly, it is one of the main contentions of this thesis that any attempt to offer additional definitions of empathy only contributes to the white noise already surrounding the term. A far preferable approach, I argue, is to develop some accountability for all these different understandings of empathy, testing them against real-world cases in ways that highlight both the conceptual and material limitations of its existence.

On a basic level, this thesis adheres to the majoritarian consent that empathy is an affective *and* a cognitive process, which often develops in response to the suffering of others. Amy



Coplan's useful overview of these stages is included in Chapter Two, however this thesis intends to move beyond any single definition of empathy in its analysis. Instead, multiple and sometimes competing perspectives on empathy from philosophy, psychology, cultural studies and sociology will be engaged with throughout. These perspectives will be used to unpack the significance of the heritage sites and experiences in question, in a way that responds to Margaret Wetherell's (2012) call for more situated engagements with emotion and affect in the social sciences.

For Wetherell (2012, p.4) the study of emotion in the social sciences suffers from a lack of perspective, where it is prone to delivering 'simple lines of causation, character types and neat emotion categories' above and beyond the 'shifting, flexible and often over-determined figurations' of emotion 'as it appears in social life'. Rather than reproduce such lineal accounts of empathy, this thesis will seek to adapt to Wetherell's epistemological model of 'affective practice', by attending to empathy's configuration within a wider range of emotions, performances and practices than is currently provided in most accounts, and re-inserting engagements with empathy back into 'the flow of ordinary life' (2012, p.77). In so doing, empathy will be discussed within a broader intellectual archive of work on humour, kitsch, victimization, authenticity and spatial affects, and will always be oriented towards a politics of the 'local' (Massey, 1991; Massey, 1993) as found in the post-conflict heritage in Northern Ireland. Finally, attentive to the cultural power invested in empathy, this thesis will also reflect on the ways in which heritage providers in Belfast may attempt to knowingly cultivate empathy's effects in their international visitors, exploring the strategies that are used to achieve these ends.

### **The Limits of Empathy in Northern Ireland.**

Considering how popular it has become in the academy (particularly in relation to conflict), empathy has made remarkably few appearances in academic, or popular accounts of Northern Ireland. A few studies make passing reference to its benefits in fostering

understanding between interface communities (Williams, 2001; Hamber and Kelly, 2005, p.590; Hewstone *et al.*, 2006; McGrattan, 2013, p.17; Crooke, 2016, p.91), however on the whole empathy remains an under-discussed and under-analysed phenomenon in the post-Troubles literature.

This aversion to talking about empathy possibly results from the sheer intractability of the divide that separates nationalists from unionists in interface communities. Indeed, in spite of the fact that desegregation is occurring in parts of the country, and public relations are increasingly likened to a multicultural, rather than ethnocentric form (Nagle, 2009), cities such as Belfast continue to operate on what Brendan Murtagh (2010, p.2) describes as a 'twin-speed' setting, where 'those with the education and skills are doing well in key growth sectors whilst those without resources are increasingly corralled in the sink estates'. It is around these more deprived 'sink estates', (which were also host to some of the most violent episodes of the Troubles), that ethno-national division has been at its most intractable, and where the majority of post-Agreement violence takes place (Shirlow, 2003; Shirlow, 2006; PSNI, 2017). In these areas, fears around inter-communal mixing stem not just from the unknown quantity that is the 'other' community, but also from the known in people's own neighbourhoods, where dissident paramilitary gangs continue to exert a large degree of control over residential behaviours and activities (Murtagh and Shirlow, 2006). The end result of this is that many interface areas are defined by what Bryonie Reid (2005, p.487) has describe as an intense 'psychogeography', which actively shapes people's day-to-day activities, so that fewer than 18% of people living around interfaces areas cross their local peace line on a regular basis, and 82% admit to travelling out of the area to seek necessary services, rather than using ones in their neighbouring community (Murtagh and Shirlow, 2006, p.85).

The continuation of these fears, and restricted mobilities makes it very difficult to talk about empathy at all in Northern Ireland, where for affective and cognitive connections to be

made, there needs to be at least some degree of face to face contact. Rather than prematurely discussing this possibility, most of those working on post-Agreement Ireland have therefore preferred to explore what is commonly known as the ‘contact hypothesis’, which operates on the more general basis that ‘bringing together individuals from opposing groups, can reduce intergroup conflict “under optimal conditions”’ (Hewstone *et al.*, 2006, p.102). Certainly, the work of the Community Relations Council, and several other policy and third sector organisations proceed under this assumption, with Brandon Hamber and Grainne Kelly’s (2005, p.13) report on attitudes towards reconciliation in Northern Ireland noting that it tends to be the most popular model for local community projects. When it comes to Troubles heritage, those projects that have received funding from the EU Peace Programmes are the ones that can demonstrate their commitment to ‘promoting cross-community relations and understanding’ (PEACE III, p.49), meaning that single identity projects that tend not to encourage such contact remain underfunded. This presents a severe challenge to those working within the informal heritage sector, where the memorials, murals and museums that are so central to the single-identity work of ethno-national communities are, because of the psychogeographies surrounding them, less likely to be visited by members of the ‘other’ community, and so don’t usually qualify for public funding.

However, what such overinvestments in the notion of the contact hypothesis can overlook, is the way that physical and psychological boundaries are consistently being transgressed, albeit by erstwhile strangers (tourists) to these communities. The tendency to ignore these transgressions is, Deborah Lisle (2006, p.28) argues part of the general ‘two communities thesis’ that has dominated scholarship in Northern Ireland, and which she laments for its ‘depoliticising’ effects, and tendency to treat cities like Belfast as an exception to, rather than product of, and participant in, the global order. By exploring the relationship between troubles tourism, and Troubles heritage in Northern Ireland, it is argued that this thesis can further contribute towards the breaking down of bicultural academic approaches to Northern Ireland, whilst providing a platform from which to interrogate and discuss empathy’s role in

relation to these spaces and practices. Certainly, the overwhelming presence of tourists at many of these interface areas is undeniable; visiting areas associated with the Troubles has become more popular amongst tourists to Belfast than going to the city's own state-run Ulster Museum (*Belfast Tourism Monitor*, 2014), and 42% of residents in West Belfast feel that their most immediate memorial garden or mural is used more by the tourist population than themselves (Viggiani, 2014, p.203). The question that remains, then, is how the development of empathy is encouraged at some of these key sites, and what role this might play in disrupting or reinforcing the ethno-sectarian feeling and emotional geographies that circulate within these communities.

A certain amount of cynicism will be deployed in this thesis when it comes to expounding on the benefits of tourist empathy for reconciliation in Northern Ireland where, as Sara McDowell (2008a) has speculated, tourists are often used to legitimise, rather than overhaul certain cultural narratives and interpretations of the past. This thesis won't go as far as McDowell (2008a, p.419), however, who argues that troubles tourists indisputably contribute towards a 'conflict by other means'. Such a position seems both dismissive of the sincerity of the connection that tourists can make to these sites and with local representatives and, as Laura McAtackney (2013, p.258) has argued, treats tourists as 'intentionally blinkered or naïve' when it comes to the operation of sectarian narratives. To do so would, as Kimberly Chabot-Davis (2004, p.406) highlights, result in us 'throwing out the proverbial baby (empathy and compassion) with the bathwater' in 'our zeal to avoid celebratory analyses', and almost certainly would end up reproducing those same 'simple lines of causation' that Margaret Wetherell (2012) argues are so ineffective when it comes to social science engagements with emotion. What will be employed instead is a narrative that complicates easy assumptions about empathy's reconciliatory power in relation to tourism in the North, whilst still signposting moments where it appears to arise, mining these moments for their political and social significance. Given the intimacy of some of these moments, and their particularity in relation to my embodied and situational experience as a researcher, this

study situates its findings within the scope of what Jane Gallop (2002, p.2) has called ‘anecdotal theory’, which attentive to ‘exorbitant’, rather than generative models, offers a situated account of the relationship between tourist, and Troubled heritage that ‘honors the uncanny detail of lived experience’.

### **Case Studies.**

For the purpose of this thesis, ‘Troubles heritage’ is broadly defined as any tangible or intangible activity that is connected to the conflict (Smith, 2006). When it comes to Belfast, which is the main focus for this thesis, such a broad definition could be applied to a dizzying array of activities, places and events, from the Orange Order parades that take place throughout the year in various parts of the city (Jarman, 1997), through to the many, sometimes almost unobservable memorial gardens and plaques tucked away on street corners, and in the middle of residential neighbourhoods (Leonard, 1997; Viggiani, 2014). However, for now only two types of Troubles heritage will be explored, both of which have developed out of, and are run by, members of the local community in Belfast, and both of which are of particular relevance to the tourist experience.

The first manifestation of these are Belfast’s two paramilitary museums, which developed within the last ten years, represent what is often regarded as the apotheosis of the tangible heritage economy (Smith, 2006). The Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre (ATIC) and the Irish Republican History Museum (IRHM) (sometimes known as the Eileen Hickey to locals), run by opposing republican and loyalist paramilitary organisations, provide a useful starting point for thinking through how Troubles heritage is politicised, and what the effects of this on visitor empathy might be. Located in the hubbub of West Belfast, the Irish Republican History Museum undoubtedly attracts larger visitor figures than the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre. The Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, however, is particularly interesting for the way it must position itself, not just against the republican narrative, but against other loyalist histories too, such as those offered by the UVF. At times this makes the development of

emotional narratives and empathy somewhat complex for ATIC, where there is a risk that visitor reactions to their story might be too general, and not specific enough to their organisational history to generate the kind of politicised engagement that they are looking for. Both sites are examples of what Fiona Candlin (2016) has termed ‘micro museums’, and will be unpacked in more detail in Chapter Three.

The second ‘case study’ explores the black cab mural tours that run in the city. A legacy of the black taxi cabs that were once used to ferry local residents across West Belfast during the Troubles blockades (Leonard, 2011), the increasing popularity of the murals in Belfast soon saw drivers put their vehicles to other uses, through the provision of private hire tours of the city’s murals and Troubles memorials. Generally (although not always) run by those who grew up around some of Belfast’s key interfaces, the black cab mural industry now dominates the overall troubles tourism sector, with larger companies processing up to 2000 tours a month during peak season. Although professional in their aesthetic (some companies even have matching uniforms for their drivers), and with several drivers having taken professional qualifications in their area, black cab mural tours are generally unregulated, and until 2015 were completely ignored by the Welcome Belfast tourist centre, who have only latently started advertising and selling tickets on behalf of a select few companies. Given the intimate environment that these tours generate, and the personal connection that many drivers have with the history of the Troubles, these tours tend to be emotionally charged, and as the only type of mural tour that makes stops on both sides of the interface, also provide ample opportunities for the development of empathy.

In exploring these ‘case studies’ in particular, this thesis makes a useful intervention into the field in two ways. Firstly, barring a few book chapters and articles that have briefly referred to the Irish Republican History Museum, or explored some of the individual artefacts that it holds (McAtackney, 2013; Candlin, 2016; Welch, 2016), to date no one has offered a sustained overview and comparison of paramilitary museums in Northern Ireland. This is

particularly interesting, given the overwhelming attention that is paid to other forms of Troubles heritage, such as memorial plaques, commemorative marches, and murals (Dunn, 2000; Switzer, 2005; Dawson, 2007; Graham and Whelan, 2007; McDowell, 2007; Conway, 2010; Hartnett, 2011; Hill and White, 2012; Viggiani, 2014; Braniff *et al.*, 2015; Hopkins, 2016; Brown and Grant, 2016; Carden, 2017), and the comparative attention that other community museums such as the Museum of Free Derry have received (McDowell, 2007; Crooke, 2008b; Crooke, 2010; Crooke, 2017). Similarly, research engaged with mural tours in Belfast usually focuses on the much more divisive walking tours, which are run by loyalist and republican ex-prisoners (McDowell, 2008a; Leonard, 2011; Dowler, 2013; Skinner, 2015), or combines both walking and cab tours into a single analysis, making inaccurate assumptions about the overlap between the two that overlooks the realities of the cab tour (Lisle, 2006; McDowell, 2008a; Wiedenhof-Murphy, 2010; Welch, 2016). One such example of this can be found in the work of Sara McDowell (2008a) and Wendy Ann Wiedenhof Murphy (2010), both of whom found that the taxi tours they took part in only showed them the murals on one side of the interface. Whilst this may have been true for their own particular experiences, it is not representative of the taxi tour industry as a whole, where even the explicitly nationalist West Belfast Taxi Association commits to providing visitors with a holistic overview of murals and memorials on both sides. Both authors combine their experiences of these taxi tours with those of the more explicitly sectarian walking tours, which are also run in West Belfast by republican and loyalist ex-prisoners, drawing parallels between the two forms that are perhaps no longer applicable to the ever-protean troubles tourism industry. By exploring black cab mural tours in further depth, and drawing on a wider selection of interviews and experiences than are currently covered in the existing literature, this thesis will provide a more nuanced account of how they work, and establish the uniqueness of what it is that the taxi tours offer to tourists.

The second original contribution that this thesis makes in terms of previous work on Troubles heritage is through its consideration of the interrelations between these two case

studies. To date, there has been very little comparison of how different Troubles heritage experiences might complement each other, which is surprising given how deeply the two are enmeshed. Certainly in my own experience, the paramilitary museums are rarely visited by tourists who are not already in the area as part of a troubles, or mural tour; in the case of the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre, such tours are offered directly by the volunteers themselves, who will take visitors down Newtownards Road and provide them with a history of the area after visiting the museum. Fiona Candlin (2016, p.17) has made a similar observation about the embeddedness of the micro museum in its broader landscape, suggesting that such places needed to be treated as ‘events’ rather than simply ‘sites’, which are continuous with, and a product of, the environments they are in. Going forward, this thesis will also treat both museum and mural tour as an ‘event’, and making links between the two, will attest to their entanglement within the tourist experience.

### **Chapter Breakdown.**

In providing an account of empathy in relation to Troubles heritage that is at once both nuanced, and generative of thick, situated description that can be critically deconstructed, this thesis is structured thematically, rather than according to case study.

Chapters One and Two provide the broader theoretical and foundations on which the rest of this thesis is based. **Chapter One** offers the reader a more in depth history of the conflict in Northern Ireland, charting the rise of tensions between the Catholic and Protestant communities, and connecting these to a history of contested events and identities. Highlighting key moments that are of particular importance in terms of cultural memories of the conflict, this history is then connected to a broader literature on heritage studies, and an overview of post-conflict heritage and its politics is provide in relation to Northern Ireland.

**Chapter Two** expands on the introductory discussion of academic approaches to empathy. Drawing together a disparate set of literatures from neuroscience, psychology, literature and



cultural studies, this chapter provides an insight into empathy's 'ambivalent grammar', and highlights in particular some of its critiques from feminist, critical race and decolonial scholars, which are then connected to its discussion and use within heritage studies. Particular attention is paid here to questions of power, interpretation, and affective accuracy, all of which are relevant to the analysis chapters.

**Chapter Three** charts the methodological challenges involved in undertaking research in post-Troubles Northern Ireland, and explores how those challenges shaped the current form of the project. Consideration is given to the autoethnographic subject and the kinds of methods and writing processes that are used to capture and record micro-affects and the shifting valences of emotion whilst exploring conflicted landscapes.

**Chapter Four** is the first major analysis chapter, which looks at the way that discourses of guilt, innocence and responsibility play out in the paramilitary museum. Highlighting popular accounts of empathy that emphasise its reliance on notions of innocence, critical engagement with the notion of 'organisational innocence' (Jalusic, 2007) is offered, and visitor book entries are analysed to argue for the tourist's role in upholding such narratives. The focus here is on empathy as a cultural construct, and the susceptibility of the troubles tourist to the paramilitary museums' quite proscriptive approach to empathy (as intrinsically connected to innocence) is addressed. Links between these sites' attempts to court visitor empathy, and broader insistence on the legitimacy of their paramilitary campaigns are also unpicked, and connected to broader reflections on heritage's politicisation in Northern Ireland, and the implications this has for reconciliation and justice in the present.

**Chapter Five** develops some of the insights from this previous chapter, highlighting the way that projects of innocence impact visitor interpretation by transforming violent content into 'kitsch', re-positioning tourists as outsiders to the narratives being displayed. Exploring kitsch's ambiguous sociality further, the links between kitsch, and the positionality of the

museum visitor are developed, alongside consideration of the way that its ‘flat affect’ (Smith and Campbell, 2016b) impacts routes to empathy. Here, again, the paramilitary museum is treated as a political tool that is designed to inspire identification and allegiance from its visitors, although ruptures in these allegiances are signalled through attention to object meaning and interpretation, which are mapped out in relation to empathy’s perspective-taking process.

**Chapter Six** develops this tension between troubles tourist as both insider and outsider to Belfast by considering its mediation through humour on the black cab mural tour. Arguing that humour, like empathy, is defined by the transgression of poorly-defined social boundaries and conventions, this chapter reflects on the way that the use of jokes on the black cab tour both highlights these boundaries, whilst creating closer identification between tourist and tour guide. The use of humour to simultaneously create new imaginaries for community relations in West Belfast, whilst acting as a form of ‘injurious speech’ (Butler, 1997) is explored, and connected back to broader philosophical reflections around the pro-social effects of empathy. The possibility that humour (and by extension, empathy) might operate as a form of social control on these tours is also addressed, although the tourist as a disruptive influence on such modes is also unpacked.

**Chapter Seven** is the final analysis chapter in this thesis, and as the most positive, gestures towards the transformative potential of empathy. Drawing attention to the mural tour’s geographic features, this chapter offers an overview of tour guide authenticity in relation to a spatio-affective phenomena that I term ‘affective synecdoche’. Suggesting, (in contrast to many other theorists of empathy) that empathy for individuals need not always be attached to authentic, or sincere narratives, this chapter highlights the way that affective synecdoche evokes a kind of response-able (Oliver, 2001) empathy in the tourist, the effects of which shape tour guide performances, and the broader emotional landscapes of West Belfast.

This thesis concludes by considering the various different critiques and analyses of empathy and Troubles heritage alongside each other, drawing out common themes and parallels, and focusing in particular on the complicated role that the tourist plays as both insider, and outsider to the post-conflict landscapes of Belfast. Further critical reflection is offered on the political impact of troubles tourism, particularly in relation to questions of justice, and a few final speculations about the role that empathy might play in the turn to, or away from justice are also offered. The limitations of this research project will also be addressed, and directions for future research signalled.

### **Language and Terminology.**

A final note needs to be made here about the way that language, and certain terms are used in this thesis. Firstly, it should be observed that, although there is a clear correlation between religious identification and political views in Northern Ireland, these are by no means exclusive or static in nature. There is a tendency amongst some researchers to view the terms Catholic/nationalist/republican as interchangeable, with the same view expressed about Protestant/unionist/loyalist. In fact, as a huge amount of secondary literature now shows, each term has a very specific meaning and is attached to specific modes of identification, and whilst there may be some cross over between those who identify religiously as 'Catholic' or 'Protestant' and who may also support republicanism or loyalism, they are also host to vast discontinuities.

A survey conducted by Bernadette Hayes and Ian McAllister in 2011 that explored public support for political violence confirmed as much, with results showing that community approval of paramilitarism fluctuated significantly throughout the thirty-years of war, and that by 1998, an overwhelming majority (between 69-89%) of Protestants and Catholics had 'no sympathy' for the use of paramilitary violence. Moreover, within loyalist and unionist, and republican and nationalist ranks, there is a remarkable degree of disagreement over politics, as well as deep-rooted factionalism, which makes it very hard to talk of a coherent

‘vision’ or experience amongst these organisations.<sup>5</sup> This continued perpetuation of the view that all Catholics and Protestants supported paramilitary violence, or could now be unilaterally identified as nationalists and unionists is a lazy supposition, and one that often feeds into the two-communities thesis.

Within this project, careful distinction will be made between religious identification and political positioning throughout, with some key definitional terms provided in the glossary. Such distinctions are important not least because as the next chapter explores, the history and heritage of the Troubles in Northern Ireland tends to be monopolised by minority groups, in ways that often excludes wider, or more diverse viewpoints. To overlook these exclusions and fracture lines when discussing the ability of outsiders to empathise with a particular experience would be a myopism too far, and so attention will always be drawn to the differences, as well as continuities of opinion and identification that run through these communities in relation to such contested heritages.

Beyond this, it must be recognised that language is in itself deeply powerful in Northern Ireland. As Liam O’Dowd (1989, p.3) has written, language in Northern Ireland can be used to ‘possess, exclude and express collective solidarity’ with different groups, and as such needs to be treated with caution, lest a researcher be accused of political bias, or being over-sympathetic to a single cause. Dermot Feenan (2002, p.156) has observed that ‘the most likely problems arise in making reference to “Northern Ireland”’, which ‘is the name of the formal political unit created by the Government of Ireland Act’, and which nationalists refer to instead as the ‘North of Ireland’ or simply the ‘North’, and unionists as ‘Ulster’ or ‘Northern Ireland’. Beyond this, other ways of referring to places (Londonderry/Derry), sites (Long Kesh/Maze prison), documents (Good Friday Agreement/Belfast Agreement), and organisations (terrorist/paramilitary) also reveal a great deal about an author’s political, or

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<sup>5</sup> For more on these divisions see: Graham, 1998; Moore and Sanders, 2002; Graham, 2004; Mycock *et al.*, 2011; Shirlow, 2012; Evans and Tonge, 2013; Wilson, 2016.

even moral alignment. Within this thesis, in the interests of remaining neutral (outside of my own emotional reactions to the heritage displayed) such terms will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis, and should not be viewed as an endorsement of, or agreement with any particular viewpoint.

**Chapter One:**  
**A Brief History of the Northern Irish Conflict: From Troubling Origins to  
Troubles Tourism**

This chapter provides a brief history of the Troubles as pertains to contemporary heritage practices in Northern Ireland, followed by a consideration of how contemporary Troubles heritage in the North fits into the broader academic literature on heritage and conflict tourism. The first section deals with some of the origins of the conflict, and ties these to the formative expressions of ethno-national identity that both stimulated and sustained much of the atavism between Catholics and Protestants in the North. The second part of the chapter expands on such identities further, providing an overview of the main actors involved in the conflict, and highlighting some key events and moments which have come to dominate contemporary cultural memories of the Troubles. From here, a review of the literature on heritage, and community heritage will be provided, alongside a more critical deconstruction of ‘community’ in relation to Northern Ireland. These concerns will then be channelled into a more detailed explanation of what ‘Troubles heritage’ is in Northern Ireland, reflecting on how it both intersects with, and resists neat typologies of collective identity and experience, before concluding with a consideration of its more recent manifestation in ‘troubles tourism’ in the years since the peace process.

Given the considerable dissent that surrounds, not just the origins of the Northern Irish conflict, but many of its key events too, the following review of the literature should be considered neither an exhaustive, nor comprehensive historical analysis of the Troubles and its aftereffects, but a broad and general base from which to start thinking about questions of by whom, when and where Troubles memories are being collected and commemorated. Moreover, although occasional reference may be made to the concept of ‘collective’ (Halbwachs, 1950) or ‘cultural’ (Assman and Czaplicka, 1995) memory, given that this thesis is primarily concerned with tourist experiences, whose ‘memories’ of the Troubles are at best ‘prosthetic’ (Landsberg, 2004), such terms will not be subject to any sustained debate

within this literature review, nor will extensive consideration be given to the full scale of memorialising, or commemorative practices in Northern Ireland, beyond those that are immediately relevant to the tourist experience.

### **Troubling Origins.**

Ireland's obsession with the past has, as Ian McBride (2001, p.1) observes, 'become a cliché of scholarly and unscholarly writing' on Anglo-Irish relations. Indeed, as indicated in the introduction, the stereotype of the 'the time-warped character of Irish mindsets' has made its presence felt within academic approaches to the conflict, to the point that Edna Longley (2001, p.223) has claimed that 'history "itself" is indeed structurally to blame' for aspects of the conflict, with debates over the interpretation of key events often reaching unusual levels of virulence amongst various stakeholders.

Consensus about precisely when the contemporary Troubles began is often divided according to whether interpreters believe colonialism, religion, or ethnicity is to blame for its origins (Ruane and Todd, 1996, p.10). It is, however, broadly recognised that the cause for the most recent conflict stems from the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, where concession to growing nationalist demands for Ireland to be wrested away from the English (who had gained control over the country in the 1600s) led, after a protracted period of negotiations, to the creation of two parliaments — the six county 'Northern Ireland' and twenty-six 'Southern' or 'Republic of Ireland' (Ruane and Todd, 1996; Hennessey, 1997; Tonge, 1998; McKittrick and McVea, 2000). Almost immediately after the creation of these dual parliaments, McKittrick and McVea (2000, p.8) observe, the ruling Ulster Unionist party in Northern Ireland set out to consolidate unionist (and by implication Protestant) control over the North by redrawing electoral boundaries. This, combined with the shift to a first-past-the-post style electoral system, led to the significant underrepresentation of Catholic MPs in the new devolved government, the consequent rise of a nationalist civil rights movements, and eventually, to outright war between the two factions.

Before this moment, Ireland had existed as a colonial ancillary of Great Britain where ‘two distinct (if in some degree overlapping) ethnic groups’ emerged during the sixteenth century which consolidated over the next four hundred years into increasing ethno-national atavism (Ruane and Todd 1996, p.24). The settler-native relationship that initially defined relations between the Scottish and English invaders and resident Gaelic Irish gave way over time to a more religiously inflected understanding of community, manifested in the twin traditions of Irish Catholicism and Anglican Protestantism (Ruane and Todd, 1996). The impact of a newly created, religiously mixed Northern Irish State led by a predominantly Protestant parliament was a significant contributor to many of the antagonisms and issues that arose in the second half of the twentieth century.

As a community that has defined itself through its connections (both imagined and real) to the original English settlers, Protestants in Northern Ireland, generally identifying as British, have a long history of fealty to both the ‘Crown’, and have traditionally been the most ardent supporters of unionist politics in the North (McKittrick and McVea, 2000, p.7; Moore and Sanders, 2002). In contrast, Irish Catholic identification with their native ancestors, coupled with the historical oppression and disadvantages that they have faced over the years, has led to a growing nationalist movement within the Catholic community that calls for unification between the North and South of Ireland and full independence from the British state. Although there is a long history of inter-marriage and intellectual exchange between these two groups (Ruane and Todd, 1996; McKittrick and McVea, 2000), by the time of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1921, political and economic differences between the two communities were such that they had begun to self-segregate in both rural and urban areas (Boal, 1969) — a division that effectively allowed the UUP to reshape electoral borders in a way that disproportionately favoured their Protestant-unionist supports in the North.



That Northern Ireland was a state ‘born in violence’ (McKittrick and McVea, 2000, p.4) is a fact that few historians of the conflict dispute. Almost immediately after the creation of the new state, the 1922 Special Powers Act was introduced. Developed in response to the 400 deaths and 2000 injuries that emerged from clashes between armed unionists and nationalists, this Act gave the government ‘sweeping powers of search, arrest and detention’ (Tonge, 1998, p.19), and the ability to intern suspects without trial (a power that in fact lasted until 1972). Under a Northern Irish parliament facing increasing levels of anti-Protestant violence from the IRA in the South, such powers resulted in the overwhelming detention of Catholics during this period, in spite of the fact that most deaths during this period were caused by loyalists (Tonge, 1998, p.20). Compounding this injustice, was the introduction of various legislative acts on employment and housing, which some argue were designed to disadvantage the Catholic community in these areas, and which led to the eventual establishment of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) in 1967.<sup>6</sup> As an organisation, NICRA existed to protest discrimination against Catholics in these areas. However, unlike previous challenges to the unionist government, it had a ‘liberal democratic rather than nationalist form’ and was successful in capturing ‘the public imagination’, as well as garnering significant international attention, and support from a large section of Protestant society (Ruane and Todd, 1996, p.127).

As attention to the civil rights movement grew, so did the agitation of more hard line unionists and UUP politicians. Indeed, whilst many Protestants may have supported the aims and demands of NICRA, the unionist government was actively opposed to the organisation, banning all civil rights marches soon after NICRA’s establishment, and claiming

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<sup>6</sup> Although most critics agree that the civil rights movement, and later republicanism, evolved out of these core issues, there is significant disagreement as to whether discrimination in these areas was intentional. Those sympathetic to the Protestant/unionist community have often argued that the working-classes as a whole were disadvantaged by UUP policies, and that republicans have sought to exaggerate anti-Catholic sentiment of the government to further justify their cause, whilst members of the Catholic/nationalist community see such legislation as evidence that they were only ever second class citizens under a unionist led government. For more on this see: Hewitt, 1981; Tonge, 1998, p. 24 and also Dixon, 2001, p.66

connections between the civil rights group and the IRA (Hennessey, 1997, p.142). Between 1967 and 1969, a series of 'illegal' marches were organised by NICRA and the socialist People's Democracy which further contributed to community tensions, as reactive unionist groups (often spearheaded by Ian Paisley and supported by the RUC) sought to intervene in the marches, leading to violent clashes between the two sides (Hennessey, 1997, p.155). A weakened Terence O'Neill, who had been sympathetic to NICRA's demands, was replaced by the UUP in 1969, shortly after a particularly brutal riot between Catholic marchers and the RUC in London/Derry (Hennessey, 1997, p.161). By the summer of 1969, riots had become so commonplace, and the fatality rate so alarming, that the British government stepped in to help a flailing Stormont. The deployment of British troops to the streets of Belfast and London/Derry on August 14<sup>th</sup> 1969 heralded the beginning of a new era of conflict in Northern Ireland, known as the Troubles.

### **The Troubles: Key Actors and Events.**

Up until 1969, support for the nationalist cause amongst the Catholic community, whilst coterminous with the demand for civil rights, had not yet translated into popular support for armed republicanism nor, moreover, was it explicitly connected to the campaign for reunification (Tonge, 1998, p.38). According to popular legend amongst republicans, Catholics initially treated the arrival of troops with relief, regarding the British Army as neutral mediators in the fight against loyalist aggression, particularly in contrast with the Protestant dominated RUC or B-specials. However, within a few months this relief had turned to outrage. The introduction of curfews in key nationalist areas of Belfast and the fatal shooting of five Catholic civilians soon changed public opinion, and by July 1970 the British Army had become a legitimate target for armed republicanism for the first time in its history (Dixon and O'Kane, 2011, p.29). Amongst unionists, meanwhile, the arrival of the British Army was seen as an undemocratic attempt to interfere with UUP governance— a feeling that was almost certainly confirmed when direct rule was introduced in 1972 (Dixon

and O’Kane, 2011, p.27).<sup>7</sup> One concrete consequence of these mutual misgivings about the British was that previously marginal (albeit aggressive) terrorist organisations on both sides began to attract increasing levels of civilian support from 1970 onwards, resolving the conflict into a triangulated affair between ethno-national paramilitaries and the British state, that was sustained for the next thirty years.

Until this point, paramilitary groups, whilst responsible for 525 deaths between 1969-1972 and a definite source of terror within their own communities, had been relatively poorly organised. Prior to 1969, the main agitators for violence had been the Official IRA, and the loyalist UVF, both of which had emerged out of the political chaos of the 1916 Easter Rising. After 1972, factional politics within the IRA and UVF, catalysed by the sudden rise in recruitment from civilian ranks, led to the establishment of several new groups, including the INLA, PIRA, UDA, UFF, LVF and Red Hand Commando. After 1972, the PIRA, alongside the socialist INLA became the dominant face of radical republicanism after the disbandment of the Official IRA. Within loyalism, sustained feuding complicated unity, and although the UVF continued to dominate areas such as the Protestant Shankill, the UDA was technically the larger organisation, with its membership of 35,000 Protestants and unionists undoubtedly a consequence of its legal status (Tonge, 1998, p.46).<sup>8</sup> The British Army, meanwhile, continued to dominate state interests in the North. Initially a benign ‘peacekeeping’ force, the introduction of the Parachute Regiment in late 1969 marked a significant shift in military tactics from neutral mediation, to active participation in war.

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<sup>7</sup> Direct rule was the process by which, for the first time since the formation of the Northern Irish state, the British government took complete control of political life in the North. This state lasted until 1998, and enabled the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to make decisions without consulting local political parties, leading to a series of increasingly penal actions being carried out against the Northern Irish people (Tonge, 1998, p.76).

<sup>8</sup> Although technically a legal organisation until 1992, the UDA continued to carry out a range of terrorist activities through its paramilitary wing the UFF. Over the course of the Troubles, the UDA was responsible for 408 deaths, where as the UVF killed 544 individuals (McKittrick *et al.*, 1999).

Although the total number of deaths throughout the Troubles is around 3,700, the cycle of violence in Northern Ireland was such that some years saw more casualties than others. 1972 to 1977 are generally regarded as the most violent years of the Troubles, with 1,757 deaths in total, 1,027 of which were civilians (Sutton, 1994). This sudden spike in fatalities, two years into Operation Banner is undoubtedly partially attributable to the events of Bloody Sunday, which amidst international outrage, led to an increase in civilian support for paramilitary forces on both sides (Dixon, 2001).<sup>9</sup> After 1977, casualties decreased again to pre-1972 levels, although the death rate remained in double figures throughout the conflict, and a steady reign of sectarian terror continued to shape attitudes within communities for many years to come. In total, it is estimated that over 35,000 shootings, and 15,000 bomb explosions took place between 1969-1998 (Hayes and McAllister, 2011, p.903), which carried out by a range of actors, account for 91% of deaths during this period (Smyth, 2006, p.8). Although it is not possible in a thesis of this length to discuss every fatality, some key events that are central to cultural memories of the Troubles are sketched out below.

### **Bloody Sunday.**

Bloody Sunday was not the first instance of the British Army deploying lethal force against its own citizens, but it has gone on to become one of the most well remembered, in part due to the extraordinary efforts of the Bloody Sunday for Justice campaign. A civil rights march, designed to protest internment without trial (a practice that had been renewed by the British government in 1971), was taking place in Londonderry on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> January 1972 when British paratroopers opened fire on the crowd, killing thirteen people and injuring fifteen, one of whom later died from his injuries. Recordings of the shootings were quickly fed to newstations around the world, where comparisons with the civil rights situation in America prompted international outrage, and fed the fervour of a languishing republican campaign.

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<sup>9</sup> Operation Banner is the operational name used to refer to the Army takeover of the North.

The shooting, according to Graham Dawson (2005, p.151) represented ‘the most devastating instance of the British state’s use of armed force against a section of its own citizens since Peterloo in 1819’, and after the release of the Widgery Report, which exculpated the paratroopers from any wrongdoing, it was used by republicans to evidence the rampant anti-Catholicism of the British Government. Commemoration began almost immediately, with NICRA organising a march on the anniversary of the shooting to protest the Widgery Report, however this was soon co-opted by Sinn Féin and other republicans (Conway, 2007). To this day, commemorations of Bloody Sunday remain one of the most significant in the calendar year (Dawson, 2005; Conway, 2007; Conway, 2010; Croke, 2016), the organisation of which is intrinsically connected to the Bloody Sunday for Justice campaign, whose efforts led to an official apology from then-Prime Minister David Cameron after the publication of the Savile Report in 2010.

### **Bloody Friday.**

Bloody Friday is sometimes seen as an IRA revenge attack for Bloody Sunday, and a response to the breakdown of talks between Sinn Féin and the British Government (Tonge, 1998). On Friday 21<sup>st</sup> July 1972, the IRA detonated 22 bombs in Belfast city centre, killing nine people and injuring 130. Although the human cost of this event was high, there are few physical testaments to this bombing in the city, which is partly explained by the general absence of memorials in Belfast’s city centre (Switzer and McDowell, 2011). However, according to Kirk Simpson (2008, p.472) this absence is also attributable to ‘the lack of serious historical attention that has been devoted’ to the bombing, where its treatment as a ‘forgotten’ atrocity by scholars, has contributed to feelings of marginalisation and resentment amongst unionists, for whom the city centre has long operated as ‘the ethnic marker of Ulster Protestantism and unionist political territoriality’.

**1981 Hunger Strikes.**

Possibly one of the most iconic events of the Troubles, the 1981 Hunger Strikes saw a shift in both internal and external attitudes towards the IRA, whose reputation had begun to flag by the late 1970s. At the time, some 2,357 men were interned in prison without trial, a significant proportion of which were held on the outskirts of Belfast in Long Kesh/Maze Prison (Tonge, 1998, p.87). Although they were initially treated to special category political prisoner status, the adoption of a criminalisation policy by Margaret Thatcher in 1975, saw the loss of this for republican and loyalist internees. Such a change in policy was of particular significance to the IRA, who used political status to legitimise its campaign of violence, and a series of prisoner protests were soon organised to protest criminalisation.

Such protests initially took the form of ‘blanket’ and ‘dirty’ protests -- the former involving prisoners refusing prison issue clothes, and the latter a more visceral campaign of smearing excrement and other bodily fluids on the walls of their cells. Hunger Strikes, which have a long history as a form of protest in Ireland (Sweeney, 1993), were introduced after the former proved ineffective, and in 1981, after an unsuccessful start, a staggered strike was organised. Running for 217 days, and culminating in ten deaths the first, (and most famous) of these was Bobby Sands’, whose successful election as an MP whilst on strike is a testament to how effective the protest was in revitalising the IRA’s fortunes. This marked, in the propaganda officer’s own words, a shift towards an ‘armalite and ballot box’ strategy for republicans (Hennessey, 2014), and as will be discussed later in this thesis, has proven a powerful political tool for republican Sinn Féin in the years since the end of the Troubles. Exhaustively commemorated in the conflict’s aftermath, international coverage at the time also makes the hunger strikes one of the most well-known periods of the conflict, although this has, as others have noted, often been at the expense of those loyalist and female internees, whose own protests have been ignored as a result (Hopkins, 2016; Lehner and McGrattan, 2012; McDowell, 2007).

**Enniskillen and Omagh Bombs.**

Although they don't tend to attract the same levels of scholarly interest as Bloody Sunday or the Hunger Strikes, the republican-orchestrated bombings at Enniskillen and Omagh in 1987 and 1998 carry a great deal of weight within unionist memories of the conflict. Both bombings were typical of the sectarian tactics routinely deployed by paramilitary groups on all sides, in so far as the towns targeted for attack had high numbers of Protestant civilians, and so could guarantee maximal damage to that community. The Enniskillen Bomb, detonated during a Remembrance Sunday ceremony in the town centre, killed ten civilians and a police officer, injuring a further sixty three, whilst the Omagh bomb, organised during a ceasefire by a PIRA splinter group, killed twenty nine and injured two hundred and twenty. Graham Dawson (2007, p.288) has argued that 'the ruins of the buildings destroyed by the [Enniskillen] bomb, became global icons signifying the inhumanity of the IRA's armed struggle and the suffering of its victims'. However, despite the significance of both these events, and the obvious opportunities that they would seem to provide for sectarian unionist commemoration, as with Bloody Friday, both Eniskillen and Omagh remain relatively under-exploited in comparison with attacks on Catholic civilians.

**The Peace Process and Contemporary Contexts.**

In 1994 after exhaustion on all sides, a ceasefire was tentatively introduced by the British Government, which eventually culminated in the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, on April 10<sup>th</sup> 1998. Entailed in the Agreement were a number of principles designed to ensure peace would last in the region, but which have in themselves become a source of contestation in the years since the signing. Briefly sketched out here, these include the installation of a power sharing executive (organised on the principle of consociationalism), a commitment from the British government to grant the people of

Northern Ireland the right to national self-determination in the future, and the establishment of the Northern Ireland Victims Commission<sup>10</sup>.

As will be explored across various chapters in this thesis, all three of these addenda have, in one way or another influenced commemorative practices in the North. Of particular concern has been the question of how responsibility and blame for the conflict's 3,700 deaths should be allocated — a question which, as will be explored in Chapter Four, is also significant when it comes to thinking through the mediation of empathy. It is also worth noting that another key negotiation point in the peace process was the development of a prisoner release programme, which gave those incarcerated in Long Kesh/Maze prison for paramilitary activity the right to apply for early release. Between 1998 and 2012, 506 such applications were approved, meaning that the many of those directly responsible for civilian deaths are now living alongside victims and their families (Democratic Progress Institute, 2013). Such a move has not only had a significant impact on people's faith in the justice system but, as will shortly be explored, it has also created a unique environment for the development and control of grassroots heritage projects.

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<sup>10</sup> Consociationalism is the political philosophy by which ethnically divided societies are governed by a set of four main principles, among which is the commitment to the creation of an executive power sharing model for parliament or government. This model ensures that each of the main communities involved in a dispute are guaranteed to a proportional representation of MPs in power, as well as in other areas of cultural and social life that matter, and they are also given the right to veto any changes to law or the status quo that might negatively affect their community whilst remaining independent of British adjudication on these matters (see: McGarry and O'Leary, 2004 for more on this). Within Northern Ireland, class and ethno-national divisions have meant that since 1998, Stormont has been dominated by Sinn Fein and the DUP, both of whom represent the most politically extreme versions of unionism and nationalism, and both of whom have longstanding links to paramilitary forces. For Sinn Fein in particular it is well known that many of their current ministers are themselves former IRA commanders. Consociationalism in Northern Ireland has come under significant criticism because of the barrier that it currently seems to pose to more moderate parties and politics that might actually enable proper mediation on key issues related to the Troubles legacy (McGrattan, 2012; Jarrett, 2016)



### **Heritage Studies.**

Heritage, writes Laurajane Smith (2006, p.11), ‘is not so much a “thing” as a set of values and meanings’ which shaped by ‘a cultural and social process [...] engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present’ (2006, p.3). Prior to the publication of Smith’s monograph, the tendency within the field was to focus on the ‘grand’ narratives of heritage’s relationship to the past, exploring themes and issues relevant to national identity and public legislation, usually to the neglect of the smaller, more localised ways in which heritage is developed, used and contested in everyday social settings (Carman and Sørensen, 2009). For Smith (2006, p.11), the overlooking of these more grounded examples of heritage, which could range from anything from a family heirloom, through to a local woodworking method, is symptomatic of the dominance of what she refers to as the ‘authorised heritage discourse’, which defined as a ‘hegemonic discourse about heritage’ has, Smith argues (2006, p.31), traditionally conceived of heritage as a discrete ““site”, “object”, building or other structure with identifiable boundaries that can be mapped, surveyed, recorded, and placed on national or international site registers’. Opposing this hegemonic approach, Smith (2006, p.11) countenances that ‘there is, really, no such thing as heritage’, and argues that further attention should be paid to the ““work” that heritage “does” as a social and cultural practice’. Such ‘work’ is (as will be shortly explored) of particular pertinence to the development and use of Troubles heritage in Northern Ireland, and will be one of the key themes of this thesis.

As a discipline, heritage studies is often regarded as being all-encompassing, and yet strangely conservative field of study, which although influenced by the critical turn within museology (Witcomb and Buckley, 2013), has continued to place quite strict parameters on those practices and things it considers to be heritage (Albert, 2013). Early in the discipline’s formation, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995, p.370) observed that heritage was a “value added” industry’, in which values of ‘pastness, exhibition, difference, and where possible indigeneity’ were invested in obsolete assets, through the process of exhibition and display.

Taking Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1995, p.370) subsequent observations about the importance of heritage as 'a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past', David Lowenthal (1997, p.1-3) later described it as a 'cult', which 'outpac[ing] other modes of retrieval' such as history and tradition had, he argued, become symptomatic of a narcissistic obsession with our 'earlier selves'.

Certainly at the time of both authors' observations, there had been, as Carman and Sørensen (2009) note, a 'boom' in the heritage industry (Harrison, 2013, p.581), which stimulated by the formation of presiding bodies such as English heritage and the introduction of several National Heritage Acts, gave credence to the idea that the past was being colonised by a sudden onslaught of 'heritage-speak' (Lumley, 2005, p.20). However, since its tentative emergence in the 1980s and 90s (marked by the publication of Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country*), heritage studies has gradually shifted focus from a concern with objects and places, through to the increasingly popular field of 'intangible' heritage, which takes into account the memory-work built into the performances and rituals that inform more local identities and senses of place (Harvey, 2008; Carman and Sørensen, 2009).

As the definition of heritage has grown, so too has the number of things bearing its insignia. UNESCO currently lists 1,502 examples of tangible and intangible global heritages that it considers to be of 'outstanding value to humanity', with 62 of those added in 2016 alone (UNESCO). Rodney Harrison (2013, p.580) has criticised this development, suggesting that by assigning a protective cultural value to too much, 'we risk being overwhelmed by memory'; rather than preserving memory 'we have let heritage accumulate on registers and lists without thinking about what work it does in the present' (Harrison, 2013, p.587). However, his arguments, whilst cogent of heritage as a social process, do not quite take into account the importance that the designation of something as 'heritage' can have on a local, communal level, and thus risks becoming part of the more glib authorised heritage discourse that Laurajane Smith warns against. Certainly, when it comes to community heritage (that

subcategory of heritage studies that Elizabeth Crooke [2008a, p.415] suggests is ‘often referred to but rarely defined’), the impact that designating something as ‘heritage’ can have in terms of local politics, agency and identity is not to be underestimated, not least because as a key part of the modern ‘knowledge economy’ (Graham, 2002), heritage is invested with significant amounts of social, symbolic and political power.

### **Community in Northern Ireland.**

‘Community’ is, as Benedict Anderson (1983) has famously observed, a highly deceptive term which, deeply implicated in the formation of nation-states and nationalisms, has very few defining qualities or identifiers. Consequently, Anderson (1983, p.6) argues, ‘communities should be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined’, noting that:

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.

Similarly, Gerard Delanty (2003, p.152) has also articulated the fragility of the thing that we call ‘community’, as an unstable mode of belonging that ‘fluid, very open and highly individualised’, is replete with fractures and inconsistencies. And yet as Stuart Hall (1994) has observed, within social and cultural studies, essentialised notions of community are continuously returned to in the academic literature, in ways that reinforce the homogeneity of the term, and prohibit or ignore expressions of difference.

Heritage studies is no stranger to these essentialisms, where according to Waterton and Smith (2010, p.7) ‘the theoretical aspects of the term [community] are less advanced than they ought to be’ and community is often invoked to describe a ‘seemingly homogenous collective defined by ethnicity, class, education or religion’ (Waterton and Smith, 2010, p.5).

Whilst this may be true for those pedestrian and top-down modes of community engagement employed by large cultural institutes where, as Waterton and Smith (2010, p.7) write, the term community 'is used with impunity' to 'other' those outside of the official sector, Elizabeth Crooke argues (2007a; 2010) that the same cannot be said of grassroots community initiatives, where the development of local heritage projects create infinitely more anarchic and reflexive engagements with community than those described by Waterton and Smith. Such an approach to community heritage (as a grassroots, anarchic movement) is particularly prevalent in Northern Ireland at the present time, where the absence of any formal memorial or physical testament to the conflict means cultural representations of the Troubles are generally orchestrated on a local level, by those who suffered the worst of its effects (Crooke, 2007b).

It is noticeable, however, that whilst the practices of community heritage in Northern Ireland may be anarchic, the writing about it frequently isn't, and too often as Deborah Lisle (2006, p.28) observes, work on Northern Irish culture falls into what she describes as the 'two-communities' thesis. Perpetuating binaristic notions of an endemically opposed and continuous Catholic and Protestant population, the two-communities thesis 'hides, covers over, the complex and competing networks that function throughout the urban landscape' of Northern Ireland, creating a cyclical programme of self-confirmation that can actually perpetuate tensions between the dominant ethno-national groups. In reality, community in Northern Ireland is, as several researchers have argued, much more diffuse, hybrid and unstable than these accounts let on. Recent accounts of the Troubles have begun to draw attention to those 'alternative' communities or types of cultural identity whose narratives have been inexplicably erased by the machismo of the two-communities approach. These may be racialised (Olorunda, 2013; Prince, 2015), gendered (McDowell, 2008b; Braniff and Whiting, 2017) or queered (Conrad, 2001; Conrad, 2007), and very often transgress the usual boundaries marked out by interface politics. Nevertheless, the vitality of the two-

communities model is such that it continues to be consolidated through its perpetuation both within the official heritage sector, and those writing about it on the 'outside'.

Whilst Troubles heritage in Northern Ireland undoubtedly falls into what Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) initially described as 'dissonant heritage', and which Sharon MacDonald (2009) later refined into the concept of 'difficult heritage', unlike other nations recovering from conflict, such difficulties have not been mediated through the seemingly 'neutral' governmental institutes usually tasked with remembering the past but are, by and large, engaged with on a more local level, by those who suffered the worst of its effects. This is partly a matter of precedence in Northern Ireland where, as Elizabeth Crooke (2008b, p.300) writes, 'the public representation of the past [...] has never been the single domain of the "official" museum and heritage sector'. However partly also, this reluctance to address the recent past in more formal institutions also stems from fears around the seemingly intractable divisions that a two-communities approach poses to historical interpretation, which has made providing neutral representations of the Troubles seem an all but impossible task (Crooke, 2001; 2008b).

Indeed, in spite of the fact that theoretical blueprints for a public Troubles memorial were agreed upon early in the peace process (Bloomfield, 1998), twenty years on it has yet to materialise. When it comes to developing an appropriate memorial to the conflict, the challenges for state officials are two-fold. Firstly, Northern Ireland is, as Edna Longley (2001) has highlighted, hostage to its own history, and oppositional interpretations of the past have frequently been the fuel for contemporary conflict amongst loyalist and republican groups. Whilst the initial cause of the conflict can be attributed to these differential

understandings of history,<sup>11</sup> interpretations of recent events are also contested, so that memorialisation of key moments such as Bloody Sunday, or the Enniskillen bomb, in which there were clear victims and aggressors, are becoming increasingly detached from the lives of those most immediately affected (Conway, 2007; McGrattan, 2013). It was for this reason that attempts to turn the former Long Kesh/Maze prison site into a 'Troubles Museum' and peace memorial were abandoned in 2013, over longstanding concerns from the DUP that it could too easily become an exclusive shrine to republican hunger strikers (Graham and Whelan, 2007; McDowell, 2009; Flynn, 2011). Since then, plans to develop a shared memorial or shrine to the conflict have reached a stalemate, leaving the task of commemoration to the largely unregulated community sector.

### **Troubles Heritage in the Community.**

In lieu of a centralised strategy for remembering the Troubles, several grassroots initiatives have arisen which, purporting to be the product of communal thinking, are more usually the handiwork of paramilitary groups and their allies (McDowell, 2007; McDowell and Switzer, 2011). A recent study from Kris Brown and Adrian Grant (2016) surveying different forms of Troubles' commemoration in Northern Ireland revealed that 76% of all commemorative activities organised between 2009-2014 were controlled by groups affiliated with paramilitarism. Such findings are unsurprising given, as Emily Pine (2011, p.103) has observed, that republicans began memorialising their history well before the conflict's denouement, whilst loyalists have been at the helm of mural painting since the early twentieth century (Rolston, 2003b). Such activities are, however, an anathema to the actual distribution of victims during the Troubles, where 54% of the dead had civilian status, and 83.1% of all deaths were the result of paramilitary activity (Smyth, 2006). The extent of

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<sup>11</sup> For example, whilst for nationalists/republicans the Troubles were the outcome of British colonial policy in Ireland, which not only saw the original Irish Catholics suffer under imperial rule in the sixteenth century, but also saw their continued repression in the twentieth, loyalists/unionists believe such interpretations to be overblown, and have in fact started to view themselves as the victims of a slow genocide, with demands for Irish unity part of a long term strategy to drive their community out of Ireland altogether. See: Ruane and Todd, 1998; MacGinty, 2004; Graham, 2004.

paramilitarism's responsibility for these deaths has made its dominance in cultural representations of the conflict a source of rancour amongst both academics and activists, where there are fears that they can be used to re-write history in a way that justifies, and even glorifies terrorist activity (Graham and McDowell, 2007; McDowell, 2007; McDowell and Switzer, 2011; Lehner and McGrattan, 2012; Hill and White, 2012; McGrattan, 2013; Brown, 2014; Radford, 2017).

In terms of the geography of Troubles heritage, most murals, memorials, and commemorative activities are located around Northern Ireland's major cities (although there are some exceptions to this rule) (McDowell, 2007; Nash *et al.*, 2013; Viggiani, 2014), where they are particularly concentrated in interface areas. This is unsurprising, given that these neighbourhoods are where some of the most violent episodes of the Troubles took place, and having experienced the highest concentration of deaths over the thirty years, they have also been the slowest to recover from the conflict (Smyth, 2006; Viggiani, 2014; Braniff *et al.*, 2015). However, the effect of this scattered aggregation of memory is as Switzer and McDowell (2009, p.350) highlight, that these cities take on an 'almost schizophrenic' feel, as 'a city that wipes virtually all evidence of the Troubles from its newly polished centre' stands in stark contrast to the 'the murals, monuments and painted kerbstones of some of its residential suburbs'. Such a strategy, Bree Hocking (2015, p.8) has argued, is far from accidental, and is increasingly becoming part of a neoliberal 'civic identikit' developed by council officials who want to re-brand Northern Ireland's cities as modern, welcoming metropolises. Although there are some examples of publicly funded artworks being developed in Belfast city centre, which are intended to reflect shared experiences of the conflict these tend not, Hocking (2015) argues, to be engaged with by those for whom the Troubles remains most painful and divisive.

In those interface areas where Troubles heritage proliferates, it comprises of a number of different physical structures and activities which are, Viggiani (2014, p.68) argues 'localised

in nature, to the extent that almost every working-class area can boast its own memorial'. Most famous are the murals which dominate Belfast and London/Derry's urban landscapes, and which commemorate a range of individuals and events, from the 1981 hunger strikes, to Stevie "Top Gun" McKeag (a UDA commando famed for the number of Catholics he killed during the Troubles). Once functioning as territorial markers for paramilitary groups, where they were used to intimidate members of the opposing community, and unify groups within communities (Sluka, 1996; Jarman, 1997; Murray, 2014; Barber, 2014), the advent of a series of 're-imaging' projects has seen the inherent militarism of these murals shift. Although paintings of balaclava-clad, gun-toting men are still a notable presence in many loyalist areas (reflecting a general shift towards a 'siege mentality' amongst these communities [Rolston, 2003b; Rolston, 2010; Bryan *et al.*, 2010]), murals are increasingly being developed for audiences without direct experience of the conflict, where they are used to re-shape perceptions of 'post-peace' republicanism and loyalism (Rolston, 2003b; McCormick and Jarman, 2005; McDowell, 2007; Hartnett, 2011; Hill and White, 2012). Alongside these stand various memorial plaques and gardens of remembrance which, funded and designed by paramilitary groups, serve to remind visitors of the names of all those killed, albeit in a highly selective manner (Graham and Whelan, 2007).

On a museological level, community-run sites dedicated to the Troubles are less common, given the time and expense involved in setting up and sustaining a museum. Where these do exist, they are sectarian in form, and again under the control of those sympathetic to paramilitarism. At present there are two established republican museums in Belfast (the Irish Republican History Museum and Roddy McCorley's Museum), two loyalist museums (the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre and the ACT Initiative's UVF Exhibition) and an Orange Order Museum which has sites in Belfast and Loughall.<sup>12</sup> With the exception of the

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<sup>12</sup> At the time of writing this, plans were also being developed for a Red Hand Commando museum to be opened on the Newtownards roads.



ACT Exhibition and Orange Order museums, all these museums are again funded by paramilitary groups and their allies, and are entirely out of governmental control.

Beyond this, only a few projects organised across Northern Ireland are truly civilian in nature, amongst which is the Museum of Free Derry in London/Derry (Kerr, 2011; McDowell and Switzer, 2011; Crooke, 2012), the 'Garden of Light' Omagh bomb memorial (Johnson, 2011) and a permanent monument due to open in Enniskillen to the victims of the 1987 explosion (Black, 2017). Such initiatives tend to be few and far between, not least because the death of civilians were often appropriated and incorporated into the more militant memorials organised by the IRA, UDA and UVF (Graham and Whelan, 2007). One inevitable consequence of the concentration of Troubles heritage in urban areas, is that it has opened up the possibility of engagement with these sites to international visitors. So popular have some of these become within this demographic, that in recent years the practice of visiting areas blighted by conflict has been formalised into what is now controversially known as 'troubles tourism' (*Cultural Tourism Strategy*, 2006).

### **Defining Troubles Tourism.**

In spite of the sudden flurry of interest it has received from the media (Calder, 2007; de Sola, 2011; Jenkins, 2012; *Daily Mail*, 2014; O'Doherty, 2016) the concept of 'troubles tourism' actually predates the end of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Once a key activity, not just for journalists, but some braver tourists to the North, the practice of visiting urban areas divided by war to examine the peace walls and murals grew in popularity in the late 1980s and 1990s, in spite of the precarity of Northern Ireland's multiple ceasefires (Rolston, 1995b; Jarman, 1996; Thompson, 1999; Boyd, 2000). After the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, and in line with the general revival of tourism to Northern Ireland's shores (Neill, 2001), visits to areas scarred by conflict continued to grow in popularity, so that by 2007, some 9% of tourists admitted that they had been driven to visit by 'curiosity' about the Troubles (*Belfast Tourism Monitor*, 2007). These figures are further increased when a

precise breakdown of tourist activities to the major cities is considered, with recent tourism monitors for Belfast suggesting that around 5% of non-Northern Irish visitors take part in a mural tour whilst in Belfast (Tourism Northern Ireland 2014), and a further 21% visit ‘areas associated with the Troubles’ (*Belfast Tourism Monitor*, 2014). And yet, despite the popularity of Troubles-related heritage and activities amongst international visitors, both Belfast City Council, and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board have been reluctant to embrace attempts to formalise the tourist industry in these areas, fearing that it could obstruct their attempts to rebrand Northern Ireland as a desirable ‘post-conflict’ destination (Wiedenhof-Murphy, 2010).

The practice of visiting areas blighted by death and conflict usually comes under the rubric of ‘dark’ (Lennon and Foley, 1996) or ‘thana’ tourism (Seaton, 1996). The literature around dark tourism is diffuse, and there are several debates over which sites and practices should be included into this category.<sup>13</sup> However, it is most commonly associated with ‘the visitation to any [atrocious] site [...] for remembrance, education or entertainment’ (Lennon and Foley, 1996, p. 195), and a desire to confront death (Seaton, 1996). A ‘dark tourism’ framework has been applied to the activities of troubles tourists by a number of practitioners and academics (Causevic and Lynch, 2007; Causevic and Lynch, 2008; Wiedenhof-Murphy, 2010; Nagle, 2012; Skinner, 2015; Black, 2016), who often point to guides’ explicit focus on death, and macabre tales of violence, as justification for its inclusion in this category.

However, for many councillors and tour providers in these areas, the description of their activities as ‘dark’ is morbidly offensive, and suggests a more commercialised, less sincere engagement with recent history than they feel they offer. In 2012, MLA for West Belfast Paul Maskey vocalised these concerns during an interview for the independent news site

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<sup>13</sup> For a systematic review of the various debates about, or definitions of dark tourism see: Hartmann, 2014; Ashworth and Rami, 2015; Light, 2017

EamonMallie.com, where he speculated that the ‘very use of the term dark tourism’ had been popularised by troubles tourism’s opponents in an attempt to justify the NITB’s lack of investment in the area. On that basis alone, many guides I spoke to during the course of this thesis explicitly spoke of their preference that such tours be referred to as ‘cultural’ or ‘political’ tourism, aligning it more closely with the broader category of ‘heritage tourism’ (Yale, 1991; Boyd and Dallen, 2003).

That troubles tourists are also viewed as consumers of heritage is something that plenty of academics also take for granted when studying tourist activities in the North (Boyd, 2000; Dowler, 2013; Skinner, 2015; Boyd, 2016; Simone-Charteris and Boyd, 2011; Murtagh *et al.*, 2017). Simone-Charteris and Boyd (2011) place the visitation of sites identifiable with conflict in the same category as religiously motivated travel, suggesting there is a high degree of overlap between the two in Northern Ireland, whilst a recent study from Brendan Murtagh, Peter Shirlow and Philip Boland (2017) looking at the activities of tourists to London/Derry during its year as City of Culture, also makes very little distinction between the history of recent conflict in the city (as expressed by murals, memorials and community museums), and its wider ‘AHD’ type heritage attractions, such as the city walls. Certainly, the way that tourists consume Troubles heritage affirms these positions, with work from Causevic and Lynch (2008) suggesting that ‘dark tourism is not a motivator’ for the majority of international visitors to Northern Ireland’s mural and memorial sites, who they argue usually stumble on these places and onto these tours whilst in the cities for other reasons. In Murtagh *et al.*’s (2017) study too, there appears to be some degree of cross over between the dark tourist, and ‘regular’ heritage tourist, with their survey revealing that whilst only 19% could be accurately considered ‘troubles tourists’, 61% of visitors declared an interest in how in the history of the Troubles had shaped the city. For the purposes of this thesis, troubles tourism in Northern Ireland will be considered as an example of both heritage and

dark tourism in light of what Duncan Light (2017, p.294) observes is the ‘increasing convergence’ between the two.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Politicisation of Troubles Tourism.**

Although Northern Ireland’s tourist industry suffered a significant setback during the years of the Troubles (Boyd, 2000), by 2014 visitor figures had recovered from their post-1969 dip and doubled to over 2 million (Northern Ireland Tourist Board, 2015). So important is contemporary tourism to the Northern Irish economy that it has, according to Bree Hocking (2016, p.369), become the key motivator for urban regeneration as ‘the post peace process imperative to meet the tourist gaze has spurred massive private-public redevelopment projects’. This same sense of urgency to match the expectations of the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry and Larsen, 2011) is also found in the informal Troubles heritage economy, where Sara McDowell (2008a, p.406) has argued ‘agents within local communities such as community or ex-prisoner groups see the landscape as a political tool through which they can vie for external support and sympathy’.

Certainly, McDowell’s accusations seem well founded when contrasted with data released by a 2014 NITB survey, which apparently indicated that mural tours are only engaged with by foreign visitors (Tourism Northern Ireland, 2014). Although anecdotally (and methodologically) such findings can and have been disputed, the heavy reliance that tour providers and creators of Troubles heritage have on international visitors for business would increase the likelihood of them changing their narratives to court these audiences, in ways which can alienate other members of the local community. The increasing adaptation of these sites for an external audience is, McDowell (2008a, p.406) reasons a politically strategic device, in which paramilitary owned and run tour groups ‘conditio[ns] an external audience to interpret and remember the Troubles in a certain way’, with the presence of

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<sup>14</sup> See also: Ivanova and Light (2017) for work on tourist motivations to ‘lighter’ dark tourism sites that also highlights this convergence.

tourists in these areas ‘work[ing] to reinforce both the legitimacy of the landscape in question and the narratives being evoked’, so that ‘Republican and Loyalist symbolic landscapes can be sold as Republican places or Loyalist places’. Given the uncertainty that surrounds Northern Ireland’s future, the suggestion that those mining tourism for its political effects are also the ones who are most invested in, or fearful of, any future changes should come as no surprise.

Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland’s paramilitary parties have been locked in something of a political stalemate. One of the key tenets of the Good Friday Agreement was that, along with proportional and fair representation in government, citizens of Northern Ireland would be given the right to determine the future of their country through a referendum on reunification at some point in the nation’s future. However, an often overlooked clause in the Agreement states that, whilst the right to host this referendum could occur ‘at any time it appears likely to him that a majority of those voting would express a wish’ to do so’ (Belfast Agreement, 1998), permission to grant this vote could only come from the Northern Irish Secretary of State themselves, who is always directly tied to British government. As recent as 2016, the Northern Irish Secretary of State denied a motion from Sinn Féin to hold such a referendum in the wake of the Brexit vote, citing a lack of support for the motion in the polls as her reason for doing so, and overlooking Sinn Féin’s arguments that the decision to leave the EU was a threat to the rights of nationalists who wanted to retain their Irish connections (McDonald, 2016).

Given the intransigency of the British state on this issue, and the fact that granting a referendum on Irish unity would almost certainly be career suicide for any Northern Irish Secretary of State, it is often understood by both republicans/nationalists and loyalists/unionists that the hosting or withstanding of a referendum will come from external, rather than internal pressures. Certainly, it is well known that Sinn Féin spends a vast portion of its time courting voters in Southern Ireland, and that its ‘effort to ensure that Ireland’s

self-determination features on the international agenda is not new' (Maillot, 2005, p.129). It is, however, also well recognised on both sides that the Northern Irish Troubles took place in a heavily globalised context, with several international bodies having vested interests in the maintenance of peace on the island to this day (Ruane and Todd, 1996; Buchanan, 2017).<sup>15</sup> Continuing to sell their own particular version of events to these international bodies through the medium of tourism is therefore a logical extension for those paramilitary groups who support the aims of nationalism and unionism, but who no longer have recourse to violence, and one of the routes through which national self-determination will either be prevented or achieved. Troubles heritage should therefore be seen, not just as a reflection of the identities and experiences of the past, but a projection of the hopes and aspirations for the future, with troubles tourists playing a key role in the shape that this future takes.

## **Conclusion**

So far, this chapter has provided an overview of some of the key tensions and moments that led to, and sustained the thirty-year conflict in Northern Ireland, and the contested heritages that have emerged in its aftermath. Specific areas of academic interest that have been highlighted include the bonds between contested heritage, and contested communities that now dominate Northern Ireland, and the politicisation of such heritage in the absence of 'neutral' cultural representations of the Troubles.

Many of these points will be developed and unpacked further throughout subsequent chapters in this thesis. However, one theme that has been touched upon, but not yet made explicit, is the basic challenge that increased tourist participation in Troubles heritages poses to the notion of the 'two-communities thesis'. The specifics of these challenges will be unpacked more fully in Chapter Seven through a discussion of spatialisation and affect in relation to the black cab mural tour. However, for now it is worth gesturing toward

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<sup>15</sup> For example, the EU alone has to date donated £1.3 billion to a variety of cultural and social programmes in Northern Ireland as part of its specialised Peace Programmes, and has promised a further £270 million over the next few years.

arguments already made to this effect by Deborah Lisle (2006) and Kathyn Conrad (2007), both of whom view tourism as being a significant disruption to the ‘social cleavages’ (Lisle 2006, p.28) that dominate interface communities. Whilst both authors are highly attuned to the visual politics of such transgressions (Conrad is particularly interested in the ways in which photographic reproductions of the murals circulate, whilst Lisle explores the discursive constructs of the visual that emerge through different audiences), far less attention is paid (both in their work and across the literature on troubles tourism) to the emotional and affective impacts of tourist participation on sectarian cultures. Such considerations will form the backbone of the content in the next chapter, which offering a more detailed conceptualisation of empathy than already covered in the introduction, unpacks this in relation to tourism and heritage studies in general, providing a theoretical platform from which assessments of emotionality and empathy in relation to Troubles heritage can be developed.

## **Chapter Two.**

### **Empathy: A histology**

Emotionality, Sharon Pickering (2001, p. 485) observes, has ‘been systematically excluded in most academic work on Northern Ireland’. Arguing that the paradigm of the ‘detached researcher’ has continuously taken precedence in conflict scholarship, Pickering (2001, p.485) suggests that despite the centrality of emotion to violence in Northern Ireland, real talk of emotion has continuously been marginalised in most accounts of the Troubles. However, whilst Pickering’s observations are astute when it comes to reflexive accounts of academic work on the North (something which will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three), in relation to policy documents and third sector work in post-conflict Ireland there has, if anything, been a surfeit of emotion, to the point that Graham Dawson (2017a; 2017b) has suggested we need to recalibrate how, and where it is integrated into public discourse.

For Dawson (2017, p.82), the emotional excesses found in much of the media and political commentary on the conflict is rendered problematic because of its relentless filtration through the rhetorical framework of trauma, which he argues ‘has become established as a pervasive trope in discourse and practice concerned with the affective legacies of the Northern Ireland Troubles’. Noting the tendency to ‘homogenise’ work on trauma in Northern Ireland, so that it is expressed either in terms of ‘the trace of an unspeakable wound or medicalised as “PTSD”’ (Dawson 2017b, p.82), Dawson (2017a, p.276) also argues that over focus on trauma has temporal consequences, both positing emotional distress as a constant consequence of events in the past (as opposed to distress resulting from



the handling of Troubles legacies in the present), whilst ‘privatise[ing] dangerous emotions that cannot be incorporated’ into political trauma-speak.<sup>16</sup>

Dawson’s (2017b, p.89) solution to such over-investments in empathy is to propose a forensic re-evaluation of the way emotion is discussed and evaluated in academic research. Rather than focusing on trauma, he advocates ‘a shift in the analytical framework we use to think about the affective legacies of the Troubles and their relation to “post-conflict” activity, away from trauma and towards the domain of emotion, feeling, and affect in history’, creating a ‘more inclusive consideration’ of emotion and feelings with ‘more complex and nuanced accounts of the relation between external and internal worlds’ that focuses on ‘situated individuals and social groups’. Whilst the call for more situated understandings of emotion has already been hailed by Margaret Wetherell (2012) in relation to the social sciences, its application within the context of Northern Ireland is, as Dawson highlights, much more unusual, where there is a tendency is to fall back on references to ‘hauntings’ and undiagnosed emotions that are as vague as they are unhelpful when it comes to unpicking the politics of the current context.

Such a project is, to all intents and purposes, well suited to an exploration of empathy, which with all its contestations and unsettling ambiguities, provides a pertinent starting point for thinking through situated emotion and affect in relation to post-conflict Northern Ireland. What follows in this chapter is an outline of some of the dominant theories and different disciplinary definitions of empathy, drawing attention to its ‘ambivalent grammar’ (Pedwell 2014, p.1), and reflecting on some of the shortfalls and ethical quandaries that applying such

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<sup>16</sup> One example of the temporal disruptions caused by the over-use of a trauma paradigm is described by Dawson (2017a, p.272) in relation to the disappearance of Jean McConville. Here he notes ‘tropes of haunting’ are persistently used by the media, both to describe Gerry Adams’ ‘inability to shake off his association with the case’, and the figure of McConville herself. Instead, Dawson (2017a, p.273) argues that the emotions expressed by McConville’s children in the present (ongoing anger at the PSNI’s inability to solve the case, fear about being treated as a ‘tout’ by dissident members of the IRA) ‘testifies to the centrality of emotions [...] within the ‘post-conflict’ politics of time in Northern Ireland’, and he suggests that researchers need to pay much more attention to the ‘complex “afterlife” of emotion’.

conceptualisations of empathy to conflict research might present. Following on from the declaration in the introduction that this thesis would make use of, rather than trying to resolve empathy's ambivalence, no single definition will be privileged in this review. Instead, the following discussion is designed to provide a more critical consideration of empathy's ambiguities, which will serve as the broad theoretical platform from which the rest of this thesis will be drawn.

### **Empathy: History, Definitions and Uses.**

In spite of the differences that plague academic reflections on empathy, it is generally accepted that the term first came into popular usage through the work of nineteenth-century art historian Theodore Lipps, who used the German terminology 'einfühlung' to describe the process of self-projection and feeling into a work of art (Coplan and Goldie, 2011). 'For Lipps', Coplan and Goldie (2011, p.xii) write, empathy 'referred to a process of inner imitation or inner resonance that is based on a natural instinct and causes us to imitate the movements and expressions we perceive in physical and social objects'. However, George Pigman (1995, p.242) also recounts that Lipps made some extraneous claims about the relevance of the term of psychology and sociology, arguing that it should become a 'fundamental concept' for both.

Taking Lipps at his word, Freud later adopted 'einfühlung' into his work on *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. Here, Pigman (1995, p.244) notes, Freud originally used empathy to explain the intellectual process of 'distinguish[ing] between a joke and naïve remark by assessing the intentions of the speaker', whereupon it became 'an essential component' of his practice throughout the rest of his career, its usage ranging from discussions of the importance of the establishment of 'rapport' between patient and doctor, through to reflections on the role it could play in improving psychoanalytic diagnosis. Important to note, however, is that the affective dimension of empathy that featured in Lipps' work (the notion of a 'natural instinct') was dropped from Freud's definition amidst

his concern that ‘some analysts might, in the name of “tact”/empathy, justify arbitrary, subjective, complex-ridden interventions’ into patient wellbeing (Pigman 1995, p.252). It is perhaps here that some of the earliest debates over empathy’s definition emerged, and certainly Freud’s account of the phenomena provides one of the earliest examples of an attempt to distinguish between its affective and cognitive states.

Whilst empathy as a taught practice became increasingly commonplace in psychoanalysis throughout the twentieth century (Coplan and Goldie, 2011), it was quickly dropped from discussions of aesthetics and academia in general until well after the second world war, when its re-emergence coincided with ‘a dramatic and widespread conviction about the “exhaustion of empathy”’ (Dean 2004, p.6). By this point, Carolyn Dean (2004, p.3) writes, conversations about empathy had shifted, and in the wake of the Holocaust, conviction in empathy’s potential to create connections between people was replaced by an equally strong consciousness of ‘empathy’s precariousness’, whereupon it became entangled in questions of humanitarianism and morality in the age of new visual technologies.

Certainly, in Susan Sontag’s (1971, p.168) account of contemporary photography, she attributes an ‘anaesthetising effect’ to our constant bombardment with visual images of suffering, which she argues curtails empathy and political outrage by ‘subtract[ing] feeling from something we experience at first hand’. However, later work by Dominic LaCapra (2001, p.40) speculated that empathy could act as a ‘counterforce to numbing’, and he describes his oral history work with survivors of the Holocaust as an example of this, as a way in which victimisation was counteracted through the process of observing another in pain. More recently, empathy has crept back into discussions of aesthetics in general, where it is used to explain the emotional impact that literary and artistic fictions have on viewers and readers, usually in conjunction with discussions of affect, but sometimes also in relation to the cognitive processes of identification and interpretation (Boler, 1997; Neill, 1996;

Coplan, 2004; Bennett, 2005; Keen, 2007; Gaut, 2010; Kaplan, 2011; Norridge, 2013; Hammond and Kim, 2014; Lo, 2016).

Contemporary accounts of empathy now span a vast range of disciplines, positions and definitional accounts. Neuroscience has given students of empathy a physiological basis for its effects through discovery of the so-called ‘mirror neurons’ in the brain, which are, it is claimed, responsible for a primitive learning mechanism, and which provide evidence of direct connection between the act of witnessing the behaviour of another individual, and the activation of similar brain regions in the observer (Gallese *et al.*, 1998; Gallese, 2001; Preston, and De Waal, 2002; Singer *et al.*, 2004; Kaplan and Iacoboni, 2007; Watson *et al.*, 2009; Iacoboni, 2011). Some researchers have even gone as far as suggesting that, as a fundamental indicator of social competency, inactive mirror neurons can also explain the behaviour of those on the autistic spectrum, who are perceived as having a limited capacity for empathy (Williams *et al.*, 2001; Baron-Cohen *et al.*, 2004; Oberman *et al.*, 2005; Pfeifer *et al.*, 2009; Baron-Cohen, 2012). Such studies have however been criticised by disability rights activists and other neuroscientists (Southgate *et al.*, 2008; Baird *et al.*, 2011; Milton, 2012; Chown, 2014; Lamm *et al.*, 2015; McGrath, 2017) who argue that a theory of empathy entirely underpinned by physiological determiners is weak, and does not take into account the broader affective and cognitive components considered earlier, which neurodiverse individuals are just as capable of engaging with. Moreover, these critics also argue that empathy can be stimulated in a wide variety of ways, and as much as it might be about pre-cognitive imitation at a physiological level, it is also about conditioning and learned behaviour.

The current trend within psychological and developmental accounts of empathy certainly takes the latter view, and studies from a range of child psychologists and behaviourists have suggested that empathy is a learned trait which, absent in infants, develops as we age and interact with others (Hoffman, 1984; Hoffman, 2000; Zhou *et al.*, 2002; Moreno *et al.*, 2008;

Tong *et al.*, 2012). Such an approach to empathy suggests it is also deeply connected to the development of morality and ‘pro-social behaviour’ (Eisenberg and Miller, 1987b; Roberts *et al.*, 1996; Hoffman, 1990; Slote, 2007; Slote, 2009; Hoffman, 2011) — a view that has recently stimulated debate within the humanities about the role that the arts can play in the creation of more empathetic and moral individuals (Nussbaum, 1985; Nussbaum, 1996; Nussbaum, 2001; Carroll, 2011; Currie, 2011; Pedwell, 2012c). However, further enmeshed in these debates about empathy’s pro-sociality, have been warnings about the dangers that over-empathising with individuals (particularly suffering individuals) can bring. For LaCapra (2001, p.78), empathising too much with someone in pain can lead to a form of vicarious trauma, which effectively prohibits the empathiser’s ability to act in a pro-social way as they ‘identify with the victim to the point of making oneself a surrogate victim who has the right to the victim’s voice or subject position’. Contained in such conversations are broader concerns about the effects that mis-identified, or misappropriated empathy can have on a political and social level, which goes to the heart of both contestations around empathy’s definition, and wider issues about the ethics of representing suffering and trauma.

Whilst, as has already been indicated in the introduction, there are some clear distinctions to be made between empathy and sympathy (empathy as the process of feeling with someone, and sympathy as feeling for), beyond this there tends to be very little consensus as to the kind of skills or processes needed to empathise with another. For some, empathy is an involuntary affective response to a stimuli that we have no control over and which is, for the most part, universal in terms of both its physical manifestation and the things it responds to (Hatfield *et al.*, 1993; Hoffman, 2000; LaCapra, 2001). Hoffman (2000, p.15) has described this as ‘empathic affect’, which he notes is comprised of two components; namely, the stimulant for the affective response in the first place, and a ‘principle-driven component’ that moderates responses in line with general ideas of morality and justice. For others, the key to empathy is the cognitive process of ‘perspective-taking’ (Batson *et al.*, 1997) which much like the early Freudian understanding of empathy, puts rational interpretation and what

Nancy Sherman (1998, p.89) has described as the capacity for ‘imaginative transport’ at the forefront of an intellectual drive to understand each other, and in which affect and emotion may only play a secondary, or marginal role. Some note that whilst affect and cognition may be necessary for initial identification with another person, they do not properly translate into empathy until some form of action has been taken to alleviate another’s suffering, without which empathy should be more properly classified as pity, compassion or sentimentality (Sontag, 1971; Boler, 1997; Berlant, 1998; Hatfield *et al.*, 2009; Berlowitz, 2016). On account of this disagreement over what constitutes a useful empathetic skill set, a range of theorists have taken to describing any emotional or intellectual identification with another as empathy, but swiftly place these on a spectrum of ‘bad’ to ‘good’ identifications. These may range from ‘empty empathy’ (Kaplan, 2011, p.264) (the kind of empathy produced in response to media images and removed suffering that does not result in pro-social behaviours), through to ‘postmodern empathy’ (Goldberg, 2016) (an empathy exclusively reserved for victims, but which remains attentive to the ‘otherness’ of the victim’s experience).<sup>17</sup>

For the purpose of this thesis, whilst no strict definition of empathy will be adhered to, Amy Coplan’s comprehensive synthesis of empathy’s key features is useful, in so far as it captures many of the major components attributed to empathy, and provides an unusually narrow specification as to how these components must operate in order to be successful. For Coplan (2011a, p.5-6), empathy can *only* be empathy if it fits in with the following definition:

A complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person’s situated psychological states while maintaining clear self-other differentiation. To say that empathy is ‘complex’ is to say that it is simultaneously a cognitive and affective process. To say that empathy is ‘imaginative’ is to say that it involves the representation of a target’s states that are activated by, but not directly accessible through, the observer’s perception. And to say

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<sup>17</sup> See also LaCapra’s (2001) reflections on empathic unsettlement for more on this theme.

that empathy is a “simulation” is to say that the observer replicates or reconstructs the target’s experiences while maintaining a clear sense of self-other differentiation.

Contained in this evaluation of empathy is recognition of the importance not just of the emotionalisation or intellectualisation of another’s situation, but the accuracy of both these processes -- a feature which, often neglected by advocates of empathy, has come under increasing scrutiny from its critics. Indeed, unlike many other theorists of empathy, Coplan (2011a; 2011b) stresses the essentiality of both ‘affective matching’ and accurate perspective-taking in her definition. For Coplan (2011a, p.6), ‘affective matching occurs only if an observer’s affective states are qualitatively identical to a target’s, though they may vary in degree’, (which she notes is ‘a stricter condition than is proposed by researchers who argue that [...] mere qualitative similarity or identical valence — is a sufficient condition for the affective component of empathy’), whilst accurate perspective taking is dependent on the empathiser being able to ‘imagine being the target undergoing the target’s experiences rather than imagining being myself undergoing the target’s experiences’ (Coplan, 2011a, p.13). Such requirements for empathy, whilst seemingly straightforward, are increasingly complicated by real world interactions, not least because of the potential pitfalls that can occur in the process of imagining and simulating the inner life of those different to us.

Indeed, in spite of the recent groundswell of pro-empathy research, a number of charges have been levied against its conceptualisation, many of which go to the heart of resistance to the term in Northern Ireland. The first, and arguably most virulently debated ethical issue concerns the relationship between the empathiser, and the person being empathised with. As already indicated, there has been for some time an awareness amongst researchers that too much empathy, and too much identification with an individual can lead to a form of vicarious trauma that erases the experiences of the original sufferer (LaCapra, 2011; Kaplan, 2011; Howe, 2012). Writing on sentimentality (which she describes as being built ‘through

channels of affective identification and empathy’) Lauren Berlant (1999, p.53) raises precisely this complaint, observing that:

Sentimentality has long been the means by which mass subaltern pain is advanced, in the dominant public sphere, as the true core of national collectivity. It operates when the pain of intimate others burns into the conscience of classically privileged national subjects, such that they feel the pain of flawed or denied citizenship as their pain.

‘Theoretically’, she continues, ‘to eradicate the pain those with power will do whatever is necessary to return the nation once more to its legitimately utopian odor’. However, in reality Berlant (1999, p.54) writes that:

the tactical use of trauma to describe the effects of social inequality so over-identifies the eradication of pain with the achievement of justice that it enables various confusions: for instance, the equation of pleasure with freedom or the sense that changes in feeling, even on a mass scale, amount to substantial social change. Sentimental politics makes these confusions credible and these violences bearable, as its cultural power confirms the centrality of interpersonal identification and empathy to the vitality and viability of collective life.

For writers such as Lauren Berlant, empathy essentially denotes the power relationship that exists between the empathiser, and empathy’s target, which all too often conservative in its aims and effects, inhibits, rather than promotes serious structural change. This is also a point that Carolyn Pedwell (2012b, p.172) makes very effectively in relation to international development work, where she writes that, ‘while the affective capacities and skills of development staff can be cultivated, honed and tested through immersions, the poor “third world” “other” remains simply the object of empathy and thus once again fixed in place’. Megan Boler (1997, p.255) has also discussed empathy in relation to the notion of political responsibility, citing her scepticism that ‘empathy leads to anything close to justice, to any shift in existing power relations’, and observing that for it to be truly effective, empathy



requires us to admit our own complicity in another's suffering. Going further than this still, Sneja Gunew (2009) has argued that the whole concept of empathy and affective identification derives from a uniquely Eurocentric intellectual archive which, she continues, require a thorough decolonisation before we begin to make grand claims about its effects.

Closely tied in with these concerns about empathy's role in the social infrastructure, are issues that Coplan raises around the accuracy of both affective identification and perspective-taking. Indeed, whilst much psychoanalytic literature suggests that the ability to decode facial expressions is essential to understanding another's thoughts and feelings, Gunew (2009, p.15) makes the point that '*interpretations* of facial expressions, the privileged site of communicating affect, are surely not universal'. Moreover, for Berlant (1998, p.641), the belief that it is possible to imagine the suffering of one who is gendered, classed or racialised differently to us often overlooks the 'nonuniversality of pain', reproducing normative, and inaccurate ideas about another's suffering. Certainly, for Pedwell (2012b, p.167) the notion of infallible cross-cultural understanding is precarious, not least because 'while empathy is interpreted as positive because it "humanises" "others" through individualising', there are always 'those "others" who cannot be encountered or known as individuals, precisely because structural relations of power enforce absolute distance of segregation'. Similarly, Kimberly Chabot-Davis (2004, p.407) in her analysis of empathy in relation to the responses of white female readers to primarily African-American literary narratives notes, 'a troubling tendency' to 'minimise racial difference in their zeal to connect with the characters "as women"', which she writes can prohibit readers' ability to fully empathise with the lives of the fictitious black women they are discussing. Considerations of empathy cannot therefore be separated from the inequity of a social system in which suffering is produced and there is, as these theorists highlight, a real need to attend more closely to the original conditions of empathy's production. This is one of the key interventions of this thesis, where grand theoretical approaches to empathy are foregone in favour of a more grounded perspective, which attends to the minute ways in which it can

be manipulated and experienced within the situated politics of place, and which remains particularly cognisant of the fallibility of representation and interpretation when it comes to heritage.

Criticisms aside, it also has to be recognised (somewhat counterintuitively) that distance between empathiser and target is a necessary condition of empathy. Megan Boler (1997, p.256) writes that ‘the identification between self and other also contains an irreducible difference — a recognition that I am not you, and that empathy is possible only by virtue of this distinction’, whilst for Sara Ahmed (2004a, p.4), the desire to feel another’s pain is sustainable ‘only insofar as I don’t already have it’. Iris Marion Young (1997, p.340) has drawn attention to this essential conundrum, arguing that ‘imaginatively occupying’ another’s perspective ‘is neither possible nor morally desirable for persons engaged in moral interaction’. Instead, she advocates the idea of ‘asymmetrical reciprocity’, which ‘entails an acknowledgment of an *asymmetry* between subjects’ (1997, p.352), and in which communication and empathy is delivered on the basis of trust, and treated as a gift, rather than an inalienable right on behalf of the more privileged subject. That empathy is actually defined by distance, rather (than as Pedwell suggests) closeness, does shift our understanding of the conditions in which it might occur, and can make it particularly interesting to explore in relation to tourism and heritage.

### **Narrowing the Debate: Empathy in Tourism and Heritage Studies.**

Although somewhat late to the party, in recent years empathy has made its presence felt in studies of heritage and tourism. Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell (2016, p.447) write that ‘emotion is, when it comes to those fields that study the meaning of the past in the present, all too often excluded as an area of valid research’, yet in spite of this, they note such areas are increasingly being privileged in relation to museums. Certainly, a range of researchers have begun to unpick the relationship between empathy and the museum, albeit sometimes deploying wildly different definitions of empathy to do so, which contributes to

the general conceptual confusion that surrounds the term (Höge, 2003; Landsberg, 2004; Soudien, 2006; Gregory and Witcomb, 2007; Williams, 2008; Norridge, 2009; Arnold-de-Simine, 2013; Witcomb, 2013; Galani *et al.*, 2013; Schorch, 2014; Witcomb, 2015; Gokcigdem, 2016; Lisle, 2016; Kidd, 2017; Savenjie *et al.*, 2017; Mason *et al.*, Forthcoming).

Alison Landsberg (2004, p.26), offers a somewhat woolly definition of empathy through her discussion of ‘prosthetic memories’, which she describes as those memories ‘experienced with a person’s body as a result of an engagement with a wide range of cultural technologies’, whilst for Andrea Witcomb (2013) uncomfortable affects are the key to truly empathetic experiences in the museum, which maintain the kind of self-other differentiation that Amy Coplan (2011a) prioritises in her definition of empathy. Other studies such as those by LauraJane Smith (2011) and Silke Arnold-de-Simine (2013) have grappled with empathy’s shortcomings. Smith (2011) draws attention to the ‘platitudes of avoidance’ used by white visitors to 1807 bicentenary exhibitions to deny their complicity in, or responsibility for the history of slavery (which she argues denotes a failure of empathy in the museum), whilst Arnold-de-Simine (2013) focuses on the somewhat de-politicised emotional engagements that occur when empathy for historical figures sentimentalises traumatic experience. Such criticisms naturally concur with arguments previously raised by Pedwell and Berlant about empathy’s inherent conservatism, whilst also again indicating the challenges involved in empathising with a distant ‘other’.

Indeed, one dimension of the museum/empathy relationship that is sometimes overlooked in these accounts, is the essential ‘otherness’ that underpins the museum visit. From its genealogical connection to the spectacularities of travelling fairs (Bennett, 1995), through to their use as a means of gratifying the contemporary ethnographic gaze (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1991), museums have, as Tony Bennett (2006, p.46) has highlighted, often acted as ‘differencing machines’, which thrive on, and cater for, the basic consumption of

difference. Whilst to a certain extent the rigidity of the ‘exhibitionary complex’ (Bennett, 1988) is transgressed in the more modern ‘inclusive’ museum (particularly so when it comes to community-led projects), a fundamental distance between the visitor and narratives on display continues to be essential to the museum’s vitality as an educational and experiential institute. Sometimes, the distance may be inter-generational, as with visitors who return to sites that connect to an aspect of their familial, or community history, and who use these to engage in nostalgic remembrances of the past (Smith *et al.*, 2017; Mason *et al.*, forthcoming). For others, distance is framed through the ethnographic, as when heritage sites (even community ones) are incorporated into tourist experience (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998), whilst for others still, distance results from the sheer inarticulable horror of traumatic events, which prevents full historical understanding (Crysler, 2006; Williams, 2008; Arnold-de-Simine, 2013; Oliver, 2016). The latter in particular is most often incorporated into what Bonnell and Simon (2007) have described as ‘difficult exhibitions’, which they argue provide the most significant challenges to empathy. Yet even within Bonnell and Simon’s work, where the notion of an ‘intimate encounter’ is used as a substitute for empathy, the initial distance that (somewhat paradoxically) must be in place to generate intimacy in the first place remains undertheorised.<sup>18</sup>

What is often explored in place of considerations of distance and difference in relation to empathy and the museum, is the concept of ‘witnessing’. Fritz Breithaupt (2012) recently offered an alternative definition for empathy, which he suggests has been limited by its repeated conceptualisation as a two-person phenomenon. Such an understanding, Breithaupt (2012, p.86) argues is ‘too narrow for the most social animal’, and he proposes a more multi-relational, three-person model of empathy, in which empathy revolves around two (or more)

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<sup>18</sup> Described as ‘a capacity for reaching out to another’s experience in which our distinctive psycho-social history is maintained’, Bonnell and Simon’s (2007, p.76) concept of the intimate encounter bears a striking similarity to Coplan’s (2011a) description of empathy as a process of engagement that maintains ‘self-other differentiation’, and Young’s (1997) notion of asymmetrical reciprocity, which makes their apparent neglect of distance in their work all the more strange.

antagonists, and a witness. This particular model fits, not just with the role of the historian, who LaCapra (2001, p.97) argues always acts as a ‘secondary witness’ to injustice, but is also highly transferable to the museum visitor, who is often described as being a ‘witness’ (secondary or otherwise) to the historical events described in the museum (Kavanagh, 2000; Williams, 2008; Janes, 2011; Williams, 2011; Andermann and Arnold-de-Simine, 2012).

Whilst the language of ‘witnessing’ is most often deployed in relation to ‘difficult exhibits’, where the implication is that museum visitors, through their presence at these sites act to validate and confirm the truth of the histories being displayed, there is also a moral dimension to the act of witnessing, which Kelly Oliver (2001) summarises in her work on witnessing and recognition. For Oliver (2001, p.143), as much as witnessing is about ‘testifying to something that cannot be seen’, it is also about going beyond recognition in the formation of subjectivity, and she argues that where recognition ‘is conceived as being conferred on others by the dominant group’ (2001, p.9), witnessing creates ‘response-ability’ (2001, p.15) in the viewer which ‘open[ing] up rather than clos[ing] off the possibility of response by others’ also constitutes the subjectivity of the witness in return. In fact, argues Oliver (2001, p.7) ‘witnessing is the basis for all subjectivity’, and she suggests ‘there is a direct connection between the response-ability of subjectivity and ethical and political responsibility’ (2001, p.19).

Conceptualising the museum visitor as witness to another’s subjectivity, and through this witnessing, as an individual bound by a moral duty to respond to the conditions of the subject’s existence, adds another layer to our understanding of the way that empathy might also play out in the museum. Certainly, witnessing as Oliver conceives of it bears a striking number of similarities to empathy, not least the notion that, through a concern with subjectivity, it goes beyond the basic politics of recognition (a theoretical framework that those who explore the intersections between museums and social justice also adhere to). However, one aspect of witnessing that Oliver doesn’t necessarily pick up on, but that

Breithaupt, and others interested in the intersections between law and empathy (Henderson, 1987; Massaro, 1989) do, is that witnesses to events are often required to produce testimony about what they have seen; testimony that is inevitably used to create and take ‘sides’ in the mediation of justice. Side-taking, Breithaupt (2012) writes, is actually essential to a three-person model of empathy, with one process often working to validate the other (a more sympathetic victim might encourage us to take their side, whilst feelings of empathy are often used to justify the side we take).

An understanding of empathy as a finite resource that cannot be extended equally to everyone but which, as an act of witnessing, is bound by a responsibility to respond to injustice, is crucial to understanding the relationship between tourism and empathy in Northern Ireland. As already highlighted in the previous chapter, heritage in the North is doubly politicised, both through its nature as a form of ‘community’ heritage, and its orchestration by those who were responsible for others’ suffering. Sara McDowell (2008a, p.406) has offered some reflection on the intersections between empathy and side-taking in her discussion of mural tours in Belfast, which she argues are used to ‘vie for external support and sympathy’ for sectarian politics. However, in general the connections between empathy, conflict tourism, and justice remain underdeveloped, and the specifics of how such empathies are manipulated unexplored. Thus, another key intervention for this thesis will be to unpack the implications of Breithaupt’s three-person model of empathy in relation to Troubles heritage, considering how and where tourists are encouraged to act as empathic witnesses to recent events, and what the political implications of such witnessing might be.

Somewhat surprisingly, (especially given the obvious intersections between the two), discussions of empathy within tourist studies have generally been less forthcoming than within museology. Where discussions have occurred, they are largely in relation to the emotional impact of the dark tourist experience, which fits into more populist engagements with empathy that often explicitly connect it to trauma and suffering (Miles, 2002; Ashworth

and Hartmann, 2005; Lisle, 2006; Knudsen, 2011; Stone, 2012; Podoshen, 2013; Brown, 2014; Ashworth and Rami, 2015). Research from Biran, Poria and Oren (2011) has identified the desire to empathise with difficult experience as one of the primary motivators for tourists to Auschwitz. However, it is noticeable that in spite of the obvious ethical issues around distance, difference and subjectivity that dark tourism presents, very few of these accounts engage critically with empathy's presence on the dark tour.<sup>19</sup>

The absence of critical dialogue on the intersections between empathy and tourism is all the more surprising considering, as Hazel Tucker (2016) notes, that tourism is often credited by national and international organisations, as well as many governments, with the spreading and maintenance of peace. Certainly, this is the case for the available literature in Northern Ireland where, when not arguing for its deleterious effects, advocates for troubles tourism often suggest that it might be one of the few spaces in which true cross-cultural encounter between ethno-national groups can occur (Causevic and Lynch, 2008; Simone-Charteris and Boyd, 2010; Wiedenhoft-Murphy, 2010; Simone-Charteris and Boyd, 2011; Dowler, 2013). Nevertheless, such studies generally avoid the language of empathy altogether. This is likely the result of a more general attitude towards troubles tourists in the academy, which as Laura McAtackney (2013, p.258) observes, often conceives of tourists as a homogenous, passive mass, whose responses to the emotional landscapes that they visit are both predetermined and finite. By offering a more in-depth consideration of troubles tourism in this thesis, and using auto-ethnography to unpick the complexity of emotion at specific conflict sites, I hope to dispel such configurations, in order to create a more nuanced and critical account of the relationship between conflict tourism and empathy than has been offered previously.

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<sup>19</sup> A notable exception to this is work from Hazel Tucker, where she considers empathy in relation to the idea of tourism as a 'moral encounter'. See: 2014; 2016

## **Conclusion**

As the review of literature in this chapter has demonstrated, empathy is a little-understood phenomenon which, referenced across a wide range of disciplines, is plagued by a general conceptual incoherency. Whilst it may be broadly ascertained that empathy is both an affective, and cognitive process, the emphasis placed on each of these processes varies between academic accounts, and there is little consensus by researchers as to how each of them may manifest, or be recognised. Rather than trying to resolve these incoherencies, this chapter has provided an overview of different approaches to empathy, focusing on the tensions between them, and drawing particular attention to empathy's critics, who view its recent resurgence in the cultural and political spheres with some scepticism. The clear implication of arguments from Berlant, Boler and Pedwell, is that we should be less zealous about citing empathy's ability to overcome structural inequality, and more attentive to the role that it can also play in perpetuating oppression, developing as we do so a more refined account for the conditions under which it may emerge and be withheld, and the political responsibilities that empathising with another places on us.

Such an account is particularly important when considering empathy's intersection with troubles tourism in Northern Ireland, where as the previous chapter highlights, conflict heritage is becoming increasingly politicised. However, in order to truly consider the ways in which empathy might begin to occur in these situations, a more critical understanding of tourism needs to be advanced, which takes into account Margaret Wetherell's (2012) call for more situated depictions of emotion and affect in the social sciences. To generate such situatedness, rather than contributing to empathy's incoherencies by taking a singular definition, and 'testing' each of my case studies against this, a more diffuse approach to empathy's emergence is deployed in the analysis chapters, which considers individual aspects of the empathetic process (such as affective matching, perspective taking and interpretation) in a grounded context, and in relation to the various other emotions and experiences that are central to the troubles tourism experience. Such an approach does of



course have its limits, in that it is likely to produce only partial knowledges and frustrate those looking for a clear resolution to the empathy question. However, the advantages of treating empathy as a series of processes, rather than pre-packaged whole, is that it immediately becomes easier to engage with, and critique the way such processes play out in any given situation, as well as highlighting specific improvements that could be made to improve the chances of more socially conscious, productive engagements with others in those situations. Of course, the challenges involved in developing a methodology that allows these processes to be engaged with is significant, not least because certain phenomena, such as affective reactions, are so subliminal as to often prohibit their detection. Quite how an appropriate methodology was developed for this project is explored in the next chapter, alongside further reflection on the ethics and merits of utilising such methods within a post-conflict context.

### Chapter Three: Methodology

We've done tonnes of these interviews. A million times for different people. You kind of get fed up doing them, you know what I mean? It's different if it's a tour. If you're on a tour, you're getting paid. But doing the freebies, I don't mind, every so often, but it does get a bit monotonous. You get me?

(Tour Guide 7)

Academic curiosity about the Troubles is hardly a new phenomenon. As observed by Marie Smyth and John Darby in the decade following the Good Friday Agreement, 'it is difficult to imagine an ethnic conflict anywhere in the world that has been more thoroughly researched' (Smyth and Darby, 2001, p. 36). With a notable 5000 references to the conflict included in the 1983 *Social Science Bibliography of Northern Ireland* (Rolston *et al.*, 1983), and an impressive 605 individual projects recorded before the ceasefires (Smyth and Darby, 2001, p.36), these figures pale in comparison to CAIN's claims (Conflict Archive on the Internet) that it currently hosts details of a staggering 18,800 academic outputs on the Troubles (CAIN, 2016). Considering that at last count, the population of the North had peaked at 1.8 million (NISRA, 2014), and just over half (56.6%) of this populace directly witnessed a violent event during the Troubles (Tomlinson, 2013, p.2), it could be estimated that some 2% of Northern Ireland's affected populace has been the subject of a research project at some point over the last seventy years. Given that, in reality, much of the work on Northern Ireland's conflict has tended to coalesce around an even smaller pool of participants, deemed by researchers to have been major actors in, or witnesses to significant events, this figure is not insignificant (Corcoran, 2005; Murtagh and Carmichael, 2005; Byrne and Hansson, 2006; Hayes and McKittrick, 2011). Small wonder then, that so many of the North's inhabitants express so little enthusiasm for the whims and over-reaching zeal of new research projects, whose investigators are perhaps either too junior, or too geographically removed to have had more than a glancing encounter with the realities of the Troubles.

The issue of research fatigue in certain communities is one that dominates much of the work in the social sciences, where those interested in particularly popular topics must continually find new ways of negotiating access to, and writing about sometimes closed, vulnerable and often cynical communities or groups of people (Pickering, 2001; Clark, 2008). In Northern Ireland, where long-standing suspicion of academic institutions continues to affect relations between researchers and participants (Taylor, 1988; Miller, 1998a; Knox, 2001; Lundy and McGovern, 2006), negotiating this access can at times feel like a Sisyphean task, particularly when the principal investigator has no prior credentials in the community. Recent high profile cases where research projects have resulted in legal proceedings being taken against participants, or those they implicate, (BBC, 2016b), have only served to reinforce the perception that academic research is a laborious, and often unrewarding use of a participant's time, further reducing the number of people willing to talk to researchers about their experiences of the Troubles. Furthermore, as observed by Marie Smyth and Ruth Moore (1996), high levels of academic interest in the Troubles as a topic has not necessarily resulted in high quality outputs, and they note with some concern that 'the academic community has tended to act as a mirror, reflecting rather than analysing the sectarian dynamic in the society in which it operates'.

All of these factors serve to make developing an appropriate methodological framework for a project on Troubles heritage both intellectually and ethically challenging. Certainly, from the idealistic early stages of planning the fieldwork for this project, through to the intense reflectivity of analysing its results, a number of provocations and issues have arisen, all of which have gone some way to moulding not just the dissertation's methodological approach, but some of the theoretical approaches that underpin this research as well. However, it is the position of this author that, as wisely construed by Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford (2012), those projects which encounter significant challenges during the fieldwork stage can be

responsible for the radical rethinking of conventional approaches to methods as a whole (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007).

What follows in this chapter is an attempt to capture some of those core challenges, complimented by personal reflections on how they impacted upon myself as a researcher, and the research process. The first section outlines my early plans for the fieldwork, and the original methodologies I had planned on using, before a confrontation with participant recruitment and the issue of ‘telling’ forced me to alter my approach. The second section unpacks the impact of such ‘tellings’ further, through a discussion of researcher positionality and emotion in relation to Northern Ireland, which ultimately led to my eventual decision to utilise an autoethnographic approach. A brief literature review on autoethnography as a method is then provided, where the benefits in exploring empathy and affect in Northern Ireland are highlighted, accompanied by reflections on the inevitable limitations of this method. Moving on from here, a detailed introduction to the core sites that form the basis of this study are provided, complete with further reflection on the other methods that have been used to investigate these. A brief examination of the kinds of analysis used to unpick the fieldwork ‘data’ follows, which is discussed alongside key ethical considerations, and linked again to this project’s concern with affect and emotionality. This chapter concludes with some final reflections on the actual writing of ethnographic research, and the ethical and political concerns that are tied up with particular uses of language, and approaches to the field in Northern Ireland. The methods charted in this chapter, whilst perhaps pedestrian in isolation, have been applied in combination to respond to the challenges implicit in researching Troubles heritage, resulting in a re-evaluation of approaches to the field, and to the project as a whole. The purpose of this chapter is not, therefore, to circumvent methodological challenges and flaws of this project, but to embrace these in their all their frustrations and to reflect on the opportunities that they created for a more honest and critical encounter with the research ‘data’ and epistemology.

### **Initial Conceptualisations and Challenges.**

As a project that explicitly attempts to deal with empathy in a divided society, initial plans for the fieldwork relied on a set of approaches that can broadly be described as ethnographic. Ethnography has a long, and particularly concentrated history in Northern Ireland where, notwithstanding the significant dangers such an undertaking has historically posed to its investigators, it was frequently used in the latter years of the conflict to advance some of the most authoritative and formative texts on the Troubles (Burton, 1978; Jenkins, 1984; Bell, 1990; Feldman, 1991; Brewer, 1991; Jarman, 1997; Cavanaugh, 1997). John Brewer has suggested that the ‘ethnographic imagination’ (Atkinson, 1990) offers users of this method unique opportunities to focus on the ‘micro events’ and ‘small scale’ occurrences of everyday life that are otherwise disregarded by social researchers (Brewer, 1994, p.237), and can be particularly useful on terrain like Northern Ireland’s, where the smaller, more interpersonal aspects of the conflict have too often been overlooked. Although this trend has shifted since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, as greater access to communities and participants has meant researchers tend to be drawn either to the oral history interview (Smyth and Fay, 2000; Dickson *et al.*, 2003; Snodden, 2005; Spencer, 2005; Dawson, 2007; Simpson, 2009; Aguiar, 2015; McLaughlin, 2016), or the kinds of mass-scale, quantitative surveys that inform policy in the North (Cairns *et al.*, 2004; Murtagh and Shirlow, 2006; Hayes and McAllister, 2011; Viggiani, 2014; ARK, 2016), ethnography still remains a potent means through which social life in post-Troubles Northern Ireland can be explored (Dowler, 2001; Pickering, 2001; Byrne *et al.*, 2006; McAtackney, 2013; Hocking, 2015). Given this history, and heritage and tourist studies’ own disciplinary preference for the ethnographic (MacCannell, 1976; Frohlick and Harrison, 2008; Sørensen and Carman, 2009), such an approach also seemed a logical way of approaching this project, not least because of the role that ‘micro’ events and moments play in the more comprehensive accounts of ‘proper’ empathy.

Whilst a commitment to the ethnographic and the micro moment has been retained throughout the project, both technique and subject have shifted over the course of the fieldwork, partly in line with recruitment challenges and changes, but also reflecting ethnographers' preference for developing grounded approaches to the field (Atkinson *et al.*, 2007). Initial blueprints for the research design were concerned with channelling everyday encounters with the heritage of the Troubles, which not unlike other researchers of conflict memorialisation (Rolston, 1992; Rolston, 1995a; Rolston, 2003a; McDowell, 2008a; Leonard, 2011; Rolston, 2013) proposed to complement visually recorded auto-ethnographies with in-depth 'go-along' interviews with a range of 'everyday' stakeholders living around some of these key sites (Kusenbach, 2003). In focusing on the everyday, 'average' resident in Belfast, rather than ex-paramilitary, or community workers (who are often amongst the most 'research fatigued' in Northern Ireland), I hoped to be able to build a comprehensive picture of the more quotidian affects and emotions that circulate around Belfast's conflict memoryscape.

However, much like Bree Hocking's experiences of trying to recruit a similar set of participants, it quickly became evident that accessing the 'everyday' members of the community brought its own particular set of challenges. Whilst Hocking's use of semi-structured interviews with residents living along Cupar Way peace wall provided invaluable insights into broader perspectives on 'community' artworks in the area, she notes that access to such individuals was sometimes restricted by key gatekeepers who 'keen to highlight my "outsider" status' (Hocking, 2012, p.50), attempted to block her from attending certain meetings, or even cancelled interviews with her in the first place. On other occasions, she recalls being somewhat hostilely referred to as 'the Yank' and the 'tourist', noting her suspicion that such actions are 'a way of asserting authority and maintaining boundaries between the ethnographer and the field, and constitute a form of information management' (2012, p.48). This process of being identified as belonging inside or outside of a researched

community is hardly a new challenge for the ethnographer, however it is one that has taken on a particular intensity in Northern Ireland, given the recent conflict.

Initially described by Frank Burton (1978) as the process of ‘telling’, the notion that different ethnic groups possess distinct physiognomic or linguistic markers is given particular legitimacy in Northern Ireland, where such identifiers are frequently used by those living around the interfaces to distinguish friend from potential foe in a setting where inhabitants otherwise share a number of genetic and cultural similarities. The fact that these readings are also frequently projected onto the interviewer-interviewee relationship is hardly surprising, and has been well documented by other researchers in Northern Ireland (Jenkins, 1984; Brewer, 1990; Leonard, 1994; Knox, 2001; Lundy *et al.*, 2006). Andrew Finlay recalls in particular an occasion during his own PhD fieldwork where after being ‘read’ as Protestant by an older Catholic interviewee he was forced to confront the role that his ethno-national background played in the way his participants related to him. Noting that at the time, ‘concern within social anthropology about the researcher’s identity was then focused on the political and moral implications of white metropolitans doing fieldwork in former colonies’ (2001, p.58), Finlay (2001, p.65) observes that the process of being ‘read’ by his interviewee undercut any pretences he had about his ability to remain neutral in the field: ‘I had constructed myself as a non-sectarian, secular socialist and her moral equal; she constructed me as a Protestant’.

Naturally, such confrontations with ‘telling’ are particularly problematic for those researchers who have grown up in these segregated communities, and who if suspected of not belonging to a participant’s ethno-national group can find interviews refused or, as in Finlay’s case, pretensions to ‘neutrality’ exposed in a somewhat unwelcome manner (Brewer, 1994; Knox, 2001; Lundy and McGovern, 2006). With regards to the latter, John Brewer (1990) describes the experiences of his research assistant Kathleen Magee who, whilst conducting ethnographic research on the RUC found herself alternately singled out as

one of the ‘decent’ Catholics, or on the receiving end of outright hostility from members of the largely Protestant force. Whilst Brewer ultimately concluded that such moments were propagated by the few or the ‘lazy’ amongst the RUC, their occurrence still highlights the tensions that circumvent relationships between ethnographer and research participants in Northern Ireland. However, it is also worth noting that encounters with ‘telling’ are not solely reserved for those ‘native’ researchers in Northern Ireland. Indeed, several commentators over the years have noted the preferential treatment that researchers from Ireland tend to receive from potential research communities, citing the tendency for outside investigators to be regarded as spies for the other side, or agents of the State (Taylor, 1988; Knox, 2001; McKeown, 2001; Corcoran, 2005; Lundy and McGovern, 2006). At certain points during the height of the conflict, Jeffrey Sluka (2012) recounts that paranoia amongst paramilitary ranks about why an ‘outsider’ might be interested in their activities was such that academics themselves ended up becoming the occasional targets for violence. In more recent years, already shaky relations between outside researchers and communities of interest in Northern Ireland have been further impacted by the fallout from the Boston College Belfast Project, which fronted by two ‘inside’ oral historians, but funded and controlled by an American college, have once more brought issues of mistrust to the fore (McMurtie, 2014).

Certainly, the impact of the Boston College tapes was made clear to me in the initial stages of this project, when I first tried to engage with locals living around key sites of memory in Belfast. Initially I sought to recruit potential interviewees through local community projects, both sectarian and cross-community, such as the Lower Shankill Association, or the Falls Road Women’s Centre, however although my conversations with community leaders were always agreeable, and I attended a number of workshops and events being run by these organisations, I consistently found that exchanges with fellow attendees were invariably limited to informal pleasantries and polite curiosity about the project. Much like Hocking, I suspected that my outsider status, as a young, British, middle-class woman, often restricted



my access to the relevant groups, where I was invariably viewed as an interloper who had very little understanding, or experience of the conflict. The fact that I did not live in Belfast at the time, and so was unable to spontaneously drop in on community events and meetings, which would have given me the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with key gatekeepers, and instil greater confidence in the validity of my research project, heightened such limitations. On top of this, conversations with these gatekeepers and my own participants, suggested that extensive media coverage of the Boston College Tapes has instilled an enhanced awareness of the risks that participation in academic research projects can pose to the communities, which as Israel and Hay (2006) note is unusual amongst the non-academic population.

Sensitive as I was to the painful memories that still run through these communities, and my dual status as both outsider to the North, and beneficiary of a state system that has systematically neglected and waged war on those concerned, I was reluctant to pursue these lines of inquiry further, and ultimately began to move away from attempts to access local 'everyday' experiences of conflict heritage. Another limitation to this initial approach may also have been, as Viggiani's (2014, p.203) research indicates, that interface residents on the whole tend not to talk about their experiences of living near conflict heritage sites, simply because they don't notice them. Certainly, the informal conversations that I had with residents in West and North Belfast confirmed the results of Viggiani's survey, with many people shrugging off the notion that they had any particular investment in the memorials and murals around them, beyond a vague awareness of their historical or territorial significance.

When opportunities did arise to interview locals about their heritage experiences, these were invariably the result of introductions through a BnB host in North Belfast, whom I initially stayed with as a guest, but who after establishing a friendship, would take me to her local pub and grab unsuspecting acquaintances and persuade them to hand over their number to me with the promise of arranging future interviews. As has been the experience of many

ethnographers working in the North, I suspect that the success of these moments, although limited, was derived from the authority invested in me by my host as a trustworthy and ‘safe pair of hands’ (McKeown, 2001, p.5), further ameliorated by the conviviality of the pub setting and my friend’s own magnetic personality. However, at this point a year into the project, my focus had begun to shift away from local experiences of the heritage environment, and towards an increased interest in the triangulation between tourist and stakeholder experiences of conflict heritage. After six months of unsuccessfully attempting to ingratiate myself with Belfast’s interface residents, I turned towards a more direct engagement with those running Belfast’s informal ‘troubles tourism’ industry; a shift that appeared to be epistemologically congruent, given my status as an external interpreter of the city’s conflict heritage. Whilst motivated in part by recruitment difficulties, this move also coincided with an increased awareness of the ways in which emotionality, and particularly empathy, were being problematised through the commercialisation of troubles tourism.

### **The Researcher as Emotional Subject.**

As observed by Bill Rolston, one of the many consequences of British state involvement in Northern Ireland has been a general unwillingness to discuss the origins and manifestations of the Troubles through anything other than an objectivist sociological lens. Rolston (1998, p.99) recounts the discrepancies between his own experiences of the conflict as an inhabitant of a ‘working class area’ in Belfast ‘where political violence was an everyday occurrence’, and the way this subject was approached and discussed within his home department of Queen’s University as an ‘archaic quagmire of Northern politics’. Noting that the concept of ‘going native’ (or more transgressive yet, ‘being’ native) was considered to be the ‘worst sin’ in the university, Rolston observes that sociological interpretations of the conflict were often overwhelmingly lacking in the kind of emotional, human engagements that were key to understanding the finer details of the conflict. More recently, Sharon Pickering (2001) has taken these observations one step further, as she criticises the lack of attention to the

emotional work involved in researching Northern Ireland — a deficit that she suggests is both deeply gendered, and intellectually limiting in terms of the knowledges that are omitted through scholarly obsessions with ‘reason’ and ‘objectivity’.

Given my interests in tracking the variegated routes of empathy in this dissertation, emotionality and subjectivity were always going to take a centre place in the fieldwork process, however I had not anticipated how integral they would become to the shaping of the fieldwork process itself. From my initial deep-rooted anxiety about asking for interviews with people I viewed as ‘vulnerable’ in some way, through to the editing and interpretive decisions I made towards the end, the impact that emotions have had on the development of this research project should not be overstated. My very first entry in my field diary notes the discomfit I felt walking down the Falls Road in Belfast, which at the time I attributed to my uneasiness with being perceived as a tourist, writing that I was particularly conscious of the DSLR camera “jutting assertively from around my neck”. However, as I realised over the course of that trip, my uneasiness was not with being a tourist in the literal sense, who are after all permanent fixtures of West Belfast’s mural landscape, but stemmed from broader anxieties about my status as a ‘tourist-ethnographer’ (MacCannell, 1976, p.178) to the politics and life of the North as a whole. Such an ontological positioning was, as I later realised (and explore in Chapter Four) of benefit in many ways, not least because I often masked my discomfit by using that tradecraft of the tourist, photography, to shield myself as I moved through my chosen sites and interface areas, yielding a vast repertoire of visual data that acted as an involuntary form of photo-elicitation (Pink, 2013) for my own autoethnographic reflections.

As someone with no previous experience of, or connection with, Northern Ireland or the Troubles, I felt ill equipped to understand the significance of the various plaques, murals and memorial gardens to people in the North, and unsure of what I as a ‘translator’ of these sites could possibly add to the considerable body of literature already written by those who

did have the insight and personal experience to authorise these perspectives. This knowledge, which percolated at the back of my mind as I thought about how to approach possible informants, did not go away as I progressed over the months, but became a question that I consistently returned to. How could I, a young, middle class, English researcher with no real sense of national affinity, or experience of conflict, possibly seek to represent the significance of Troubles heritage, to the largely working-class, highly patriotic and undoubtedly traumatised communities in sectarian Belfast? Reading back through Bill Rolston's comments on objectivity, I realised that these questions and discomfits, rather than barriers to overcome, were indicative of an epistemology that was specific to me as a researcher. And so it was around this time that I began to actively utilise my 'outsider' status in Belfast, to reflect on the way that other outsiders approached and understood the emotions and narratives attached to these sites.

### **Autoethnography.**

In keeping with a method that allows for frank discussion of emotion, and that offers an honest appraisal of the researcher-subject's complicity in the knowledge produced, much of the analysis contained in this thesis is derived from what Leon Anderson (2006) terms 'analytic autoethnography', which is supplemented by the usual mainstays of ethnography, including participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, and semiotic deconstructions of museum displays (MacDonald, 2006). As a distinct branch of autoethnography, which is often championed for its ability to 'acknowledge and accommodat[e] subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on the research' (Ellis *et al.*, 2011, p.2), analytic autoethnography maintains its rootedness in traditional realist practices through the use of interviews and observation, whilst still offering highly personalised insights into the entanglements between the emotional and social lives of both researcher, and participants.

As a practice, analytic autoethnography involves attending to the emotions and experiences that arise during immersion in the field, but engages with those experiences critically and

self-reflexively, using them to ‘develop and refine generalized theoretical understandings of social processes’ (Anderson, 2006, p.385). I chose to follow ‘analytic autoethnography’ over the more popular ‘evocative’ in part because, in spite of Norman Denzin’s (1997, p.228) declaration that practitioners of the latter ‘bypass the representational problem by invoking an epistemology of emotion, moving the reader to feel the feelings of the other’, I would be a poor scholar of empathy if I did not recognise that claims to be able to create the conditions for shared representation, whilst evoking appropriate emotions in a reader, are impossible even for the most luminescent of writers. A researcher concerned with critically exploring what it means to share emotional and affective experience cannot be accused of glossing over the same issues in her own methodology, and so the more literary, and traditional forms of autoethnography have never been an option for this project. For me, analytic ethnography has therefore been a means through which I can make sense and use of my own particularised knowledges, emotions and experiences as a researcher-outsider in Northern Ireland, whilst still engaging with the perspectives of people for whom Troubles heritage in the North matters the most.

One of the consequences of conducting an autoethnographic account has been significant expansion in the scope of the research field. Thus, whilst this thesis is nominally responding to three different case studies, many of the chapters are structured around experiential vignettes, or pivotal moments that occurred outside of what would usually be considered the field’s temporal boundary. In Chapter Six, my analysis of the use of humour on black cab mural tours is based on a tour that I undertook for fun with friends in Belfast, and which, I realised a few months later, perfectly illustrated some of the boundary work that is inherent to empathy. As taking this tour with friends broke with my normal approach (which usually involved me undertaking them alone, before conducting interviews with the guides), I initially discounted this excursion from the ‘field’, meaning I was in an altogether different mental and emotional state (giddy, secure, more relaxed) which ironically produced a far more ‘authentic’ tour experience than any of those that I had engaged with previously. At

other times, conversations I have had about my work whilst staying with a friend in Belfast also became the subject of critical reflection in this project, in much the same way that discussions or confessions that interview participants have made to me once the audio recorder has been turned off have retroactively shaped my understanding of their interview responses. Using these moments as the basis for developing key ideas in the thesis, rather than repeated themes gleaned from interviews or field notes, is part of what Ellis *et al.* (2011) refer to as the centrality of the ‘epiphany’ to the autoethnographer’s work, which they note is often retrospective and selective, but which must nevertheless be substantiated by drawing on wider literatures and ethnographic documentation. In some situations (see later on in this chapter) my own experiences were all I had to draw on for analysis, and so in these cases, documenting my own responses to the sites was also a logical choice.

Aside from allowing me to make use of my own discomfort with my position as a researcher, an approach driven by analytic autoethnography also offers an alternative perspective on the many fluctuations and inconsistencies that lie at the heart of pre-existing approaches towards empathy in academic research. As already discussed in the literature review, empathy has been the topic of discussion across a startling number of disciplines and sub-disciplines over the years, and treated with a correspondingly dizzying number of methodological approaches. Within heritage studies this is no different, and a diverse range of methodologies have been used to try and identify what role empathy might play in the visitor experience. Laurajane Smith’s (2010) often cited work on the 1807 bicentenary in Britain involved conducting structured interviews with 1,498 visitors across eight different exhibitions in the UK, during which questions about visitor’s feelings were used to ascertain the development or withholding of empathy. More recently, a project by Rhiannon Mason, Areti Galani, Katherine Lloyd and Joanne Sayner (forthcoming) has made innovative use of eye tracking technologies to establish which displays attract the most visitor attention, whilst other museum researchers have relied on semiotic analyses of individual exhibitions and

objects to draw attention to their potential for stimulating deeply emotional, affective experiences (Norridge, 2009; Arnold de Simine, 2013; Witcomb, 2015).

However, what distinguishes these approaches from my own is their tendency to treat empathy as a readily identifiable reaction to a stimulus, which can be recognised and accurately measured in other people. As already explained in the previous chapter, this thesis aims to avoid falling into this paradigm by treating empathy as a diffuse and constitutive force that can be broken down and analysed as distinct cognitive, emotive and affective stages. By using autoethnography to ground my approach to these sites, my hope was that I would be better placed to give an honest and reflective appraisal of these stages, rather than trying to disinter them from visitor interviews or other people's often confused monologues. Reiterating this thesis's interest in tracing tourist reactions to Troubles heritage in particular, again my own outsider status has given me a privileged insight, allowing me to approach my chosen museums and sites much as any other tourist, with the added bonus that I was then also in a position to chart and evaluate my reactions to these situations over a number of years as my relationship with them, and Northern Ireland as a whole, changed.

The other benefit of a highly personalised autoethnographic account of empathy is that its focus on critical self-reflection, and fostering of intimacy with the reader also creates the ideal conditions for discussing affect. As raised in the introduction, it is incumbent on researchers not to generalise discussions of affect and emotion into the realm of the abstract, which can, as Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell (2016b) highlighted in a recent conference paper, result in a 'turn away from the social' and foster ignorance of the role that human agency and politics plays in the formation of heritage. Margaret Wetherell (2012, p.4) has issued a call for more grounded engagements with affect in the social sciences, through her work on 'affective practice', arguing precisely for an account of affect 'as it appears in social life', which takes into account 'the intimate ways in which affect is linked

to convention and normal practice', as well as discourse, representation and power (2012, p.92).

However, Britta Knudsen and Carsten Stage write (2015, p.2), developing a methodology appropriate to the 'fleeting and immaterial' nature of affect poses a 'huge challenge' to contemporary researchers, and they note that 'many of the established cultural research practices are too focused on content and structures of signification with too little attention paid to reflecting inventively on where and how affect may be traced, approached and understood'. Proposing three 'meta-strategies' (Knudsen and Stage, 2015, p.3) for addressing this methodological gap, Knudsen and Stage suggest that the where and the how of tracing affect becomes 'increasingly more answerable if they are concretely linked to specific bodies (for instance, the researcher's own body) in specific (and empirically approachable) social contexts' (2015, p.5). Within the same collection, Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (2015, p.98) respond to this challenge by developing the concept of 'methods in motion'. This concept, applied to their work on heritage, suggests that one viable approach to understanding the affective moment in heritage is to conduct 'in situ' ethnographies, collecting immediate visitor responses to sites by using the researchers' own emotional, or opinion-based 'provocations' to stimulate discussion and response amongst participants.

Certainly, whilst conducting my own in-situ interviews with black cab tour guides in Belfast (see Chapters Six and Seven), some of the most affectively resonant moments came about when I advanced an opinion about a particular mural, memorial or culture, only to have the participant react in some unanticipated way, which was both strongly emotional and deeply affecting. As I later discuss in Chapter Six, these reactions were invariably connected to the space we were in, as much as they were to my own provocations, and revealed a great deal about the quality of the relationship between the tour guide and the spaces they occupied during their tours. On these occasions, affect was not necessarily revealed through anything



the participants directly said or did, but was more about an intensity or feeling that I had in response to these moments, which were often hard to translate into chunks of easily analysable text. This, as Kathleen Stewart (2007, p.3-4) has highlighted, is one of the major shortcomings of current ethnographic approaches to affect, which too often treat affect as ‘analytic object that can be laid out on a single, static plane of analysis’ with the expectation of being able to create a ‘perfect, three-tiered parallelsim between analytic subject, concept and world’. As such, my focus on the micro-moments built into the mural tours in Chapter Seven, which I elaborate through the concept of ‘affective synecdoche’, is an attempt to refute this three-tiered parallelism, whilst still addressing Smith and Campbell’s (2016a, p.455) imperative to recognise ‘the agency, context, and above all consequences of the affective moment’ in the heritage encounter.

Generalising the consequences of these personally documented affective moments for a broader tourist population is a particular challenge for this thesis, and highlights one of the shortcomings of the chosen methodological approach, although as indicated in the introduction, this is somewhat ameliorated by the decision to adopt Gallop’s (2002) ‘anecdotal theory’ as one of the key epistemologies for this project. Catherine Palmer (2009, p.126) illuminates the essential paradox of trying to do extended participant-observation on tourists, as she draws attention to the temporal tensions between ethnography as a longitudinal immersion in the field, and the ‘transitory composition of visitors at the given location’, where ‘it is not always possible to observe a core group of people day after day, month after month’. Such a disjuncture, Palmer (2009, p.126) notes, makes it difficult to develop the kind of intimacy with participants that is usually expected of most ethnographies, however she remains resolute that scholars of tourism should not be dissuaded from applying an ethnographic approach to the field which she insists is ‘uniquely suited to the study of tourism’ (2009, p.125). Like Palmer, I recognised early on in this project that intimacy with so-called ‘troubles tourists’ was inevitably going to be restricted

both by temporal and spatial challenges specific to the sector and, as documented below, made adjustments to my both site selection and data collection to account for this.

### **Site Selection and Data Collection.**

In deciding to explore tourist experiences of conflict heritage in the North, any number of museums and memorial sites across the province could have become the focus for this study. From the newly renovated Museum of Free Derry in Londonderry, to the now infamous Twelfth of July parades held every year across the country, the opportunities for international visitors to engage with Northern Ireland's conflict culture are diverse and many. As highlighted in Chapter One, the last tourism survey to explicitly refer to the conflict suggested that 7% of Northern Ireland's visitors were driven by 'curiosity' about the Troubles, and certainly more recent tourist studies have highlighted the increased popularity of Troubles related tourism across the province (Tourism Northern Ireland, 2014; Murtagh *et al.*, 2017). Given the iconic role that Belfast played during the Troubles, the decision to focus in on Northern Ireland's biggest city for this project was almost reflexive, although further justified by the popularity of Belfast as a tourist destination, which is visited by between 25-29% of those who come to Northern Ireland (NISRA, 2016). At the time of determining the field, the range of Troubles-related activities on offer in Belfast also made it an appropriate setting for ethnographic study, where unlike Londonderry, both loyalist and republican organisations were well represented in the independent museum sector.<sup>20</sup> The particular popularity of mural tourism in Belfast also made it a unique fit with the aims of this project, where I anticipated that the opportunities for tourists to engage directly with those affected by the conflict would increase the likelihood of tourists establishing an emotional connection with Northern Ireland's history.

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<sup>20</sup> Although this was true when the field was first being determined in 2013, over the course of writing this thesis two new museums have opened/are due to open in Derry (The Derry Apprentice Boys and the Republican exhibit in the Gasyard), which have created additional opportunities for tourists to engage with a range of perspectives on the Troubles.

In keeping with ethnography's focus on drawn out engagement with the field, the 'data collection' process for this project spanned a three-year period, between 2014 and 2017, when I spent alternate months travelling to/from Belfast from my residence in York. During this period, I narrowed the focus of my research to encapsulate three main 'case studies' which are detailed below. Whilst three case studies may not appear to pose much of a challenge for a research project of this length, the use of autoethnography, and in-depth exploration of emotion and affect at each of these sites has provided more than enough 'data' to unpack, as well as creating a substantial basis from which to develop some 'anecdotal theory'. J.C. Mitchell (1983) has famously defended the use of case studies in making broader claims within sociology, arguing that when guided by appropriate levels of caution and analytical reasoning, even the most atypical of case studies is able to make a broader contribution to specialist knowledge. Meanwhile, George Marcus (1995, p.105) praises the use of multi-sited ethnography for the way that it forges connections between 'chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions', in a more holistic analysis of a 'world system'. Certainly, such an approach is also approved of by Fiona Candlin (2016, p.20) who, in her study of micro-museums argues that some of the more eclectic sites 'can disrupt received wisdom' within academia more generally, although she also reasons that such sites should not be subjected to the same lofty theoretical analysis as larger, more pedestrian institutes (something which I seek to contend with through this project).

One additional factor which contributed to the decision to focus in on these three case studies in particular was the high degree of dependency that exists between them, which makes considering one 'case' outside the other somewhat futile, although the trend so far in academia has been is to isolate them in this regard. Indeed, given their centrality, not just to the troubles tourism experience, but conflict heritage as a whole, it seemed only natural to explore these sites and experiences alongside, and in relation to each other.

**Black Cab Mural Tours.**

A phenomenon in Belfast since the late 1990s, taking a tour of West Belfast's murals in a black cab, although not the only way of visiting areas scarred by conflict, is often touted by its stakeholders as a more authentic way of engaging with the history of these communities. Whilst other academic researchers (McDowell, 2008; Leonard, 2011; Dowler, 2013; Skinner, 2015) have tended to focus on the more controversial ex-prisoner walking tours that run in these areas, black cab mural tours have remained relatively unexamined in the literature. This is in spite of a 2014 Northern Ireland Tourist Board survey, which indicated that black cab tours were more popular amongst tourists than the city's own officially run bus tours (NITB, 2014). Popularity aside, as Chapters Six and Seven will explore, there is also a significant spatio-affective element to these cab tours which make them prime case studies for exploring empathetic memoryscapes. Additionally, black cab mural tourists are also more likely to visit the city's paramilitary museums than bus or walking tourists, which gave me further opportunities to reflect on the continuity between tourist and heritage practices.<sup>21</sup>

Typically, black cab mural businesses are small, independently owned ventures that have emerged organically from Belfast's interface areas. Like their walking counterparts, black cab tours are usually run by those who have directly experienced the conflict, and whilst only a small proportion of the guides can claim to have had paramilitary involvement, many of those who own these companies live, or have lived, in proximity to an interface, and often regale clients with childhood stories of throwing stones at passing RUC vans/over the peace walls, or in more extreme cases, will talk about witnessing the death of a loved one. As

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<sup>21</sup> Whilst some of the ex-prisoner walking tours may recommend that their tourists visit the Irish Republican History Museum on the Falls Road after the tour, due to time constraints the guides will rarely enter the space with them. Additionally, at the time of conducting this fieldwork, there was no equivalent loyalist/unionist museum on the Shankill, so those visitors doing a tour with the loyalist EPIC group would not be encouraged to visit this site. In comparison, the time spent on a black cab tour is only limited by the amount visitors are willing to spend, and the route is often determined by the tourist as much as by the driver. During my period of observation at the IRHM in particular, it was notable that the vast majority of visitors to the museum came in with a black cab driver.

indicated in Chapter Seven these claims, whilst mostly genuine, do need treating with some caution as competition amongst tour guides is fierce, and as has been suggested to me on more than one occasion, some guides have been known to exaggerate, or fabricate their personal backstories to appeal to dark tourists' pursuit of authenticity.

Black cab guides occupy a distinct demographic: the majority of drivers are male, between 40-60 and white, although there are notable exceptions to these rules. The black cab industry as a whole is also much more heavily populated by Catholic and nationalist employees, which is unsurprising given the historical use of the taxi as an alternative transport method for Catholics in Belfast after the republican blockades in West Belfast, and the aforementioned tendency for nationalist narratives to dominate the commemorative landscape. Although Protestant and unionist black taxi drivers were in operation throughout the Troubles, as more than one driver has observed to me, the strength of the association between nationalism and black taxis has dissuaded a lot of Protestants from getting involved in these tours, or Troubles tourism in general. Although the unofficial nature of mural tourism, and the tendency for drivers to freelance for multiple companies makes working out a precise breakdown for driver demographics all but impossible, I deliberately sought to balance my interview sample by recruiting equal numbers of self-declared unionists and nationalists, as well as speaking to those from religiously mixed backgrounds, and one participant who was a recent immigrant to the North. A breakdown of the backgrounds of those I interviewed for this project can be found in the Appendices of this thesis.

As they operate out of private-hire vehicles, each tour only caters to a maximum of six clients, the exception being when schools or universities hire multiple taxis. Whilst this creates an intimacy that is quite different from the larger walking or bus tours, it also made accessing black cab tourists particularly challenging. Guides, whilst willing to speak to me as an individual, were not keen for me to approach their guests, insisting that I should look at TripAdvisor for feedback. As these tours have no common start or end point (tourists are

invariably picked up from their hotels, and dropped off randomly in the city, depending on their schedule for the rest of the day), there were very few opportunities to approach participants for in situ ‘vox pop’ interviews about their experiences. Instead, over the course of two years I undertook fifteen tours, which mimicking data from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board about how tourists plan their trips, were initially selected on the basis of their popularity on TripAdvisor (NITB, 2014). Later in the study, to ensure that I was taking tours with a drivers from a range of ethno-national backgrounds, I began to take recommendations from the tour guides themselves, who were able to point me to other Protestant and loyalist drivers working in the sector.

To get a feel for how the dynamic of these tours shifted when in company, after taking the group tour mentioned earlier in this chapter, I began to use my friend’s BnB business to recruit guests to join me on my excursions. In the end, three of the tours I undertook were with other people, and during these phases I made extensive notes about my fellow passengers’ reaction to their content and the landscape, which were then supplemented by informal follow-up conversations about their experiences. These were then complemented by twelve semi-structured interviews conducted with the cab drivers themselves, which took place in a variety of settings, initially in public settings of the guide’s choosing, but which towards the end, were conducted during the tour itself, in a variation of the ‘go-along’ method (Kusenbach, 2003).

I quickly realised that conducting the interview during the course of a tour, rather than afterwards, encouraged guides to open up much more, and stimulated more honest and reflective responses to my questions. A large part of this was to do with the additional privacy that being in an enclosed cab lends to the interview environment, which probably gave interviewees a greater sense of security and confidence about breaking the cautionary Northern Irish adage ‘whatever you say, say nothing’. This was often illustrated during these tours when it came to questions about other guides’ practices. Whilst participants would

usually give quite diplomatic answers at first, suggesting relations with other tour guides were generally good, and making vague references to the kinds of tour guide practices they disapproved of without ever providing names, they frequently returned to the question when passing a guide or company that they didn't like. At this point, interviewees would offer pointed critiques of that particular guide, focusing on the way they ran their tours, and often providing biographical tidbits that alerted me to which paramilitary organisation/community they belonged to, or whether they were outsiders, posing as locals. Moments like these perfectly demonstrated Kusenbach's (2003, p.466) observation that the go-along method enlivens the researcher to the otherwise hidden 'social architecture' of a place, offering a level of insight that the static interview never quite achieves.

However, such insights were perhaps also facilitated by the role that participants fulfilled during these moments as my official 'tour guide'. Both Elisabetta Viggiani and Bree Hocking refer to the impact that they believe gender and youth had on their relationships with interview participants, where 'the common assumption about me has been that "I must not know" and therefore, I need to "be taught" (Viggiani, 2011, p.41). Certainly, in my case, gender and youth intersected in similar ways in my relationship with male participants; like Hocking and Viggiani I was often benevolently viewed as a grandchild or mascot, however, due to the nature of my research, this took on an added dimension as I was often treated as a 'tourist' and potential political ally rather than critical researcher. I discuss this phenomena further in relation to discourses of innocence within museum cultures in Chapter Four, however for now it is worth mentioning that in line with the emphasis that these tours place on the fostering of 'authentic' interpersonal relationships, I noticed a distinct shift in terms of what guides were willing to reveal during these go-along interviews, versus the earlier discussions held in public spaces, where the voice recorder was in plain sight, and my status as a researcher was more pronounced. The Boston College Tapes, and old fears around the consequences of speaking to academic researchers perhaps came into play here; a couple of times in these very early interviews, participants waited until I had turned the audio recorder

off before elaborating on a particular question, or offering illuminating autobiographical vignettes that contextualised and explained some of their responses. Morgan and Manny (2014) describe these interactions as taking place in the ‘waiting field’, and whilst I couldn’t include these moments in my data, they did influence how I later interpreted the interview content. In addition to interviews I also took detailed notes throughout all the tours, commenting on the routes the drivers took, the particular sites they stopped at, and making particular note of any interaction with local community members and other tour guides. Once the interviews had been transcribed they were anonymised and sent back to the participants, who were then given an opportunity to edit them as they saw fit before authorising their usage.

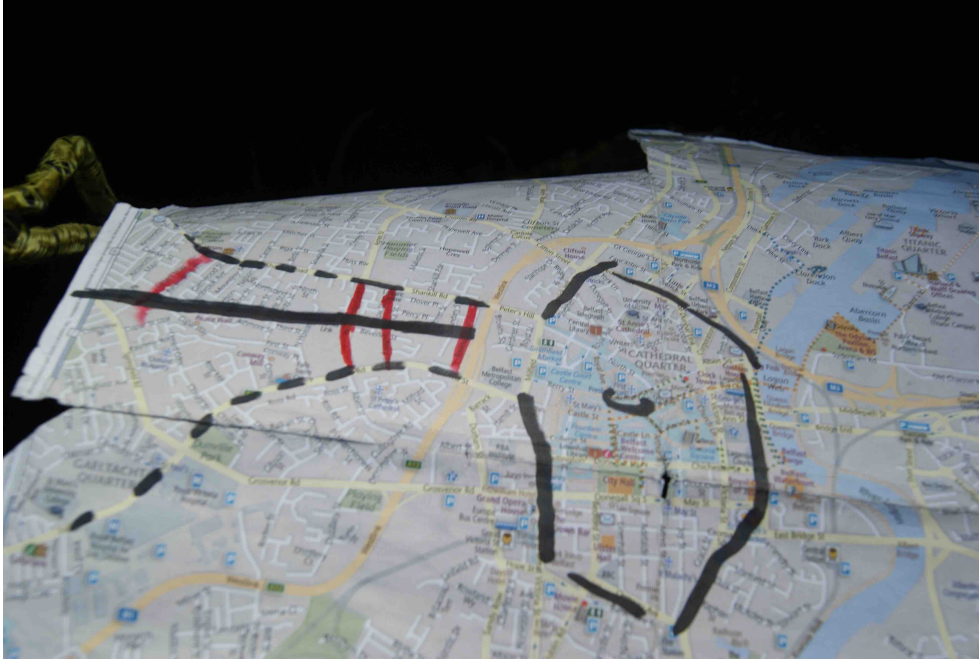
The final thing to note about these tours, in terms of the impact they have on ‘data collection’, are their structural features. Theoretically, black cab mural tours are, as already indicated, billed as being a more spontaneous, less scripted way of seeing Belfast’s murals, which because of their private hire status, allows guides to build a tour around their clients’ interests and needs. Certainly, in my own experiences of doing a tour, the individual sites that we visited varied, depending on whether or not I had seen a particular mural or memorial before, or whether the guide had a whim to go somewhere new. Twice, guides took me to sites that they had a personal connection to, whilst on other occasions drivers would try and draw my attention to murals that had just been painted, which offered a commentary on a relevant political issue at the time. Half way through the fieldwork period, all drivers’ routes changed slightly, as the development of a new housing block in the Shankill Estate both prevented easy access to some of the murals, and destroyed one of the area’s most famous murals, the ‘Mona Lisa Gunman’. The changeable nature of these excursions, and the inevitable impact that they had on the way guides narrated the Troubles is one of the many reasons that a fully generalizable account of these tours cannot be developed (something that other researchers who have explored cab tours appear to overlook), and also informed my decision to focus on anecdote and micro-moments instead.



However, beyond these minor, but sometimes significant discrepancies (some of which I unpack further in Chapter Seven), the basic geographical ground covered by the black cab tour remains largely the same. Figure 1 below shows the general route taken by the average black cab mural tour, which starting in the Shankill or the Falls (after picking customers up from their hotels or train station), will travel down one side of the interface, before crossing through one of the peace gates, driving down a portion of the peace wall, and visiting the murals and memorials found on the other side of the interface. Although not all drivers visit the same sites, all tours include a visit to the Shankill Estate (to see the murals of King Billy and Stevie ‘Top Gun’ McKeag), as well as the ‘International Wall’ and mural of Bobby Sands that’s plastered on the Sinn Féin offices on the Falls Road.<sup>22</sup> Most (although not all) tours will also include a stop somewhere along the gargantuan peace wall that separates the Falls Road from the Shankill, where many visitors are given an opportunity to then add their signatures to a growing collection of names that adorns the wall, and which has also been signed by the likes of Justin Bieber and Bill Clinton. For the purpose of this thesis, it is not so much the murals themselves that interest me (the cultural and symbolic value of which has been exhaustively covered already) but the spatial practices, and emotional and affective experience of the visiting tourist as they move through such space. These elements are unpacked in detail in Chapters Six and Seven.

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<sup>22</sup> ‘King Billy’ or William of Orange is an iconic figure for supporters of unionism, as he represents one of the earliest successes for Protestant factions in Northern Ireland through his defeat of the Catholic King James II at the 1609 Battle of the Boyne. Stevie ‘Top Gun’ McKeag was a UDA member remembered in the Shankill for having one of the highest number of sectarian kills in the organisation. The ‘International Wall’ refers to a stretch of murals on the Falls Road that’s become famous for its depictions of both calls for justice concerning injury inflicted upon Catholics during the Troubles, and other iconic humanitarian struggles across the globe. For more on these murals, their evolution, symbolic meanings, and international connections see: Rolston, 1987; Jarman, 1996; Vannais, 2001; Abshire, 2003; Rolston, 2003b; Jarman, 2005; Rolston, 2009; Forker and McCormick, 2009; Rolston, 2010; Hartnett, 2011; Rolston, 2012; Hill and White, 2012.



**Figure 1. Map of the route taken by black cab mural tours in Belfast.**

### **The Paramilitary Museums.**

In exploring the troubles tourism experience through mural tours, I was also conscious that I would need to consider the role that more static sites of memory, such as museums, played in the tourist experience. Given the almost blanket silence of the official museum sector on the topic of the Troubles, opportunities to explore State narratives of the conflict were limited, meaning my focus automatically shifted to the independent museum sector. At the time of scoping out the field in late 2014, there were three permanent sites to choose from in Belfast, which included two republican museums (the Roddy McCorley Museum and the Irish Republican History Museum), and one loyalist UDA museum (the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre). Throughout the summers of 2014 and 2015, an exhibition organised by the non-profit organisation Healing Through Remembering was also open on Queens Street in Belfast. Whilst offering the North's only non-partisan 'Troubles museum', the temporal nature of the exhibit (it moves around the country rather than having one fixed location) and its explicit positioning as an exhibition for a domestic audience, made it less well suited for a thesis concerned with exploring tourist interactions within these spaces. In the end, I decided to focus on just the Irish Republican History Museum museums and the Andy Tyrrie

Interpretive Centre, the first because of its popularity with tourists to West Belfast, and the second because at the time it was the only unionist museum in the city after the closure of the Protestant-oriented People's Museum in Fernhill House.<sup>23</sup>

Data collection at these sites was conducted through a combination of interviews, participant-observation and semiotic deconstruction of the objects on display. Particular effort was made to record my own emotional and affective experiences in these spaces, which shifted over time as I became more familiar with both the sites and the volunteers. Much like with the cab tours, conducting interviews with tourists to the museums was challenged by the fact that visitors to both sites usually came as part of a mural tour, and so were afforded very little time in these spaces (sometimes a maximum of 30 minutes, but more regularly this was no longer than 15). Initially, I attempted to combat this by leaving questionnaires next to the visitor books for people to fill out and leave for the organisers. However, whilst the volunteer at the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre was enthusiastic (although unsuccessful) about aiding me in this endeavour, the organisers at the Irish Republican History Museum were evasive, citing timing issues as being a possible preventative to this method, and I abandoned this approach. In the end, it was the usual mainstay of museum research, participant-observation, that was used to analyse visitors' interactions with these sites, and as with Falk and Dierking's (2000) ethnography of museum learning I made particular note of any conversations between visitors to try and gain some insight into how they were interpreting the artefacts they looked at.

The often-overlooked visitor book was also used to supplement this data, providing a useful (although obviously limited) overview of responses to the museum as a whole (MacDonald,

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<sup>23</sup> Between late 2016/2017, two further loyalist UVF museums opened in Belfast. One is located in the Ballymac Centre in East Belfast, and the other has just moved premises to the Shankill Road. The latter has been part-funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and is organised by the ACT Initiative. My informants have also advised that a fourth site, put together by the Red Hand Commando is also being planned for Newtownards Road in East Belfast.

2005; Noy, 2008a). To analyse the entries I adopted the same approach as Sharon MacDonald (2005, p.123), which she describes as ‘intelligent critical reading [...] informed by broadly semiotic and interpretive techniques’. Like MacDonald, I scanned all available visitor books at both sites, and made notes about recurring phrases and comments. I then began to code these phrases into broad themes, which I used to develop a broad overview of how visitors felt about both sites. As I will later discuss in Chapter Four, unlike the books that MacDonald discusses at the Nuremberg Documentation Centre, these entries were often very brief (limited to a few words) and tended not to offer extensive biographical reflections. However, they were indicative of the kind of performativity that Chaim Noy (2008a) alludes to in his work on heritage sites in Jerusalem, and suggested a particularly heightened awareness of who was going to be reading these entries.

At the Irish Republican History Museum, the entries were also complemented by reviews left on TripAdvisor which, whilst problematic as a data source, have been used as interpretive tools elsewhere with success (McManus and O’Reilly, 2016). In this case, the usefulness of TripAdvisor as a resource seemed justifiable, because as recently acknowledged in a tourist board survey, some 21% of visitors to Northern Ireland use TripAdvisor to do research before their trip, so consultation of its site simply enhanced, and sometimes confirmed the ethnographic data I was collecting on the ground (NITB, 2014). Informal discussions, and some formal interviews were also held with staff at both sites, which provided additional insights into how they viewed their museums, and what they felt visitors got out of it, which Catherine Palmer (2009, p.132) notes can lend validation to the researcher’s own observations. Although the participant who gave the interview at the Irish Republican History Museum later withdrew consent to directly quote the material in this project, these discussions were nevertheless illuminating, and added greater depth and perspective to my understanding of these sites.

Finally, it is important to note that as examples of what Fiona Candlin would call ‘micro-museums’ (Candlin, 2016), some of the basic practices and structures of official museology simply aren’t in place at these sites. The financial independence of both these sites, and their small-scale, DIY approach to museum curation means, according to Candlin (2016, p.11) that they shouldn’t be ‘judged within dominant paradigms of good practice’. It is, however, my contention that such sites still curate a ‘museum effect’ (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1991, p.410) for visitors, which combined with the reductive expectancy of the tourist gaze (Urry and Larsen, 2011), means that however haphazard they might be, such practices still merit critical engagement. For the purposes of this project, I decided that as long as the sites in question self-defined as ‘museums’, and self-consciously adopted museological practices (however badly managed), then there was no compelling reason not to treat them as such when it came to their evaluation, albeit with some consideration of the impact that reduced funding and expertise can have on the final ‘product’.

### **Irish Republican History Museum (Eileen Hickey Museum).**

The Irish Republican History Museum is a relatively small, three-roomed museum housed in Conway Mill, which is just off the Falls Road in West Belfast. Conceived by ex-IRA Officer Commanding Eileen Hickey, the museum opened in 2007, shortly after which Hickey died. It is now run by members of her extended family, who see the site as a way of educating local children about the history of armed republicanism and Catholic oppression. However, as a site that was set up by a female CO, it is also unusual in that it incorporates evidence of women’s contribution to the republican movement, which as Sara McDowell (2008b) observes, is a rarity within the material culture of paramilitarism.

A small room just off the entrance to the main museum site provides visitors with a scale replica of Hickey’s own prison cell (Figure 2); inside the main building is a glittering array of handcrafted artefacts and prison ephemera produced by republican prisoners throughout the twentieth century, and an education room complete with a fully stocked library that

chronicles key events relating to the conflict (Figure 3; Figure 4). Aside from the prison ephemera, there is a vast collection of clippings from the local republican newspaper *An Phoblacht*, a number of propaganda posters designed by the IRA and Sinn Féin, and other material artefacts connected to either important members of the movement, or Catholics who were killed during the Troubles. One corner holds a small cabinet of UVF and Orange Order artefacts, which were donated after the closure of Fernhill House in the Shankill. Records held at the site indicate that the museum's artefacts are almost exclusively on loan from local and international collectors, with several items coming from American donors.

At present the organisers claim they receive no public funding for the site, although the Trust in charge of Conway Mill does not charge them for the use of the building. There are now more international visitors to the museum than local, and volunteers to the site admitted that they sometimes struggle to engage with the 'local' community, although they are periodically visited by school and cross-community groups. The museum doesn't keep any records on its visitors, however during the peak tourist season, somewhere between 20-30 visitors may come through its doors each day, usually whilst on a mural tour of West Belfast (a figure which increases during significant republican anniversaries such as the celebration of the Easter Rising).



**Figure 2. Scale replica of Eileen Hickey's Armagh prison cell. IRHM.**



**Figure 3. Interior of the Irish Republican History Museum.**



**Figure 4. Interior of Irish Republican History Museum.**



**Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre (ATIC).**

The Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, whilst still recognisable as a museum, is much smaller, and generally less well attended than the Irish Republican History/Eileen Hickey Museum. Occupying three single-roomed floors of a terraced building on the Newtownards Road (Figure 5; Figure 6; Figure 7), the ATIC is located at the opposite end of the city in East Belfast, which was generally regarded as a Protestant/unionist stronghold during the Troubles. The site was built after, and partly in response to, the Eileen Hickey Museum, and was developed by ex-UDA leader David Stitt, and named after one-time commander of the UDA, Andy Tyrie.

Backed by East Belfast ex-prisoners association Charter NI, ATIC marks itself out as a UDA museum, although for a while it was the only site exclusively dedicated to the history of loyalism. As such, the museum occupies a slightly more uncomfortable position than the Republican Museum, where due to the historic feuds between the UDA and UVF, and the Orange Order's official disavowal of armed unionism, it must balance fealty to its parent organisation, whilst providing some overview of loyalism in general. Most of the artefacts on display are marked as belonging to the UDA, UFF or LVF, and like the Irish Republican History Museum, much of the collection from the ATIC is on loan from local and 'international' collectors (the majority of the latter being Ulster Scots sympathetic to the unionist cause). There are, however, fewer examples of prison ephemera than at the Republican Museum, which most likely reflects the slightly more uncomfortable relationship that loyalists have with that period of their history (Flynn, 2011). The uppermost floor of the building holds a meeting space, which the volunteers claim is for educational groups, but as suggested by advertisements on the museum's Facebook page, is also used to host meetings with ex-UDA members and their sympathisers.

Unlike the Republican Museum, the ATIC doesn't benefit from the high numbers of tourists who grace West Belfast's landscape, although those on unionist-specific mural tours in East

Belfast do visit it. As such, on any given day there may only be 3-4 visitors to the site, the exception being when there are large school and college groups, who will typically visit the ATIC and then the Republican Museum, as part of an introduction to the history of the Troubles. Its primary volunteer also informs me that around significant dates, such as the twelfth of July, they may receive up to 200 visitors in a day, although this figure has not been verified.



**Figure 5. Entrance to the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre.**



Figure 6. Front Desk of the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre.



**Figure 7. First floor interior of Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre.**

**Analysis, Coding and Ethical Considerations.**

Much like the approach to data collection, the analytical methods used for this project have been selected for their ability to capture the elliptical intensity of affect and emotion. Drawing attention to the limitations of traditional modes of analysis, Maggie MacLure (2013, p.171) observes that ‘coding can be very effective [...] but it handles poorly that which exceeds and precedes “capture” by language, such as the bodily, asignifying, disrupting (and connecting) intensities of affect’. The limitations of traditional coding methods became most evident in this project when applied to dark humour on the mural tours, where the disjuncture between what was said and what was meant was usually communicated through non-verbal cues such as bodily language, facial expression, tone, and affective atmosphere, none of which are picked up by traditional forms of coding.

MacLure (2013, p.171) refers to such moments as “rebel becomings”, and suggests they often represent the data that ‘qualitative research often prefers, or needs, to forget’. Instead of traditional coding, MacLure (2013, p.164) advances the idea of ‘wonder’, which she prefixes as an ‘unfaithful’, ‘languorous’ and ‘relational’ approach to data that makes space for the shifting, unpredictable nature of the affective encounter. Certainly, in re-visiting field notes and interviews over the course of this research, I felt this sense of ‘wonder’, and in line with many autoethnographic accounts of the ‘epiphany’, retrospectively returned to moments or notations in my field diary that at the time I considered insignificant, but which as the thesis developed, seemed to stand out as relevant to the study of empathy.

To contextualise these moments, a narrative approach was also used that deepened my engagement with my field diary, and interviews by encouraging me to think about the ‘epiphany’ as part of a broader narrative being constructed between the interviewees, myself, and the heritage sites. Whilst Catherine Riessman (1993) has advanced a fairly systematic conceptualisation of narrative analysis in relation to the qualitative interview, in recent years scholars have begun to broaden narrative analysis’ insights to ‘stories’ outside

of the interview (Holstein and Gubrium, 2012, p.3). Such a holistic approach is encouraged by Atkinson and Hammersley (2007, p.171) who argue that ‘narratives should not be treated as if they occupied a different, special and privileged analytic space’, but should ‘be studied within the context of an overall ethnographic strategy’. At its core, narrative analysis does this contextualising work by drawing particular attention to temporality, phenomenology and spatiality in the research encounter (Riessman, 1993). Considering this project’s particular interests in memory and place in Belfast, narrative analysis seemed a particularly appropriate method for the interpretation of the data.

When it came to transcribing interviews, in line with Riessman’s guidance (1993, p.56), interviews were roughly transcribed at first, and details of ‘striking features of conversation’ such as laughter and long pauses were included into the basic text. After spending some time looking through these transcripts for those ‘rebel becomings’, I returned to sections of the text that seemed indicative of a broader personal, social, or cultural ‘story’, and added further detail by re-listening to the audio-recordings, and re-visiting my field diaries. In this way, a performative narrative analysis was developed (Riessman, 2004) that allowed the embodied, emotive, and affective elements of the story-text to be drawn out.

As participants were advised that they would have an opportunity to review their transcripts in the rough draft stage, this inevitably led to portions of the text that interviewees were uncomfortable with being removed, some of which were (to my frustration) the most illuminating in terms of the ‘story’ they told about conflict heritage in the North. In the course of normal ethnographic research, such segments would usually be forgotten, where the absence of ‘evidence’ is usually regarded as suspect scaffolding on which to hang substantial and generalisable arguments. Kathleen Stewart (1996, p.71) refers to this forgetting as a kind of ‘disciplined amnesia’ that she notes is particularly prominent in ethnography, which ‘re-remembers things only as fixed symbols or examples of ideas’ and which ‘reduce[s] “anecdotal evidence” to a secondary and deeply suspect status’. To counter

this, Stewart (1996, p.73) advances the idea of ‘unforgetting’, which drawing on what ethnography erases, creates ‘scripts of imagined alterity’ [...] to evoke the semantic richness of a barely glimpsed alterity or even the rich vitality of a “real” life beyond academic analysis’.

Ethically, of course, those deleted interview scripts couldn’t be ‘unforgotten’ in any literal form. However, what was retained in the analytic stage was an awareness of the impact that these alternative stories had on the interpretation of the data. In some cases, as with the withdrawal of the participant at the Irish Republican History Museum, the scriptural subtext pointed again to the extraordinary impact that the Boston College Tapes have had on attitudes towards academic research and discussions of the past in Northern Ireland. In other cases, the decision to delete certain portions of a transcript revealed a great deal about the personal challenges faced by participants, who negotiate the tension between being a heritage professional and community member on a daily basis.

Critics of autoethnography have raised concerns about its ethical implications, particularly given that the heavy reliance on autobiography means participants are often frequently ‘recruited’ into a study without their consent (Tolich, 2010). Going into this project I was acutely aware of the delicacy of the situation in which I was working, and from the start made it clear to all interview participants that transcripts could be anonymised as they wished. For the black cab taxi guides, given the large number of companies and drivers in operation in the West, anonymisation was relatively easy to achieve, and only the most basic biographical details of each interviewee (ethno-national background and nationality) have been retained. For interviewees at the paramilitary museums, this was more challenging, given the small staff base at each site, however those who gave consent to be part of this project were aware of this, and tended to speak much more explicitly as representatives of the museums, rather than in their personal capacities.

**Conclusion: Writing Ethnographic Research.**

Paul Atkinson (1990) has famously observed that as a formative part of the fieldwork phase, the process of writing up research is too often undervalued for the role it plays in the interpretation of data. Certainly, at various points during the PhD, writing has proven to be an unwelcomely laborious process, where my own anxieties over how to make a tone or description appropriate to the moment I am trying to describe have resulted in sections of the thesis being written and re-written. Returning to my personal field notes a year, or sometimes two years after originally jotting them down, I am reminded of a sentiment or perspective that I encountered at the time which simmers beneath the surface of my diary, but which is never quite fully expressed. On these occasions, desirous to be able to fully ‘translate’ that perspective for an external reader, sections of my field diary were re-written for clarity for the thesis, or else additional explanatory notes have been added to try and avoid misinterpretation. Such a practice is in keeping with autoethnographic accounts in general which, Ellis (1999) notes, are often reliant on an after-the-fact construction of material.

It should also be noted that by no means is this thesis meant provide an exhaustive account of either empathy, or Northern Ireland’s Troubles heritage. By focusing on such a specific area of study, it is inevitable that many of the observations I make throughout will be limited to these case studies, and so will not be generalisable in the way that traditional ethnography often demands. In presenting the work in this way, and being open about the inconclusivities and contradictions that run throughout this thesis, I aim to avoid adopting what Atkinson (1990) refers to as the ‘heroic’ turn in ethnographic writing. Too often, Atkinson (1990, p.107) notes, ethnographic research is presented in the style of a ‘voyage’ or adventure story, with the researcher initially cast as the cavalier and ‘naive intruder’ who, over time, achieves the privileged status of insider and expert. Such narratives, whilst often a natural consequence of the research process itself, are dangerous for the kind of relationship they set



up between the reader, researcher, and the studied world, in which the latter is all too often relegated to the status of the 'alien' or the 'exotic' (Atkinson, 1990, p.110).

Exoticisation is the last thing that Northern Ireland needs, where the narrative of exceptionalism that has long informed Britain's political and social attitudes towards its people has become more pronounced in recent debates around Brexit and the Conservative-DUP coalition. An autoethnographic account, whilst in some ways ameliorating this narrative through an explicit focus on the researcher's subjectivity, also creates a certain 'heroism' through the trust that it demands the reader place in the researcher's competency (Ellis, 1999) — trust which, in the academy, is all too often is awarded in deeply gendered, classed and racialised ways. Conscious of this, I have been at pains throughout this thesis to avoid framing my research through such a 'heroic' lens, and certainly my experiences in the field, right up to the conclusion of the fieldwork have proved that I am far from expert on these topics, or am anywhere near achieving a kind of 'insider's insight into Northern Irish social and cultural life.

Instead, I find myself returning again and again to that which I do know in relation to Northern Ireland, which is my persistent, infuriating, and sometimes bemusing 'outsiderness', which has consistently cropped up both in the field, and at academic conferences. The sense of being an outsider in the North has, for all my informants' hospitality and generosity, never quite gone away, and this is the source of most knowledge in this thesis. Being an outsider of course means that I will inevitably read things 'wrong' and interpret situations in ways that, to an insider, will seem as obvious as a patent truth, or so arcane that the relevance of the entire thesis will be questioned. I have deliberately embraced these contingencies and inconsistencies in the hope that they are not only indicative of some of the epistemologies fundamental to the tourist experience of the Troubles, but also of the other, often overlooked knowledges built into academic research as a whole. Contradiction therefore lies at the heart of this thesis; in essence, what I am trying

to surmise here, is that all mistakes committed to these pages, and elsewhere, are very much my own.

**Chapter Four:  
Innocence and Responsibility: Reframing Empathy in the Paramilitary  
Museum.**

The great maxim of all civilised legal systems, that the burden of proof must always rest with the accuser, sprang from the insight that only guilt can be irrefutably proved. Innocence, on the contrary, to the extent that it is more than “not guilty”, cannot be proved but must be accepted on faith, whereby the trouble is that this faith cannot be supported by the given word, which can be a lie.

(Arendt, 1963, p.87)

Addressing the House of Commons in 2017, Conservative MP James Brokenshire made headlines when, in a debate about the prosecution of historical armed forces in Northern Ireland, he announced that government would ‘never accept any kind of moral equivalence between those who sought to uphold the rule of law and terrorists who sought to destroy it’ (*Hansard*, 2017). His comments inspired a round of applause from onlooking DUP and UUP parliamentarians who, like the British government, have always firmly denied claims of State misconduct during the Troubles. However, whilst a shrewd political move for the Northern Ireland Secretary of State who, as media coverage of the debate later suggested, was using the spotlight to pacify public grievances over the prosecution of Iraq war veterans, Brokenshire’s appeal to moral absolutism once again demonstrated the extreme myopia of the British Government when it comes to the ‘Northern Ireland question’, particularly over how such debates play out within segregated communities in the province.

Discussions of morality in relation to the conflict are hardly new in Northern Ireland, where during the Troubles the management of interface communities was initially predicated on what Alan Feldman (1991, p.3) refers to as the ‘sanctuary space’. Largely associated with

ideas of sacralisation and refuge, Feldman argues that the ‘sanctuary space’ was also strongly allied with ‘moral right’, which strengthened every time communities came under attack from state or paramilitary forces. Slightly more controversially, Feldman (1991, p.39) also suggests that for Catholic and nationalist communities it was these ‘local traditions of “moral right,” community, and familial and domestic integrity (rather than fully worked out Nationalist and Republican ideologies) [that] were the ideological bases of resistance to the state’. As the conflict progressed, such spaces were ‘instrumentalised’ and ‘converted [...] into a base of operations’ by paramilitaries, who used the moral order conferred upon them to legitimise their own violent actions (Feldman, 1981, p.39).

This same moral order also featured in the republican propaganda accompanying the 1981 Hunger Strikes, where descriptions of the strikers explicitly drew on religious discourses of martyrdom and self-sacrifice, in an attempt to elevate incarcerates beyond mere criminality (Rolston, 1987; Yuill, 2007). Whilst much of the mainstream British media remained impassive in the face of the strikes, it often played out differently overseas, so that by the end of 1981, notwithstanding the failure of the strikers to achieve their demands, it was generally conceded that the Conservative government had lost the moral highground they once held over the IRA (Curtis, 1984, p.203; Mulcahy, 1995).

However, it was not until after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement that more explicit engagements with the moral dimensions of the conflict began to emerge in public discourse, this time in relation to notions of ‘victimhood’. Stimulated by the publication of the victims report *We Will Remember Them*, discussions about who should be allowed to define as a ‘victim’ of the Northern Irish conflict were soon established as the key post-Agreement issue, after the report’s suggestion that victims should be broadly understood as ‘the

surviving injured and those who care for them, together with those close relatives who mourn their dead' (Bloomfield 1998, p.14) was met with incredulity and outrage. This single sentence definition rapidly became the focal point for a number of victims groups who, resenting the equivocation between ex-paramilitary members and their own civilian family and friends, argued for a narrower understanding of the term that would exclude those responsible for violence (Morrissey and Smyth, 2002; Brewer and Hayes, 2011). The intersection between these debates and those on morality crescendoed in 2009, when a long-awaited report from the Consultative Group on the Past re-affirmed Bloomfield's broader definition by recommending that all families of those killed during the conflict be eligible for a £12,000 compensation payment from the British government, regardless of paramilitary status (Eames and Bradley, 2009, p.92). The response from civilian groups and politicians was instantaneous, with many expressing antipathy towards what they regarded as 'dirty blood money' (McDonald and Hinscliff, 2009), the payment of which was interpreted as tacit endorsement of paramilitary claims that theirs was a legitimate, and morally justifiable, war.

In the years following the Bloomfield report, it became evident that the struggle over the 'victims issue' was not only symptomatic of the difficulties inherent in dealing with the recent past, but also reflected wider divisions and issues in post-Agreement Ireland. Somewhat predictably, opinions on the issue soon fractured along party political lines, with unionist politicians leading the way in challenges to the Bloomfield definition of victimhood, and Sinn Féin arguing for it, as part of their campaign for the British government to be held accountable for the 300 deaths it caused during the Troubles (Morrissey and Smyth, 2002). Such arguments were backed up with extensive statistical evidence on both sides, with unionists drawing attention to figures that showed republican paramilitaries had killed more people than any other single organisation (Fay and Morrissey, 1998), and nationalists

highlighting the extremity of the death rate that disproportionately affected Catholic communities (Smyth, 1998). Whilst both arguments have merit, what lies behind these statistical quibblings is a much more pernicious political attitude towards relations in Northern Ireland, with the reliance of both parties on static notions of community reflecting a desire to maintain, rather than re-shape, the sectarian status quo.

As a political party that has strong 'elective affinity' with unionism (Aughey and Gormley-Heenan, 2016) it's hardly surprising that, when addressing a House of DUP and UUP politicians, the Conservatives chose to weigh morality on the side of the British armed forces, whom unionists have always defended against nationalist calls for prosecution. Notwithstanding this capitulation, Brokenshire's ulterior suggestion that the British Government has the authority to mediate on such matters will have seemed laughable to those outside of Parliament, where it is widely recognised that, already a 'war by other means' (Breen-Smyth 2009, p.35), disputes over morality and victimhood in the North are increasingly mediated through cultural, and not political means.

Referring to this newest phase of the conflict, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the ways in which strategic engagements with discourses of victimhood, innocence and responsibility are coded into visitor experiences of the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre and Irish Republican History Museum. Focusing in particular on the role that innocence plays in psycho-social accounts of empathy, this chapter will explore the way in which both sites capture the 'ideal subject' (Suski, 2009; Mortensen and Trenz, 2016) of empathy in their accounts of paramilitary history, and position this figure as the key to interpreting their pasts. Reflecting on the cognitive dissonance produced by the tension between this phantasmagorical figure, and the material indices of violence kept in the museums' archives,

this chapter will conclude by considering the role that tourism plays in legitimising such interpretations, both within the liminal space of these museums, and in relation to broader contestations over innocence that are currently circulating in post-conflict Northern Ireland. In doing so, this chapter offers this thesis's first critical contestation with empathy, as conceived of and understood in popular culture and some academic accounts. Drawing attention to the fallibility of the exercise that empathy is premised on an automatic response to virtuosity, this chapter demonstrates how such claims are limited in their application to recently conflicted societies where inherently contradictory figures, such as the innocent paramilitary, are a consistent feature of the post-Troubles landscape.

#### **Empathy and the Ideal Subject.**

This is love as empathy: I love you, and imagine not only that I can feel how you feel, but that I could feel your *pain for you*. But I want that feeling only insofar as I don't already have it; the desire maintains the difference between the one who would 'become' in pain, and another who already 'is' in pain or 'has' it.

(Ahmed, 2004a, p.4)

Writing on compassion for her edited collection on emotion and cultural politics, Lauren Berlant observes that 'there is nothing clear about compassion except that it implies a social relation between spectators and sufferers' (Berlant, 2004, p.1). Criticising popular and academic accounts of the phenomenon for neglecting the experience of the recipient, she continues to argue that 'the word compassion carries the weight of ongoing debates about the ethics of privilege', where it is overly invested in the feelings and perspective of the 'spectator'. As already indicated in the literature review, similar objections have also been raised against empathy by Berlant and others; a growing recognition that it may 'sustain the very difference that it may seek to overcome' (Ahmed, 2004a, p.29) has led some researchers to question the use of empathy a force for social and political transformation. More recently,

political scientist Paul Hoggett (2006, p.150) has countered Berlant's claims, suggesting that the inequity of empathy 'is hardly a revelation to researchers of emotion', and arguing that 'compassion should be and often is extended to those who are not innocent victims' (2006, p.152). Whilst, as this chapter will shortly explore, Hoggett may be right in terms of the actual social nuances of empathy, his suggestion that this is a position universally accepted feels premature, considering the way empathy continues to attach itself (both outside of and within the mainstream academy) to 'liberal discourse[s]' (Hoggett, 2006, p.150) of unqualified victimhood.

Echoes of empathy's conservative attachment to ideas of innocence can be seen in British political and media responses to the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015. Throughout 2015, but particularly after the emergence of the photos of the drowned toddler Alan Kurdi, a 'compassion explosion' (Lustgarten, 2015) in the media saw online and mainstream discussions of the crisis make hefty use of the language of empathy in their pleas for the government to take action. Absent from the majority of these responses was a sense of Kurdi as anything other than a vehicle for public grief, and in spite of author JK Rowling's appeals to 'imagine yourself in one of those boats' (Saul, 2015), grotesquely sentimentalised memes of Kurdi's body continued to resonate with online communities throughout 2015 (Mortenson and Trenz, 2016). Later that year, David Cameron's speech to the House of Commons again demonstrated empathy's 'uneven effects' as he praised the British public for being 'a country of extraordinary compassion' (*Hansard*, 2015) — the lack of reference in this speech to either Alan Kurdi, or the photo which had inspired such sentiments confirming Lauren Berlant's (1999, p.53) arguments that empathy is usually wielded as a political tool for the advancement of trite nationalism, at the expense of 'subaltern pain'.



Aside from confirming neoliberalism's ability to colonise our most fundamental human instincts, what reactions to the 2015 refugee crisis also reveal is the process through which declarations of empathy get attached to certain bodies (Ahmed, 2004b). Prior to the release of these photos, attitudes towards those crossing the Mediterranean ranged from apathy to outward hostility. Yet, through Kurdi's death, mainstream media reactions in particular were transformed, with previously anti-refugee paper *The Sun* issuing an appeal to David Cameron to 'deal with the biggest crisis facing Europe since WW2' (*The Sun*, 2015). That a child's death could inspire such a dramatic change of public opinion is not in itself surprising given, as Laura Suski (2009) and others have observed, that images of suffering children have long been used by the media as shorthand for humanitarian injustice (Avery and Reynolds, 2000; Seu, 2015). However, the implication of these reactions for critical understandings of empathy is more severe, with the outpouring of emotion inspired by the image of Alan Kurdi revealing a great deal about the durability of the relationship between idealised constructions of innocence, and the ability to empathise with another human being.

The preferential predisposition towards identification with certain individuals has often been described by neuroscientists and psychologists as empathy's victim bias (Hoffman, 1990; Singer *et al.*, 2006; Hoffman, 2011). Arguing that we are more likely to identify with another person if we believe they are victim of an injustice, Martin Hoffman (1990, p.159) articulates the victim bias as a form of 'sympathetic distress' which, he suggests, arises when we recognise that 'the victim has no choice or control over his plight'. Acknowledging that empathy is often based on the value judgements we make about the person in distress, Hoffman (1990, p.159) notes that 'when victims are perceived as having a choice or control they may not be responded to with empathy because they are no longer viewed as victims'. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2001, p.314) goes further than this still in her assertion that

‘compassion requires [...] a notion of responsibility and blame’, intimating that we are more likely to empathise with someone when we believe that ‘suffering is out of proportion to the fault’ (Nussbaum, 1996, p.33). According to Hoffman and Nussbaum’s understanding of the term, empathy is predicated not just on victimhood, but on an intrinsic belief in the victim’s innocence.

Of course, as scholars such as Sara Ahmed (2000; 2004b) have already documented (and as this chapter will later explore), the kind of interpretive processes that lead us to perceive someone as an innocent (rather than culpable) victim are in themselves highly conditioned and fraught with racialised and gendered assumptions — a point emphasised by Suski (2009) through her description of the child as ‘ideal subject’ of empathy. There are now, as Paul Hoggett highlights, numerous critiques of the presumed relationship between innocence and empathy, amongst which are legalistic accounts that draw attention to empathy’s utilisation within the justice system (Henderson, 1987; Massaro, 1989; Reichman, 2006; Colby, 2012; Chin, 2012). However, Hoffman and Nussbaum’s conceptualisations, whilst deservedly interrogated by these authors, are still useful to the scholar of empathy, not least because as the media coverage of Alan Kurdi showed, they capture something of the broader cultural consensus about the roles that innocence and guilt play in impulses towards, and away from empathy.

### **Negotiating Innocence in Northern Ireland.**

Within Northern Ireland, awareness of the role that innocence can play in shaping public perceptions of ‘the victim’ has long been appreciated by its antagonists. During the conflict state killings were often downplayed by the media through coy, usually fabricated references to the victim’s paramilitary connections, in a bid to shift the blame away from the British

government and onto the victims themselves (Curtis, 1984; Miller, 1994; Rolston, 2000). ‘Such was the power of this ideology’, writes Bill Rolston (2000, p.x), ‘that it was possible in the case of state violence to override even the most obvious criterion of “innocence”’; childhood. Indeed, Rolston (2000, p.x) recounts that coverage of child deaths during the conflict were routinely accompanied by reports on the victim’s familial activity at the time, which were, he argues, a poorly-disguised attempt to shift blame away from the state and insinuate ‘an element of contributory negligence’. Such narratives were also evident in media responses to the deaths of the Gibraltar Three, when rumours that Fairead, McCann and Savage had been armed at the time of the shootings were amplified by reporters, despite the lack of evidence to support these speculations (Miller, 1991). Rolston (2000, p.x) writes that such moments were particularly revealing, in that they indicated an ‘unquestioned belief that the state does not act as a terrorist’, whilst reinforcing an implicit ‘hierarchy of victims’ that Rolston and other commentators have argued continues to permeate attitudes towards justice in post-conflict Northern Ireland.

As with the discussions about victimhood, the impact of these media narratives became clearer in the aftermath of the conflict when, according to Michael Morrissey and Marie Smyth (2002, p.9), ‘the use of the terms “innocent” or “real” as qualifications for victimhood began to appear’. Following the publication of the Bloomfield report, a pattern emerged whereby civilian victims groups took to describing their own family members as ‘innocent’ non-combatants, directly contrasting this with what they felt was the ‘guilt’ of the paramilitary men and women responsible for their relatives’ death. Twenty years later, and it is notable that whilst civilian groups continue to adhere to this prefix, ‘innocence’ has also been appropriated by the DUP and UUP in their exclusive application of the term to victims of the IRA. During the historic armed forces debate in 2017, the word ‘innocent’ was used

twelve times by the six speaking unionist ministers, always alongside, and in opposition to, the ‘terrorists’ they blamed for these deaths.<sup>24</sup> The effectiveness of these portraits on the mainland media not only demonstrate the continued potency that exclusive definitions of victimhood have on British audiences, but also a particular susceptibility to the idea that “‘true’ victim status demands innocence’ (McEvoy and McConnachie, 2012, p.532).

Somewhat counterintuitively, this cultural shift towards ‘innocence’ as the true marker of victimhood presents a significant opportunity for those paramilitary groups seeking to reinvent themselves in the aftermath of the conflict. This is, in part, driven by what Hannah Arendt has described as innocence’s paradoxical unutterability. Observing that justice is often driven by a legal approach in which ‘only guilt can be irrefutably proved’, Arendt (1963, p.87) writes that innocence by contrast, ‘must be accepted on faith, whereby the trouble is that this faith cannot be supported by the given word, which can be a lie’. In other words, Arendt’s analysis suggests that public declarations of innocence from victims’ groups and politicians, whilst not entirely impotent, are not sufficient to convince a local and international public of their truth, but must also be supported by popular consensus. True to the shifting relativity of post-conflict culture, increased distance from the memories of the Troubles in Northern Ireland has seen a range of ‘guilty’ actors exploit this linguistic paradox. Paramilitary groups have been accused of manipulating international curiosity about the conflict in this regard, where, it is often claimed, they prey on the empathic tendencies of a readily captive tourist audience, by positioning this demographic as witness to their protestations of innocence in order to secure international solidarity and support.

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<sup>24</sup> Although theoretically the term ‘terrorist’ could apply to both republican and loyalist paramilitaries, within unionist, and most mainstream British media circles, it has only ever been used to refer to the IRA and its supporters. ‘Terrorist’ thus becomes a byword for republicanism that subtly excludes those loyalist paramilitaries who were equally guilty of inflicting terror on the population of the North.

**Innocent Victims and Empathy in the Paramilitary Museum.**

Offering a blistering condemnation of the current peace process, historian Cillian McGrattan (2013, p.39) argues that the contemporary fashion within Northern Ireland of promoting discursive approaches to the past has become 'particularly pernicious' of late. Noting that this method, which has obvious roots in a South African model of transitional justice, tends to privilege discussion over legal retribution, McGrattan (2013, p.40) observes that the dogged insistence on fostering dialogue between perpetrators and victims silences the latter, encouraging 'paper-thin sentimentality' when it comes to redressing issue of guilt and responsibility. For McGrattan (2013, p.40), 'the replacement of judgement with empathy' is key to this silencing, as empathy 'points to a generalised position where distinctions are no longer possible, and, since everyone is responsible for the 3,700 plus deaths, no one is individually culpable', thus returning 'questions of social responsibility to a privatised realm'.

Under this model, questions of innocence and guilt are no longer adjudicated by national policy, but haunt those still living with the effects of the Troubles, where their meaning is contested in the space between the 'community' and the home. It is notable that McGrattan's interpretation of the way empathy functions in Northern Ireland stands in stark contrast to the more legalistic approaches discussed in Chapter Two where, as already noted, scholars such as Fritz Breithaupt (2012), Lynne Henderson (1987) and Toni Massaro (1989) have suggested that empathy, whilst useful in the court room, is limited precisely because it cannot be extended to all the actors and 'all stories cannot be given equal value' (Massaro, 1989, p.210). The polarisation between these positions is indicative of the challenges facing activists in Northern Ireland at present, where questions of justice once reserved for the court of law are now played out in a more liminal space between politics and culture, so that empathy is no longer purely connected to questions of justice, and the 'taking of sides'.

One aspect of post-conflict Northern Ireland that further complicates engagements with victim/perpetrator narratives, as well as the concept of 'side-taking', is the erratic nature of attitudes that victims themselves have towards their own 'status'. Work from John Brewer and Patricia Hayes (2011, p.78) has highlighted that, whilst only 12% of the population actually describe themselves as 'victims' (in contrast to the 46.1% the government considers to have been directly impacted), the majority of that 12% have never actually experienced violence, leaving (according to Brewer and Hayes) a 46% gulf between those that did experience violence, and those who opted to claim victimisation in the conflict's aftermath. Such observations correspond with Marie Smyth's (1998, p.37) acknowledgement that, although perennially eager to adopt victimhood for themselves, most paramilitary groups refuse 'to own responsibility in relation to hurts and harms that have been done in their name'. This gulf, whilst accounted for by a diversity of factors (including the negativity attached to the idea of being a victim for those who really did experience violence) is also indicative of what Stephanie Lehner and Cillian McGrattan (2012, p.39) have described as the 'foundational power gap' between those they consider to be 'true' victims of the conflict, and those who represent victimhood in the cultural and political spheres. Noting that 'victimhood itself is constructed in the public realm during the course of debates on the issue', Lehner and McGrattan (2012, p.43) have suggested that the power to define who, or what, a victim is, is increasingly shifted to the representational spheres, which are largely dominated by paramilitary interests.

Drawing attention to the sophisticated means through which a number of paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland have used international curiosity about the Troubles to narrow the political agenda, Lehner and McGrattan (2012, p.40) write that 'the process of representation

cloaks itself in a transparency that disguises the role of the subject (that is the person representing) in relation to the object (victims and victimhood)', resulting in cultural outputs where 'silencing [...] is concealed within the very act of narrativising victimhood'. Similar charges have also been levied by Sara McDowell (2008a), who expresses concern about the impact that partisan conflict tours are having on external perceptions of victims and aggressors during the conflict. Writing that republican and loyalist tour guides deliberately construct narratives for their visitors that emphasise their historic oppression at the hands of each other, McDowell (2008a, p.408) suggests that tourists are invited onto these tours to 'make a moral judgement about the validity of that narrative', in a way that polarises understandings of victims and perpetrators. In the case of mural tours, such judgements are often enhanced by images of child victims on gable walls, which work effectively alongside the more militant paintings of paramilitaries to 'establish social cohesion through a history of shared suffering' (Goalwin, 2013, p.208). Elsewhere, Brian Graham and Yvonne Whelan (2007, p.484) have noted the rootedness of both loyalist and republican memorials in discourses of victimisation, where they argue inscriptions to the 'murdered' dead both evokes the rhetoric of the 'deserving victim', and reinforces the perceived illegitimacy of their killers.

However, for all of the attention that academics have paid to paramilitary memorial practices, one area that is still notably under-researched in relation to the victims question is the museum sector. Elizabeth Croke (2001; 2008; 2016) has lead the way in this regard, through her acknowledgement of the challenges that contested notions of victimhood pose to the formal museum sector, and more recently through her distillation of the victim-centred approaches to the past taken by the families of those killed during Bloody Sunday, which underpins the work of the Museum of Free Derry. Here, Croke (2016, p.94) alerts us to the

dubious role that constructions of innocence can play in these approaches, observing in relation to the *In Their Footsteps* campaign, the omission of ‘elements of the life story of the victim that might alienate the reader’ and the repetition of ‘the theme of innocence’ in the biographies of those killed by the Paratroopers, noting their similarity to memorial plaques in the North. However aside from this, and a few papers that comment on the potential (mis)use of victim narratives at the Long Kesh/Maze prison site (McDowell, 2009; Flynn, 2011), attention to the way that themes of victimhood and innocence play out within more fixed spatial settings has been surprisingly scant. This is particularly true of the paramilitary museum, which despite its status as a definitive part of the informal heritage sector has, as indicated in the introduction, yet to be thoroughly explored by academic commentators.

As sites that are in some ways little more than extensions of the broader memorial landscapes that encase them, both the Irish Republican History Museum and Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre prolong bipartisan engagements with victimhood and innocence. Much like the monuments described by Graham and Whelan, the (somewhat limited) text accompanying displays at both sites is frequently polemical, referring to ‘murdered’ members of the paramilitary community in a way that brings the victimisation of these individuals to the fore, and fixes them as passive objects of remembrance. An example of this is found in the entrance hall to the Republican Museum, where a memorial to the ‘Supreme Sacrifice’ of those female members of the IRA (Figure 8) makes oblique reference to their death by ‘premature explosion’ or describes them as being ‘shot dead’ by loyalist or state forces.





Figure 8. Republican Women's Role of Honour. IRHM.

Although unusual for their explicit gendering (McDowell, 2008b), such descriptions are similar to those found on memorial plaques elsewhere in West Belfast, where specific details that might indicate the victim's collusion in the victimisation of others are absent. At the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre, a similar pattern emerges, whereby the justification for taking up arms is framed through reference to the 'republican atrocities' inflicted upon Protestant communities (Figure 9). Besides from the distinct differences that emerge in terms of how the sites situate their members within broader genealogical histories (loyalists tend draw on tropes common to the depiction of the 'Great War', where as republicans situate their own narratives within a longer nationalist history of martyrdom and sacrifice [Brown, 2007; Rolston, 2010] ), at first glance both museums appear to offer a similar expression of victimhood; one which for the most part focuses on the violence inflicted upon them by others, accompanied by the 'ritual rhetoric [...] of the martyr, hero, and just victim' (Graham and Whelan, 2007, p.489).<sup>25</sup>

Of course, such an approach is entirely coterminous with observations already made by Morrissey and Smyth about the way that perpetrators contextualised their actions during a conflict. Writing that 'since all victims by definition are vulnerable, the violence of the victims is seen in the context of their victimisation', Morrissey and Smyth (2002, p.5) suggest that without the 'moral fig leaf' of another's aggression to explain past actions, 'their violence becomes too naked, politically inexplicable and morally indefensible'. As spaces that invite sustained engagement with a single narrative, museums are the ideal medium for doing this contextual work, not only due to the affective and cognitive engagements that they encourage in their visitors, but also through the western-centric emphasis that is placed on the museums as places of learning, which often leads visitors to attribute a degree of trustworthiness and authority to those creating the exhibits (Falk and Dierking, 2000, p.232).

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<sup>25</sup> It's important to note here that, whilst the UDA has not traditionally had the same level of purchase on the Battle of the Somme mythology as other loyalist groups such as the UVF and Red Hand Commando, Kris Brown (2007, p.720) argues that more recently it has begun 'following suit', with many of its memorials 'featur[ing] allusions to the Great War and the Somme sacrifice' as part of the 'civilianization of UDA commemorations'.



**Figure 9. Newspaper clippings documenting ‘republican atrocities’. ATIC.**

At the Irish Republican History Museum and the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, the contextualisation of violence is doubly effective, given that these sites operate as single-identity projects, and their restricted opening hours, and location at opposite ends of the city, means access to their spaces can be limited. Therefore, the average ‘troubles tourist’ is only likely to have time to visit one of these sites, where they will encounter a partisan narrative that accentuates the injustices inflicted on a single community, which is devoid of references to the suffering that their organisations caused others. Whilst, as Laura McAtackney (2013, p.258) has argued, troubles tourists are not ‘intentionally blinkered’ or ‘naïve’ about the fact of these sites’ impartiality, the intensity of the emotions that tourists can undergo whilst in these spaces should not be underestimated. Certainly, in my own experience, the conjunction of victim-centred narratives, alongside the tangible traces of violence found at these sites makes for both an uncomfortable and disorienting museum experience, which can impede the critical faculties of the museum visitor, and their ability to act as a ‘response-able’ (Oliver, 2001) witness to the histories they are invited into.

*I'm walking with my sister towards a set of doors which, flanked by steel bars gesture towards a dark corridor behind. I'm apprehensive, perhaps unreasonably so, but away from the frenetic rhythms of the Falls road, with its stream of camera-wielding tourists and hourly rotation of black cabs and bus tours, the tangible stillness is slightly unnerving. We've followed the route to the museum on my phone, but even with its assistance, and the sign on the road that points towards the site, it would be easy to miss. We've come down a street that's just off the Falls, bearing down towards the iconic Conway peace wall, before turning into the old mill site, behind which the Eileen Hickey museum is tucked.*

*Just standing outside these gates, the museum's entrance, feels like an imposition, and I can't escape the feeling that I am disturbing the landscape. It occurs to me that maybe I'm being paranoid, exhibiting all the trademark neuroses of the academic. Who is going to know that my motives for visiting this place are any different from that of the next American tourist that breezes through the doors? Maybe I've spend too much time reading about republicanism, am too aware of my complicity in this war. Looking at my sister I take a quick breath and lightheartedly say 'shall we go in then?'. But inside, the negative cycle of thoughts continues: "I'm not sure what I'm doing here. I have no right to be here."*

[...]

*We step inside and immediately welcome the coolness of our surroundings (it's been an uncharacteristically hot couple of days in Belfast). The hallway is dark in comparison with the bright June sunshine, and accompanied by the faint sound of moving water and a not-unpleasant smell of damp. It's earthy. To the left I see some sort of memorial plaque whose significance I haven't worked*

*out yet, although I note underneath it a small water feature, and just ahead are the double doors, inviting us into the body of the museum. We wander down, almost missing a side-room that looks like a prison cell. Taking a quick peek, I notice an imposing looking metal door impedes a full view into the cell, and I absently wonder whether it's an original from the prison. But now that we are inside I'm eager to enter the heart of the place, to begin the process of looking in its cabinets, reading labels, dissecting curatorial strategies and uncovering the hidden meanings that sustain both this museum, and the people who created it.*

*Finally entering the main room, I immediately realise that this is not how my first visit is going to pan out. Almost at once I am disoriented by the sheer volume of objects that litter the place, the harshness of the strip lighting overhead, the gaelic music that reverberates tinnily around the room. And then in a shift that seems almost too twistedly ironic to be true (I am aware of this as I write it up now), my eyes lock onto what appears to be a rocket launcher, casually hanging from the ceiling, suspended above the heads of an unsuspecting couple who are absorbed in the display cases below.*

Being a tourist, and engaging in travel to new and unknown places is, as Mike Robinson (2012, p.40) highlights, a highly emotional affair which, although often characterised by joy, also engages with a spectrum of other emotions, including 'anxiety, nervousness, uneasiness and apprehension'. In fact, he writes, apprehension and worry are 'defining attribute[s] of the tourist condition', stemming not only from the usual stresses involved in organising a holiday, but also the 'mental stresses and strains brought about by encounters with difference' (Robinson, 2012, p.40). Undoubtedly these anxieties are intensified when entering a space that we suspect may be hostile to us — a common occurrence in Northern Ireland where, as Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh (2006) have indicated, the boundaries separating interface communities are as much 'psychic' as they are physical. In this sense, my own feelings of apprehension as I entered the Republican Museum with my sister were hardly unique,

where my consciousness of my status as not just a researcher, but also a 'Brit', and technical adversary to broader republic philosophies fuelled my anxiety. However, compounding this consciousness, was undoubtedly a deeper, more profound fear, which stemmed from the knowledge that I was entering a space organised by and dedicated to, the perpetrators of violence.

For tourists to either the Irish Republican History Museum, or the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre the connection between these sites, and histories of violent conflict, are in many ways inescapable. Besides from the names of these museums, which particularly in the case of the Republican Museum make the connection explicit, the surrounding landscapes in which these spaces are situated, with painted kerbstones, and gable walls plastered with images of gunmen, are a constant reminder to the visitor that they are entering, not just a strange space, but one that in many ways is the ideological centre of these landscapes. At the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, this is made particularly evident through the inclusion of the meeting room that sits on the uppermost level of the building, which formally described as the museum's 'learning room', is also used as a meeting site for different events involving present and ex-members of the UDA in East Belfast. The room, which includes a single desk surrounded by an array of UDA flags, has all the hallmarks of a clubhouse, a perception that the curators appear to be in no hurry to dispel.

Whilst visitors may not be aware of these connections, or even fully understand the differences between Belfast's paramilitary groups, participant observation suggested a degree of reticence in people's engagement with the Irish Republican History Museum and its displays, which undermines these sites' self-promotion as tourist-friendly, and interactive spaces. As observed by the volunteer at the Andy Tyrie Centre, 'it's funny the amount of people that walk in without a hello, walk out, its dead on [...] it annoys you because you're dying to tell them something!' (ATIC). Over the course of repeated visits to the Republican Museum in particular, I frequently observed this reservation in

tourists who, usually accompanied by a taxi tour guide, wore expressions of uncertainty, or masks of attentiveness on their faces, as they listened to their guide's monologue, without glancing around them. More often than not, once their speeches had finished, guides would draw attention to a specific object or case in the museum that in some way fed into the narrative of their tour, and which they would use to unpack a discussion point made earlier, catalysing visitors' own exploration of the displays. Attention would usually be drawn to objects connected to the hunger strikes (such as the model of Long Kesh/Maze prison, or a blood pressure monitor used on prisoners), and very rarely would the display cases of guns (Figure 10) or rocket launcher (Figure 11) be highlighted, which is not entirely unsurprising, given that most guides to the Republican Museum tend to be sympathetic to the aims and achievements of the movement, and thus eager to frame the space positively for tourists.

Apart from the rocket launcher, most weapons in the Eileen Hickey museum are tucked away in hidden corners, or contained in innocuous-looking display cases. For first time visitors to this site, it may take some time to come across the two small cases filled with petrol bombs, handguns and rifles which (in a rare concession towards the museological convention of providing some contextual information) are emphatically labelled as "Type of weapon used in the cause of Irish Freedom" (Figure 12) and "Example of the few weapons used in Catholic areas" (Figure 13). Frequently mixed into these displays are older guns that dating back to the first world war and Easter Rising, suggest an uncomplicated trajectory from this earlier (and in many ways more legitimate) incarnation of nationalist resistance, through to the armed republicanism of the Troubles. In doing so, the museum unwittingly reveals something of contemporary republicanism's attitude towards its own genealogy, as it attempts to justify the violence it used during the Troubles by situating it within a longer, more legitimate history of nationalist campaigns such as those organised by NICRA. These attempts to generate false commonality with nationalist and Catholic communities has long been part of the IRA and Sinn Fein's strategy and, as Sara McDowell (2007, p.732) has observed, is particularly common to

republican commemorations, where memorials often incorporate references to civilians to create ‘the idea of a communal struggle, a campaign of state terror inflicted against the whole community and not just towards combatants’.



**Figure 10. One of the display cases containing weapons used by the IRA. IRHM.**





**Figure 11. RPG-7V Russian Rocket Launcher, suspended from the museum roof. IRHM.**



Figure 12. "Type of weapons used in the cause of Irish Freedom". IRHM.



**Figure 13. “Examples of the few weapons held in catholic areas August ‘69”. Label on the milk bottle reads “Petrol Bomb used to defend the nationalist people of Belfast and Derry from RUC and loyalist mobs”. IRHM.**

Part of the reason that such display cases are so effective at re-writing the connections between these three communities, and directing attention away from paramilitarism’s immediate association with violence, stems from the lack of signposting that the museum provides for the first time visitor to the site. Apart from the crudely typed A4 information sheets on offer at the door that provide some historical background to the museum, visitors to the Irish Republican History Museum are given very little guidance for navigating the museum, or the objects it displays. Indeed, although the curators suggest that they have created a ‘logical’ narrative, with the collection of newspaper clippings and posters at the far end of the space offering a chronological (albeit selective) breakdown of the conflict, this is strongly at odds with the arrangement of other displays, where Tom Williams’ framed shirt dated from the 1940s, sits next to a collection of rubber bullets collected during the 1970s,

accompanied by only the briefest contextual information.<sup>26</sup> Such a curatorial approach is entirely in keeping with strategies that Fiona Candlin (2016, p.12) notes are employed by other ‘micro-museums’, which often lack the kind of thoughtful arrangements, or ‘archival histories’, that visitors have come to expect from a museum visit. And yet, as I found in my own experiences, the very absence of these informative hooks does create narrative, albeit a sometimes counterintuitive, less structured, and more individualised one than is typical of sites with more ‘interpretive scaffolding’ (Ballantyne, 2003). Looking back through my field diaries, I found myself making constant refrains to the sense of confusion that I experienced whilst there, to the point that I queried whether the ‘confusion is deliberate?’. Candlin (2016, p.146) records a similar disorientation in her dealings with the site, observing that the museum ‘does not present a strong textual narrative [...] to the extent that if the same museum was in a hypothetically neutral situation, it would be difficult to know how to interpret the exhibition’. Yet, with the benefit of hindsight, and by contrasting fieldnotes with the photos I also used to document my visits, it is clear that I was experiencing a narrative each time I came to the museum, albeit one that (as I eventually, unwillingly admitted) revolved around an intense fascination with the weapons on display at the Irish Republican History Museum — a fascination that was often disarmingly removed from the immediacy of their usage.

*I've spent what feels like hours looking at the hundreds of photos I've taken of the Republican Museum over the past year, trying to document and recreate the experience I had when I first visited with my sister. I've tried to take pictures of every display case, as well as having documented the museum from several different angles, after giving up on trying to fit its eclectic collection into a single frame. Looking back through these images I note that on several occasions I have taken similar photos of several display cases on each visit. With a slight queasiness I see that amongst the*

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<sup>26</sup> Tom Williams was a member of an earlier incarnation of the IRA active shortly after partition. He was arrested in 1942 after a clash with the RUC over a commemorative parade for the Easter Rising, and was sent to Crumlin Road Gaol where he was executed later that year. The shirt hanging in the Republican Museum is reportedly the one he was wearing when he died.

*accidental duplicates are numerous images of the case containing the petrol bomb and handguns. Again, I start mentally rehearsing the litany of questions that I've been trying to answer about this case: why include these weapons in here? Where are the weapons from? Who have they got them from? Why include weapons at all? What is their effect supposed to be? Suddenly the question that I've been avoiding asking myself for the past few months breaks in with a silent force: "Who did they kill?"*

Writing on the rise of micro-museum, Fiona Candlin notes a growing tension between museum objects as embedded in the social contexts that produced them, and the death of those contexts, which is brought about through their inclusion in the sterile and highly regulated museum environment. Arguing that 'museums are akin to mausoleums in that they 'kill' objects by removing them from their non-museological circuits of use and belief', Candlin (2016, p.22) goes on to document the way that micro-museums often resist such killings, suggesting that a 'live' object is one that 'has the capacity to prompt reactions that are more appropriate to its former role in a non-museum world' (2016, p.54). Such arguments stand in stark contrast to what Gaynor Kavanagh (2000) has suggested is a total absence of social memory when it comes to objects in the history museum, and the fragments of history that Paul Williams (2008) argues objects in the memorial museum provides us with. However, it is my argument that contrary to Candlin's analysis of the Museum of Witchcraft, whose objects she attributes with a peculiar vitality, the artefacts on display at the Irish Republican History Museum actually occupy a liminal space between 'liveness' and 'death', whereby they are at once immediate and indexical reminders of some of the worst of the paramilitary atrocities, and curiously decontextualized from the specific circumstances of their usage. My personal experience of engaging with the weapons cabinet demonstrates this, where my fascination with these objects as direct indicators of a recent conflict was balanced by an equally strong desire to avoid contemplating the most obvious aspect of their 'liveness', namely their use as agents of violence. A similar attitude is

also revealed by one of the museum's reviewers on *TripAdvisor*, who remarks that they found the experience 'uncomfortable' at the time, but that 'it was only some days later', when reflecting on the weaponry on display, that they began to 'think if any of the guns had been use in the killing of British soldiers' (Fozboz, 2016). Such reactions indicate an impulse towards a sanitisation of republican history, and a desire to avoid the social impact of these weapons usage. Contrasting visitor reactions to these particular display cases with others at the Republican Museum, it was possible to see similar patterns playing out, again suggesting that, although these weapons might be invested with what Paul Williams (2008, p.31) calls a 'sinister appeal', they are marked out from other objects on display by the quite limited engagement that visitors have with them.

The average visitor to the Irish Republican History Museum, once let loose by their guide spends no more than 30 minutes weaving their way through its exhibitions and stops only briefly to examine the contents of each display case. The absence of explanatory labels or contextual information in the museum means that many of the items which may have far richer histories (such as Tom Williams' shirt, or a large Irish tricolour that was once draped over the coffin of Joe McKelvey) can be overlooked in favour of those items that are either more visually striking, or which speak to visitors' pre-existing knowledge about the Troubles. Without a doubt, the cases that always attract the most attention are those containing the handguns and petrol bombs, which people linger over for noticeably longer than others (an observation also confirmed by multiple members of the curatorial staff). Occasionally I have overheard jokes being made about the weapons on display, but people's uneasiness was more frequently communicated through a furtive silence, which alongside the occasional anxious glances they might cast around them, suggested discomfit about being caught staring for too long at these items. On one occasion, when I was trying to take an unobstructed photo of the rocket launcher, I was struck by the behaviour of a couple behind me, who also kept glancing towards the object I was photographing, but didn't pass any comment on it, or ask their guide for any

further information. It was only when the guide himself noticed their curiosity, and instructed them to take a photo that the couple appeared to relax, suggesting that they had been unsure about what the appropriate etiquette was for engaging with such obvious objects of violence in an otherwise convivial setting.

When young children come to the museum as part of a family trip they are invariably drawn to these cases, and are less afraid about spending longer periods of time gazing at the weapons on display and smearing the glass with greasy fingerprints as they point out items to each other. However, what was also striking about these interactions, was that I rarely heard the children asking questions about the guns whilst in the museum, nor did their parents seem to particularly encourage them. Such reservations are atypical of the behaviours usually displayed by parents and their children in museums, where, as Falk and Dierking (2000, p. 56) observe, learning ‘is a fundamentally social experience’, and usually revolves around discussion and the asking and answering of questions. The contrast between this, and interaction with other objects in the museum was particularly notable in one instance, where a mother and son, after spending a period of time silently examining the contents of the gun case, moved on to a handcrafted crib, which immediately prompted the child to exclaim “Awh! That’s amazing!”.

Observing these interactions it was clear that, like for me, handguns and rifles held a certain ‘sinister appeal’ (Williams, 2008, p.31) for visitors to the Republican Museum, and yet it was rare to see this reflected in visitor book comments. The discrepancy between people’s actual engagements with the museum, and what they chose to publicly record, could suggest residual discomfit about offering criticism in a space that doesn’t invite it. Indeed, it was not unusual to see and hear tour guides instructing clients to sign the visitor book before they left, sometimes making them form a queue to do so before they would be allowed out of the building. Under such conditions, it would hardly be

surprising to find curtailed, or more taciturn entries in these books, which might reflect the restricted conditions under which visitors were being mandated to sign them. However, as this chapter will later explore, whilst many entries did include such comments, a significant number went in the opposite direction and, offering what sometimes seemed like excessive praise for such a small site, suggested a tacit acceptance of, or disassociation from, the violence of the recent past, which bolsters republican claims to innocence in the present.

Unlike the Republican Museum, where most weapons are tucked away or hidden in between more banal displays, the Andy Tyrie Centre compels loyalism's violent history to the forefront of the visitor narrative by literally putting the guns at the front and centre of its exhibition space. The first time I visited the museum, the curator had arranged the weapons so that they, alongside a mannequin dressed in a paramilitary uniform (Figure 14 and Figure 15), were the first thing to greet the visitor as they walked through the doors, a move that he explained was driven by visitor demand to see the weapons first hand. Possibly as a result of this flagrant attitude towards objects that I found as unsettling as I did compelling, on my first visit I found that these guns repelled me in a way that similar displays at the Republican Museum had not, and I wrote that they were 'crass' and 'disturbing'. Partly I put my extreme reactions down to the type of weapons included in their collection which, alongside the handguns and rifles found in the Republican Museum, feature an ominously stained wooden bat, and what looked to be an improvised flail (Figure 16) that summon a particular viscerality, and associations with the more macabre activities of the Shankill Butchers.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The Shankill Butchers were a UVF loyalist gang that were known for their sectarian methods, and a series of particularly grisly murders. They were responsible for 23 murders during the Troubles, however it was their tactic of driving into known Catholic areas, abducting, torturing and then killing random Catholics that stoked their infamy both within Belfast and the wider world. See: Dillon, 1990.





**Figure 14. Mannequin dressed as loyalist paramilitary next to museum entrance, alongside the first collection of weapons. ATIC.**



Figure 15. Some of the weapons positioned near the front of the museum. ATIC.



Figure 16. Wooden bat and flail. Also by the front entrance of ATIC.

Largely though, such disturbance was also stimulated by the prominence of these weapons' position in the museum, where resting on simple metal hooks and without any fastenings to keep them in place, they're all too accessible to passing visitors, and I noted at the time that my fingers were 'itching to take them off their rests'. Such fears, it later transpired, were not unwarranted, as an interview with one of the volunteers revealed that local visitors and members of the UDA frequently do precisely this; picking up the guns and posing with them, in a move that the volunteer attributed to gender, rather than anything more sinister ('honestly, it doesn't matter if you're a four year old wee boy or sixty five year old man, the first thing that the fellas walk in — straight to the guns' [ATIC]). When I later pushed him on the reasons for keeping the weapons in such a prominent position, the volunteer was adamant that their inclusion was because 'we tell the truth. We don't try to hide the gangster element that happened' – a refrain that is often used by loyalists as a form of rebuke to republicans, who are perceived as being 'dishonest' about their actions during the conflict (McAuley and Ferguson, 2016). However, 'telling the truth' about the UDA's association with violence also suggests a particular confidence in the museum's ability to shape the interpretive experiences of its visitors, and an assuredness that their own claims to victimhood and innocence will translate for an international audience.

Entering this site I was markedly less nervous than I had been entering the Republican Museum, however my comparative ease was offset by the discomfit of my companion who, confident and affable for the duration of our visit, later confessed to me that she had experienced a 'dead chill [that] went right through me' when she first came through the Centre's doors, and who particularly highlighted the guns and models of paramilitary members as a source of that discomfit. As a Catholic-nationalist woman who had lived in North Belfast her whole life, encountering the guns on the walls, and the mannequins dressed in paramilitary clothing was a deeply unnerving experience. Indeed, for my friend, such props symbolised, not just a generalised violence apropos to that of a country at war,

but the much more specific experiences of her own childhood, and those of her broader community who had suffered at the hands of these loyalist groups.

The affective intensity of my friend's response contradicted the volunteer's initial claim that the Centre was a 'community' style museum that deeply invested in the work of Charter and other third sector organisations, actively promoted reconciliation. This was later confirmed when the volunteer stated that 'the members of the organisation mean more to us than the actual community community' (ATIC). Yet, in spite of the alienation that my friend felt in this place, clear attempts were being made to engage with a network of people that stretched beyond the immediacy of the East Belfast UDA, suggested by the multi-language welcome sign and visitor book that were added after the site's renovation in 2016. Perhaps in a notable concession to this newer, more sensitive audience, this renovation also saw the guns and weapons that had been by the entrance moved to the second floor of the museum where, no less accessible to those who wanted to play with them, they were at least less obtrusive to first time visitors (Figure 17).

Despite the intimidating atmosphere generated by the weaponry on display at the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre and Irish Republican Museum, their effects are softened by their rationalisation within a broader history of conflict. At the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre, this is achieved through extraneous narratives that contextualise loyalist violence through its close relationship to the British State. Unlike the Eileen Hickey, which purports to represent all facets of republicanism, the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre (ATIC) is exclusively dedicated to the history of the UDA in East Belfast, and rejects its association with other loyalist groups, such as the UVF or even with some of its broader UDA networks. For the volunteer at the museum, this distinction was important, given the longevity of the feud between the UDA and UVF (Bruce, 2004), however it is also crucial insofar as it draws attention the UDA's official status as a legal political organisation during the Troubles.



**Figure 17. Weapons display in the refurbished museum. ATIC.**

Certainly, during the course of my first visit to the site, the volunteer on duty was at pains to remind me that the UDA had been legal until 1992, and although he acknowledged the violence it inflicted through its armed wing the UFF, he was quick to inform us that ‘we were just protecting our families from terrorism’. The newspaper clippings that adorn the walls confirm this perspective where, unlike the Republican Museum, a clear chronology for the UDA’s emergence is provided, which positions the UDA as a direct response to a long history of republican violence through extracts that are overwhelmingly centred on the deaths caused by republicans. Outside the immediate confines of the space, the museum’s Facebook page accentuates the associations between loyalism and victimisation, through the inclusion of a daily ‘on this day’ post (which also takes the form of a physical plaque on the museum’s front desk), which reminds followers of those Protestants, UDA members, Brits and Security force members killed by the IRA and UVF, but which somewhat conveniently absents any references to deaths inflicted by the UDA on its own community.<sup>28</sup>

At the Republican Museum, the justifications for their campaigns are made more visceral than those found at ATIC, where several material objects (shirts, paintings) ripped by bullet holes are presented to the visitor as evidence of the brutality of the British State’s siege on the Catholic community. A case of rubber bullets located just under the educational room is a particularly poignant riff on this theme, where dozens of menacingly solid looking plastic casings are nestled in between the names and photos of the eight Catholic children killed as a result of their usage (Figure 18). Watching visitors encounter this particular display, one middle-aged Australian woman was overheard saying that ‘if someone does something to you like that then you’re going to retaliate’, in a clear indicator of the kinds of empathetic impulses that are stimulated by such blatant displays of innocent victimhood.

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<sup>28</sup> In fact, as Steve Bruce’s (2004, p.502) analysis of UDA actions shows, since the ceasefire ‘61% of UDA/RHD killings [...] have been of other Loyalists’, whilst during the Troubles a fifth of all Protestant deaths were caused by loyalist forces (Smyth, 2006, p.13).



**Figure 18. Display of rubber bullets and list of names (above) of those killed by them. IRHM.**

### **Visitor Books and Organisational Innocence.**

The impact that evidence of violence from the ‘other side’ can have on visitors’ ability to contextualise the violence of paramilitary groups can be understood by referencing the visitor books at both sites, which provide a more nuanced insight into the attitudes that visitors have towards these museum spaces. Sharon MacDonald (2005) and Chaim Noy (2008a; 2008b) have already drawn attention to the role that the visitor book can play in our understanding of the museum experience, with MacDonald (2005, p.119) in particular observing that, as a ‘relatively little used’ source, the visitor book can be a highly rewarding material for the researcher to engage with as it represents ‘an integral part of that exhibition [...] in which many visitors participate’. Highlighting Tamar Katriel’s insights about the limitations of these books as academic sources, whereby inscription may be governed more by politeness than ‘well-balanced feedback’, MacDonald (2005, p.122) nevertheless sees the visitor book as a useful complement to more traditional museum methods such as visitor-observation and

interviewing, insofar as they 'are produced independently of research being undertaken' and can therefore offer more unmediated insights into visitor attitudes. Chaim Noy (2008a, p.516) expands on this, noting that in many ways visitor books have become part of a highly ritualised performance that is central to the museum visit as 'the surfaces of the visitor book provide a *miniature stage*, only a few inches large, where words and signs are printed and inscribed, documented and collected', through which visitors 'perform an act of documentation' (2008, p.513).

Certainly, at the Irish Republican History Museum, the performative element of signing the visitor book quickly became clear, as I observed tourists diligently queuing up to sign their names and add a comment, under the watchful eye of their tour guides. Quite what the motivation was for getting clients to sign these books wasn't always clear, however I noted that at the end of the tour, nearly every visitor was implored to 'at least write your name and where you're from' by their guide. From the museum staff's point of view, this practice was also useful in that it gave them a way to keep track of visitor demographics, which could then be used for future funding bids or bragging rights in an ever-competitive tourism sector. Certainly, whenever I asked staff about their visitors, I was always enthusiastically directed to these books, and usually had the most effusive comments read out to me by a volunteer. In this sense, both the signing and reading of these books appeared to be deeply performative and controlled affairs, which seemed entirely appropriate to the space they were in.

Taking these coercions into account, it was hardly surprising to find that across the ten years of visitor books at the Republican Museum there was very little in the way of critique of the site, or suggestions for change. This was particularly evident when contrasted with the museum's TripAdvisor page, where critics are much more forthcoming in their accusations of bias, and diatribes against the 'glorification of terrorism' (Raydar, 2014). The places where tacit disapproval was sometimes suggestive were where visitors left gaps next to their names (which had presumably been added under duress) without



providing a comment. At various points in the books there were whole pages of this, where judging by people's geographical locations, they had been part of a large tour, and either did not have the time, or inclination to write something more substantive. However, the inability to engage more fully with these signatories made such silences difficult to interpret, and so they were mostly treated as curious breaks in the page.

Of those who did leave comments in the books, a majority offered variations on the usual banalities found at such museums, with the site being alternately described as 'interesting', 'excellent', 'brilliant', or another positive variation thereof. A few cagier (and perhaps braver) informants simply described the museum as 'ok', 'good', or the more neutral 'informative', although again it wasn't always clear whether such word choices were down to the restricted English of their authors, or a simple lack of time. At the other end of the spectrum (and in notable contrast to the comments found at the Andy Tyrie Centre), a number of signatories described feeling 'moved' by the museum, qualifying the experience as 'emotional', 'heart breaking' and on occasion even 'life altering'. Somewhat surprisingly in these cases, the more emotional comments were expressed by people from a range of backgrounds (from London to Honolulu), rather than those already living in the Belfast or Northern Ireland, and often written independently of the other comments in the book, were not part of the 'collective production' usually associated with such entries (Noy, 2008a, p.517).

At the Andy Tyrie Centre, the kinds of insights that could be derived from the visitor books were more limited, in that the Centre has been open for less time than the Republican Museum, and only started keeping a book in 2015. However, in contrast to the Republican Museum, where comments were usually briefer and more general in tone, responses to the Andy Tyrie Centre were much more developed, often covering a sentence or two, albeit without the expressions of emotionality found in the books at the Republican site. It's also important to note that entries into these books weren't

usually completed under duress, as visitors to the Andy Tyrie tend to arrive at the museum at the end of (rather than half way through) a tour, giving them more time to wander round the museum and sign the book, with the guide/volunteer being much more relaxed about this process. Like the Republican Museum visitor books, the one at the Andy Tyrie contains all the usual platitudes of ‘brilliant’, ‘interesting’ and ‘very good’, however they also offer additional notations, often from other members of the UDA, expressing gratitude to the organisers for ‘preserving our history’, in a nod to the narrower audience for which the site was conceived. Also unlike the inscriptions at the Eileen Hickey, which tend to be more respectful and sombre in tone, there is an underlying jocularity and humour to some of the entries at the Andy Tyrie Centre, with one particularly notable commentator writing ‘cheers for the lovely time UDA’.

These differences aside, one striking commonality across both of these visitor books is the way that visitors position themselves in relation to the material, and imagined communities of both sites. Returning to the display cases in the Republican Museum that condoned its weaponry on the premise that they were ‘used to defend the nationalist people [...] from RUC and loyalist mobs’ (Figure 13), this slippage between the suffering of the Catholic community, the aims of nationalism, and actions of republicanism is evidenced through visitor comments, which reference the hurts issued against the ‘community’ or ‘the Irish people’, indicating a tacit acceptance (even if only for the benefit of the tour guide) of the idea that republicanism in some way represents the general feelings and ideology of a broader (imagined) civilian community. Going further than this, a number of comments in both the Andy Tyrie Centre’s and Republican Museum’s books actually saw visitors using phrases associated with paramilitary forces, in an apparent gesture of solidarity with these ideologies. Whilst at the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, slogans such as ‘Quis Separabit’ or ‘QS’ were most commonly used by those who indicated belonging to some kind of loyalist brigade, at the Republican Museum, notes that

finished with “Up the Ra!”, ‘Viva la Republique’ or “Go raibh maith agat” (a gaelic blessing not exclusive to, but heavily used by republicans), came from a range of actors from across the globe.

Possibly this was the result of the museum’s broader audience, which receives double the number of visitors on any given day than the Andy Tyrie Centre, and which is most heavily visited by those tourists on a taxi tour of the city. Possibly, it also reflects republicanism’s broader success in importing its aims and ideologies abroad, to countries also engaged in conflict over their colonial legacies (Rolston, 2010; Prince, 2015). However, given that comments such as ‘I feel more irish now’ came from places not engaged in active conflict in the present (in this case, Italy), such an explanation isn’t entirely convincing. No doubt these declarative expressions of identification may be encouraged by what Chaim Noy (2008a, p.523) sees as being the visitor book’s performative element, through which the seasoned museum visitor use the book’s stage to demonstrate her understanding of ‘both how she is expected to *react*, and how she is meant to *convey* her reaction’. However, visitors’ willingness to align themselves with paramilitary ideologies in the face of the tangible evidence attesting to their violent histories, also suggests there is an alternative kind of performativity at work in these museums, which is deeply aligned with what Vlasta Jalusic has termed ‘organisational innocence’.

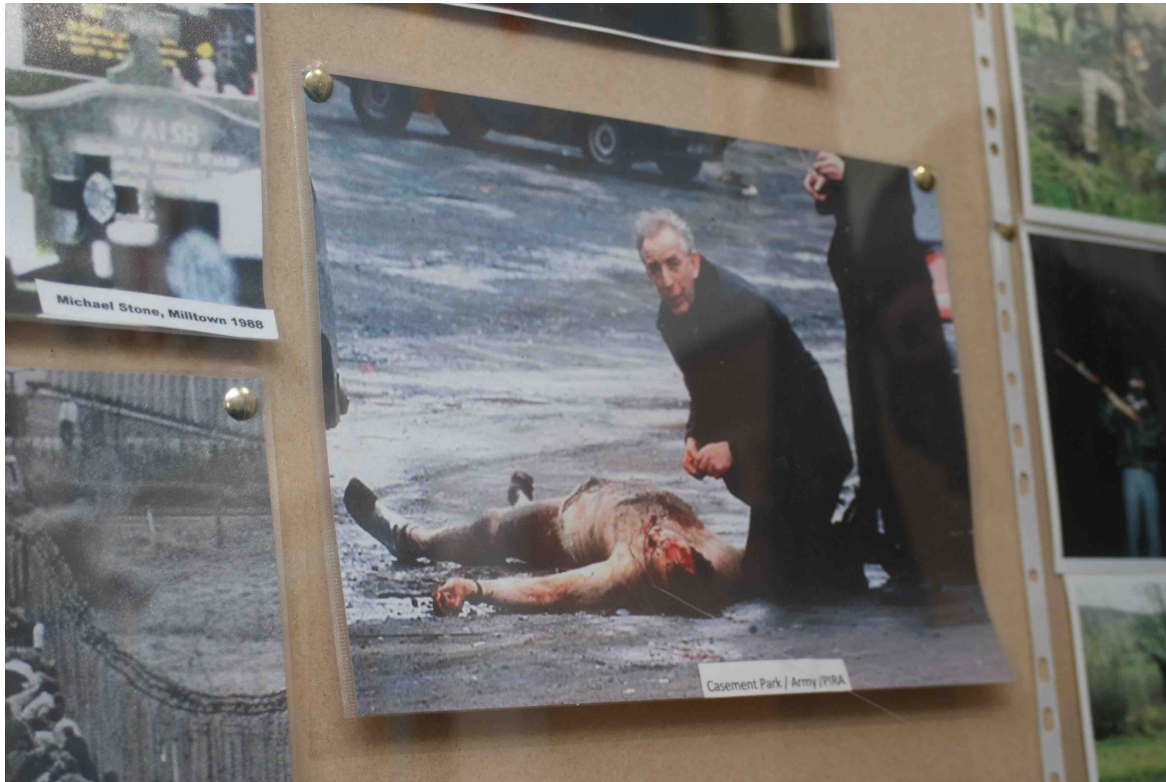
Writing on guilt and responsibility in the Yugoslavian conflict, Vlasta Jalusic (2007, p.1174) observes that a significant cultural shift took place in the aftermath of World War Two that shaped international understandings of how to talk about and understood ‘the criminal past’. Following public indictment of German citizens for their role in the persecution of German-Jews, it no longer became possible, Jalusic argues, to deny the idea of collective responsibility, and so instead those preparing for war and criminality began to divert their attention away from the rhetoric of responsibility, and towards that of innocence and guilt. Out of this shift came the concept of ‘organised innocence’, which Jalusic (2007, p.1174) describes as ‘an extended process of preparation’ for ‘a specific climate and mentality [...]

created in order to prepare people to participate in, commit to, or tolerate' violence that is also a 'preparation process for an enterprise of organised guilt, producing a situation of inverted human values, where unimaginable things become conceivable and people can easily renounce their personal and collective responsibility' (2007, p.1181). As a concept, organised innocence is heavily invested in the Arendtian interpretation of innocence and guilt which, stemming from the argument that only those excluded from the fullness of state participation (i.e.refugees) are truly innocent, argues that all who benefit from the richness of national belonging must admit complicity in a nation's wrongdoing. Organised innocence, Jalusic (2007, p.1180) writes, works to invert this truth, first by selling the lie that those belonging to a nation are, in fact, stateless, and secondly by encouraging citizens to renounce their 'basic political potential' through the construction of artificial victimhood.

Organised innocence can clearly be seen at work in the rhetoric of contemporary loyalism and republicanism in Northern Ireland where the two traditions have essentially developed out of fear for the mutual disenfranchisement that each other's campaign ensures. Within a museum context, such rhetorics become doubly potent where, alongside the visual evidence of the wounds that have been inflicted on both communities (captured in the array of gruesome photographs of the injured and dead), are references to militarised resistance, in a way that naturalises the association between the two. At the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre, the most obvious manifestation of this militancy in the face of disenfranchisement is found in the arrangement of photos on one of its display boards, where amateur snapshots of armed and balaclava-covered UDA/UFF members are situated alongside particularly graphic images documenting the stripping and beating of two young corporals, carried out by the IRA in 1988 in retaliation for the Michael Stone attacks three days before (Figure 19; Figure 20).



**Figure 19. Photos of UFF members with guns, next to images of murdered corporal. ATIC.**



**Figure 20. Photo of murdered British Army Coporal. ATIC.**

The inclusion of this particular event, which actually occurred well after the formation of the UDA, asks the visitor to make an explicit connection between these two events: namely, that loyalist violence emerged directly in response to an assault on British soldiers, and therefore unionists' British identity. Notably, on the opposite side of this same display are images taken of a protest march conducted between London/Derry and Belfast, featuring banners emblazoned with the slogan "British citizens defend British rights!" (Figure 21), which enable even the least discerning of visitors to pick up on this connection. Elsewhere, smaller, less obvious signs play into this ideology, with stickers subtly adhered to glass display cases with slogans such as "I am fully insured by AK 47" (Figure 22) and calls to "Defend the Union" (Figure 23). Such an interpretation is also cognisant with how ex-UDA members use the space who, according to the volunteer will 'come in, take a look around, at some of the atrocities that the IRA committed, and they'll go, "you know what? Thank god that was on the wall because that's why I did this. To stop these men from doing this"' (ATIC). In this way Jalusic (2007, p.1175) notes that organised innocence is also backward looking, used to reflect on

crimes that were committed so that they are ‘for the second time rendered into something righteous and are, accordingly, normalised’.



**Figure 21: Full billboard showing marching protestors to the left.**

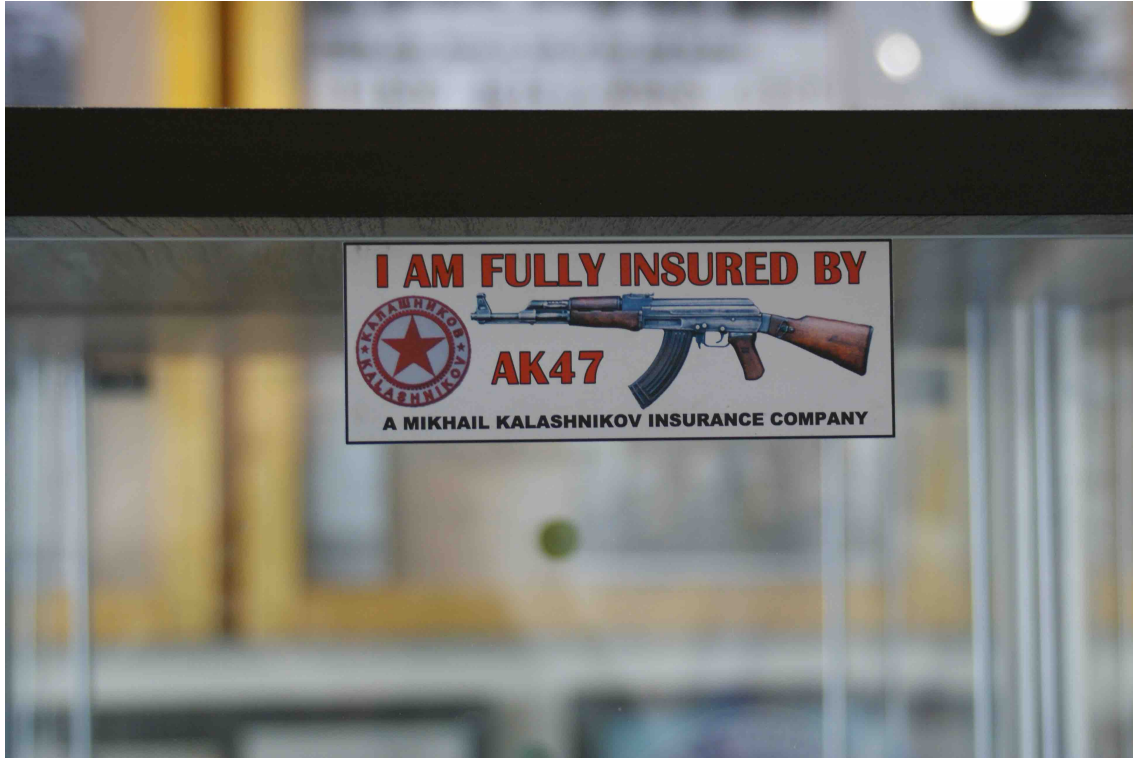


Figure 22. "I am fully insured by AK47". Sticker on display case in ATIC.

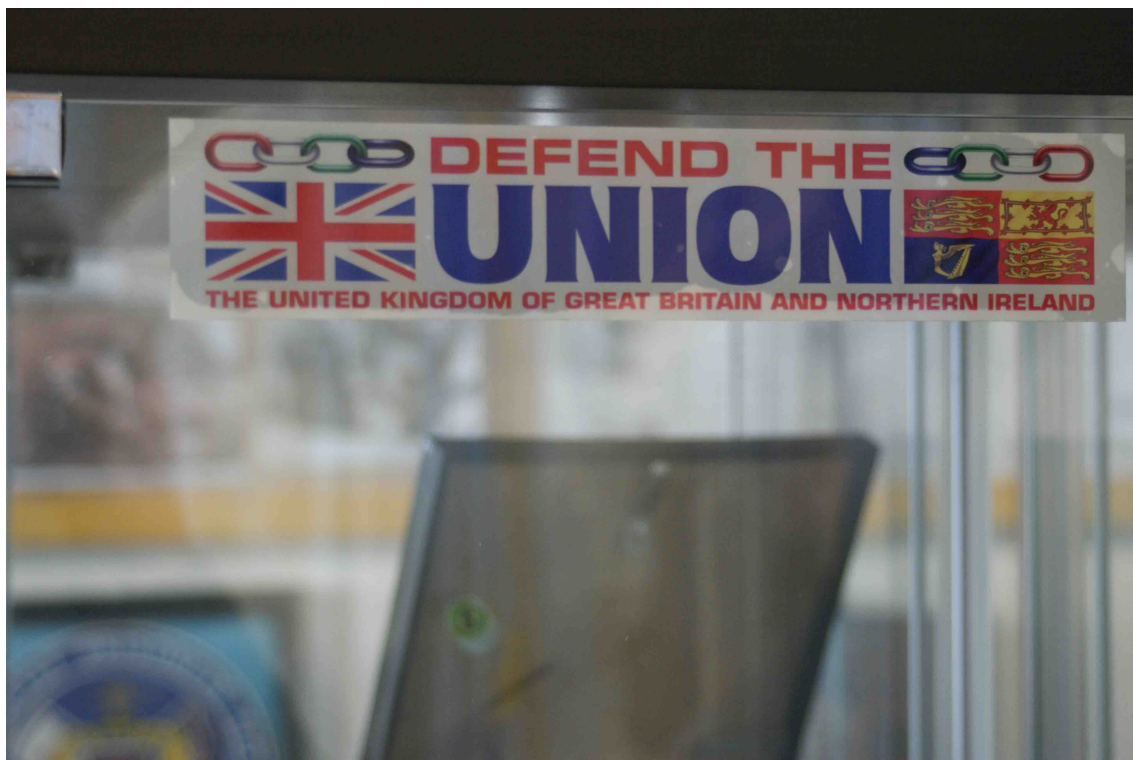


Figure 23. "Defend the Union" sticker on display case. ATIC.



At the Republican Museum, this triangulation of militancy and innocence is in some ways subtler than at the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre, possibly in recognition of the fact that, thanks to the British media, the IRA's international reputation for violence has already been well established around the globe (Jarman, 1996). Perhaps in response to this, violence is less embodied than at the Republican Museum and there are, for example, fewer images of actual IRA men dressed in military gear, in spite of a vast repository of such images held at the Roddy McCorley Museum down the road. Instead, embodied violence takes the form of abject photos of beaten hunger strikers (Figure 24) and Catholic civilians (Figure 25 and Figure 26), or conversely, a series of mannequins dressed in the uniforms of the RUC, British Army and Prison Guard (Figure 27), thus reconfirming Catholic civilians as the victims, and never the perpetrators of violence. Subtle allusions to the necessity of republican militancy can be found however, in labels that mark certain items down for their use 'in the cause of Irish Freedom', which avoids specifying against who, and when they were used. In this way, the Irish Republican History Museum becomes not only the publicly acceptable face for republicanism, but also a key medium for the dissemination of organised innocence, into which the tourist is guilelessly invited to take part.



Figure 24. Image of beaten political prisoner. IRHM



Figure 25. Newspaper cutting of Catholic family the Meehans killed by British Army. IRHM.



Figure 26. Republican News newspaper with images of Bloody Sunday. IRHM.



**Figure 27. RUC Uniforms. IRHM.**

Because of course, as the distinction between the collections at the Irish Republican History Museum, and its more militant cousin, the Roddy McCorley museum show, investments in the idea of organised innocence at these sites are not only deeply performative (a fact that Jalusic herself also picks up on), but they are also performed for a much more cosmopolitan audience than might have once been imagined by their paramilitary chiefs. As a community that over the years has been repeatedly mis-characterised as ahistorical, a-national wanderers (Urry and Larsen, 2011), tourists are themselves often written into the framework of ‘organisational innocence’ by academics and tourist providers, who tend to treat them as stateless individuals, incapable of inflicting violence. Instead, Hazel Andrews (2016, p.5) argues, violence is ‘manifest in many aspects of touristic practices and encounters’, whilst Julia Harrison (2003, p.137) writes that ‘the innocence with which the tourist imagine their travels blinds them’ to the real and symbolic injustices that may be enacted on their behalf whilst in another country. That tourists are capable of violence is the framework through which their declarations of allegiance with the IRA/UDA should also be interpreted, not least because as Jonathan Harden (2010) argues, violence in Northern Ireland has always been a deeply performative affair, with witnesses frequently going beyond spectatorship, and becoming victims to, and perpetrators of violence themselves.

It is through this understanding that comments expressing solidarity, and emotiveness in these visitor books should be read, more so because they are often used by museum curators and organisers to justify their existence. In such cases, empathic impulses are not only attached to superficial claims to innocence and victimisation by paramilitaries, but to that of the visitor too. Visitors’ willingness (myself included) to overlook the inherent violence of displaying certain items in the museum, feeds into the web of organisational innocence that sustains both these sites and troubles tourism as an activity. Certainly, what isn’t mentioned at these sites, or on most troubles tours, is the way that paramilitary violence continues to impact on interface communities in the present, with routine kneecappings, intimidation, and murder still taking

place in some of Northern Ireland's poorest boroughs, although it is now routinely refracted inwards, onto their own communities (Monaghan, 2010; PSNI, 2017).

Although both museums might disassociate themselves from such activity in the present, the heavy emphasis on militancy, combined with a victim-centred narrative of organisational innocence suggests a project of ideological preparation for war, should the need arise. Tourists endorse this ideology, not necessarily through their presence at these sites, but through the way they position themselves in relation to expressions of innocence, particularly when their emotional engagements with these museums are limited purely to sympathy, or identification with one side. Whether such sympathies are authentic, or a reaction to the limited range of responses that visitors feel they can have at these sites is difficult to assess, however there is no doubt that museum organisers and volunteers take these kinds of engagements as a validation of their projects and interpretations of history, in a way that normalises paramilitary violence.

This was revealed to me in a more recent visit to the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre, where one of the volunteers gestured towards the posters and objects littered around the walls, and chuckled that "this is basically like my bedroom", apparently under the impression that I would also find this amusing. The promise, or expectation of my empathy in that moment, the certainty that I would be able to view these items in the same way as the volunteer, expressed a certain level of confidence about the effect that the museum and its objects has on visitors, and an assumption that I would find their inclusion in a domestic space routine, rather than shocking. The strength of popular attachments to the relationship between empathy and innocence solidified in that moment, making what is nominally a media-mediated cultural phenomenon a social reality. To empathise with the volunteer in that moment was to affirm the innocence of his statement, and the ideology that lay behind it, whilst the general innocence with which I had viewed my own

engagements with the site until then, fed into my relationship with both museums and their volunteers, which I had wilfully disconnected from its broader social context. Empathy in other words, had taken a deadly turn in that moment, from which there was apparently no going back.

### **Conclusion.**

As a strategic curatorial device, in my own experience at the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre and Irish Republican History Museum, organised innocence is both deeply effective, and deeply affecting. Being able to look on the weapons on display and not see the immediacy of their violent connections, or to at least be able to ignore them, is deeply unsettling, but also attests to the impact of the two communities thesis on external visitors, which reveals itself in what Bairner and Shirlow (2003, p.209) observe is the ‘conventional feature’ of ‘telling of the “Collective Self’s suffering at the hands of the “collective other”” in Northern Ireland.

Nevertheless, the ability of these museums to persuade visitors to incorporate themselves into the collective self of one community is telling, and certainly a fundamental moral basis on which to object to the transformation of these sites into full-blown tourist attractions. However, these are reflections that are also worth bearing out in other contexts, away from the immediacy of the paramilitary museum. As Ciraj Rassool (2007, p.101) has observed in relation to District Six Museum, a museum is rarely an ‘space of innocence’, and there are countless other examples of objects of violence being included in museums in ways that invest in notions of organised innocence (Williams, 2008). Indeed, as recently as 2015, research on a gun held in a collection at the Imperial War Museum in London uncovered evidence of its usage in a loyalist attack on a Belfast betting shop in 1992, which resulted in the deaths of five people (BBC, 2015). Quite how the weapon came to be in the Imperial War Museum’s collection is unclear, particularly as the gun had been missing as evidence for the past twenty-three years. Although the jury is still

out on this, rumours of state collusion with loyalist paramilitaries continue to circulate, and point to what is in many ways a much more serious narrative of the violence inflicted by a government upon its own people. In a context where these objects, and the stories they tell are connected, not just to historical violence, but to groups that continue to activate these ideologies today, the approaches to the past taken by museums (whether paramilitary or state-run) needs to be treated with great care. Not least because, as the next chapter will now explore, disconnecting such objects from the inherent pain that they have inflicted not only cheapens the memory of that pain (and by extension the conflict), but also becomes another route through which empathy can be used to condone violence in the present.



## Chapter Five: Toy Guns and Miniatures: Kitsch in the Paramilitary Museum.

*I've just arrived at the Eileen Hickey, but am disappointed to see that, although it's midday (which is usually prime time for tour groups to visit), the place initially seems deserted. It's been six months since my last visit — the stress of moving cities, writing conference papers and tackling a particularly tricky chapter has kept me away, and I am surprised by how much I've missed being here. This year (2016) is one of the most significant in the so-called decade of centenaries, and having arrived a month after the Easter Rising commemorations, but two months before the celebrations for the Battle of the Somme, I'm looking forward to seeing how my chosen museums have responded to the occasion.*

*Taking a brief look around, I immediately notice that a number of changes have taken place. Several of the big display cabinets down the centre of the room have shifted to make way for mannequins dressed in a range of RUC and British Army uniforms (presumably in connection with the Easter Rising), and an old tricolour flag has come out of storage and been pinned to one wall. I'm about to start wending my way through these cabinets to see if anything new has been added to the collection when I notice some movement towards the back of the museum in the education room. It's a group of school boys (about ten in total, somewhere in the range of 14 to 17 years old), who are gathered around a young man I presume to be their teacher. I've not seen a school in here before, so I position myself discreetly by a mannequin where I can pretend to read the text next to it, whilst observing their activity through the glass window that offers a panoramic view of the room. The students are animated, and clearly involved in some activity with the teacher who appears to be giving them instructions. Doing a double take, I realise that more than one of the boys are holding assault rifles, which look as though they've been lifted directly from the museum's collection.*

*With a slight lurch of horror I watch as, under the encouragement of their teacher, the boys begin excitedly arranging themselves in a series of poses, emulating the kinds of military formations I have come to associate with old photos of the IRA. Some kneel down, guns gently rested against their shoulders, whilst a couple of others stand and point their rifles towards the low slung ceiling of the museum, eyes cradled in the metal iron sights in what can only be a juvenile imitation of the final salute. As they switch between these positions the teacher begins taking photos, expressing humorous approval as some of the boys aim the weapons at each other, holding friends to mock hostage.*

*The museum volunteer sidles up next to me, and we observe the same scene. He is a private man and although always polite, has steadfastly declined invitations to interview. From talking to other sources, I happen to know he himself spent time in Long Kesh during the Troubles, and right now he is obviously upset at what I'm witnessing, and is quick to inform me that this particular activity was not his idea, and that it was the teacher who insisted the students be able to handle the guns. "They've got no idea", he keeps saying, 'to them it's just toys. It's all these video games". I'm torn, between wanting to believe his distress (which seems genuine), and a shocked sense of cynicism. At what point, I wonder, did such iconic instruments of death become the play-things of a new generation?*

Children engaging in terrorist play is not new in Northern Ireland. Over the past few years several media stories have emerged about young people turning up to commemorative marches dressed in paramilitary garb and carrying replica guns (Dutta, 2011; McCurry, 2013; Meredith, 2016). Last year a republican parade organised by Sinn Féin to commemorate the death of 18 year old Patricia Black attracted the interest of the Children's Commissioner when it emerged that a number of the children marching had been persuaded to dress in IRA uniform for the event.<sup>29</sup> Suggesting that rituals such as these presented serious safeguarding issues, Koulla Yiasouma added that 'in the absence of an agreed narrative on our history and full consideration of how we educate our children on the conflict, this sort of activity will fill the void' (Monaghan 2016) – a statement that attracted the ire of Sinn Féin's Gerry Kelly who questioned whether 'you have a problem when it comes to cadets wearing British Army uniform?' (Williamson, 2016). As indicated by the previous chapter it seems clear that when it comes to the material legacies of conflict in Northern Ireland, a great deal of controversy is generated by the 'polysemic unpredictability' (Edwards, 2001, p. 189) of the artefacts and symbols connected to this period. Indeed, whilst Gerry Kelly's comments about British Army uniforms were in many ways highly reductive, his recognition of the fact that different artefacts signify different things to communities in Northern Ireland and Britain was much more astute, and highlighted the fundamental challenge facing the formal museum sector in the North, where even the most innocuous exhibitions are often subject to intense public scrutiny and criticism (Crooke, 2008b).

Of course, such challenges are not unique to Northern Ireland, and although amplified by thirty years of war and social division, are issues that face museums and heritage sites across the globe. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000, p.103) articulates objects, whilst 'imbued with meaning-functions in everyday life', do not in themselves retain that meaning on a broader

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<sup>29</sup> Patricia Black was a member of the PIRA, who along with Frank Ryan, was killed in 1991 when a bomb that they had intended to detonate outside a theatre in St Albans, London, exploded prematurely. 2016 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death, and the march was organised in honour of this.

scale, but are subject to the emotional and intellectual projections of different ‘interpretive communities’. Describing the ‘interpretive community’ as a ‘shared occurrence’ rather than a specific socio-economic, gendered, or racialised demographic, Hooper-Greenhill (2000, p.122) is nevertheless clear that interpretation tends to constellate around these factors, observing that ‘if exhibitions speak only to the interpretive community to which the curator belongs, then unless visitors share these interpretive frameworks, they will not feel comfortable’ (2000, p.123). The existence of strongly divergent interpretive communities in Northern Ireland is one of the fundamental barriers to a unified Troubles heritage sector at this present time. However, as suggested by the previous chapter, the binarism of these communities are undergoing significant changes at the moment, as the increased presence of troubles tourists creates, not just an alternative interpretive community for curators to reckon with, but one that is in many ways less predictable than those they previously served, and which can lead to a subtle re-shaping of attitudes towards the sector as a whole. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore the interpretive community of the tourist in more detail, considering it in relation to the perspective-taking elements of empathy and the aesthetics of the kitsch-collection at the paramilitary museum.

Of course, questions of interpretation, and the limits that particular communities may impose on meaning are entirely relevant to the study of empathy. Iris Marion Young (1997, p.341) writes that the ‘injunction to look at an issue from the point of view of others’ is, we are told, essential to empathy’s success. However, as Decety *et al.* (2011) and other social psychologists have indicated, experiencing the world through another’s eyes is itself a mediated phenomenon, which requires interpretation of facial, linguistic, and bodily representations, to enable this ‘perspective-taking’ to take place (Batson and Salvarini, 1997). Such processes are, as Sneja Gunew (2009) highlights, not universal but are themselves highly dependent on shared cultural understandings of what certain expressions, linguistic inflections, and gestures might mean. When it comes to empathy for objects, the museum literature often focuses on other modes of perspective-taking, such as affect and rawer forms of emotionality, stressing the necessity that,

however unpredictable their effects may be, visitor reactions need to be appropriate to the overall narrative of the museum for empathy to be judged a success.

In this regard, thinking of empathy through the notion of interpretive communities can be highly beneficial, and a way of further interrogating what it might mean to correctly understand, and then adopt the perspective of another, in emotionally and cognitively identifying with them. Interestingly, Hooper-Greenhill (2000, p.112) herself draws on the language of empathy in her discussion of museum objects, as she describes the cognitive and affective ‘exchange between object and viewer’. Writing that ‘the encounter between an active agent and an object has two sides to it’, Hooper-Greenhill (2000, p.112) suggests that whilst ‘responses to objects are culturally shaped, according to previous knowledge and experience [...] the initial reaction to an object may be at a tacit and sensory rather than an articulated verbal level’. In doing so, she brings the discourse of empathy back to its genealogical roots in art and aesthetics, whilst offering potentially new ways for thinking about the relationship between the empathiser and empathy’s target, through her description of object meaning as ‘dialogic — a dialogue between viewer and object’ (2000, p.117).

Taking engagements with the museum’s interpretive communities as its starting point, this chapter seeks to explore the idea of empathy as a mutually-generated meaning that is ground by the museum collection. Starting from the premise that *collections* are just as important to the generation of meaning as objects (Stewart, 1993), this chapter shifts the focus of this thesis away from the micro-study of individual items, and towards the macro-concerns of atmosphere and affect that are created through the accumulation of multiple artefacts in a room, drawing attention to the ways in which these atmospheres impact visitor interpretation. In this way, this chapter signals a return to the argument that the paramilitary museum possesses a strangely liminal relationship to real world violence, and offers a fuller explanation for this in relation to what I identify as a kitsch-aesthetic. Recognising that identifying something as ‘kitsch’ doesn’t just indicate, but also *creates* ruptures between interpretive groups, this chapter attempts to

untangle kitsch's rupture points in relation to those academic accounts of empathy which emphasise accurate interpretation, and the notion of fixed, knowable meanings as central to its success. Highlighting the contradiction between this, and Hooper-Greenhill's understanding of meaning as co-production, I will ultimately offer a critique of those museums and curators that have previously avoided confrontation between interpretive communities in Northern Ireland by ignoring the conflict altogether. Instead, I argue that an understanding of museum-generated empathy which is driven by Iris Marion Young's (1997) notion of 'asymmetrical reciprocity' and Hooper-Greenhill's notion of dialogic meaning, whilst problematic in some ways, may also be a preferable basis from which to start engaging with questions of empathy and post-Troubles heritage as a whole.

### **Objects that Matter.**

Returning to the episode with the boys in the education room it seemed apparent, as I watched them pose with their rifles, that by this point objects of violence in the republican museum had not merely been decontextualised for this particular group of users but were, through their engagement in play, being invested with new meanings. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Paul Williams (2008, p.31) has drawn attention to what he describes as the 'sinister appeal' of museum artefacts that bear the signs of violence, suggesting they often occupy a dual status as both 'insidiously arresting' signifiers of 'terrible acts', and objects that 'appear somewhat generic and interchangeable, lacking in specific bearing to any particular event'. This tension between genericism and specificity was certainly reflected in the actions of the students who, happy to treat the guns as toys, yet engaging in exaggerated 'play' that retained echoes of a republican history, effectively embodied the collision of past and present that Williams identifies as being evoked through the 'witnessing' object in the memorial museum. At this point, rather than being obliterated, violence became performative for the boys engaging with it, its acceptability determined by its staging within the limited sphere of the museum. Of course, given performativity's deterministic effect on social reality (Butler, 1999), the treatment of

weapons as toys in the paramilitary museum also needs to be understood within a broader, non-museological context.

Such performances are, it transpires, neither limited to the Republican Museum, nor to children. Talking to the volunteer at the Andy Tyrrie Centre, it emerged that engaging with weapons through play is also a common feature of local interactions with the museum and its objects:

See no matter what age a fella is [...] honestly, it doesn't matter if you're a four-year-old wee boy or sixty-five-year-old man, the first thing that the fellas walk in — straight to the guns. "Mate can we get photographs of them?". "No we're not allowed to do it, we get into trouble". "Oh please mister, please".

And the best about it is that you'll always give in: "right lads, go upstairs, take your photographs but for god's sake don't put them on Facebook". And of course, some of the guys who have been in prison and all, you look at the group and think "well I don't need to tell them uns". And then the next thing you get a phone call, "thingy from South Belfast, you want to see the pictures they put on Facebook!" [...] And of course one of them will comment "that's not first time you've had...."

(ATIC)

A significant difference between the interactions described by the volunteer at the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre, and those I witnessed in the Republican Museum, is the involvement of ex-prisoners/UDA members in the former 'play', whose handling of the weapons and circulation of photos on Facebook suggests yet another alternative 'meaning-function' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.103) is being attributed to these objects. Much like murals, which reinforce social and geographical boundaries in Northern Ireland (Jarman, 2005), online photos of UDA members with guns highlight a boundary between those who celebrate the role that paramilitarism played in the conflict, and those who do not. These performances are extended into the visitor book entries mentioned in the previous chapter, where frequent refrains to the UDA slogan 'Qui

Separabit' or 'QS' (a Latin phrase translated as 'who shall separate us?') can also be interpreted as a reaffirmation of the sectarian 'symbolic landscape' (Jarman, 2005, p.174) and mentalities which sustained the conflict. Certainly, this is the argument that Sara McDowell (2008a) and other academics have made about Troubles heritage in the past when describing it as a 'war by other means' and, as shown in the previous chapter, there is little doubt that ethno-national divisions and oppositional interpretations of the past do continue to shape paramilitary museums in the North.

However, what does put the interpretation of gun-play in the museum at odds with these arguments, is the way my participant described this episode to me in the first place, as an amusing anecdote, rather than a serious interaction with the museum and its contents. There are numerous ways in which such light-heartedness could be interpreted, including general interview nerves. However, I would argue that this underlying jocularity signifies a fundamental shift that has taken place in the paramilitary museum, in terms of how 'sinister objects' are interpreted by curators and some visitors, which conceals the association between these objects and their biographical histories. Such changes are not the result of a reduction in sectarian tensions, nor do they reflect a desire to engender real cross-cultural dialogue within these institutions, but they are intimately connected to the affective life of the kitsch-collection.

### **The Collection.**

Analysing the role of memory in heritage, Gaynor Kavanagh (2000, p.98) writes that the museum collection is the 'raw material of the historians craft within the museum setting', which exists as 'a resource from which all other museum functions stem: exhibitions, educational work, identification and research, education and outreach'. Yet despite the centrality of the collection, Kavanagh observes that precious little investment has been made at the curative level in unpacking the relationship between these objects and the memories once attached to them. Arguing that 'museums are full of objects stripped of these associations and it is anyone's guess what they really meant in people's lives', Kavanagh (2000, p.103) goes on to declare that

‘curators fit the objects they collect into their own established patterns of knowledge and sequences of things’. For Susan Stewart (1993, pp.154-155), the power of the museum collection extends beyond even this, engendering a total destruction of context so that ‘each element within the collection is representative and works in combination toward the creation of a new whole that is the context of the collection itself’.

At both the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre and the Irish Republican History Museum, the dominance of the collection over the individual object is perceptible in the minimalistic approach to labelling deployed at both sites. Frequently, staff themselves do not know what the biographies of their objects are, with sparse acquisition records at the Republican Museum containing just donor name and address, rather than any information, formal or otherwise, about where the objects came from, and what they meant to the original owner. Where such information is present, the kinships they reveal between donor and original owner are replicated for the museum displays, as well as any additional history provided on the original docket, however there appears to be little attempt to undertake any further archival work or research in this regard. Such an approach to collecting stands in stark contrast to methods employed by those selling conflict artefacts on eBay, where Louise Purbrick (2013) notes, listings for items from Long Kesh/Maze Prison are always accompanied by detailed descriptions that inscribe a personal relationship between the seller and creator of the object, whilst drawing attention to the relation between that creator and broader republican icons. Under such conditions, objects in the paramilitary museums accrue their meaning, not as might normally be expected in a museum through the individual stories that each item tells, but through the collective, affective narrative generated by the interaction of these items in the museum space.

*After the initial shock of seeing it on entry, I’ve acclimatised to the rocket launcher, and am ready to start exploring the exhibition properly. The music, which a few moments ago disorientated me with its unexpectedly frenetic welcome is now making me smile. Of course a museum so heavily invested in notions of Irishness would be playing gaelic music! I make a*



*mental note to find out what it is that they're playing. Still, I think there is something faintly bizarre about the contrast between this music, (which somewhat unpredictably has summoned memories of watching Waking Ned as a child), and the rocket launcher, the presence of which I've decided to accept, but can't resist glancing towards every now and then.*

*We shuffle forward a few paces, and not knowing where to start, my eyes shift from the rocket launcher on the ceiling, to another elevated display that runs perpendicular to the door we've just come through. It forms a long recess in the ceiling and is filled all the way across with wooden harps and celtic crosses of varying size and design. I catch the wry expression beginning to cross my face— first the music and now this? It seems the museum is working pretty hard to sell us its Irish credentials. As we begin to explore the museum in more detail, I notice the same items being repeated across the exhibitions. Sometimes in display cases of their own, sometimes unobtrusively tucked alongside other objects, the same wooden harps and crosses are everywhere.*

*Stopping at one particular display case to take a closer look, I see a label marks one of the harps as belonging to Barry Louellen, who (it is claimed) carved it in the H-blocks of Long Kesh/Maze Prison. It suddenly dawns on me that these items, whilst appearing to be carbon copies of each other, are actually highly individualised objects which, if the labels are to be believed, have been handcrafted by republican prisoners. I immediately get the urge to re-examine the ones I've already passed, to see if my engagement with them changes with this new information. I wander round a bit more, this time taking time to stop and look at each object to try and get a sense of the hands that made them, to analyse my own reactions — do I feel moved, affected in any way? A wooden piano engraved with the words 'to Mother from Anthony' in elaborate calligraphy does strike me, and a wooden cot, devoid of all labelling, but covered in signatures also makes me pause. However, for all this, I still can't help but feel disconnected from the majority of these objects. As much as I try to get a sense for their humanness, they still feel like the kinds of knick-knacks I might find in the local souvenir shop*

*down the road, and beyond a very basic appreciation for the craftsmanship involved in their creation, I don't know how to interpret them.*

*Moving on, I start to notice more and more of these handcrafted memorabilia littered around the room. One case is entirely filled with leather purses, bags and book covers, some inscribed with celtic knots, but one (for some inexplicable reason) bearing a crudely drawn copy of Daffy Duck. There are also folios filled with painted handkerchiefs in a variety of designs, usually with personal messages to the receiver, but again several bearing felt-tipped impersonations of Mickey and Minnie Mouse. A lone plaque in a cabinet of mixed trinkets takes the shape of a two-dimensional carving of Ireland, with a poem written entirely in rhyming couplets inscribed next it in pen; a gypsy caravan made from lollipop sticks, adorned with painstaking flower detail; full-sized coffee tables and miniature wooden chairs; an embroidered quilt in pastel colours, two teddy bears on a wooden rocking chair. By turns these items inspire amusement, bemusement, and the occasional twinge of sentimentality.*

*But in between these sometimes humorous, sometimes touching, and often very 'Irish' crafts, are other objects that I can't quite wrap my head around, and which affect me much more deeply. A renaissance style portrait of the Virgin Mary, riddled with bullet holes seems intimately connected to the crosses and harps I've been looking at, although no label explicitly links the two. Above the case of guns that I've been staring at for some time, I suddenly notice what I at first think is a rifle holstered to the exposed wall, but on closer inspection turns out to be another wood carving, disarmingly precise in its realism. Opposite this, on the other side of the room is another wooden replica, this time labelled as a Thomson machine gun. These items seem at once out of sync with the general conviviality that emanates from the other handicrafts in the museum, and at the same time, entirely befitting a place like this.*



Figure 28. Celtic crosses and harps in the recess next to the museum entrance. IRHM.



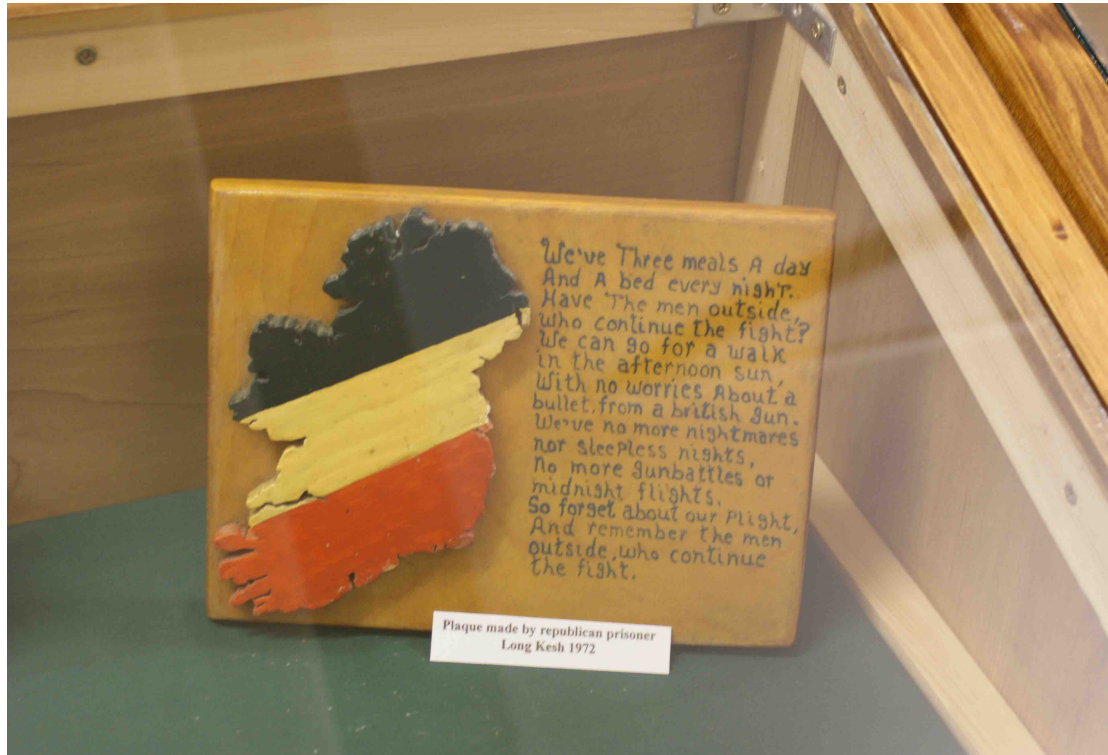
Figure 29. Handmade Leather items. IRHM.



**Figure 30. Selection of harps made by republican prisoners. IRHM.**



**Figure 31. Personal inscription on handcrafted piano from a prisoner to his mother. Made in Long Kesh. IRHM.**



**Figure 32. Wooden plaque with carved feature of Ireland and a handwritten poem. Made Long Kesh 1972. IRHM.**



**Figure 33. Batiked handkerchief made in Armagh jail. IRHM.**



**Figure 34. Handsewn teddy bears, made HM Whitemoor Prison. IRHM.**



**Figure 35. Wooden replica of General Purpose Machine Gun. Made in Portlaoise Prison. IRHM.**





**Figure 36. Carved Thompson Machine Gun. Made in Long Kesh 1978. IRHM.**

### **The Kitsch-Collection.**

Kitsch, Celeste Olalquiaga (1999, p.28) writes ‘is nothing if not a suspended memory whose elusiveness is made ever more keen by its extreme iconicity’. Tracing the development of kitsch from the Parisian arcades, through to its modern incarnation in the Bahamas’ Atlantis theme park, Olalquiaga attributes kitsch to the modern mania for collecting, which she argues emerged out of the nineteenth century turn towards mass production and commercialisation. Observing that such commercialisation made the possibility of materially representing the self accessible to a wider audience, Olalquiaga (1999, p.14) writes that ‘instead of being dismissed, the serial and mechanical aspects of industrial culture were valued as signs of a modern, cosmopolitan spirit that replaced vintageness and authenticity with novelty and quantity’ resulting in a fundamental change to the collection as they ‘came to be more about many versions of the same or similar items [...] organised to show their common features — than about sophisticated selections of rare objects or unique specimens ornamentally arranged to display their differences, as had been the case with earlier collections’. Kitsch, Olalquiaga (1999, p.19) argues, is best understood

precisely through the display of sameness, as well as the 'shattered aura' of the unique, the authentic, and the individual that it leaves in its wake. Such shattered auras are inherently problematic when it comes to thinking about museum objects however, where notwithstanding their inclusion in a collection, objects are usually treated as 'artefacts' and unique and authentic bearers of specific histories, rather than mass produced commodities (Kavanagh 2000).

Despite the more conventional aspects of museology deployed by the Republican Museum, kitsch was clearly present in my initial engagements with the site. Here, as has already been indicated, the dominance of the collection often overpowered the individuality of the items being displayed, and although this was occasionally thrown into relief by personalised touches, such as inscriptions or photographs, too often they were subsumed by the oculacentricity of these displays, where repetitive symbols, and multiple variations on the same theme, made it difficult to realise the uniqueness of their origin. The upshot of this was that my first experience of the Republican Museum was a somewhat dissonant one, where caught in between frissons of excitement, intrigue, sentimentality and shock, the overall effect was what Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell (2016b) have described as the often overlooked 'flat affect', characterised by an utter 'lack of intensity' in bodily response. Indeed, although I consciously attempted to stimulate some kind of reaction in myself for much of that first visit (largely by obsessively examining some of these personal objects at length), beyond the initial shock of seeing the guns in place, none was forthcoming and I ended up leaving the museum feeling disappointed.

This inability to derive significant emotions from the items on display is an absurdity considering their significance to the wider republican community where, as symbols of a long history of internment, they may be, as Laura McAtackney (2014, p.260) observes 'stylistically repetitive or superficially mundane', but they also 'hold heightened meaning to local communities', with many families in the local area possessing one or more artefacts that were crafted by a relative, or extended relative whilst in prison. This tension between 'mass production and individual subject' is, Susan Stewart (1993, p.67) observes a feature of kitsch's

‘saturation of materiality’, however the overall ‘flatness’ of my initial response is also intrinsically connected to the much more personal value judgements and experiences that I had as a ‘tourist of history’ at this site – a mode of engagement that Marita Sturken (2007, p.9) describes as a sentimentalised, ‘mediated and re-enacted experience’ of history, that is defined by distance from the historical event itself, and those whose lives were impacted by it. It is this removal from events, and this distancing that I argue was manifest in my early reactions to the Irish Republican History Museum as a place of kitsch, and which can also be understood in relation to the positionality and interpretation of the empathising subject.

Whilst many treatises have been written on the aesthetics and demerits of kitsch in academia, far fewer pay attention to its social dimension. To judge something as ‘kitsch’, Tracey Potts and Ruth Holliday (2012) note, is to go beyond the simple atmosphere generated by the accrument of indistinguishable objects, and becomes a ‘doing’, which is deeply riven with classed, gendered and racialised orders. Stating that ‘kitsch is doing-kitsch, an achievement with a history, and not, in any way, an essence’, Holliday and Potts (2012, p.32) declare that to pronounce something as ‘gaudy’, ‘cheap’ and ultimately ‘kitsch’ feeds into a socially fixed cultural politics of taste, which ultimately operates as form of ‘symbolic violence [...] aimed at dismissing the tastes of cultural “others”’. The fact that I describe my own judgement of the displays at the Republican museum as ‘kitsch’ was borne of the uncomfortable realisation that, whilst unwilling to admit it on my first visit, something about the DIY nature of the displays in that space, and the earnestness with which ‘Irishness’ was pronounced, impeded my ability to fully connect with the objects on display, making me feel more ‘tourist’ to the site and its history than I had anticipated. However, whilst such judgements were undoubtedly tangled up with an entrenched snobbery both around the amateurism of the museum’s venture, and such overt displays of patriotism, it also became evident in the months following this first visit that the sense of outsidersness and flat affect I experienced when engaging with the Republican Museum’s collection was not entirely at odds with its intended effects, where kitsch, and in particular Irish kitsch, is a key component in republican visions for Northern Ireland.

‘Irish kitsch’, according to Colin Graham (2005), ‘is spectacularly gaudy by comparison with any nation’s useless ephemera’. Writing that ‘Irish kitsch goes out in to the world to teach the world about what Ireland is like’, Graham attributes kitsch in Ireland to an outsider’s vision of the world, which he suggests is manifest in the abundance of plastic leprechauns, shamrock pins, and miniature cottages sold on every street corner in Ireland. Such a sentimentalised view of a nation, he observes elsewhere, is fundamental to Ireland as an imaginative project, which since the nineteenth century has existed as a ‘floating sign’, expressed through ‘a plentitude of images [...] toppl[ing] into an Ireland of ceaseless reproduction and commodification’ (Graham, 2001, p.2). That kitsch is essentially about distance and ownership (a point also highlighted by Holliday and Potts) is emphasised by David Lloyd (1999, p.92), who writes that for many in the Irish diaspora, it has become ‘crucial to the articulation of the simultaneous desire for and impossibility of restoring and maintaining connection’ with a country of their distant past. What Irish kitsch presents the viewer with, in short, is something that is deeply knowable and familiar, yet laced with a radical alterity, which often reduces ‘ethnic’ Irishness to the status of a commodity that can be acquired by anyone wanting to share the “real” culture of the country’ (Rains, 2004, p.56). The flip side of such commodified Irishness is, as David Lloyd (1999, p. 90) writes, a ‘devolution of “authentic national culture” into kitsch’, which engendering cultural nationalism through ‘stylistic uniformity’, creates both ‘standardized forms of affect’ and ‘rich repertoire[s] for resistance’ (1999, p.97) among subordinated groups.

The intersections between this reductive Irishness, and republican hopes for an imaginary, unified Ireland are rife in the Irish Republican History Museum. From the amateur drawings and carvings of an Ireland without borders, that make explicit the organisation’s geographical aspirations, through to the harps and celtic knots that tap into mythologised and ethnicised notions of Irishness (Rains, 2004), the use of the museum to promote an alternative vision for the nation is obvious at every turn. Such a venture is entirely in keeping with the essence of the museum, which Benedict Anderson (1983) notes is deeply entrenched in Western articulations

of the nation. However, it was also, as Laura McAtackney (2014, p.247) observes, a venture enshrined by the production process of many of the handcrafted items displayed at this site which were, she observes always 'intended, and treated, as commodities' by their creators, sold to family, friends and other supporters to raise money for the republican cause. On this level, the kitsch that pervades first visits to the Republican museum is an accurate reflection of the site's indulgent attitude towards crude articulations of the Irish nation, which conveniently for its curators, has a marked appeal for the troubles tourist. Certainly, the kinds of standardised, flat affects that accompany Irish kitsch, and the possibility of 'becoming' Irish that Stephanie Rains (2004, p.56) suggests such objects inspire in tourists can make for a comforting lens through which to engage with some of the museum's more disturbing elements, creating (as was the case for me) a surprisingly convivial atmosphere in which to consume stories of conflict, death, and guerilla violence.

The strength of the convivial atmosphere generated by these kitsch appeals to nationalism was quite intoxicating at times, and I would suggest partially accounts for the almost careless mode with which some of the more difficult displays and objects, such as the rifles, were treated by some of the museum visitors and staff. Indeed, if the inauthenticity that enshrines all kitsch is as contagious as David Lloyd (1999) suggests, it would provide a reasonable explanation for a comment from one of the museum volunteers I spoke to during one visit to the site, who gesturing towards the carved wooden version of the general-purpose machine gun hanging on the wall, described it in an off-hand manner as being 'one of our favourites'. Referring, as he was to the IRA's preferred weapon of choice, this casual remark was revealing in terms of the equation that was being made between the kitschified produce of Irish nationalism, and the actual weapons used to advance this nationalism through militant warfare. The irony of this exchange was that it was held with the same volunteer who had complained the month before about the students treating the real guns as 'toys'. Nevertheless, the impact of this statement on me as an outsider was profound, in that I also accepted this equation until, reminded of the

boys' behaviour on my previous visit, I began to unpick some of the more complex interplays between such 'real' and 'symbolic' violences.

On an interpretive level, the collapse that kitsch engenders between the inauthentic/authentic and individuality/collectivity means that empathic experiences of the Republican museum are limited, not by any fixed histories attached to specific objects, but by a broader, negotiated meaning that troubles tourists plays a key role in upholding. Such a reading, whilst seemingly the superficial, or even wilful postulations of the autoethnographer, were inexplicably and ironically confirmed to me during two of my later visits in the latter half of 2016 where, on separate occasions I noticed alongside the postcards and badges usually for sale next to the visitor book, the addition of plastic rifle pens, and a selection of keyrings featuring a range of images of balaclava covered IRA men (Figure 37; Figure 38; Figure 39). The transformation of these indices of violence into the most kitsch of objects, the tourist souvenir, seemed both to highlight the museum's desire to encourage a more dispassionate mode of visual consumption, whilst playing to tourist desires to authenticate their being-ness in such a space by providing them with their very own take-home piece of Northern Ireland's dark past. Certainly, transferring the impersonality of the collection into the 'individual autobiography' (Stewart, 1993, p.152) of the souvenir seems a strategy more clearly aimed at the troubles tourist than the local museum visitor, for whom it may be more socially acceptable to purchase trinkets featuring IRA gunmen, and for whom also souvenirs represent the possibility of acquiring the "'secondhand" experience' (Stewart, 1993, p.135) of an event or memory that they don't already possess.

What this suggests, in terms of engagements with empathy and interpretation at the Republican Museum, is that organisers are less concerned about visitors engaging on an intense emotional level with the biographies of individual artefacts in the museum, and more concerned about offering tourists a commodified, limited identification with a generic Irish nationalism. One of the consequences of this approach, is that it becomes increasingly difficult to talk of empathy in

terms of accurate interpretation, or intense emotional reactions to the narratives of others, as Coplan and other psychologists do, largely because the basis on which their diagnoses rests presumes a more specific target of empathy than the Republican Museum offers. And yet to dismiss the possibility of empathy being present at all at the site would seem churlish, given its effectiveness in enveloping visitors into its kitschified national perspective. Instead, bearing in mind empathy's essential asymmetry (Young, 1997) it is worth further considering how these sites use kitsch to encourage museum visitors to bring their own perspectives to bear on artefacts in the museum, thus encouraging more intimate engagements with the museum as a whole.



**Figure 37. Keyring with IRA militant on it. IRHM.**



Figure 38. Magnets for sale by the front desk. IRHM.



Figure 39. Plastic rifle pens for sale by the visitor book. IRHM.



Whilst at the Irish Republican History Museum it is the kitsch-collection that is emphasised by repetitive displays of sameness, at the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, whose archives are notably smaller than the Eileen Hickey, kitsch-judgements emerge not necessarily out of the collection, but from individual objects, which offer a metonymic, rather than collective relationship to nation building. The story told by my participant of grown men uploading photos of themselves with guns to social media already hinted at this relationship where, ‘appropriated within the privatised view of the individual subject’ (Stewart, 1993, p.162), objects mediated through photography could be used to tell multiple, sometimes conflicting stories of the conflict. Whilst the same may have been true for the boys at the republican museum, the comparative frequency with which the volunteer implied it happened in the Andy Tyrie Centre suggests that artefacts at these sites are more readily incorporated into the privatised realm than at the Republican Museum, enabling more personal interactions, and sometimes emotionally fulfilling stories to be told.

At the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, the emphasis on personal interaction with objects is effectively the result of a much more limited material archive, which leaves its displays feeling spartan in comparison with the excesses of the Republican Museum. In the absence of glass cabinets crammed with multiple objects of the same type, exhibitions at the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre are generally built around one or more carefully selected items that have been included because of the quality of their workmanship, or the biographies of their owners and creators. Looking into display cases at the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre therefore, the opportunity to engage with individual pieces, and build a personalised narrative from those is greatly increased. A tobacco tin constructed from lollipop sticks, featuring a bulldog in loyalist flute band uniform, is surrounded only by lollipop sticks, matches, and an unvarnished tin tobacco box, articulating the process of its own material transformation, and accentuating its non-mechanical creation (Figure 40). Asking the volunteer about this item, I was told it had been made by the museum’s founder and current UDA leader, Dee Stitt. Where objects are grouped together in taxonomies (such as leather wallets, or wooden drums), these are generally

smaller in quantity, and tend to bear the name of their creator, again suggesting a more personal connection between the maker and their craft. There is also an attempt to contextualise these objects in terms of the original conditions of their usage, to try and capture their unarticulated sociality, by placing them alongside photos of them in use, or next to objects they would usually be used alongside (Figure 41). As I walked around the site, the volunteer on duty was able to provide more detail on where each object came from, and what its history had been — something they informed me they took great pride in doing. As they said in interview ‘there’s always a fascinating story to come with the item. So it’s just a pity the items couldn’t tell their own stories!’ (ATIC).

In this way, individual narratives are given paramount importance at the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre, and assigned a value in the visitor experience that is unforthcoming at the Republican Museum. Naturally, the smaller nature of this museum and the reduced number of visitors coming through its doors enable volunteers to offer these more personalised insights, however the principle of engaging with visitors in one-on-one tours of the space is also deeply embedded in the foundation and operation of the site, which is aimed at a much more limited, sometimes better informed audience than the one at the Republican Museum. On an experiential level, these intimate engagements with exhibitions means that objects are more closely allied to the souvenir than the kitsch-collection where, rather than a history being written through a collection, the individual stories behind each item, once explained by the volunteer on duty, comes to stand for an abbreviated loyalist past as a whole, much in the way that the souvenir ‘exist[s] as a sample of the now-distanced experience’ (Stewart, 1993, p.136). This sense of the museum object as souvenir is further enhanced by the tactility encouraged by the onsite volunteers, as items are taken out of their casings and given to visitors to hold and examine in more detail, adding a physical dimension to the museum experience, and sense of protective ownership over some of its items, that doesn’t exist at the Republican Museum.



Figure 40. Tobacco box made out of lollipop sticks. ATIC.



Figure 41. UDA badges and armband alongside a photo of East Belfast UDA parade from 1972. ATIC.

However, in spite of the personalised stories provided by the museum guide, and the more intimate connections that they can generate between visitor and object, a kitsch aesthetic still persists at the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, which feeds into the gaudy aesthetics of conflict and nationalism that are found across the globe. Writing about the museumification of the First World War, Jay Winter (2008, p.35) has insisted that ‘it is impossible to reproduce the odour, the light, the emotions of the war in the trenches without being kitsch’. Arguing elsewhere that representations of war always entail a distinct othering for audiences who have never experienced it, Winter (2012, p.162) suggests that most war museums are involved in the promotion of ‘pseudo-realism’, through which curators attempt to ‘bring the visitor into something approximating the experience of combat’ by attempting to simulate the precise conditions in which the battle took place. Marita Sturken (2007, p.7) has confirmed the fine line that separates national remembrance and sentimentality in her work on commemorative souvenirs that emerged in the wake of national disasters such as 9/11 and Oklahoma City. Terming such souvenirs ‘kitsch’, Sturken (2007, p.21) argues that these objects are both symptomatic of a desperate comfort culture that emerges after a disaster, and ‘a kind of deliberate and highly constructed innocence [...] that dictates particular kinds of sentimental responses and emotional registers’ on a national level. For Sturken (2007, p.171), ‘kitsch has long been the primary aesthetic of American patriotism’, and is one that promotes ‘prepackaged emotional registers in order to signal affiliation with the myth of the nation’. Such prepackaged sentiments have already been raised by Lauren Berlant (1999, p.53) as one of the key failings of dominant models of empathy where, she insists, they are used to reify notions of ‘universal true feeling’, and obliterate the structural and social issues that underlay pain in the first place – an approach to empathy that, as the previous chapter has shown, paramilitary sites such as the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre and Irish Republican History Museum remain deeply invested in.

The use of kitsch at the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre fits neatly into these paradigms, and certainly the links between kitsch and fevered patriotism are more pronounced at the site. Until

recently, the Centre was stationed next to the Newtownards Union Jack Souvenir shop, meaning that before even entering the museum, visitors were exposed to a range of garishly 'British' knick-knacks, from hand-held Union Jacks, and key rings of the Queen to loyalist calendars and King Billy tea towels. Somewhat surprisingly, within the Centre itself signs of Britishness are more muted, and many of the handmade items are instead emblazoned with the loyalist Red Hand of Ulster (Figure 42 and Figure 43). Such repetitive symbolism enacts the kind of 'homogenisation of affect' that Lloyd (1999, p.90) suggests underlies cultural nationalism, and also fits into what Brian Graham (2004) has suggested is the slightly ambivalent attitude that many loyalists have towards their links to the mainland, whereby allegiance to 'Ulster' is far more important than to Britain itself. Patriotism within the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre is therefore expressed not as interchangeable with British patriotism, but through loyalty to an archaic, mutable idea of Ulster, which resonates with the appeals to imaginary Irishness found at the Republican Museum.

However, underscoring the essential 'Britishness' of Ulsterism, and the more aggressive nationalism typically associated with this, is the memorial wall that sits opposite the desk at the entrance to the museum. Featuring a wall of posters and paintings dedicated to dead UFF volunteers, a large roll of honour dedicated to 'the memory of our glorious dead', and painting of a field of white crosses with individual names inscribed onto each cross occupy most of the space (Figure 44). Such pieces deploy iconography from '*the* iconic representation of Loyalist self-imagining' (Graham 2004, p. 496), the Battle of the Somme through the inclusion of poppy symbols, and the Ode of Remembrance regularly recited at World War One ceremonies, a move that is surprising, given that Battle of the Somme imagery is more closely allied to the UVF, with whom the UDA have a longstanding feud (Brown, 2007). However, the centrality of these pieces to the museum space suggests recognition of the fact that such images are a useful way of legitimising UDA activities by enfolded them into a broader British history of great battles.



Figure 42. Handcrafted wooden drums featuring UDA logos. ATIC.



Figure 43. Leather wallets emblazoned with the Red Hand of Ulster. ATIC.



**Figure 44. Memorial Wall. ATIC.**

Nevertheless, rather than being a moving or powerful testament to the dead, as is presumably their intended effect, for overseas visitors such as myself the use of flimsy plastic material, and hammy nature of the posters' design refracts a depoliticised, camp version of Britishness, that amplifies the already kitsch-nature of much war remembrance. This is the kind of kitsch that Holliday and Potts (2012) suggest the average consumer easily recognises as being in 'poor taste' and which, inspiring a degree of superiority in the non-local visitor, can also provide tourists with a somewhat familiar and non-threatening frame of reference through which to interpret the museum. As with the Republican museum, positioning such pieces alongside the guns found on the second floor of this museum helps recontextualise these items as remnants of a bygone conflict, and reasserts the claims to 'national innocence' that Marita Sturken (2007, p.7) suggests the 'comfort culture' of kitsch inspires.

Of course, the fact that kitsch imbues the museum visit with a certain ‘flat affect’ (Smith and Campbell, 2016b) in many ways puts it at odds with the general focus within the literature on empathy as a product of a more ‘febrile’ (Smith and Campbell, 2016b), emotionally intense and critical heritage experience. Art historian Peter Murphy (2012, p.105) offers a particular condemnation of attempts to link kitsch and empathy, arguing that whilst ‘most museum stories are kitsch’, the outcome of this is that most museum narratives ‘sentimentalise suffering’ and inspire a ‘narcissistic pseudo-sympathy’ in the visitor, in which ‘I cry for myself in the guise of crying for another individual’ (2012, p.113), very much echoing those who critique empathy’s predisposition towards vicarious trauma and passivity (Boler, 1997; Kaplan, 2011). Marita Sturken (2007, p.22) goes some way to agreeing with this position through her description of kitsch objects as ‘encourage[ing] visitors to feel sadness for the loss of lives in a way that discourages any discussion of the context in which those lives were lost’, which effectively prevents ‘opportunities for broader cultural empathy and new ways of response’ to trauma (2007, p.30). Nevertheless, what is notable about both of these positions is that they rely on precisely the kind of hierarchised philosophies that suggests firstly, that kitsch is only ever a two-dimensional, reduction of an idea or emotion, and secondly, that empathy must always be based on the accurate interpretation of emotionally intense encounters. Both of these positions can be critiqued, not least the argument that kitsch produces only mono-dimensional engagements, which failing to attend to what Spurgeon Thompson (2012, p.75) has highlighted as its ‘deeply ambiguous signifier’, overlooks the way that kitsch is often rendered ‘invulnerable to full instrumentalisation by projects of ethnicity commodification’

Certainly, for many curators and museum commentators, empathy is only really achievable when visitors are presented with a critical, unsentimental portrayal of the past, which pushes them into the kinds of new affective engagements, and critical self-reflection that mimic what Amy Coplan has described as empathy’s ‘self-other perspective taking’ process. Andrea Witcomb (2015, p.322) refers to this through her notion of a ‘pedagogy of feeling’, which she describes as ‘affective encounters between viewer and viewed [...] that encourages



introspective reflection on the part of visitors', whilst Bonnell and Simon's (2007, p.76) work on difficult exhibitions defines 'good' empathy as a 'relation of acknowledgement' that avoids ideas of universality. Recent explorations of contemporary exhibits that avoid obvious sentimentality, and which usually employ fanciful new techniques for engaging the visitor are often praised by these commentators for promoting precisely these kinds of engagements, the underlying subtext being that only newer curative techniques can inspire appropriate empathic reactions in the museum (Landsberg, 2004; Winter, 2010; Arnold-de Simine, 2013) . However, what is sometimes missed in these accounts is, as already highlighted by Hooper-Greenhill, the gulf which lies between visitor interpretation, and the meaning of displays themselves, which suggests that empathy isn't necessarily a response to some inherent quality of the object, so much as a product of the dialogic relationship between visitor and object that in many ways relies on the visitor's 'ability to not close off narrative' (Witcomb, 2013, p.267) in the first place.

This tendency to overlook the inherent dialogism of museum meaning tends to be most forceful when it comes to those smaller, less curatively sophisticated museums, where the praise lavished on new kinds of museum design implicitly rejects the notion that older, less technologically adept sites can also inspire emotional reflexivity and empathy in the visitor. The underlying assumption when it comes to these sites is that, whilst they may be capable of inspiring emotionality in the visitor, such emotion will invariably be the flattened sentimentality of the kitsch experience, which will fail to be intense, or critical enough, to constitute 'proper' empathy. What neglect of this arena does overlook though, is the binary nature of the kitsch-object, which representative of both intimacy and distance, authenticity and inauthenticity is both 'deeply ambiguous', as Spurgeon Thompson (2012, p.75) sees it, and capable of producing precisely the kind of unsettling, alienating affects that advocates of 'proper' empathy are so desirous of.

**Kitschifying Empathy.**

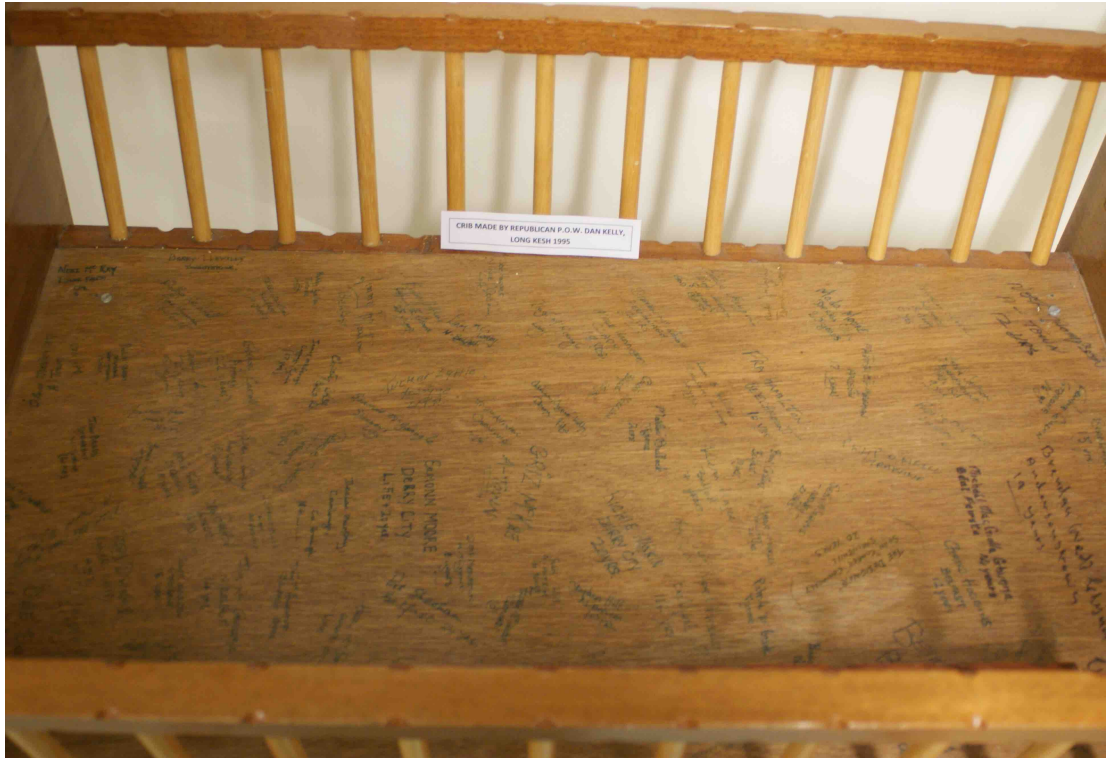
Despite her general condemnation of kitsch, Marita Sturken (2007, p.20) is attentive to the power that it can have on ‘tourists of memory’, particularly when contrasted against other, less kitsch aesthetics. Writing that ‘kitsch objects, with their prescribed emotional content, are often quite spontaneously mixed with objects that are understood to be more personalised and individual’, Sturken (2007, p.20) acknowledges that ‘in the context of memory and loss, kitsch can often play a much more complex role than the mass-culture critique of kitsch allows’. Going around both museums, tensions between kitsch’s iconic ubiquity and the more personal dimensions of the items on display was everywhere, with their contrasts often producing deeply unsettling effects. At the Irish Republican History Museum, objects such as the painting of the Virgin Mary, shredded with police bullet holes, are striking for the way they bring religious kitsch into dialogue with the brutal reality of a state’s aggression against its own people (Figure 45). Elsewhere on the site, the wooden cot made by an internee for his unborn daughter, signed by all the other prisoners incarcerated with him at the time, is all the more moving for the break it makes with the repetitive symbolism of cottages, crosses and harps that otherwise fill the space (Figure 46; Figure 47). At the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre, the heightened impact that the personal can have when nestled within the kitsch was highlighted to me, when the volunteer at the time, picking up a photograph of a UDA parade in East Belfast from 1973, pointed out his father in the crowd, who had just left the museum building (Figure 41). Beginning to speak passionately about his father’s subsequent imprisonment, and the strain it put on their previously tight family unit, the volunteer’s generosity in providing me with this narrative enlivened the other objects that sat around this photograph, tying them to real lives and experiences that overturned their otherwise banal patriotic overtones. What kitsch did in this moment for me, was to refract my own judgements back on myself, forcing me to confront the outsidership which led me to mark such objects as ‘kitsch’ in the first place, whilst inviting a deeper identification with those forgotten micro-narratives that are channelled through individual artefacts.



**Figure 45. Portrait of Virgin Mary, once owned by the McMahon family who were all shot dead by the RUC in 1922.**



**Figure 46. Handmade cot by republican prisoner Dan Kelly. Made Long Kesh/Maze Prison 1995. IRHM.**



**Figure 47. Close up of handmade cot with signatures from other republican prisoners. IRHM.**

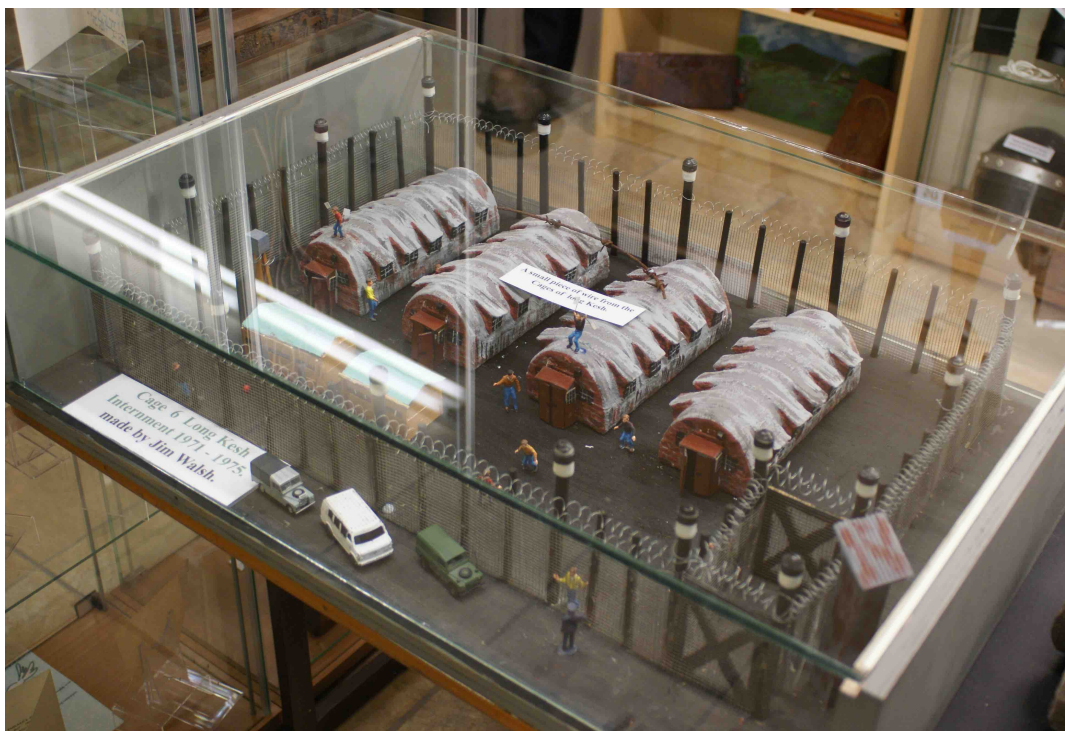
However, beyond the affective jolts that the combination of the kitsch and the personal can inspire in the visitor, must also be recognition of the mutability of meaning when it comes to micro-museums such as the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre and Irish Republican History Museum. Illustrating this at both sites are the scale models of the prison H-blocks and Cages to be found at both museums (Figure 48; Figure 49). As one of the few examples of a landmark that has equal significance for loyalists and republicans, attempts to interpret and commemorate the prisoner experience at of Long Kesh/Maze Prison have proven highly inflammatory when engaged with on a national level, but useful at a local level, where narratives of imprisonment have been used to promote oppositional narratives of the past and court sympathy for paramilitarism on both sides (McAtackney, 2014) For this reason, both museums have almost identical models of the prison in their collections, which they use to reinforce established patinas around what internment meant to their organisations. And yet ironically, these models happen to be made by the same republican ex-prisoner, who was

commissioned to build one for the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre after organisers saw the original version in the Republican Museum.

The fact that these models are not just the same, but made by the same person, says a great deal about the malleability of object meaning, not least because the only concession that the creator has made to the different experiences of republican and loyalist prisoners is a miniature diorama included in the republican version, which shows a prisoner being beaten by two prison officers (Figure 50). The volunteer at the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre noted the popularity of this model with the ex-prisoner population, but added that the majority are kept in the dark about the fact that its creator has a republican background, suggesting a sensitivity to the way that different interpretive communities might receive this information. For a non-local visitor, the subtle distinctions between the two models, and potential variation in attitudes towards their placement in the museum are undetectable unless told, meaning that without this kind of contextual information, the true significance of these models, as evidence of a tentative collaboration between the two ideologically opposed organisations is likely to be lost in the overwhelming kitschiness of their aesthetic.



**Figure 48. Model of the Long Kesh/Maze Prison Cages at the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre.**



**Figure 49. Model of the Long Kesh/Maze Prison Cages at the Irish Republican History Museum.**



**Figure 50. Diorama of republican prisoner being beaten by prison guards in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh/Maze Prison. IRHM.**

### **Conclusion.**

As outlined at the start of this chapter, the limitations that visitor positionality can have on the ability to fully comprehend the full significance of museum is usually treated by museum professionals and theorists of empathy as signifying a failure of empathy. For Alison Landsberg (2004, p.227) who celebrates what she has termed ‘prosthetic memory’'s role in empathy, total comprehension of the museum narrative, and its objects is paramount to a successful visitor experience, which recreates a total ‘bodily, experiential memory in the face of absence’. Other scholars have also suggested that a project’s inability to move visitors



through its representations of pain often indicates a lapse in the project's communicative skills, again reinforcing the assumption that empathy is always based on wholly translatable content. However, such a position is, as Iris Marion Young (1997) indicates, not always the most helpful way of approaching empathy, and she advocates for a re-think of the empathetic experience that is based on a more limited form of interaction described as 'asymmetrical reciprocity'. Arguing that 'it is neither possible nor morally desirable for persons engaged in moral interaction to adopt one another's standpoint', Young (1997, p.340) describes the concept of asymmetrical reciprocity as that which recognises that 'each participant [...] is distinguished by a particular history and social position that makes their relation asymmetrical', making it 'ontologically impossible for people in one social position to adopt the perspective of those in the social positions with which they are related in social structures and interaction' (1997, p.346). Arguing that 'through the constructions we have made common between us, there is also always a remainder, much that I do not understand about the other person's experience and perspective', Young (1997, p.355) ultimately proposes asymmetry as a solution to sentimentalised and universalised notions of empathy, and a true form of 'communicative ethics', which she suggests is attentive to the limits of understanding.

As a museological technique, kitsch is a perfect way of illustrating both the ontological impossibility of putting the self fully into another's shoes, and the possibilities that acknowledging the asymmetry between interpretive communities can bring to a museum experience. Amusing, alienating, and sentimental by turns, kitsch's inherent familiarity to outsiders can allow basic meaning to be translated between interpretive communities in unexpected ways, whilst still forming a useful political tool for the museum organisers. For the tourist visitor to the paramilitary museum, the kitsch experience can certainly have the unwelcome effect of reducing the potency of the judgements that would normally be attached to republican and loyalist nationalisms. However, as the next chapter will explore, the softening of violence's affects through light hearted appeals to humour, combined with

the emphasis that kitsch puts on the visitor's outsider status, can be deeply effective when it comes to communicating conflicting perspectives on Troubles heritage, and provide a useful reminder of the essential asymmetry that lies at the heart of all attempts to remember, and empathise with, the divided past.

**Chapter Six:**  
**Performing the Craic: The Use of Humour on Belfast's Mural Tours.**

“Is maybe the cause of the problem [...] that they say the  
Irish is always up for the crack?  
(Ali G)

Launched to coincide with West Belfast's annual Fèile an Phobail festival, Rita Duffy's highly satirical Thaw Factory project made its debut at the Falls Road Pop-Up Shop (Siopa Sealadach) in August 2014. Designed alongside local branding agency Hurson, the Thaw Factory conjoins banal, everyday household items with risqué wordplay about Northern Ireland's thirty-year conflict, to pointedly comic effect. On the first day of the project's opening, members of the public were invited to peruse the shelves of the Siopa Sealadach, and purchase their own Thaw Factory 'produce', which ranged from a can of peas cheekily emblazoned as 'Peas Process', to 'Ulster Vinegar' 'produced through a historical process of slow fermentation of pain, anger and grievance' (Thaw Factory, 2015).

Duffy's original intention, according to the flyer promoting the pop-up shop, was to offer an 'exploration of our shared lived experience, historical, political and social issues' through 'a selection of groceries and gifts that have multi layered and darkly humorous undertones' (Duffy, 2014). Whilst the dark nature of the humour invoked in these quasi-artefactual items is in no doubt, the reception of some of Duffy's bolder pieces has been mixed, and after protracted complaints from Sinn Féin about a t-shirt featuring Gerry Adam's face, surrounded by mandarin oranges ('Gerrymanderine'), the project was reportedly forced to close its doors early (Cosstick, 2015).

That such joviality about a war which claimed so many lives could cause offence to its stakeholders would, in most cases, not come as surprise to most people. Indeed, as one of Basil Fawlty's finer moments in *Fawlty Towers* demonstrates, the discomfit around the mere

mention of the war in the wrong setting, whilst a source of genuine, if guilty hilarity, gains much of its comic success from the very incongruity and inappropriateness of this kind of behaviour within recently conflicted societies. And yet within Northern Ireland, where citizens frequently make proud (if sardonic) reference to a dark sense of humour that has become so embedded in everyday interaction that it is practically a national trope, the sense of propriety around what can or cannot be said for the sake of a laugh generally knows no such boundaries. So entrenched has the relationship between conflict and comedy become, that in 2012, the Belfast Comedy Festival was host to a seminar on the very topic, titled “Laughing Away Our Troubles? The Relationship between Comedy and Conflict in Northern Ireland”.

For all the anecdotal evidence supporting the hypothesis, the literature exploring and documenting the proliferation of dark humour within Northern Ireland remains practically non-existent, with the exception of a short extract in a pop-book on Irish Comedy (Dixon and Falvey, 1999). This chapter seeks to partially fill the void left by the scarcity of research into this topic, by examining the use of humour in perhaps its most incongruous setting; within the minute interactions which are packaged as part of the black cab mural tours. In doing so, this chapter follows on from the concerns of the previous by offering further reflection on the relationship between the subject and object of empathy, and engaging critically with tourist positionality in relation to this. Much like museum visitors, who coalesce around different ‘interpretive communities’ (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000), the sociology of humour is also defined by what Linda Hutcheon (1995) has identified as ‘discursive communities’, the edges of which become exposed when someone fails to ‘get’ the joke, and which reveal the socio-cultural boundaries that determine and shape our relationships with each other. Engaging with the edges of these boundaries further, the possibility of humour as a form of ‘injurious speech’ (Butler, 1997) will be addressed, and the impact of this upon tourist perceptions of interface communities unpacked. Finally, recognising that humour is a deeply embodied mode of communication, dependent on a

range of features that go beyond the linguistic, the affective dimensions of empathy will be analysed in relation to this embodiment, and its stimulation through performative encounters with the tour guide will be addressed and linked back to the self-other nature of perspective taking.

### **Humour, Empathy and Dark Tourism.**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the lighthearted treatment of serious subjects can sometimes have surprising effects on tourist understandings of the conflict in Northern Ireland. As Tracey Potts (2012, p.235) has observed, ‘in the context of dark tourism [...] kitschification is rendered a positively perverse process’, and yet she notes closer inspection of its materiality often reveals a ‘range of responses’ that ‘move[ing] beyond any strict division between producers and consumers’ (2012, p.237), shows kitsch to be a diverse, and deeply politicised mode of engaging with the world. The fine line dividing kitsch and humour is evident, not just in Duffy’s work, where humorous takes on a political situation take the form of mass produced commodities, but also in some of the objects found in the museum where, as explored in the previous chapter, individual kitsch-objects can elicit a knowing smile or bemused laugh from the museum visitor. Certainly, the cabinet stickers found in the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre that mark displays as “Fully Insured by AK47” are intended to provoke amusement, whilst humorous interjects into the museum’s visitor book such as the ‘thanks for the lovely time UDA’ mentioned in Chapter Four, also demonstrates that visitors are themselves not averse to making light of some of the site’s more challenging aspects. However, whilst some of the literature on heritage acknowledges the intersections between kitsch and violence (Sturken, 2007; Winter, 2008; Winter, 2010; Potts, 2012), very little work has been done on humour’s interpellation within the dark heritage framework.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the only study to date that mentions the potential links between humour and dark tourism comes from Phillip Pearce and Anja Pabel (2015, p.136),

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<sup>30</sup> There have however been some explorations of humour in relation to tourism more generally. See: Frew, 2006; Pearce, 2009; Mitas *et al.*, 2012.

whose research found that whilst a 'GSOH' is a desirable feature for many visitors looking to engage in light touristic activity whilst away, the almost unanimous exception to this rule was in the case of pilgrimages to sites of recent conflict and genocide, where laughter was deemed to be almost entirely inappropriate.

Such findings are ostensibly supported by an edited collection from Richard Sharpley and Phillip Stone (2009), where humour is touched upon in a chapter on kitsch, and in a later contribution from Philip Stone on the 'fun' side of dark tourism. However, such explorations tend to be carried out only in relation to those heritage practices they describe as 'lighter dark tourism' (Stone, 2009a, p.169) which 'occurs when narratives of fear and the taboo are extracted and packaged up as fun, amusement and entertainment and, ultimately, exploited for mercantile advantage'. And yet, as evidenced both by many anecdotal experiences, and the now-infamous blog *selfiesatseriousplaces.tumblr.com*, purveyors and deliverers of dark tours frequently struggle to maintain the serious demeanour that memorialized sites of death and warfare demand of us. Philip Stone (2009b, p.56) exonerates the public outrage which these dramatic failures of sensibility tend to inspire as a natural consequence of dark tourism's establishment as a 'new moral space' for the 'reconfiguration and revitalization of moral issues', suggesting that oscillation between flippancy and indignation at these sites is little more than 'a process of contemporary society in which we renegotiate moral boundaries and ethical principles' (Stone, 2009b, p.71). However, there is little doubt that collective moralities aside, the idea that humour has distinct, untraversable boundaries does recur in popular culture, in ways that seemingly contradict the actual experience of being in and engaging with those 'dark' places.

As a psychosocial area of academic interest humour has, over the years, been subjected to a fairly rigid taxonomical evaluation by researchers seeking to understand why, as a seemingly frivolous behavioural trait it, and its somatic cousin laughter, have become deeply embedded

features in our concept of the ‘human’.<sup>31</sup> Studies of humour tend to be organised into three distinct strands of thought, which advance the theories of superiority, incongruity, and relief as explanations for its function in society. These theories will be unpacked in more detail later in this chapter, however in brief, advocates of superiority suggest that ‘we find humour in the misfortunes of others’, incongruity that laughter emerges out of ‘deviation from convention’, and relief that humour is about catharsis and physical release from ‘emotional or psychic tension’ (Watson, 2014). Much like with empathy, there is little agreement between these theories as to what humour really is, and as detailed below, further contestation still over whether it should be considered a positive or negative force for equitable social relations.

Calling it ‘practically enacted theory’ (Critchley, 2002, p.18), philosopher Simon Critchley has suggested that whilst humour offers an ‘exploration of the break between nature and culture’, these explorations ‘reveal the human to be not so much a category by itself as a negotiation between categories’ (Critchley, 2002, p.29), with the punchline of many jokes feeding off the ontological anxieties surrounding these negotiations. Such a universalist approach to humour, whilst often adhered to by those wishing to make claims about its ameliorative effects have been sharply criticised by many working in sociology and cultural studies, where humour is often perceived to be more divisive than those advocating its potentially healing benefits let on (Farb, 1981; Paton, 1988; Billig, 2005; Lockyer and Pickering, 2005; Lockyer and Pickering, 2008). Michael Billig (2001a, p.268) has been particularly vocal about his opposition to the idea of humour as a humanitarian balm, insisting that in many instances there is ‘an intrinsic link between extreme political hatred and the realm of jokes’. Observing that racist and misogynistic jokes are particularly pernicious examples of this, Billig (2005, p.181) cautions that humour ‘has a universal role in the maintenance of order’, and is often used to maintain a socially conservative status quo.

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<sup>31</sup> Henri Bergson famously observed that ‘the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is called the human’ (Bergson, 2007, p.4a)

Extending these observations towards humour's more performative aspects, Joanne Gilbert (1997, p.318) has written of the challenges that face female comedians who, she suggests, tend to 'perform their marginality in an act simultaneously oppressive [...] and transgressive' whilst on stage. Further observations made by Gilbert (2004) about the faux authority often attributed to male comics over female taps into Mary Douglas' (1968, p.366) work on the essential permissibility that underwrites the success or failure of a joke, as she argues that 'all jokes are expressive of the social situations in which they occur'. For these reasons volumes from both Lockyer and Pickering (2005) and Weaver (2011) suggest that humour should be seen less as an inclusive and equalising discourse, and more as a refraction of those inequalities and privileges that dominate social relations in the wider world — a point that Kuipers (2006) picks up on through her description of the 'humour regimes' that dominate the translatability of certain jokes. Nevertheless, despite these criticisms, there are those who continue to suggest humour has a beneficial role to play in the aftermath of conflict or war, and who also attribute to it subversive and empowering effects (Williams, 2001; Gilbert, 2004; Holtorf, 2010; Sheftel, 2011; Alturi, 2009; Weaver, 2011; Berlant, 2017)

Given the cross-over between these debates, and those that percolate around empathy's role in conflict heritage, it is even more surprising that exploration of the links between empathy and humour have, so far, been so limited in the academic literature. As John Urry and Jonas Larsen (2011) have observed tourists, whilst often conceived of as a homogenous mass of pleasure seekers, are in reality highly differentiated individuals, whose experiences of the travelled world are shaped through a variety of social and cultural lenses. As such, they argue that 'there is no single tourist gaze', and that studies of tourism must be attentive to the fact that 'tourists look at "difference" differently [...] according to class, gender, ethnicity and age' (Urry and Larsen, 2011, p.3). Given that these observations are now so widely accepted as to making stating it a tautology, Pearce and Pabel's (2015) failure to fully engage with these differences in their analysis of humour's impact on dark tourism is all the



more puzzling. Indeed, whilst attentive to cultural concerns at the heart of so-called 'politically incorrect' humour, they fail to apply these insights to the data collected from their own focus groups, instead assuming a certain universality to their participants' responses about how they might interpret tour guides' humour. Therefore, whilst partially approached in this study, the links between dark tourism and humour have yet to be critically attended to, particularly when it comes to practical considerations of how differences between the tourist, and the culture they are embedding themselves in, might impact their ability to understand or enjoy different jokes. This is something that Pabel and Pearce (2016, p.191) themselves highlight in a later article, where they observe that whilst a few studies have 'attended to forms of humour and general humour themes' in tourism, 'studies have not [...] addressed context in any detail', and have 'paid limited attention to how humour is perceived by tourists themselves'.

Further cross-overs can be identified between humour and empathy research in terms of their treatment as simultaneously phenomenological and cognitive affairs. Mary Douglas (1971, p.389) draws attention to humour's cruder manifestation in laughter, which she characterises as 'a unique bodily eruption' that exists within 'a series of bodily communications which have had to be interpreted in the usual way as part of the [humour] discourse'. In a similar vein, Henri Bergson (2007, p.6a) attributes humour to the fundamental 'mechanical inelasticity' of our everyday movements (walking, running, sitting) which he suggests draws attention to the boundaries between human concepts of stasis, duration and time, and always with comic effect, whilst Fox (1990) and others (Powell, 1988; Critchley, 2002) explore the unarticulated means through which humour is communicated by body language and tone. In the same way (as has been laid out in the literature review) theorists often attribute to empathy an uncontrolled reflexivity that is usually *felt* or emoted before it is fully cognised (Hoffman, 2000; Singer *et al.*, 2006; Hatfield *et al.*, 2009). Meanwhile, humour as the expression of an inner state or thought that is interpreted through language, bodily signs and tone before it can be found amusing (Douglas, 1968; Lockyer and Pickering, 2008), can be

read analogously to the ‘imaginative leaps’ and ‘perspective taking’ processes which, it is argued, are central to accurate interpretations of empathy (LaCapra, 2001; Coplan, 2011a; Coplan, 2011b). Finally, as has been sketched out above, whilst often promising communality and shared understanding, humour all too often highlights and reinforces divides between individuals and societies, meaning that like empathy, it is also invested with questions of power, ambiguous subjectivities and a deeply complex relationship between the individual and the social world.

However, reading empathy through humour’s presence is not merely a case of drawing simplistic comparisons between the two phenomena, but is also a way of genuinely exploring how humour enables the development or withdrawal of empathy at multiple levels. Ex-director of the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE) Sue Williams (2001, p.495) has suggested that humour can invite opportunities to empathise across communities, where it can be used as ‘common ground’ and a form of ‘indirect communication across the lines of division’ as well as a ‘tool in the process of discovering whether the other side is able to change’. This position has, however, been critiqued by Giseline Kuipers (2011, p.64), who argued that in the case of the Danish “Muhammad cartoons”, international reaction to their publication resulted in a ‘transnational “humour scandal”’, in which social divides were played out through different groups’ responses, which reinforced existing power relations. William Hampes (2010) found a positive correlation between what he terms ‘affiliative humour’ (an adaptive, interpersonal style of humour) and empathic concern, suggesting that humour is effective at stimulating empathy because it acts to reduce stress levels both on an individual and interpersonal basis, whilst in reverse of this, Peter Bui et al. (2016) have identified that those with higher empathy are less likely to find other people’s misfortune funny. Billig (2001b) has also drawn attention to laughter at misfortune through his analysis of the intersections between humour and embarrassment, arguing that contrary to Goffman’s work on ‘empathetic embarrassment’, the tendency to laugh at someone else’s shame displays not empathy, but a disciplinary enactment order of social norms. Going

further than this, humour's emergence in response to specific social settings and cultural ideas also makes its intersection with the spatially oriented tourist experience (such as those found on black cab mural tours) a particular area of interest when it comes to thinking about the way that space and intersubjectivity might influence empathy's production and interpretation.

It is one of the main contentions of this chapter, therefore, that attention to the way humour plays out during tourist experiences can, in the absence of empirically verifiable data about individual emotional engagements, be a useful way of approaching empathy's emergence and withholding in response to conflict. As has already been observed in the introduction to this thesis empathy, whilst featured in a great deal of the literature on conflict across the world, is notably undermapped in the public conversations and policy work on Northern Ireland, and discussions of how to promote reconciliation tend to be quite restrained when it comes to making recommendations about the need to emotionally identify with the 'other'. Whilst there has been very little formal explanation for this absence, informal conversations with other academics and key stakeholders suggest it may be a consequence of the intractable nature of the divide that still exists between many communities, and the sense that for all the grand political talk of 'peace', Northern Ireland has yet to truly experience itself as 'post-conflict', meaning that most of those affected are still too busy dealing with their own trauma to be able to shoulder the burden of someone else's. It is therefore suggested in this chapter that aversion to the language of emotionality in political discourse has an impact on a local level, which also shapes the way that key stakeholders in the tourist industry discusses reconciliation. As a consequence, I argue that reconciliatory discourses are often expressed more indirectly within the informal tourist sector through humour, rather than through a specifically empathic framework. Exploring the discursive constructions of humour therefore, (the signs of which are also more obviously externalised) is a means through which tour guide gestures towards, and away from empathy can also be assessed within the context of a black cab mural tour, and through which tour guide interactions with

the post-conflict landscape can be discussed in a way that goes beyond simple approbation, or demonization, of troubles tourism's increasing popularity in Northern Ireland.

### **Finding the Funny Side of Black Cab Mural Tours.**

[...] Jesus I remember doing a tour with five scally Protestants, and they were so hungover that they had very little interest in what I was saying actually, so I turned it around on them, and started having a bit of a laugh. And we ended up not doing the tour as such – we went to the same sites, but rather than saying “here is Joe Bloggs, he was killed in such a time”, I’d be saying “Here’s Joe Bloggs. Jesus I remember a story about him, a funny story that happened literally during the Troubles”

(Tour Guide 1)

Black cab mural tours, whilst often disputed as a form of ‘dark’ tourism remain undoubtedly challenging experiences to take part in. Lasting anywhere between ninety minutes and two hours, their formulation as sightseeing tours of the landscapes and communities scarred by conflict involves tourists visiting both sides of the interface in West Belfast, where guides use the various murals and memorials that litter the landscape as ‘stepping stones’ (Tour Guide 3) to piece together a history of the conflict. As has already been signified in the literature review, murals in West Belfast occupy a range of political stances, and declare varying degrees of affinity with armed paramilitaries, however one key feature that binds these images together is their role as signifiers of the death and suffering experienced on both sides of the community. As such, engaging in these tours can be deeply emotional affairs, and for those with some memory or awareness of the conflict, the decision to pay for a tour to those areas that once occupied a significant part of the media landscape can be a source of equal fascination and trepidation. Indeed, it is noticeable when scrolling through TripAdvisor reviews of the various different mural tour companies, the frequency with which tourists describe themselves as being ‘nervous’, ‘apprehensive’, or ‘worried’ at the

start of their visit. Such emotions are, as Mike Robinson (2012) highlights, a formative part of most tourist experiences, however in the case of tours of West Belfast, these appear to be amplified by the highly mediated nature of the conflict, which has contributed to the perception that 'violence is part of the essential character of the Irish' (Jarman, 1996, p.39).

Given this context, it's always surprising to find that, contrary to expectation, mural tours can be quite jocular affairs. Indeed, after my first tour I was genuinely pleased by how much I had enjoyed the experience, later realising that a large part of that had been down to the guide, who had been at pains to make jokes with myself and my sister, gently teasing us and making quips to put us at ease. As these tours are largely unscripted (with the exception of a couple of the larger companies, guides are given free rein to develop their own approach), there is plenty of room for spontaneity, which quite often manifests itself in the opportunity to develop jokes and have a laugh with tourists. Such an approach to hosting a tour is in itself not unusual, and Pearce and Pabel (2015) note that humour fulfils multiple functions for the guide, including establishing comfort in strange situations, aiding concentration, developing a relationship between tourist, tour guide, and other participants, and generally heightening the client's experience. Certainly, humorous interjections from the black cab guides fulfil all these functions during the mural tours, as most drivers are willing to joke with their customers, making gentle jibes about their home countries, or mocking the dynamics between individuals on group tours in a display of familiarity— a useful tool when navigating strangers through areas where sectarian violence and antagonisms remain an everyday occurrence. However, for many of those guides I interviewed, humour also went beyond this, often occupying a deeply political, but also performative position that can be captured through the idea of the 'craic'.

### **The Craic.**

Is Irish craic a myth? You must be joking. Few nations on earth know how to enjoy themselves like the Irish  
(Eagleton, 2002, p.46)

Writing in his jauntily off-beat, encyclopedic guide, *The Truth About the Irish*, Terry Eagleton notes that ‘the craic’ has become synonymous with a wide variety of ‘Irish’ activities, from the more general “fun” or “having a good time”, to a specifically heady mixture of ‘music, drink and talk’, usually located in a pub or a bar (Eagleton, 2002, p.46). In reality, the phenomenon of Irish craic, much like Northern Ireland’s dark humour, is an uneasy confluence of stereotype and socially situated reality. Mark McGovern (2003, p.98), writing on the commodification of the concept within the now global phenomenon of the Irish pub, notes that tourist obsessions with the idea of achieving good ‘craic’ with the Irish places unrealistic expectations on those working or living around popular tourist destinations to live up to a particularly narrowed, and ethnicised, concept of Irishness. Suggesting that the more nuanced particularities of ‘Irish’ humour, embodied by the notion of the craic, is becoming an expectant feature of tourist engagement with all forms of Irish culture and life, McGovern notes that increasing pressure is being placed upon its citizens to act as cultural workers in an ever broadening tourist scene (McGovern, 2003, p.98).

Certainly, the presence of ‘craic’ in the mural tours is typified by the easy and convivial relationship that most drivers strike up with their customers at the immediacy of the tour and which often becomes a selling point for the experience, as consumers of dark tourism are eased into these affectively challenging spaces with a laugh and a smile. For the guides I interviewed, ensuring that their clients left the tour feeling optimistic about the future of Belfast was of paramount importance, and many of my interviewees stressed the importance of not overwhelming visitors with dark stories of the past. For the guide who recounted conducting the tour with the ‘scally Protestants’, humour was described as an important factor in tourist wellbeing (‘balance it out so people aren’t going away with a heavy heart.

Balance it out so they go away laughing too' [Tour Guide 1]), whilst another suggested that 'most days you have a bit of craic and you go home laughing' (Tour Guide 7). For others, humour seemed to operate on a more mercenary level, as an assured route to good TripAdvisor reviews ('not only do you have to inform them, you have to entertain them. They have to come away feeling entertained' [Tour Guide 9]), whilst for some participants it was also an effective pedagogical tool, which could be used to 'highlight th[e] absurdity' (Tour Guide 9) of the political situation, or promote 'understanding' (Tour Guide 4); all of which are positions that Pearce and Pabel write are common effects of using humour on tours. Yet despite the widespread confidence invested in the power of humour by these guides, interviewees also consistently referred to those topics that they considered sacrosanct when it came to cracking a joke (usually child deaths and the hunger strikers). Such moments suggested a heightened awareness amongst guides of the limits attendant to the 'craic' and a recognition that, in spite of the seemingly transgressive nature of their jokes, most tours are constrained by clearly defined boundaries that even humour isn't supposed to transgress. Such implicit boundaries, and the 'edges' (Hutcheon, 1995) to humour that they reveal, also has clear implications for the way tourists engage with the history of the conflict.

It is important to note here that, whilst the use of the 'craic' as documented by McGovern, and evidenced by my own participants does emphasise its commodification within an increasingly competitive tourist sector, this does not, as McGovern seems to imply in his critique, mean that authenticity is irrevocably lost as a result. Indeed, as Peter Jackson (1999, p.99) has noted in his review of consumption and commodification within geography, 'the condemnation of all forms of commodification as immoral frequently rests on a contrast between commodities and culture', which doesn't necessarily exist. Rather, Jackson (1999, p.99) argues, commodities are 'complex cultural forms' which go beyond simplistic ideas of the authenticity/inauthenticity, and would be better explored through the notion of 'authentification', or that which 'identif[ies] those who make claims for authenticity and the interests that such claims serve' (1999, p.101). The debates around authenticity and

authentication as relates to taxi tours in Belfast will be unpacked further in Chapter Seven, however for now it is worth highlighting that, like Jackson, this thesis does not argue for a purely commercialised understanding of the craic, although for many guides this is undoubtedly a motivation for its inclusion. Rather, I seek to emphasise that, commodification asides, the use of an ethnicised form of banter during these tours also has a very real and ‘authenticating’ effect on the tourist experience, which is worthy of further investigation.

### **Craic as Control.**

*We find our tour guide sitting on the steps of Jury’s Inn, taking in the last of the Belfast’s scant solstice offerings. He looks tired, which as he later explains, is because ours is the fifth tour that he has done today. Following quick introductions, two of my fellow tourers announce that they’re going to buy beer for the taxi. With a wry smile, our guide exclaims. “Lucky bastards! Get one for me whilst you’re at it!”. The ‘tourists’ in question, promptly trot off to the nearest Mace, merrily returning a few minutes later with eight bottles of Desperadoes.*

*The four people accompanying me were all known through a friend and included a nationalist from North Belfast, a Protestant from Larne and two American backpackers who had just arrived in Northern Ireland. As we clamber into the back of the cab, and our guide began to ask where we were all from, and why we had come on this tour, a palpable sense of the oddity of our grouping sets in, as listed motivations range from a dispassionate, but guarded curiosity (the two ‘locals’), to the guileless enthusiasm of two young tourists who had grown up hearing about the conflict in America, and wanted to know more.*

*When our guide asks what we knew about the conflict, my friend (the nationalist amongst us), having just taken a swig from her Desperadoes, responds that in addition to growing up in Belfast during the Troubles, she used to be a community worker in West Belfast, and now gives occasional informal tours to visitors to her B&B.*

*Unperturbed, our guide immediately reaches for her beer, quipping that in that case, he’ll sit in the back with us and she can do the tour instead!*

*My friend responds with a sardonic raising of the eyebrows.*

This particular taxi tour, which took place in August 2015, was the ninth I had taken part in since starting my fieldwork, and the second of the four I have done whilst in the company of others. The convivial exchanges outlined above, whilst a familiar part of the playful rituals



governing tour guide-tourist relationships, stood out for me in this context as a prime example of the way that tourist ‘craic’ in Northern Ireland entails not just prescribed opportunities for laughs, but signals the ongoing re-negotiation of relationships between the black cab tour guide and wider community in Belfast.

As a phenomenon, black cab mural tours in Belfast are becoming dizzyingly popular with tourists to Northern Ireland, with some companies estimating that upwards of 500,000 people a year take part in a tour whilst in the province. With most companies touting work through local hotels and the cruise ships that dock in Belfast throughout the year, it’s hardly surprising that in contrast with other global examples of ‘dark’ tourism, murals tours are heavily marketed towards an enthusiastic international audience, who have little investment in, or prior knowledge of, Ireland’s ethno-national history. With the recent formalization of a ticket distribution deal between the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre, and one of the major providers of mural tours, Taxi Trax, this market trend looks set to remain a key feature of the way black cab tours are run in the future.

As a result, guides often come to these tours brimming with qualities that fit with tourist’s preconceived notions of ethnic Northern/Irishness, predominant amongst which is the craic (McGovern, 2002; McGovern, 2003). A 2009 ‘training and product knowledge’ (Northern Ireland Tourist Board, 2009) video developed by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, and later distributed amongst taxi drivers across Belfast, clearly puts pressure on cab drivers, regardless of whether or not they conduct tours, to comply with tourist expectations of a traditional ‘Irish welcome’ (McGovern, 2002). Featuring comedian Tim McGarry, also known for his role as the republican “Da” in the BBC comedy series *Give My Head Peace*, as a condescending cabbie who speaks directly to the video’s viewers, Belfast’s taxi drivers are advised about ways in which they can heighten the tourist experience, and make money at the same time:

We're kind of like a first date for tourists, so let's show them a good time [...] what do tourists want? They want a bit of information and a good craic, and that's where us taxi drivers come in, because we are a mine of information. Some of it's even true!

*(Taxi: A Brief Tour of Belfast, 2009)*

Driving around Belfast's central attractions (city hall, the Titanic, the murals), McGarry presents a litany of trivia about the city couched in jokes or humorous anecdotes ("How many people work in Queen's University? About half of them"; "There's the Titanic Shipyard – she was alright when she left here!"; "Plaguey Hill it's called. Not going to sell many houses there are ye?"), that are clearly designed as a script for drivers to rehearse and follow. At several points in the video, drivers are even encouraged to directly plagiarize its content "Feel free to use as much or as little of this as you want", "Don't forget to tell punters there's two sides to every story", "By the way you can really impress the punters by telling them [...]", "You can have that one for free!". Whilst the success of the video cannot be measured in terms of uptake (DVDs were handed out to random drivers in the streets), many of the jokes and anecdotes offered McGarry are retold by other taxi drivers, and on occasion tour guides, suggesting that either the video did have a broad influence on the tourist culture, or that McGarry's jokes were themselves lifted from a pre-existing craic 'archive' that circulates amongst Belfast's tourist providers (BBC, 2009).

Whilst straight forward adoption of these jokes within the context of a tour would seem to contradict guides' own claims that black cab tours are authentic, and unscripted experiences (something that will be explored in more detail in Chapter Seven), something of McGarry's caricatured characterization of craic does make its way into their self-presentation during the mural tours. McGovern has listed the main features of commodified craic as including 'an atmosphere of easy conviviality, the sense of a collective, communal existence, and a supposed ethnically-specific verbal dexterity' (McGovern, 2003, p.97), all of which the Northern Ireland Tourist Board attempt to capture in their video, as McGarry talks of

opportunities for ‘having a pint with the punters’, and promotes the use of specific slang words (‘wick’, ‘slagging’ ‘kex’ ‘duke’) in a bid to push drivers towards adopting a particularly ethno-classed version of Northern Irish dialect. Within the tours I took part in, many of the guides took great pleasure in explaining words and phrases to me that I hadn’t come across before, often laughing at my puzzlement when it was clear I hadn’t understood a particular maxim or idea. In interview, some of the guides even explained how they took such ethnicised demonstrations of Irishness further, with a few openly admitting that they liked to finish tours with a visit to The Crown, or another of Belfast’s infamous bars, because ‘going from bar to bar and giving them craic, they flipping love it!’ (Tour Guide 4).

The taxi tour that I took part in in early August 2015, whilst containing many elements typical of this genial, commodified craic -- the presence of alcohol, a diverse and convivial grouping of people, gentle ribbing on behalf of the tour guide – was also notable for the exchange between the guide and my friend, in which a subtle but unmistakable negotiation appeared to take place. Despite having lived in Belfast all her life, this was the first official bit of ‘troubles tourism’ which my friend had taken part in as a punter, and I could tell that despite her laid-back attitude to the process, coded in her pointed decision to take beer along for the ride, she was fiercely protective of the communities that she had worked with for a number of years, and sceptical about the impact of conflict tourism on them.

This attitude towards troubles tourism is typical of other local community workers who feel that in addition to driving a profit out of a protracted, and painful war, providers of mural tours swerve dangerously close to exacerbating divisions within the communities, in an attempt to provide a compelling narrative for their clients. As one Protestant community engagement worker from the Lower Shankhill Association postulated:

Sometimes, I believe that cab drivers, in order to enhance the tip that they get at the end of the tour, will really make the story up. Now the degree of truth in that story is questionable, but they can make a good story.

[LSA]

All the black taxi tour guides I have spoken to so far are aware of the criticisms that they face, and often become quite defensive about protecting their right to conduct these tours when their motivations are questioned, suggesting that they are able to offer ‘balanced’ and yet ‘personal’ views in contrast to many other, larger companies operating in Belfast. As someone who is from the community he was giving us a tour of, my friend’s stance would have been painfully obvious to our guide, and in this context, the gentle jibe about turning over his role as a guide to her, could be read both as a deference to her knowledge as a member of the community, and a sarcastic rebuff to the community work sector as a whole.

For those not tuned into the broader dynamics surrounding these cab tours, this split-second exchange may well have been interpreted as an example of the fullness of Irish convivial culture, or at the very least, a demonstration of a quick-witted ‘dexterous’ exchange between two ‘natives’ worthy of the craic. Certainly, as McGovern has noted in his work on the sociality of Irish-themed pubs, bar-based craic has long offered Irish migrants a particularly welcome set of ‘practices and places’ that have acted as ‘a much-needed cultural resource to combat their minority and often marginalized status within British society’ (McGovern, 2002, p.93). Not without its performative, public facing element, in which drunken, bawdy, but funny ‘stage Irishy’ often fulfilled as much as subverted the stereotype (McGovern, 2002, p.90), McGovern and Eagleton nevertheless note that Irish craic has retained all the hallmarks of a closed system of exchange, in which casual banter is suffused with an ‘in-group culture, full of codes, hints and signals which an outsider has to decipher’ (Eagleton, 2002, p.47).

These distinction between outsider and insider status when it comes to humour is one which was initially interred by those working within the superiority school of thought, where it was assumed that through the creation of this dichotomy, humour took on a sadistic function, as communities were effectively divided into those who laughed, and those who were laughed at (Morreall, 2009). Although John Morreall (2009) argues that this theory effectively lost currency amongst philosophers after the emergence of alternative theories put forward by Freud (relief) and Bergson (incongruity), the notion of humour as a pernicious force has, as has already been discussed, retained currency amongst sociologists working at the intersections of race and gender, where humour is perceived to have regressive effects in enabling the continuation of racism and sexism.

And yet, as other humorists have noted, this all-encompassing approach to humour promoted by the superiority school often bypasses the impact that contiguous factors, such as audience demographic (are the audience likely to be sympathetic, or resistant to the content of the joke?), time (is the joke dated? Is it responding to recent events?), and place (is the joke fitting to the setting/in a location where it might be okay to laugh at risqué ideas?), has on the reception of the joke (Morreall, 1997; Mulkay, 1988; Paton, 1988; Willis, 2005; Alturi, 2009). Michael Mulkay (1988, p.40) talks of the parallel ‘scripts’ that coexist within a given joke, noting that the boundary between humorous and serious discourse fluctuates depending on the type of ‘reality work’ being done by its ‘participants’, something that Linda Hutcheon (1995) also draws on in her work on humour’s discursive communities. Suggesting that discursive communities are a way of foregrounding ‘the particularities not only of space and time but of class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual choice [...] and all the other micropolitical groupings in which we place ourselves’, Hutcheon (1995, p.8) goes on to observe that ‘it is discursive communities that are simultaneously inclusive and exclusive – not ironies’ (1995, p.91).

Therefore, in its original formation the application of superiority theory to the tense exchange between my friend and our tour guide in August would have been an inadequate and overly-simplistic interpretation of the various processes at work within that moment. Although myself and my fellow tourers were passively excluded from the moment through a specifically coded use of humour which made its underlying meaning unintelligible to us, we weren't the objects of this humorous exchange, so much as innocuous witnesses to the moment. In terms of mapping discursive communities onto this moment, some clear stratifications were taking place. At a basic level, both the American tourists and myself were pointedly not part of the discursive community that made the conversation's subtle ironies intelligible to us as, as not wanting to create dissonance at the start of the tour, the exchange was based on the assumption that none of us had the insider knowledge, or cultural familiarity, to understand the power dynamics at work – something that was assured the moment the guide had ascertained where we were all from. Such subtle exclusions mark out one of the most obvious boundaries that are drawn through humour in terms of subject positions and empathy, which much like the use of kitsch in the paramilitary museum, highlighted us overseas tourists as clear 'outsiders' to some of the more nuanced frictions of local politics, and which meant our ability to fully understand and identify, or empathise, with either antagonist was restricted. Also coded into this moment, however, a further demarcation was tacitly being drawn between which 'natives' of Northern Ireland would be allowed to enter into this dispute in the first place.

Notable throughout this exchange, and for much of the tour, was the reticence of our Protestant companion from Larne, who was staying with my friend, and had previously expressed some discomfit about the idea of going on a tour of the murals. Although he grew up in Northern Ireland, his reticence in joining in on this craic (and his reluctance to reveal that he is from a Protestant family until our friend outed him) affirms Bill Rolston's (2010) observation that ownership over collective memories of the conflict in Northern Ireland are suffused with localisms that dictate when, and by whom, recollections can be articulated.

This is an attitude frequently echoed by other taxi tour guides in the city, who have no hesitation in publicly chastising those drivers believed to have exaggerated their personal participation in the conflict to impress the punters, whilst also using it as an opportunity to certify the authenticity of their own claims over certain troubled, Troubles memories. As noted by Rolston (2010, p.293), ‘the struggle against oblivion is intimate in these tightly-packed working class streets’ and the politics of remembrance often become hotly-contested terrain for the various political factions in the area (Braniff *et al.*, 2015). With this struggle as the ostensible backdrop for our haut-summer tour of the murals, the use of the craic to re-perform, and thus re-territorialise memory speaks volumes about its ability to function, not merely as a commodity within the context of a tourism-driven encounter, but as a form of rhetorical diplomacy too, in which challenges to discursive communities are set forth, and rebutted as part of the negotiable dynamics of ethno-sectarian identity in Belfast. Thus, the craic in this moment went beyond mere superficiality or commodification, and instead became a means through which broader tensions relevant to the politicised nature of these tours were contained and obscured.

The role that humour plays in masking possible frictions between guides, tourists and the local community on these tours was evident, not just in the subtle jibes between my friend and the tour guide, but also came to light during interviews with the tour guides. Mary Douglas (1968) writes that, as much as the act of joking is about establishing a sense of communality and relaxation in a group setting, it is also deeply connected to the politics of the permissible and social control. Observing that for a joke to be successful it must be both ‘perceived and permitted’, Douglas (1968, p.366) writes that ‘social requirements may judge a joke to be in bad taste, risky, too near the bone, improper or irrelevant’, resulting in a failure to amuse. On the other hand, as academics such as Simon Weaver (2011) and Tara Alturi (2009) articulate (and as Douglas herself draws attention to), humour is also the means through which social order and control is subverted by those who have traditionally been its victims, and can in these instances become a considerable source of social power

(Gilbert, 2004). That the black cab tour guide might want to control the narrative on their tour (in spite of its unscripted nature) should hardly be surprising, given that in conducting these tours, guides openly admit that they are trying to re-shape international understandings of Belfast as a city, in order to wrest it away from the previously negative coverage that it has had in the media. However, as has already been discussed in Chapter One, participating in the informal tourist economy is also a way for influential stakeholders to authorise their own politically inflected recantations of history, in ways that sometimes contradict repeated claims to impartiality. Humour is a key means of consolidating this control for the mural guide, not only through the kinds of jokes that they tell, but also in terms of how permission to joke is granted in the first place.

The use of humour to control tourist experiences of the mural tour emerged as a repeated theme both during tours I took part in, and in interview with taxi drivers. On multiple occasions my participants, whilst enthusiastic about the role that humour played as a bridge between themselves and the tourist, drew attention to occasions when it threatened to backfire in some way. A specific example of this was provided by a guide who, discussing a particularly disastrous tour in which his clients had refused to engage in any ‘craic’, he lamented its impact on his ability to provide a good tourist experience:

I had this woman from Norwich, and her two sons, who had booked me online through a booking agency [...] Went round to pick them up in an hour's time, and she get into the back of the car. I started to talk to her, see what she was about, have a bit of a craic. No. She wouldn't look at me, she was looking out the window. And I was going "where you from?". "That's my business!". I said, "Oh this is going to be good". I says, "Lads, where are you's from?". They didn't talk [...] But this woman, I was cracking jokes – No. She didn't laugh at nothing. And every time I asked her something, "I'm not taking sides. I'm not taking any sides". And I'm going, "listen to me. It's a joke about the fucking Titanic! It's got nothing to do with anybody!". Literally. You know, crack any old joke about built by an Irishman, sunk by an Englishman? Oh no, this woman, she really,



worst tour ever. Actually if I had been able to give her money back I'd have said, "here's your money".

(Tour Guide 7)

Through more informal conversations with other guides, it became clear that those who didn't seem to 'get' the joke, were often assumed to be the wrong sort of tourists for the cab tours, and were frequently disparaged for not understanding the personal element that, in the guides' eyes, made cab tours so unique. In these instances, not 'getting' a joke, far more than nationality or political perspective, seemed to be what positioned certain tourists as 'outsiders' to Northern Ireland and, in the minds of the guides, made it particularly difficult to provide a meaningful narrative about the conflict. Such reflections were usually accompanied by the suggestion that these kinds of tourists would be better off taking the more generic, and official city bus tour of the area. However, contradicting this, tourists who try to instigate the 'craic' themselves whilst on tour were also considered undesirable. One participant spoke of being personally offended when a group of tourists laughed at the story of how his cousin was killed during the Troubles, whilst another regaled me with the litany of verbal put-downs he used on a tourist, who had made the mistake of trying to outperform the guide's own wit. The latter anecdote, framed in terms of a friendly competition between the guide and his client, was nevertheless revealing in terms of the links it suggested between power and joke telling, and was something that I later realised had been a key factor in the tour I took in 2015:

*Standing outside the Bobby Sands Mural, our guide begins telling us about the history of the Hunger Strikes, and the role that Sands' prolonged death played in garnering support for a dwindling IRA in the 80s.*

*Jean, in this moment, is being uncharacteristically quiet at the back of the group. However, as our guide starts describing the effects that Hunger Strikes had on revitalizing the IRA, my friend launches her fist into the air, exclaiming "Up the RA!"*

*Our guide, himself an ex-republican, looks shocked for a moment before turning to us with a chuckle, saying "I've not heard that in a long time"*

At this point in the tour, the relationship between the tour guide and my friend had definitely soured, as Jean's repeated comic interjections, and ill-concealed attempts to establish herself as the real authority on community relations in Belfast were received with increasing impatience from the guide. In light of this, the deliberate pause between Jean's recantation of the old Provisional IRA slogan, and our guides' reaction, suggested not just shock, but uncertainty about how to incorporate this moment into the overall pattern of a tour, which by his usual standards had gone so far awry. This was despite the fact that Jean's risqué and ironic declaration of allegiance with a (theoretically) defunct paramilitary organisation outside Sinn Féin's offices was entirely in keeping with the incongruous, defiantly dark nature of the humour used elsewhere by black cab guides on their tours.

So-called 'dark humour', whilst widely featured in popular culture, has received surprisingly little academic interest from those already working in humour research (Dundes, 1987). Given that 'dark', 'sick' or 'bad taste' jokes often offer more extreme examples of humour's transgressive, and oppressive effects, this neglect is all the more surprising. The absence of any concrete engagement with what dark humour is (or does) has resulted in a scattered approach in contemporary social and cultural literature. Initially theorised by Antonin Orbdlik (1942, p.709) as the 'humour which arises in connection with a precarious or dangerous situation', dark or 'gallows' jokes often emerge, according to Orbdlik (1942, p.710), amongst oppressed peoples as an 'expression of hope and wishful thinking'. Anna Sheftel's (2011, p.145) recent article exploring a particularly ironic memorial to the Bosnian war confirms Orbdlik's perspective, as she describes dark humour as 'an especially subversive form of counter-memory', which allows 'dissent from dominant narratives [...] that they perceive as unproductive or divisive'. An edited collection from Ted Gournolos and Viveca Greene (2011) takes such rationalisations further, through a number of chapters that explores the various ways in which the more divisive responses to 9/11 were counteracted through a proliferation of satirical and ironic comedic outputs, whilst a few publications on

Holocaust memory have made note of the gradual emergence of survivor-led films and works of fiction that explicitly use humour as both a coping mechanism, and a way of re-asserting control over traumatic pasts (De Pres, 1989; Gilman, 2000). Much like other social theories of humour, all these accounts set up an insider/outsider dichotomy for the humorist that often emphasises the psycho-social benefits of dark jokes for the ‘insiders’ (those whom the jokes are about) without necessarily considering how they could be interpreted by the ‘outsiders’ against which they are set.

Within the space of the black cab tour, examples of dark (or as Dundes describes it, ‘sick’ humour) are abundant. From jokes about Margaret Thatcher’s near-death experience during the 1984 Brighton Hotel Bomb (Thatcher was in the toilet when the bomb went off — you know what we call that? A lucky shit!), through to wry observations about the number of ex-paramilitaries in Stormont (“in my country we go to prison first and then become president”), at some points guides from all backgrounds will incorporate a more colourful joke or comment into the patina of their narrative. For many of those I interviewed, such jokes were a coping mechanism, and as suggested by the available literature, were a way of protecting themselves from the psychological effects of re-living the conflict on a daily basis (‘You have to. You’d crack it you didn’t. You know you’re talking about a doom and gloom subject, so you have to try and make fun of things you know?’ [Tour Guide 8]). To a certain extent, guides’ reliance on dark jokes fits into the ‘authenticity’ that tourists often attribute to them as representatives of Belfast’s past, as the light-hearted references to bombings, kneecappings, and other forms of violence, undeniably positions taxi drivers as part of the discursive community of Troubles victims, for whom such jokes are both permissible, and a ready remedy for the traumas they have faced. However, the use of these jokes within the context of a tour also destabilises the nature of the insider/outsider dynamic that usually marks dark humour’s emergence (Gilman, 2000; Sheftel, 2011), as the explicit invitation to laugh at these jokes, becomes an invitation to the tourist to laugh with the guide and, by extension, the broader Belfast community that they represent. Such identification is

necessary for the guide to shape tourist perceptions of West Belfast and the conflict in accordance with their own, and also becomes a useful means through which subtler, more politicised accounts of the past and present are enumerated.

### **Humour and Injurious Speech.**

The fact that the dark content of these tours can still elicit laughter from tourists is a testament to the theory of incongruity that remains popular amongst many humorists today. Incongruity theory, John Morreall (2009, p.11) writes, is the belief that all humorous content stems from a discrepancy between expectation and reality as ‘some thing or event we perceive or think about violates our normal mental patterns and normal expectations’, resulting in unexpected cognitive shifts. Certainly, on a superficial level, any joke about violence and traumatic events, to those who never lived through them, will have the quality of incongruity, but this is particularly true of a political tour, where expected to maintain a serious demeanour throughout, the inclusion of dark jokes can seem particularly subversive of the social order to the tourist, and hence comical.

On the other hand, the incongruous nature of these jokes also draws attention to the relative normality that now governs communities in West Belfast, which I suspect is part of the reason that guides feel confident enough articulating them in the first place. It seems no coincidence that dark jokes occur much less frequently in the Shankill Estate which, until recently, was the only area on the tourist route that still had murals of hooded paramilitaries and guns on its walls. When in the Estate guides, regardless of their own ethno-national background, tend to adopt a much more sombre tone, suggesting they recognise that such images inspire a level of discomfit that can’t be alleviated through a casual joke. In contrast, when in sight of the less militaristic, more cosmopolitan murals on the Falls Road, or even by the more neutral peace line, such jokes are quick to often emerge. One I often heard repeated by the Peace Wall, about Martin McGuinness’ visit to the palace in 2014 (“It’s the only time the IRA went to London and didn’t leave anything behind!”), suggested something

about this spot actively encouraged such ribaldries, with frequent laughter from tourists implying that clients took equal pleasure in the jokes told in these places.

What the spatial quality of dark humour on the black cab tour suggests, is that these jokes not only to encourage identification with the tour guide, but also sell tourists a particular perception of post-Troubles Northern Ireland. As has already been gestured to at the start of this chapter, the success or failure of a joke is often dependent on the social setting in which it is issued, however as the existing work on dark humour suggests, the relationship between dark jokes, and the space they are in, is also subject to conflicting temporal factors. This emerges most significantly in Anna Sheftel's (2011) work on the Bosnian War monument in Sarajevo. Alluding to the way that humour, communicated through the monument's iconic figuration as a can of spam (an UN-rationed food delivered to the Bosnian-Serbs throughout the crisis), effectively derives its punchline from this clash between past and present, Sheftel (2011, p.146) argues that the manifestation of dark humour *after* conflict has been neglected, where it has become 'the elephant in the room in discussions of post-conflict memory'. For Sheftel (2011, p.147), memorials such as the spam monument speak to the need for the present-effects of dark humour to be taken seriously, in so far as they 'challenge dominant interpretations of the past', through their outward-looking, and somewhat defiant reconstruction of national identity in the present.

The spatialisation of jokes on black cab mural tours points to a similarly mnemonic approach to history, in which identity in the present is constructed through appeals to the past. Reserving the telling of dark jokes to those spaces that seem 'safe' to tourists, makes it easier to create an impression of Northern Ireland as a country that is transitioning away from conflict, rather than mired in its perpetual drudgery. However, it is also by telling these jokes, and inviting tourists to find humour in the atrocities of the past, that perceptions of these spaces as 'safe' and 'post-conflict' are reinforced. My friend's declaration of allegiance with the IRA outside Sinn Féin's headquarters violated this silent rule, making

unwelcome links between an old republican chant, and political apologists for paramilitarism in the present, thus bringing the contemporaneity of conflicts surrounding the ‘victims issue’ into focus.

Asides from the commercial advantages that distracting tourists from ongoing violence has for the tour guide (most people who sign up to these tours do so on the understanding that they are entering areas that are solidly ‘post’ conflict), the other impact that dark humour has on the black cab mural tour is that it helps to conceal some of tensions that continue to exist between communities in the North in a way which then (somewhat contradictorily) provides guides with scope to deviate from the non-biased scripts that they’re supposed to stick to.

*We have pulled up outside another mural, our first in the loyalist estate of the Shankill. This is the first time we have stepped out of the car since crossing the peace line onto the ‘other side. Sandwiched between a mural to Stevie ‘Top Gun’ McKeag, and the rows of dilapidated, blank-faced council houses which encase us, the atmosphere here is a far cry from the bustle of the Falls road that we were just on.*

*The guide draws our attention to the mural immediately in front of us, which unlike some of the others in the area, has no immediate paramilitary connections. It depicts King William of Orange riding a rearing horse on the edge of the Boyne river. It’s a striking mural, both for its artistry and the vibrancy of the palette used by the painter, where it stands out, electric, amidst the mottled greys and beiges of the buildings surrounding it.*

*After providing us with the usual contextual information about unionism’s relationship to ‘King Billy’, and the Battle of the Boyne, the guide begins to give us a more detailed account of the monarch’s life and reign, as he highlights the shared nature of the history that ties Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants together.*

*With the ghost of a smile on his face, the guide turns to us and asks if we were aware that King Billy was gay? We reply that we were not, which prompts the guide to launch into a lengthy anecdote about a previous tour he had conducted in the Shankill where, accosted by an angry passer-by, they had become embroiled in an argument on this very topic. Chuckling to himself, our guide recounts the local’s attempts to show him up in front of his clients, and how the guide’s own response that his adversary could ‘look it up in a book’, was met with a nonplussed silence.*

*“There’s a lot of bigots here”, he concludes, with a rueful smile at us.*

*We smile uncertainly in response, unsure of how to interpret this new information.*

The particular event outlined above took place during a different tour, and with a different group of people, to the one discussed previously in 2015. Once again I was in the car with some of my friend's Bed and Breakfast guests (a Chinese student living in Sheffield, and a French-Icelandic pilot recently settled in Belfast), in the company of a guide (Adam) who, according to his colleague was 'a walking history book' on the conflict.<sup>32</sup> The tour had started well, with Adam's deft account of the Troubles, informed by a sharp Marxism, more than fulfilling the expectations that his colleague had set up for us. Most impressive, were the places that Adam had taken us to during the first half of the tour. Starting on the nationalist side of the interface, rather than immediately transferring us to the Divis Tower blocks, as many other nationalist guides do when they want to tell tourists about the first child casualty of the conflict, we had been directed towards a mural opposite the flats that I hadn't seen before. Depicting local street entertainer Mickey Marley, who was well known in Belfast for owning a travelling horse-drawn carousel that moved across the whole city before the erection of the peace walls, Adam noted that although never a victim of sectarian attacks, Marley was the 'first economic casualty of the Troubles'. Given this strikingly unsentimental opening, I immediately felt that, in spite of his nationalist upbringing, Adam was preparing to offer us a more neutral account of the Troubles than those I had encountered before, and was thrilled that my companions, who knew nothing about the conflict would be exposed to this.

That certain unionist politicians are, by default, social conservatives, is hardly a secret amongst those living in Northern Ireland. The DUP's consistent blockage of equal marriage and abortion laws are often characterised by the media as evidence of unionism's innate bigotry— a slur that is also extended to those working-class unionist communities in the Shankill and elsewhere from whom the DUP draw support (Ashe, 2009; Walsh, 2013). Making jokes about King Billy's sexuality (portraits of whom can be found on most gable

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<sup>32</sup> Not his real name.

walls in unionist areas) has therefore become a way for nationalists to draw attention to this conservatism, and promote themselves as the more socially progressive movement of the two, despite evidence to the contrary (Conrad, 2001; Conrad, 2006). In Tim McGarry's own stand-up set 'Irish History Lesson', jokes that rely on these kinds of subtle comparisons abound, with the comedian suggesting that one solution to 'Protestant' refusals to accept the queering of their national icon would be for 'Catholic nationalists [to] believe that he's gay. So the next time an Orange march goes past, don't get upset, just regard it as a gay pride march! (*Tim McGarry's Irish History Lesson*, 2010). In a broader set-list of witticisms that, as with McGarry's, are equally scathing of nationalist and republican mind-sets as they are of unionist, the suggestion that unionism has a cultural problem with homophobia is not, in itself, sectarian, as the joke's punchline also relies on audiences finding humour in nationalist antipathy towards Orange Order parades. However, deployed in a different context, the subtext of jokes such as these change, and can become a form of 'injurious speech', which both creates and expresses sectarian feeling, as with Adam's retelling of his encounter with the local in the Shankill.

Writing against the backdrop of the increasingly right wing and anti-gay America of the 1980s and 90s, Judith Butler's (1997) work on excitable speech draws attention to the intersection between abusive language and the constitution of the subject. 'To be called a name', Butler (1997, p.2) writes, 'is one of the first forms of linguistic injury that one learns', and she notes that whilst some bodies are subject to more name calling than others, we are all made through, and thus are vulnerable to, language. Injurious speech is one of the ways in which the subject is negatively interpolated through language, and Butler (1997, p.2) makes it clear that whilst the content of that speech is important, real damage is often done, not by the words themselves, but by the more elliptical 'mode of address [...] a disposition or conventional bearing — that interpolates and constitutes a subject'. An example of this mode of address, provided by Butler, is of a Supreme Court case that made headlines in 1992, when a white teenager was indicted for burning a cross on the lawn of a black family's



home. Observing that the teenager's legal team successfully defended him on the grounds that the act of burning a cross was a form of speech, and therefore protected by the first Amendment, Butler (1997, p.55) observes that in doing so the team 'refut[ed] [...] the racist history of the convention of cross-burning by the Ku Klux Klan [...] and, hence, portended a further violence against a given addressee'.

Within the context of the tour with Adam, the ambiguous logics through which injury was constituted against the Shankill community emerged, not just through the references he was making to King Billy's sexuality, but through his tone of voice, and the space he occupied whilst making these references. At the time of relating this episode to us, Adam's intonation was conspiratorial, and his observation that "there's a lot of bigots here", whilst standing in the heart of loyalist West Belfast, had the effect of marking out the 'bigots' and the 'here' as belonging to the Shankill and its inhabitants, as opposed to the Catholic and nationalist population of the Falls Road. Butler's observations about the link between ritual and linguistic injury were also pertinent to the moment as, drawing on popular understandings of Northern Irish politics, which has re-fashioned unionists as stalwart anti-progressives, Adam ritualised the 'condensed historicity' that Butler (1997, p.3) notes is so important to the potency of the speech act, re-performing these tropes through his telling of the joke.

What makes this particular kind of speech all the more injurious is the fact that it was communicated through humorous anecdote, giving it the plausibility of deniability whilst ensuring that such utterances could be made in the first place— a trait that Michael Billig (2001a; 2005) notes is often trademarked by those invested in promoting misogynistic and racist jokes. In this instance, the use of humour on the black cab tour, usually an invitation to feel in conjunction with a broader, non-sectarian West Belfast community, became a means of dividing tourist sympathies, subtly reinforcing the notion that some parts of the community are deserving of more understanding than others. For my tour companions, whose knowledge of contemporary politics in the North was limited, jokes such as Adam's,

which drew attention to bigotry on one side without qualifying it with references to equal levels on the other, could easily be taken as statement of fact, subtly reinforcing sectarian logics without damaging the guide's reputation as a 'non-biased' interpreter of the past. In effect, Adam's re-telling of his interaction with the Shankill local pointed towards a re-drawing of humour's discursive boundaries, as tourists were once again marked as the naïve outsiders who, although laughing in sympathy, never quite 'get' the joke.

However, as Butler reminds readers, although the source of much oppression, injurious speech also presents opportunities for resisting the status quo. Urging us to understand that 'these terms we never really choose are the occasion for something we might still call agency [...] one whose future is partially open', Butler (1997, p.38) argues that to ease us into a more open, agent filled future, such speech needs to be 'misappropriated' from its 'prior contexts' and resignified 'in ways which have never yet been legitimated'. These new contexts, and what Butler also calls the repetition of injuries, manifest themselves on black cab mural tours in two significant ways. The first, as has already been covered in this chapter, concerns the use of dark jokes around the very literal injuries that people received during the Troubles. Besides from the broader jokes about IRA bombings, more specific examples of "bad taste" humour also manifest in relation to the impact of kneecappings on medical research ("We always say the NHS was built on the work of the IRA") and references to the more routine violences that people endured, such as the objects that children would throw over the peace wall to injure their rivals on the other side ("I always say that these houses are a literal stone's throw away"). As has already been indicated in this chapter, the repetition of these 'bad taste' jokes do not in themselves signify new contexts, but are often about creating and maintaining control, and ultimately feed into the kind of 'boys club' humour which, according to my participants, were dominant during the Troubles. However, in recent years, a new take on the 'bad taste' joke has begun to emerge on these mural tours, which point us towards the kinds of re-significations that Butler suggests are so essential to resisting oppressive speech.

This joke which, like other examples of ‘sick’ Troubles humour, occurs most frequently by the peace wall on Cupar Way, draws on one of the myths that circulated during the Troubles around the idea of ‘telling’. The concept of ‘telling’, which at the height of the conflict took on all the verity of a science, was based around the idea that Catholics and Protestants could be distinguished from each other through dialect, pronunciation of certain words, clothing style and facial features (Harris 1972; Burton 1978). Since the end of the conflict, attempts to disinter a reading of someone’s religious background through these markers have diminished, although as Andrew Finlay (2001) found during his own fieldwork, guessing someone’s ethno-national identity is still common practice. Some guides whilst at the Peace Wall like to draw on this practice, and will ask tourists whether they know how to tell a Catholic from a Protestant. When, their audience inevitably fail to answer the question, guides then use their fingers to manipulate their facial features, replying “Catholics have one eye up here, Protestants have one down here:” Whilst variations on this punchline exist (one guide who came from a mixed background responded with “Catholics have big ears, Protestants have big noses, I’m both so I’ve got a big willy!”), the implication of the joke is generally the same, in that it parodies those telling processes that were once considered so central to survival in the city. In doing so, jokes such as these, which are also accessories to more serious conversations about governmental plans to remove the peace walls, resignifies the telling process for a post-Troubles age, making something that was once considered essential to survival ridiculous, and suggesting a new, underlying coherency between the two communities. In terms of the impact on outside visitors, it might be speculated that such jokes also serve to highlight tourists’ complicity in the historic investment in biculturalism, prompting a more considered, less divisive approach to the communities they are visiting.

### **Conclusion.**

Of course, jokes such as the ‘telling’ ones cannot be read in isolation from those instances of injurious speech typified by Adam’s mocking of King Billy, and any suggestion that the use

of slapstick, physical humour might be responsible for drastic shifts in sensibility amongst tourists and tour guides should be treated with caution. Indeed, in some ways, one of the knock-on effects of these resignified engagements with ‘telling’ might be to further reinforce the idea of Belfast as a ‘post-conflict’ city, thus giving the guides an air of neutrality and objectivity that they are unlikely to possess. However, as an example of the way in which humour could, and sometimes is, used to prompt alternative narratives of the present during these tours, such moments should not be overlooked, as minor as they may be within the overall context of the tour.

However, what is clear from this chapter, and does warrant further attention, is the role that humour as a whole plays in the narration of the past in Northern Ireland, and the impact that this might have in particular for tourist empathies and engagements with this past. Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai (2017, p.233) in a recent journal issue on comedy, observe that whilst ‘comedy’s pleasure comes in part from its ability to dispel anxiety’, and induce pleasure, ‘people seem to get more upset when their capacities for enjoyment are questioned or pressured by the comedic than when their capacities for empathy are tested’ (2017, p.242). Suggesting that laughter at what gives someone pleasure is ‘experienced as shaming; as condescending; as diminishing’, whereas disagreement over what produces empathy often reinforces the sense of self, Berlant and Ngai (2017, p.242) speculate that ‘it may be that we hold our pleasures closer than our ethics’. However, what this chapter has argued, and will continue to argue in the next, is that the pleasure of comedy is in fact inseparable from empathy, both of which are experienced in those ambiguous moments when clearly-defined social and emotional boundaries are transgressed. To laugh at a joke, or to find something funny is to take a position in relation to the subject, or teller of that joke, and has an emotional ripple-effect that can lead to closer identification with an idea, cause or community. What makes the use of humour on the black cab tour so complex, is the very ambiguity with which guides treat jokes during the course of the tour, where it can be used to encourage such identifications, re-assert boundaries, and re-make broader political

statements, all in the name of the 'craic'. As will be developed further in the next chapter, the impact of the diverse uses to which the craic is put during these tours creates a sense of confusion around the guide's own positioning in relation to these topics, both complicating ideas of authenticity as they relate to the black cab tour, and generating a complicated affective narrative that offers more genuine possibilities for empathy and change in post-Troubles Northern Ireland.

**Chapter Seven:**  
**Authenticating Emotion: Affective Synecdoche and the Black Cab Mural Tour.**

If the role of political tourism is developed, what will the additional experience be? Will the tourist experience mock kneecappings — maybe even the recorded screams of the supposed victims? What about the dummy bomb runs? What about the political beatings — hurley sticks provided? Even more ghoulish, what about the activities of the IRAs's infamous nutting squad? With a bit of blindfolding and torture, the tourist could relive the experience of the terror victim.

(Robin Newton MLA, *Hansard* 2008)

Railing against a recent surge of interest in Northern Ireland's conflict, DUP MLA Robin Newton's response to a 2008 Assembly debate on political tourism in Northern Ireland was, despite its inflammatory rhetoric, neither unexpected, nor out of keeping with other unionist politicians' sentiments on the subject. Driven by Sinn Fein Paul Maskey's demand that the Assembly formally recognise the importance of Northern Ireland's conflict tourism, Newton and other DUP MLAs united in their condemnation of these experiences as 'a cynical attempt to make money out of other people's suffering' (Hansard, 2008), and ultimately rejected Maskey's request for further investment the sector.

Whilst Newton's speech was undoubtedly designed to provoke his nationalist opponents, his reduction of Belfast's mural tours to a 'ghoulish' re-enactment is not without precedent in Northern Ireland, nor is it entirely unwarranted. In 2012, community worker Chris Jenkins wrote a piece for the *Guardian* decrying the rising popularity in conflict tourism as 'immoral', whilst in 2016, a private hire bus filled with Chinese tourists was pelted with stones as it travelled down the Falls Road (BBC, 2016c). In each case, the (sometimes implicit) criticism of these tours was not so much that they existed (although for both Jenkins and the DUP politicians this is still the source of some rancour) but that their

providers stood to make a significant profit from them, and so were effectively monetising tensions in the North.

For the instigator of the Assembly debate, West Belfast's MLA Paul Maskey, extracting profit out of conflict is distasteful, but only when those making money from these tours are outsiders to West Belfast's community. Stating in a later radio interview that 'it's not up to outsiders to come in and make money and go away without spending money in these areas', Maskey said:

If you've lived in an area you have the right to tell the story of your community. No matter whether it's the Falls or the Shankill. But what I do have problems with is some tour guides maybe coming from Hillsborough, who before the ceasefires maybe have never set foot in areas like West Belfast or Shankill. But they're telling that story. And that's the problem I have because who do they clear their script by? They have never lived here, they never worked here, and they never dealt with the people here.

(Maskey, 2012)

Contained in Maskey's condemnation of these elusive 'outsiders' is the implication that, however well versed a guide might be in the history of the Troubles, without the lived experience of being in West Belfast during this period, their tours will lack substance. For Maskey 'the people who have lived in these areas are the professionals at telling this story', and in a further gesture towards the tight cloister of politics and power that envelops Troubles heritage, he suggests that such 'locals' are permissible only because they have had their scripts 'cleared' by an unquantifiable entity. Although approaching the phenomena from the opposite end of the political spectrum to Newton, Maskey's obsession over who should take charge of these mural tours hints at an unlikely sharing of interests between himself and his unionist adversary, when it comes to questions of authenticity.

As one of the pre-eminent concerns of tourist practice and study, authenticity has long been treated as the primary framework through which people's motivations for visiting other places can be understood. Famously explored by Dean MacCannell in his seminal book *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* tourists, MacCannell (1976, p.104) suggests, 'demand authenticity', and contradicting those who attribute a fundamental superficiality to the industry, constantly and consciously shape their practices around this pursuit. Since MacCannell's publication, several other researchers have taken up his invocation to examine authenticity's relevance to tourism in more detail, resulting in a remarkable range of outputs, that range from epistemological deconstructions of authenticity's formation and reception, to industrial attempts to cater to these demands through increasingly innovative engagement strategies (Cohen, 1988; Hughes, 1999; Wang, 1999; Olsen, 2002; Chabra, 2005; Fox, 2007; Cohen and Cohen, 2012; Zhu, 2012). However, nowhere is the idea of authenticity more important than when it comes to the kind of tourism associated with 'dark' or conflict heritage.

As suggested by Chris Rojek (1993) the privatisation of death and the dying that occurred in the latter half of the twentieth century shifted fascinations with mortality firmly into the cultural spheres, with a variety of outputs, including dark tourism, capitalising on the public's latent desire to reconnect with death. Since Anthony Seaton's (1996, p.234) observation that dark, or thana-tourism is intrinsically connected to 'the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death', several researchers have engaged with the gulf that separates the symbolic from the actual, through their reflections on the role that authenticity plays in the thanatouristic experience. For William Miles (2002, p.1176) and others (Turmarkin, 2005; Cohen, 2011), actual sites of death and disaster have greater 'locational authenticity' than those merely associated with the event, and it is these sites 'of death, disaster, and depravity', that they argue 'constitutes a further degree of empathetic travel' in "darker tourism" (Miles, 2002, p.1175). In contradiction to this, Richard Sharpley's (2005) insistence that dark tourism is a spectrum suggests that, although undeniably more macabre



than other kinds of heritage attraction, those at the 'lighter' end are just as susceptible to commercialisation as other tourist ventures, although Eric Cohen (2011) questions whether this necessarily precludes authentic connections to the past. For Britta Knudsen (2011), most important are the emotional reactions that these sites provoke in their visitors, whilst Rodanthi Tzanelli (2007; 2016) has extended Cohen and Knudsen's reflections on the fallacy of locational authenticity further, drawing attention to the way that 'cine-tourism' and other artistic mediations on death are just as capable of inspiring emotional reactions in tourists, as physical presence at these sites. What remains clear across these debates is that whether coded in a tourist representation, experience, or digital mediation, authenticity continues to be of relevance to the scholar of dark tourism, and remains a fundamental rationale behind the development of a 'dark' attraction.

The debates on the relationship between authenticity and dark tourism are of course also central to work that has been done elsewhere on empathy's relation to the historical event. Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman's (1992) canonical work on testimony exposed the contradictions between memory as a representation of a historical occurrence, versus its manifestation as a reflection of an internal emotional truth, through Laub's account of an Auschwitz survivor who, in giving testimony about an uprising in the camp, mis-remembered the number of chimneys that were on fire at the time. For Laub (1992, p.62), who was this witnesses' interviewer, it was not the 'empirical historical facts' that mattered in their testimony, so much as the 'very secret of survival and of resistance to extermination', which their act of mis-remembering revealed. Dominique LaCapra (2001, p.91) has extended Laub's reflections in his conceptualisation of the secondary witness (or historian), describing the interviewee's testimony as an example of a 'traumatic limit event', which he argues poses a significant challenge to the idea of historical accounts as mere 'reconstruction or representation'. For LaCapra (2001, p.40), whose concept of empathic witnessing emphasises the centrality of affect to historical understanding, factual accuracy in testimony is less important than the sincerity of the witnesses' emotions, and beyond a fidelity to a

basic level of historical ‘truth’, he eschews the notion that encounters with witnesses need always be driven by the ‘exclusive objectification’ that defines much modern historiography.

And yet despite a growing body of literature that acknowledges emotion’s dependence on the non-objective and the fictional (Neill, 1996; Coplan, 2004; Coplan, 2006; Keen, 2006; Gaut, 2010; Bruun Vaaage, 2010), the idea that ‘proper’ empathy occurs only in response to ‘authentic’ representation continues to be propagated within many of the more critical accounts of the phenomenon. Megan Boler’s (1997, p.255) own excellent work on the semiotics of empathy in relation to the semi-autobiographical graphic novel *Maus* falls into this trap, when asking ‘what are the risks of reading a text like MAUS in the absence of more complete historical accounts?’, she sets up a clear opposition between ‘real’ history, and the sort of mediated account of the past found in historical fiction. Whilst this thesis is in agreement with Boler’s (1997, p.261) argument that readers’ encounters with fiction often generates what she calls an ahistorical, apolitical ‘passive empathy’, precisely because it doesn’t reflect the fullness of the historical and social conditions in which suffering is produced, this chapter departs from her thesis (and indeed some of the arguments that have been outlined previously in this project), in that it seeks to complicate the underlying suggestion that empathy can only emerge in response to a completely objective and ‘authentic’ representation.

This is something that Suzanne Keen (2006) engages with in her work on empathy in relation to narrative fiction, the falsity of which she argues can lead to more pro-social, and politicised empathic engagements. For Keen (2006, p.222), empathy doesn’t fail because it is directed towards an inauthentic character, so much as when readers ‘respon[d] empathetically to a fictional character at cross-purposes with an author’s intentions’, although she argues that even here, conflicts between authorly intention and readerly interpretation can in themselves stimulate the kinds of critical self-reflection and analytical engagements necessary to what Boler (1997) describes as ‘proper’, socially conscious

empathy. Exploring such ideas in relation to black cab mural tours naturally complicates the easy trajectory of Keen's reflections, as although guides' manner of self-presentation may be highly performative, and even fictionalised at times, they themselves are not, meaning they are in essence both authors of, and characters in, their own narratives. However, rather than assuming that these tensions lead to weaker, or less productive emotional engagements with the history of the Troubles, this chapter remains attentive to the process of 'authentication' (Jackson, 1999) built into these tours, exploring the means through which the supposedly 'inauthentic' provides an equally compelling narrative for tourists, which can lead to more genuine, and genuinely empathetic engagements with the emotional landscapes of West Belfast.

Delving further into the debates around the authenticity of tourist practices, this chapter begins by exploring questions of locational and emotional authenticity in relation to the black cab mural tour. Initially focusing on the competition for the 'real' that shapes current providers' attitudes towards their tours, this chapter will examine the importance of the 'local' in relation to authority and authenticity, which as the available literature suggests, has a particular significance in sectarian Northern Ireland (Leonard, 2011). Drawing on pre-existing scholarship on the way symbolic and emotional boundaries are created through this sense of localism, I will examine the way that the tourist figure fits into these structures, as 'embodied others' (Ahmed, 2000) who nevertheless are becoming a familiar part of the interface landscape. Finally, drawing on Ahmed's (2004b) work on affective borders, this chapter will situate these discussions of authenticity within a framework of emotionality, advancing the original concept of 'affective synecdoche' (Markham, forthcoming) as a way of explaining the complex intersections between emotion and space that dominates post-conflict space in Belfast, and which informs the practice of the black cab mural tour guide.

As a new concept in affect studies, which is guided by Wetherell's (2012) framework for affective practice, affective synecdoche draws attention to the minutiae of the performative

and ritually spatialized nature of affect within the mural tour setting, highlighting the emotional interdependences that binds tourists, tour guides and landscapes together. Acknowledging the deep level of affective solidarity that exists between the tourist and the tour guide (promoted partly, as show in the previous chapter, through the use of humour), I use affective synecdoche to show how troubles tourists and troubles tourism impacts the psychogeography of the interface area, and intercedes in the supposed biculturality of social relations in these areas. As such, this chapter will provide a more positive outlook on empathy than has previously been developed in this thesis, and argue that, although imperfect, black cab mural tours offer the possibility for real and meaningful tourist engagement with Belfast's post-conflict landscape.

### **Empathy, Authentic Emotion and the Mural Tour.**

Of all the theories of authenticity to have circulated amongst scholars over the past fifty years, Nin Wang's development of the concept of 'existential authenticity' bears the closest ties to the kind of experience that is offered by the black cab mural tour. Existential authenticity, Wang (1999, p.358) writes 'denotes a true state of Being in which one is true to oneself, and acts as a counterpoise to the loss of "true self" in public roles and public spheres'. Unlike other explanations of authenticity (objective and constructive) that emphasise its embodiment in the toured object (whether that be an artefact, landscape or story), existential authenticity puts tourist experience at the centre of all understandings of the tour, and essentially underscores the importance of participation in an event, over and above ideas of spectacle and the gaze. The result of existential authenticity is, according to Wang (1999, p.360), that it doesn't matter whether toured objects are real or not, so much as whether tourist engagement with these objects have been enough to prompt a 'fantastic feeling' that is '*real* to a tourist and thus accessible to him or her in tourism'.

Certainly, black cab mural tours in Belfast are heavily reliant on, and make concerted efforts to appeal to, tourist investments in the idea of existential authenticity. Although the tour

providers span a broad range of political and ethno-national alliances, their marketing strategies are virtually indistinguishable, with all making universal appeals to the idea of the taxi tour as a more intimate and experiential way of seeing Belfast's murals – a feature that Madeleine Leonard (2011) notes is also true of the ex-prisoner walking tours. The promotional literature for the various cab companies confirms this, with providers stressing the interactive elements of the tour (such as the signing of the peace wall, and the ability to shape the tour according to tourist demands) that the council-approved City Bus Tours are unable to replicate. Discussing the merits of the taxi tour with guides, this latter benefit came up as being particularly important to the black cab experience, and drivers often expanded by telling me about specific examples where they had gone out of their way to take a tourist to a particular location, or showed them some specific mural/memorial that other drivers didn't usually visit, in a bid to convince me that their tours were spontaneous, rather than scripted.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, although they are advertised as lasting 90 minutes, every guide I interviewed emphasised that this was a minimum, rather than a maximum tour time, with some claiming to have done tours that lasted twice this, without receiving additional compensation. Elements such as this create opportunities for experiential authenticity to develop, as tours are (supposedly) structured around the interests and emotions of the individual, rather than a generic, imaginary tourist audience, providing ample chance for the 'fantastic feeling' of existential authenticity to emerge. However, placing the emphasis on the authenticity of tourist experience, rather than the tour itself, does not mean that providers aren't themselves invested in, and actively curating a kind of 'object' focused authenticity for their clients. Indeed, although Wang and Gnoth (2015) later argue that existential-authenticity oriented tourists are capable of gaining authentic experience from the most heavily commoditised of ventures (even advancing 'empathic understanding' as an explanation for this) Knudsen and Waade (2010, p.13) have suggested that the distinction Wang develops between object-

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<sup>33</sup> One of the more memorable examples of this was a guide who had located a geo-cache by the Cupar Way Peace Wall, and who, after showing it to me, jokingly insisted that I keep its location a secret so that the other guides couldn't copy him.

oriented and tourist-oriented authenticities is sometimes superficially binaristic. Although they amend this by later suggesting that ‘authentic knowledge’ is conditional on ‘the basic principle of trust and sincerity’ of the toured object (Wang and Gnoth, 2015, p.171), Wang and Gnoth’s privileging of an object-authenticity in this case continues to uphold this binary, whilst tying empathy to a fundamentally object-centred concept of the authentic.

In place of existential authenticity, Knudsen and Waade (2010, p.13) advance the concept of ‘performative authenticity’, which ‘dependent on proximity and inbetweenness [...] is not entirely related to subjects or objects but also has to do with what happens in between these two instances’. Positioning authenticity as ‘a relational quality attributed to something out of an encounter’, performative authenticity ‘covers more than visual signs, gaze and imaginations’ and including ‘a tactile body, movements, actions and emotions’ (Knudsen and Waade, 2010, p.10), ‘not only signifies that we do and perform places by our actions and behaviours, but that places are something we authenticate through our emotional/affective/sensuous relatedness to them’ (2010, pp.12-13). Like Wang and Gnoth, Knudsen and Waade (2010, p.14) are also concerned with questions of empathy, however for them, empathy is about ‘an understanding of the other through the body’, rather than a presumption of the ‘sincerity’ (Taylor, 2001) of the toured culture, and they are explicit that this kind of bodily empathy is best stimulated by interactive, immersive experiences, which taking potential staging into account, are nevertheless ‘authentic’.

The idea that experiences on black cab mural tours might be mediated through a version of performative authenticity is extremely compelling given, as has already been laid out above, the premeditated awareness amongst guides that their clients are seeking a more interactive, more sincere experience than those found on the standard city bus, or generic coach tours. Indeed, whilst certain constructed moments, such as the signing of the peace walls, are not without sincerity, guides were also unabashed about making reference to their monetary value. As one participant, who had just shown me a hidden geo-cache on the tour route

admitted, 'it's another talking point. Talking makes money' (Tour Guide 8). Such blatant monetisation of the seemingly-spontaneous violates the 'basic principle of sincerity and trust' that Wang and Gnoch (2015, p.171) suggest is essential to empathetically-driven, existential authenticity, whereas in the scheme of performative authenticity, such a prescriptive approach to the 'real' fits in with what Knudsen and Waade (2010, p.13) call a 'shift towards sincerity as a negotiated value between local and tourist'. The focus on authenticity as the product of a 'negotiated' relationship between local and tourist is highly relevant to the black cab mural tour, where ideas of the performative occur, not just in the Butlerian sense as a relatedness between 'presentational realism and reflexivity' (Knudsen and Waade, 2010, p.14), but also manifest through the more literal performances of locality and authenticity that stem from tour guides themselves.

### **Competitive Authenticity.**

That black cab mural tours are deeply invested in a highly embodied performance of authenticity is immediately apparent from the literature used to advertise these tours where, in addition to the emphasis they place on the tours' interactive elements, authenticity is also signified through multiple references to guides' status as physical proxies for the wider West Belfast community. Eric Cohen (1985) has drawn attention to the overlooked status of the tour guide as a 'mediator' and 'go-between' for tourists and toured settings, noting that this status often imbues guides with a certain level of authority that makes it easier to convince tourists of the 'authenticity' of the sights and places that they visit. However, across the literature on tour guiding, relatively little attention has been paid to the way that this authority, and tourists' trust in the knowledge that they are being furnished with, is heightened or diminished through claims to localism, despite the attention that is paid to the sociology of tour guiding in general (Holloway, 1981; Pearce, 1984; Salazar, 2005).

Across the leaflets and websites advertising different black cab companies, guides are consistently singled out as the distinguishing selling point for taxi tours, usually described as

'local' or 'original' drivers, who have 'lived through' the conflict, or 'worked the famous Falls Road and Shankill Road during the Troubles'. Whilst appeals to localism as proof of a guide's authenticity in many ways fits into the objective approach, it is the way these localisms are expressed by (and between) guides that pushes them into performative authenticity. For many guides I interviewed during this process, their status as 'locals' was repeatedly cited as a core motivator for becoming a tour guide in the first place. As one guide observed, 'if I was going somewhere, if I was in a place with such history, I would want someone local to take me around there' (Tour Guide 1). This theme recurred in conversation with other participants, who similarly praised the benefits of being a 'local' driver, whilst critiquing those who they felt didn't have sufficient authority to be ('To me, if you didn't live through it, you shouldn't be doing the tour' [Tour Guide 11]). In terms of how such 'localism' is expressed to tourists however, the suggestion from the advertisements that personal perspectives on the Troubles are mediated solely through the 'local' can manifest in quite contradictory ways.

The idea of the 'local', despite its frequent recurrence in tourist literature, is one that has received scant critical attention from within heritage and tourist studies. Instead, questions of the local, and localism, have been consistently taken up by postmodern feminists and geographers, who have consistently drawn attention to the gendered, and often strained relationship between the idea of the 'local' and the wider world (Probyn, 1990; Massey, 1994; Massey, 2005). Writing on the construction of space, Doreen Massey (1994, p.5) observes that ideas of locality, and 'the local' are increasingly used to as shorthand for 'place', which in turn is constructed as 'as bounded, as in various ways a site of singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity'. The 'local' as a signifier for bounded and fixed identities has tended to recur in heritage and tourist studies, where even recent journal issues dedicated to exploring 'the tourist and the local' (MacCannell, 2016) have tended to assign to it a certain essentialism that fails to interrogate what impact the tourist might have on constructions of localism in the first place. Noel Salazar's (2005, p.629) work on the



glocalisation of the tour guide role comes the closest to offering a more thoughtful analysis of the local, through his description of it as ‘a spatially limited locality [that] is, above all, a space inhabited by people who have a particular sense of place, a specific way of life, and a certain ethos and worldview’ that is nevertheless subject to external influence. However in general, engagements with the local in tourist studies tend to overlook the impact that external perceptions of places have on the constitution of ‘native’ cultures, and the way in which what constitutes as ‘local culture’ is often heavily constructed under the incipient tourist gaze.

Within the context of post-conflict Belfast, externalised projections of the ‘local’ come into play within the tourist industry when complex distinctions between ethno-national groups, different areas of the city, and regions of Northern Ireland as a whole are collapsed by an unintelligible tourist audience into a broad idea of ‘Northern Irishness’ or ‘Irishness’ (Leonard, 2011; Hocking, 2016). Talking to one Protestant cab driver, this idea of a blanket localism evidentially caused some frustration, as he recalled the attitude of one group of American tourists who refused to accept that the street their grandfather had grown up on was in a Protestant, and not Catholic area of Belfast, despite his own, much more intimate knowledge of these places. Such frequent mistakes were, my participant felt, a result of American attachments to a ‘romantic idea’ (Tour Guide 12) of Northern Ireland that promotes Catholic, republican and Irish ideas of place over the more heterogeneous reality of Belfast. However, for others, the tourist’s inability to ‘read’ the various signs attached to different expressions of localism (to redeploy the ‘telling’ that used to be so central to sectarian life) can be highly beneficial for those wanting to exaggerate their own claims to ‘belonging’ in those spaces.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, although a proportion of black cab guides have grown up in sectarian neighbourhoods, many choose not to reveal their particular ethno-national background to tourists until the end of the tour. Partly, as one participant suggested,

this is so they can ‘get that feedback, to see what kind of tour I was doing as well, that I wasn’t coming across as one-sided’ (Tour Guide 12). Certainly, across all the most prominent companies, and those I toured with, with the exception of the odd ‘Irish kitsch’ logo of a leprechaun or shamrock found in the online resources or leaflets, very little reference was made to what kind of perspective guides might have, and the phenomena of single guides working across multiple companies (jauntily referred to as “tour whores”), means that even where the ethno-national background of a company owner might be known to tourists, those of individual employees are not. Consequently, guides’ claims to locality are often demonstrated, not by pointing out specific streets where they grew up, or through direct declarations of religious, or national affiliation, but through the more emotional accounts they are able to give of growing up in sectarian areas, and working on these streets during the Troubles.

Certainly, whilst doing these tours, at some point every guide offered a personal memory of the conflict, which often prompted by being in a particular spot, or by a specific mural, tapped into the phenomenological aspect of performativity that Knudsen and Waade (2010) declare is central to performative authenticity. One guide, who had been a taxi driver in the city centre for a number of years during the conflict described the impact that passing a crossroads had on him as we drove past it:

You see I’m coming to this junction here and something’s coming to my head that happened to me here, thirty years ago. I’m reliving the Troubles, which is depressing you know? But it’s my living, so I have to do it.

[...]

Because I was just coming out of the street up here now thirty years ago, say ’82, and it was two o’clock in the morning and I was coming from Ardoyne, I’d just dropped somebody off on the Ardoyne, this way to Springfield and City Centre (I was private hire at this point). And I was just coming – I’ll use this street here as an example. I was

rushing back, and I stopped at the junction. And as I stopped, Catholics were on this side and Protestants on that side, stoning each other. Twenty on each side. And by the time I stopped, I stopped in between them. And these guys looked at me. These guys looked at me and were deciding who was going to stone me. I just went through them as quick as anything. If I had stayed any longer, they'd have beat me to death. So that just flashed in my head when I was talking to you there.

(Tour Guide 8)

Such moments, although not always furnished with the same level of raw detail as this account, occur across the board on these mural tours, where other drivers draw on elements of their personal history (such as being divided from friends and family through sectarianism, being threatened by RUC officers, or getting caught in the cross fire of gang violence) to illustrate some of the more traumatic impacts of the Troubles. Many participants were quite candid about the emotional toil that doing these tours took on them in the first place, with the guide who told me the story of being stopped at this junction confessing that 'I'm reliving the Troubles, which is depressing you know? But it's my living, so I have to do it' (Tour Guide 8). Such moments can be meaningful to tourists, not only because they affirm the tour guides' status as authentic 'local' witnesses to history, but also because of what Wang (1999, p.365) identifies as being one of the inter-personal effects of authentic tourism; the creation of 'communitas', whereby tourists are given opportunities to bond with each other, and thus 'ease themselves of the pressures stemming from inauthentic social hierarchy and status distinctions'. However more specifically than this (as will be explored later in this chapter), these autobiographical vignettes also provide moments for tourists to affectively and emotionally connect to the spaces that they're standing in, in a way that provides some of the 'bodily empathy' that Knudsen and Waade argue underscores performative authenticity.

Whilst a number of the guides I interviewed had grown up, if not in West Belfast, then in an interface area similar to this in Northern Ireland, and so drew on these experiences during their tours, many participants also made bitter references to those guides who did not have such experiences, but who were encouraged by their employers to fabricate such life-stories for a tourist audience. One participant complained of a particular guide from a well known provider who he knew made claims about throwing stones at passing British Army trucks in spite of the fact, as my participant observed, ‘he wasn’t even a twinkle in his mother’s eye at the time!’. Others questioned, if not such direct inventions, then those drivers who provided incorrect, or mis-leading information to visitors, whilst guides who had been taxi drivers during the Troubles expressed some resentment about newcomers to the tourist business, who they regarded as ‘blow-ins’ (Tour Guide 7), whose motives for conducting these tours was purely sectarian. However, as valid as these complaints may have been, it was also notable that by telling me about the perceived inadequacies of these other guides, participants also seemed to be engaged in a kind of performative virtue signalling, in which they used these examples of ‘bad’ tour guiding to highlight their own sincerity and authentic ‘belonging’ to the area we toured. In light of this, a more cynical approach to guides’ investment in their own personal memories of the conflict could view these confessions, less as the spontaneous and ‘authentic’ vignettes of someone haunted by their own memories of the past, and more as a prescriptive attempt to upstage other guides, and assert their own territorial claims over West Belfast’s landscape.

### **Affective Landscapes.**

The intersections between territory and emotion, whilst a recent area of academic interest in the social sciences (Davidson *et al.* 2009; Smith *et al.* 2009), has long been recognised in Northern Ireland. From early studies of sectarian living during the Troubles (Boal, 1969), through to contemporary policy work that explores ways of bringing divided communities together, it is generally acknowledged that sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland are deeply influenced by a psycho-social sense of place that is at once affective and emotional (Shirlow,

2003; Reid, 2005). A 2006 study by Brendan Murtagh and Peter Shirlow (2006, p.84) documenting the experiences of those living around interfaces in Belfast acknowledged this, directly describing the boundaries between unionist and nationalist communities as product of the invisible 'emotional landscapes' that dominate the city, which motivated more by fear of violence than its actual effects, prevent people from moving between these communities with ease. Such tensions have also been acknowledged within the heritage sector, where early work on republican and loyalist murals have drawn attention to their use as territorial markers that are designed to inspire fear in opposing communities (Sluka, 1996; Vannais, 2001; Jarman, 2005), whilst work from Bill Rolston (2010) on local memorialisation practices notes the strong sense of community identity and emotionality attached to particular memorials in these neighbourhoods. As has already been demonstrated, mural tours are no exception to such collective emotions and expressions of belonging, however as this chapter will now explore, in addition to the emotional, there is a strong affective element to both the mural tours, and Belfast's emotional landscapes, which is often underexplored in the contemporary literature.

Knudsen and Waade (2010, p.3) have argued that affect is just as important to the authentic tourist experience as emotion and cognition, suggesting that authenticity is increasingly moving 'from a sign economy to an affective and intensive economy'. Affective experience of tourism, they argue, occurs in many forms, but central to these experiences is the idea of 'affected bodies as moved bodies', or bodies that have undergone some change during the course of the tour (Knudsen and Waade, 2010, p.16). Certainly, tourist bodies during black cab mural tours do undergo a variety of physical and emotional changes over the course of the tour, and reactions that both I have experienced, and which have been reported to me by other guides include tears (stimulated by the sight of the peace walls), laughter (at guides' jokes) and the electric thrill of fear when faced with the infamous Shankill 'Mona Lisa

Gunman'.<sup>34</sup> However Knudsen and Waade's use of a spatial metaphor to characterise these changes, whilst useful, also overlooks the very literal spatialisation of affect and movement that is inflicted on the black cab mural tourist, and which is so central to understanding the tourist experience.

In drawing on these spatial metaphors to talk about performative and emotional authenticity, Knudsen and Waade are undoubtedly indebted to the affective work of Sara Ahmed. For Ahmed (2004b) emotions, whilst performative, are not individually experienced, or discrete phenomena, but should be understood as products of a bio-economic model of affect, that distinguishes itself through the over-accumulation and displacement of emotion onto certain individuals and societal groups. Like Knudsen and Waade, Ahmed argues that the circulation and displacement of emotion and affect is akin to the movements of a capitalistic economy, and also like Knudsen and Waade, she is particularly invested in the interactions between this economy, and space. However, unlike these authors, Ahmed's understands physical realities as a product of, rather than stimulant for, affect, writing that:

Affective economies need to be seen as social and material, as well as psychic. Indeed, if the movement of affect is crucial to the very making of a difference between "in here" and "out there", then the psychic and the social cannot be installed as proper objects [...] In other words, the accumulation of affective value shapes the surfaces of bodies and worlds.

(Ahmed, 2004b, p.121)

This understanding of spatial and social life as a result of an economic model of affect is certainly applicable to interface space in Northern Ireland where, as has already been highlighted, fear rather than physical walls prevents unionist and nationalist communities

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<sup>34</sup> The Mona Lisa Gunman is a mural which, until recently stood in the Shankill Estate and depicted a hooded paramilitary member with a rifle, painted so that the barrel of the gun appears to follow the viewer as they walk around the estate (hence the nickname).

from integrating with each other. Indeed, the most recent survey on attitudes towards peace walls revealed that 61% of participants living at interface points felt that peace walls kept them safe from the 'other' community (with only 14% of respondents suggesting they would want the walls to come down at the time of the survey), despite data that suggested those living by these interfaces had mostly positive contact with people from outside of their own communities (Byrne *et al.* 2015). The underlying suggestion from this data, as laid out in the introduction, is that the walls are less of an obstruction to reconciliation than people's attitudes towards those on the 'other side', with peace walls simply manifesting these pre-existing psycho-social barriers.

However, viewing Belfast's emotional landscapes as the product of affective economies (an anticipation, rather than direct experience, of violence) whilst useful, does not by itself account for why some figures, such as tourists and non-residents in Belfast are able to traverse these barriers, without apparent fear. Indeed, so popular has West Belfast become as a tourist destination, that these days it is not uncommon to see unaccompanied flocks of tourists casually crossing the gateways between the communities, taking themselves on self-directed excursions around the Shankill and Falls roads. Certainly, in my own experience, walking around these residencies was a far less intimidating experience than being in either of the paramilitary museums that I visited – a feeling that was no doubt accentuated by my knowledge that such an activity is relatively common among visitors to Belfast. Ahmed however, again has an explanation for this phenomenon. Detailing the concept of 'stickiness', Ahmed (2004b, p.118) notes that within the affective economy, circulation of affect is not always evenly distributed, with some bodies becoming more value-laden than others. For Ahmed (2004b, p.119), those (usually queer, racialised or gendered) bodies already vulnerable to the accumulation of negative affects become 'sticky' as they enter into a cycle of aggregation, whereby they cannot shift these negative valuations, ultimately resulting in ostracisation from wider society.

Within West Belfast and other, similar interface areas, the role of stickiness in upholding segregation is self-evident. Now the stuff of on-tour ‘craic’, as drivers exchange jokes with tourists about how to distinguish Catholics and Protestants (“Catholics have big ears, Protestants have a big nose. I’m both, so I’ve got a big willy!” [Tour Guide 5]), as alluded to in previous chapters, at the height of the Troubles physiognomic ‘tells’ (alongside clothing choice and linguistic inflections) held serious mythological sway over the reading of an individual’s political, or religious affiliation (Barritt *et al*, 1962, Burton, 1978, Milroy, 1981, Harris, 1986). Despite the tongue-in-cheek attitude that many guides take towards ‘telling’ now, many of my interview participants still spoke of the fear of being (mis)recognised that accompanied their early days of doing these tours. One guide declared that ‘crossing the political divide at the start I was nervous. Very very nervous’ (Tour Guide 3), whilst another talked about being ‘people being abusive to me because they know I’m not from here [in the Falls]’ (Tour Guide 10). Even for my interviewee from the Basque Country, apprehension around being identified as a nationalist sympathiser when in Protestant areas prevailed, and he explained that ‘in the Shankill I am more ready about anything could happen and I usually spend more time in the car’ (Tour Guide 6), suggesting a heightened awareness of the various ways in which bodies are ‘read’ by members of local communities. Such affective uneasiness suggests guides feel they are still ‘stuck’ with negative affects which, on a personal level, make moving across the interface difficult despite the relative safety that being with non-sticky individuals such as the tourists might provide. However, the relatively ‘unsticky’ nature of troubles tourists does not mean that they are completely immune from sectarianism’s emotional and affective turns. In fact, as this chapter will now explore, despite freedom with which some tourists feel they can explore West Belfast on their own, the affective economies of the interface tend to take centre-stage during the average mural tour in ways which, when explored through the concept of synecdoche, offer a radically different understanding of troubles tourism’s emotional topography.



### **Problematising the Economy: Affective Synecdoche.**

Affective synecdoche, in its broadest form, is the process through which the affects attendant, or ‘stuck’ on certain bodies begin to speak *to* other bodies and self-reflexively *of* the sticking process. In doing so, this term develops Ahmed’s relativist approach to affect alongside the critical realism of Wetherell’s (2012) ‘affective practice’, by situating the study of affect on the mural tour within the micro-geographies of place found in sectarian Northern Ireland. As such, affective synecdoche is not intended to be generalizable beyond the case studies in this thesis, but offers a very specific expression of the kinds of affective relations that bind tourists, tour guides, and sectarian landscapes together on the mural tour, and which gestures towards the intersubjective nature of empathic understanding identified by more critical scholars of empathy.

As a literary term, synecdoche is widely used in the humanities as a way of identifying a relationship between the part, and the whole of the thing. Ahmed (2011, p.239) herself uses the language of synecdoche in her analysis of the Grimm Brother’s story ‘The Wilful Child’, where she argues that, not only does the unburiable limb of the story’s protagonist represent the displacement of wilfulness ‘onto an arm, from a body onto a body part’, but that wilfulness (or the will) in real life are themselves synecdochal qualities ‘that can be alienated or externalised into a part of thing’. Within the context of psycho-geographies however, synecdoche is best understood as a cartographic feature, captured by Michel de Certeau (2011) in *The Practice of Everyday Life*:

Synecdoche expands a spatial element in order to make it play the role of a “more” [...] Synecdoche makes more dense: it amplifies the detail and miniaturizes the whole.

(de Certeau, 2011, p.101)

Re-centering the individual, the banal and the quotidian in his analysis of urban geographies, de Certeau deploys synecdoche to describe the anarchic potential of individual experiences

of the city. As a 'walking rhetoric' (2011, p.100), synecdoche is characterised by de Certeau as the replacement of 'totalities with fragments', and a contusion of space and place into 'enlarged singularities and separate islands' (2011, p.101). Such splintered understandings of place have been used by researchers in the past when trying to articulate the fractured geographies that result from sectarianism in Northern Ireland (Boal, 1967, Shirlow, 2003, Shirlow, 2006). However, de Certeau's extended metaphors for place building, which focus on the 'doing' or 'making' of place are, as social psychologist Cameron Duff (2010, p.881) notes, less useful when trying to consider the experiential, affective dimensions of living in that place, and risk reinforcing the bi-cultural paradigms that Debbie Lisle (2006) and this thesis are trying to avoid.

It is my argument that by thinking about de Certeau's synecdoche through affect as well as space, greater attention can be paid to what Duff (2011, p.881) describes as the 'affective measure of place, identity and belonging', enabling more detailed, less binaristic assessments of feeling in West Belfast to be assessed. Approaching emotionality in mural tourism through the framing of affect as synecdoche, rather than an economy, also draws attention to the camouflaging effect that performative appeals to authenticity have on the 'real' emotional economies of West Belfast, which are heightened through the assumption that guides also act as representative (or synecdochal) 'parts' of West Belfast's populace. By using affective synecdoche to draw attention to authenticity's camouflaging effect, troubles tourism's role in catalysing, and subtly re-shaping the spatialisation of emotion in these areas can be better understood.

Indeed, despite persistent myths around the reading of Catholic and Protestant bodies (Feldman, 1991; Finlay, 2001; Kelleher, 2003, p.72), the most 'sticky' of sectarianism's qualities is not physiognomic, but spatial. As Shirlow and Murtagh's (2006) study already indicates, it is not so much fear of other bodies that prevents sectarian communities from effectively integrating, as fear of the space that those bodies inhabit. Brian Graham (1998,

p.130) notes that around interface communities the dogma that ‘landscapes embody discourses of inclusion and exclusion’ in Belfast has proven hard to shift. These evaluations of the spatial politics that govern individual movements across interface areas stand in stark contrast to the metropolis of Belfast’s city centre, where Catholics, Protestants, unionists and nationalists are not only present, but are affably mixed (Boal, 1982; Neill, 2006; Nagle, 2009; Hocking, 2015). As Sara McDowell and Catherine Switzer’s (2009, p.350) review of memorialisation in the city centre indicates, commemoration of Northern Ireland’s conflict is conspicuously absent in the heart of the city, which they suggest is part of an effort to maintain its appearance as a conflict-free, neutral space. The co-existence of an antonymic space just on the periphery of this new metropolis is therefore a significant source of curiosity for those visitors whose early encounters with Northern Ireland were conveyed by media coverage of bullets, bombs and riots. As such, for the general tourist population, mural tours in West Belfast are a legitimate, convenient and ‘safe’ way of exploring those areas made famous by this history (Jarman, 1997, p.182).

As covered in the literature review, the typical route taken by a black cab tour is the product of a continual negotiation between West Belfast’s ever-changing landscape, the political energies of the guides, and the whims of the clients in the car. However, as a general rule tours start in either the loyalist Lower Shankill Estate, or the republican Divis Tower blocks, where a backstory to the Troubles is woven that, depending on the narrative’s orientation, either stretches back to Ireland’s colonisation in the sixteenth century, or begins with the 1690 Battle of the Boyne. After using murals as ‘stepping stones’ (Tour Guide 3) for explaining the socio-cultural history of the community being introduced, drivers then take visitors to the site of Belfast’s longest peace wall on Cupar Way, where they are offered the opportunity to inscribe their signatures in the concrete and take photos of themselves doing so. After admiring this particular megalith, tourists then cross over the ‘other’ community, where their itinerary may include stops at Bombay Street Memorial Garden, the Crumlin Road Courthouse, or the ‘International Wall’ on Divis Road. Contrary to Wiedenhoft-

Murphy's (2011, p.547) suggestion that standard practice across the tours discourages visitors from leaving their cabs at these stops, only one of the twelve tours I took part in conformed to this agenda, and that was at my own request, on a rainy day. In fact, the act of leaving the vehicle, and walking around the sites and communities being addressed, is an essential feature of black cab tours, and many of my participants were scornful of those less official companies and city bus tours, who they believed prevented visitors from doing this. Allowing tourists to leave the taxi at will, and walk around the mural sites is an important feature of the tour for many drivers, who see the interactions which visitors have with the local landscape as being what makes their tours different, and more 'real' (Tour Guide 1) for their participants. Part of that 'realness' I argue, and a factor which is also the source of Robin Newton's anxiety about the industry, is that by inviting paying customers to immerse themselves into the geography of the area, they become indirect and sometimes disruptive participants in the emotional landscapes they are paying to see, thereby unsettling the traditional imaginings of West Belfast as a bi-culturally affected place, which have long served sectarian politics.

One of the ways in which tourists become disruptive on these tours is through their informal occupation as ethnographers of the interactions between guides and members of the local communities (Widenhoft-Murphy, 2010, p. 548; Leonard, 2011, p. 120; Skinner, 2015, p.11). As Neil Jarman (1997, p.182) has already suggested, the tradition of entering interface areas to view the murals is usually pursued by those who, drawn in by the 'seductive effect' of media coverage of the conflict, tend to represent a more knowledgeable demographic than the average consumer. The council's acknowledgement that 32% of Belfast's visitors are motivated by post-ceasefire 'curiosity' supports this thesis (*Belfast Tourism Monitor*, 2007), suggesting that whether in a cab, on foot, or mediated through the glass plate of a bus window, many mural tourists are attuned to the religious and cultural divides in Belfast. As such, it is a reasonable assumption that those on black cab tours will be particularly alert to signs of hostility between their guide and the local community, who despite being dogged by

accusations of perpetuating ‘terror’ tourism (*Hansard, 2008*), remain explicit about their desire to impart a ‘positive’ (Tour Guide 7) ‘post-conflict’ narrative to their tourists. What distinguishes interactions on black cab tours from the other forms of troubles tourism is that, unlike the walks organised by Coiste or EPIC where guides transfer the tour to someone from the ‘other side’ when they reach the peace wall (*Skinner, 2015, p. 5*), the same guide delivers the entire black cab experience, guaranteeing that at some point they will enter territory which may be unfamiliar, and possibly hostile to their presence. In terms of wading through the affects that circulate in West Belfast, this means that guides on black cab tours must internalise the emotional shifts that occur as they cross the invisible boundaries between communities, all the while engaging in congenialities with locals under the watchful eye of the tourist. This ability, not just to engage with those from the ‘opposing’ community, but also to maintain an affable exterior in the face of inquisitorial tourists is explored in an anecdote from an interview with a tour guide who identified as a republican, and who had been running his own tour company since 2010:

Actually, there’s a guy over on the Shankill road and he’s stopped me a few times. And he’s a typical Belfast character — wee small man, always walks a dog — and for some reason he has since the first time he saw me, assumed I was a Protestant from a Protestant neighbourhood not far from his. And he says to me ‘Allrigh John?’, [...] and I just say ‘are you alright?’. And he asked me this guys name — he says ‘what about Billy Bloggs — is he still living up beside you there?’. And rather than go through the whole conversation and tell him he’s got the wrong person I say ‘Oh he’s doing fine, I’ll tell him you were asking’, and he says ‘just tell him Joe’s asking’ and I’ll say ‘okay Joe, I’ll tell him’. And every time I’ve been on the Shankill road, this guy has come up with the dog and stopped and he’ll start talking to the guests too and telling them stories.

So we were standing at this mural one day [...] And this old hand as we say comes up with the dog and he stands there as we are standing by the Billy McCullough mural, and Joe started talking to me and the guests and he started telling me about him and some of the funny stories of the things he did [...] I thought it was brilliant that a local had told me that.

And it learned me to listen to other people [...] But that wee guy Joe I'll have to thank him for that because he has given me another narrative in a sense to tell a local person.

(Tour Guide 1)

What sticks out in this interview is not so much the reported details of the guide's conversation with this local, which after all rests on the kind of 'after-the-event' 'heroic' narrative that Wetherell (2012, p.96) suggests limits understandings of 'situated affect', but are the series of affective moments built into this exchange, which are ripe with 'over-determined figurations' (Wetherell, 2012, p.4), discernible only through spatial understandings of affect. Indeed, whilst readable across both Ahmed and Wetherell's analogies, the insertion of the witnessing tourist into this moment makes the incorporated affects resistant to traditional discursive and economic interpretations, and it is this moment, and others like it across mural tours, which I suggest should be read through the framework of affective synecdoche.

Present in my participant's encounter with 'Joe' is precisely the kind of spatialised deconstructive work that affective synecdoche aims to capture. Occupying a space where 'ordinary flows' (Wetherell, 2012, p.77) clashed with his self-stylisation as a republican, in the presence of a tour group the guide was forced to negate affective stickiness and assume the role of someone who was familiar, and comfortable with the Shankill. Contrary to Lisle's (2006, p.45) assertions that 'each company is affiliated with a specific community', as has already been acknowledged, the majority of taxi tour companies hire a variety of guides from across the communities in Belfast, in order to be able to market themselves as genuinely non-biased to the hotels advertising them. More than this, the names of the most popular companies are virtually indistinguishable from each other (a marketing ploy that one guide told me was to deliberately cause confusion amongst tourists so that smaller companies could leach off the success of larger ones), with most companies including some variation on the phrase 'Belfast Tours', 'Black Cab Tour' or 'Belfast Mural Tour'. As a

result, moments like the one described above make the tourist central to the creation of synecdochal affects as, in order to avoid being accused of ‘fabrication’ (which Eric Cohen [1985] suggests diminishes the authority of the tour guide in the eyes of tourists) through obvious displays of bias or hyperbolic antipathy towards sections of the community, guides instead engage in inauthentic performances of neutrality by presenting themselves as representatives of both communities. In doing so, they also become responsible for maintaining the circulation of affects on both sides of the divide, as well as ensuring that tourists continue to feel safe and at ease in these spaces.

As the above interview extract demonstrates, to maintain the affective circulations across Belfast’s interfaces, the driver not only downplayed his personal discomfit, but was obliged to engage in an active performance of belonging whilst in the Shankill. Affective synecdoche thus works on simultaneous levels in this moment. On the one hand affective stickiness, which circulates through the reading of bodily signs, but which is dependent on being presented with a readable body in the first place (Ahmed, 2004b, p.120), is devalued the instance the driver publicly negates his republicanism in front of the tour group. Synecdochal fragmentation and occlusion then takes place, as the guide engages in a hyperbolic performance of localism, which is both shaped by, and conceals, his own discomfit. The presence of an audience in this moment solidifies these ontological entanglements, as the repetition of this performance over a series of tours eventually translates into a real engagement with the affective terms and economies of ‘Joe’ and the wider Shankill community through which, by his own admission, the guide ‘learned [...] to listen to other people’. The fact that this encounter also yielded narrative material for other tours further justifies the framing of this moment through affective synecdoche as tourists, clearly involved in the remaking of West Belfast’s affective economy, become participants in, as well as witnesses to, these new emotional narratives.

Indeed, so familiar have tourists become within West Belfast's landscape that in recent years a number of incidents involving mural tourists have made headlines, suggesting that far from being platonic observers of post-Troubles culture, visitors are gradually being 'stuck' with the kinds of affects and emotions usually reserved for interface locals. In a wry confirmation of Robin Newton's fears that the development of political tourism would lead to 'ghoulish' re-enactments of Troubles-style violence, in May 2017, the Irish News reported that up to a dozen tourists had been mugged when standing outside the International Wall on the Falls Road (Simpson, 2017). Although this story was picked up by national media, other previously underreported incidents involving the violent targeting of tourists in West Belfast have featured in local news over the past decade, again suggesting that emotional experiences of conflict heritage in Northern Ireland are far less bicultural than previously believed (McDonald, 2007; BBC, 2008; Hughes, 2014).

It should also come as no surprise that, given sectarianism's propensity to direct aggressive acts towards obvious 'others' (McVeigh and Rolston, 2007), there is a tendency amongst anti-tourist stakeholders to re-imagine these unwanted figures as East Asian, signified in descriptions of 'Japanese tourists [...] clicking through your front window' (LSA). Whilst buoyed by a general culture of racism in Belfast's most deprived areas (McVeigh and Rolston, 2007; STEP, 2010), what such racialised anti-tourist agendas also reveal is a desire to incorporate tourist bodies into pre-established affective narratives of recognition and belonging. The fact that black cab mural tours unwittingly expose these incorporations through their spatial work signifies not just the uniqueness of this particular form of troubles tourism, but also hints at the radical potential that further engagements with tourist emotions and affect might bring to research on conflict heritage in Northern Ireland. More than this though, the negative transfer of affect brought about through affective synecdoche actually gives tourists on the ground the opportunity to quite literally, and authentically, connect to the experience of being in the Troubles that these tours are supposed to bring about, albeit in an unpleasantly physical way. Ironically, the very physicality of these muggings, and the



increased sense of fear that might accompany them, is also where the opportunity to actually empathise with some of the victims and stakeholders in the conflict is at its strongest.

### **Affective Synecdoche and Empathy.**

Putting such cynicism to one side, talking to tour guides about their experiences of, and reasons for, conducting these tours, the desire to share some of the emotional experiences of the Troubles with their clients often came through in earnest. Guides frequently spoke of the changes that have happened in Belfast with fierce pride, and considered the act of sharing emotional stories of the past with tourists as a way of further promoting that reconciliation, and of ensuring that there isn't a return to violence in the future. At other times it became clear that, although exhausting, the act of sharing difficult experiences about the past was also a form of catharsis for some guides. One participant, in the same breath as talking about how tours left him 'full of tension' 'even after all these years', also attributed doing those tours to a way of relieving that tension, describing how 'to make it easier I like to get out and walk around with tourists. Show them the niceties of the place, you know?' (Tour Guide 9) — an act which during the height of the Troubles would have been unthinkable. On another occasion early on in the fieldwork process, a particularly generous participant drove me up to his family home in Ballymurphy to show me some of the murals there. Sitting outside his old house, unprompted he began to tell me about a memory he had as a child of British soldiers firing bullets into his front living room where he was sat recovering from a cold with his sister and father. As he described the experience of watching bullets smash through his front window, and explode a glass of cold medicine that he had refused to take only minutes previously, my guide began to cry, surprising both of us, as he confessed that he 'hadn't told that story for a while'. The impact on myself, as both tourist and researcher was startling, and it was right around that moment that I began to fully understand both the emotional labour that goes into these tours, but also the role that tourists play in them, not just as easy cash cows, but as occasional witnesses to the still unresolved traumas undergone by many of the guides.

As the triangulated nature of affective synecdoche demonstrates, such moments of witnessing are not of the 'exclusive objectification' that LaCapra associates with the historian's approach to testimony, but are allied to an altogether more intersubjective relationship between witness and witnessed, which is closer to Kelly Oliver's (2001) notion of 'response-ability'. For Oliver (2001, p.2), as with LaCapra, 'response-able' witnessing 'complicates the notion of historical truth', moving subjects beyond the basics of recognition towards a more dialogic notion of subjecthood, which eschews universal notions of 'sameness'. Witnessing for Oliver is therefore about the non-antagonistic meeting of difference (similar to Young's [1997] asymmetrical reciprocity), in which subjectivity is formed through 'a responsive biosocial loop' (Oliver, 2001, p.223) that draws on the affective relations between individuals, and leaves subjects indelibly changed after an encounter.

Certainly, for some participants, it was clear that the transfer of affects, and effects of affective synecdoche went both ways, and was deeply intersubjective. As with the example of the encounter with 'Joe' sketched out earlier, there was a sense that doing the tours, and seeing the conflict through tourists' eyes also helped guides establish new relationships with their communities in Belfast. One participant remarked that, 'I think the more you do it the more you come away from what your personal view is of it' (Tour Guide 12), whilst another, talking about the process of getting into doing these tours spoke about the 'understanding' (Tour Guide 10) that he saw present between guides and the local community, who on the whole, willingly gave permission for these tours to take place.

When out with guides whose backgrounds I knew of beforehand I saw examples, not just of this permission being given, but of an active conviviality between guides and members of the 'other' community. On one occasion as my Protestant driver pulled away from the already claustrophobic space of Bombay Street, a passer-by lunged at the car, and I automatically tensed, assuming he was about to have an altercation with the guide. Instead,

he leant his head through the window, and proceeded to chat to the driver before asking the old joke “How do you tell a Catholic from a Protestant?” and walking away cackling. Another time, another driver pulled up alongside us on the Shankill Road and proceeded, with laughter, to ask if we were following him. When my companion retorted that ‘girl’s taking a good tour you know with a good loyalist’, the other guide snickered something about being ‘biased’, before my guide countered that ‘you’d know all about that, being a die-hard republican!’ (Tour Guide 11), again demonstrating humour’s use to both uphold and subvert pre-existing stereotypes. Evidence of drivers from a range of different backgrounds (some paramilitary) working together to create a more complete, more balanced history of the Troubles also frequently came to the fore during interviews, where despite the competitiveness that still existed between them, many guides talked about learning from each other, and using each other’s knowledge to improve their own perspectives on the past.

### **Conclusion.**

Whilst seemingly small, the simple act of being able to move freely around the interfaces, and to engage in casual craic with people from a range of backgrounds is deeply significant for these areas and should not be overlooked. Exploring these moments through the concept of affective synecdoche is potentially one way of beginning to unpack the nuances at work in troubles tourism in general, and may signify new directions for heritage research and development in the future. During a period when sectarian politics frequently block attempts to represent and work through the Troubles in museums (Crooke, 2001), and commitments to creating cross-community audiences for heritage centres are ultimately rebuffed (Young, 2015), black cab mural tours in Belfast are one of the few avenues through which memories and narratives about the conflict can be circulated and exchanged on both sides of the interfaces. Using these tours to integrate space into our discussions of emotion helps develop this critical barometer of affect in a way that acknowledges the diversity of socio-cultural experiences in West Belfast. Where as much work on emotion in conflict-heritage prefers to diminish the intensity of these factors in favour of speculating on macro-analytic concepts

such as empathy and reconciliation (Landsberg, 2004; Arnold de-Simine, 2013; Dowler, 2013), affective synecdoche targets the micro-moment, bringing transitory relationships and hardened identities into critical dialogue with each other. Viewing such moments through the more ambiguous lens of affective synecdoche also supports the paradigm shifts argued for by Debbie Lisle (2006) at the start of this thesis, opening up discussions about 'post'-conflict emotion in Belfast and providing scope for their exploration within the context of contemporary global relations.

In terms of the significance of this concept for empathy, the moments that I have identified as being relevant to affective synecdoche demonstrate that, although entangled with what some would regard as highly staged performances, mural tours nevertheless create opportunities for tourists to engage in a truly intersubjective and 'authentic' relationships with their guides. As a relationship that is based on, not just affective exchange, but the creation of new relationships under the artificial conditions of the mural tour, micro-moments such as those outlined with my participant and 'Joe' highlight the importance of the three-person model of empathy developed by Fritz Breithaupt (2012) and discussed in Chapter Two, and reinforce the centrality of the tourist to such empathetic moments. However, unlike previous accounts of the three-person model of empathy offered in this thesis, the witness on the mural tour does not enter into these moments of affective exchange as 'judge', or to take sides, but rapidly becomes another stakeholder in the affective economies of West Belfast.

Becoming a target of empathy in their own right, as guides adapt their own behaviours based on their intuition and understanding of what tourists want, or are expecting to see, the end result of these empathetic exchanges is that on a micro-level, tourists manipulate and disrupt the emotional landscapes of West Belfast through their very presence. This is not to suggest that such micro-moments are wholly representative of all forms of mural tourism in the area. Indeed, as other researchers have shown previously, and as has already been argued in

Chapter Six, other equally powerful modes of engagement, such as humour and narrative shape tourist perceptions of the landscapes that they are in, and can lead to overtly sectarian perspectives and outlooks which undo the effects of even the most genial of exchanges between tour guides and locals in the interface. However, what affective synecdoche, and examination of affects on these tours does hint at, is a more evolved understanding of the relationship that governs interactions between the tourist/tour guide/general populace of West Belfast, which all the more powerful for its ambiguity, collapses some of the hard and fast distinctions made elsewhere in this chapter between insider/outsider and foreigner/local that are often so central to empathy's formation. Quite what the impact, and limitations, of such collapses might be for broader considerations of empathy will be addressed in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

**Conclusion.**  
**Empathy and the Troubles Tourist: Final Reflections.**

For me that's what it's about – it's about giving that personal touch. I think that's important when you tell anyone anything -- the person inside it has to be part of it.

(Tour Guide 1)

On 22nd June 2015 the newly-constructed, EU-funded Museum of Orange Heritage opened its doors to Belfast's public. Graced by former President of Ireland Mary McAleese and select school groups, the museum's launch was widely covered by the national press, where it was described as an 'exciting new dawn for Orangeism' (Kerr, 2015) and significant step forward for community relations in Northern Ireland (BBC, 2015b). By the end of 2015 the museum had received 5,000 visitors, prompting master of the Orange Lodge Edward Stevenson to declare the site 'a cultural resource and attraction for the entire community' and a 'move forward to an accepted and shared future' (Orange News, 2015). Less well reported, however, was the furor in the build up to the Museum's official launch where weeks before, a billboard inviting locals to 'share our history so everyone can share the future' was removed from the nationalist area of Carrick Hill, amidst complaints from some of its residents (Meredith, 2015), which Orange Lodge and DUP ministers responded to by castigating Carrick Hill residents for their 'intolerance and bigotry' (Meredith, 2015).

Demonstrated by anecdotes such as these, is the bifocal nature of opinion on contemporary Troubles heritage in Northern Ireland. Indeed, as highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, whilst the development of new and inclusive sites like the Museum of Orange Heritage are quite rightly celebrated for their apparent dissolution of sectarian boundaries, these celebrations are often tempered by reports of (if not widespread, then virulent) resistance to these projects, which contribute to the sense that however fast things are changing in the North, they are not changing fast enough. As aspects of this thesis have

shown, such pessimism is not entirely unwarranted and it is particularly clear from the work on paramilitary museums that there are marked divisions within the heritage sector over how best to deal with, and interpret the recent past. However, this untrammelled negativity also fails to capture the full scale of the situation on the ground in Northern Ireland, which as demonstrated by this thesis has been shaped, if not by the conflict's most stoic antagonists, then at the very least by the rise of the troubles tourist in Belfast. This thesis has been dedicated to exploring the impact that such a demographic can have on the shaping of Troubles heritage, and in exploring this alongside the critical literature on empathy, has made the following key observations.

Chapter Four opened this thesis with a cynical approach to conflict heritage, as the uses of discourses of innocence and victimhood were explored in relation to the displays at the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre and Irish Republican History Museum. Drawing on a three-person model of empathy, which presupposes that the urge to empathise and identify with a group of people cannot be extended equally to all parties in a conflict, particular focus was given to the way that discourses of innocence in particular could be used to coerce empathy from visitors, and legitimise paramilitary actions during the conflict. The tourist's role as a witness to these displays of 'organisational innocence' (Jalusic, 2007) was raised, and their complicity with such perspectives was examined through the expressions of identification found in visitor books at both sites. Although not necessarily evidence of the full spectrum of affective and cognitive reactions usually associated with empathy, what such early declarations of solidarity with paramilitary philosophies and historical perspectives did show, was the ease with which empathic identification can be extended towards highly constructed and omissive histories. In this way, the kind of empathy displayed at these paramilitary museums was akin to the sentimentality that Lauren Berlant (1998) associates with outpourings of repressive national emotion, which she argues inhibit true identification by presuming consent on behalf of the sufferer as to what needs to be done to improve their condition. In the case of the Irish Republican History Museum, and Andy Tyrie Interpretive

Centre, the generic victimization that these sites make claim to is deeply bound up with the denial of their own encumbrance in others' pain, meaning that visitors' identification, or empathy with, these narratives is inevitably one-sided, and eschews more measured debate around how the victim issue should be tackled going forward. Such identifications are also associable with what Megan Boler (1997, p.253) describes as 'passive empathy', which she argues is wrought from a 'consumptive mode of identification with the other' that made out of a 'flattened historical sensibility', 'produces no action towards justice' (Boler, 1997, p.259).

Chapter Five sought to complicate the narrative of Chapter Four, by introducing the notion of kitsch, and engaging with its ambiguities to further interrogate the role that interpretation plays in visitors' ability to accurately interpret and 'feel' the affective life of the museological collection. Drawing attention to the disorienting impact that groups of objects can have on museum visitors, it was suggested that the 'flat affects' of kitsch can actually provide useful interpretive footholds for the non-local museum visitor, helping them engage in a more critical 'post-sentimental project' (Berlant, 1998) by reminding tourists of their own alterity in these spaces. However, as in the previous chapter, it was also acknowledged here that the recognition of kitsch as kitsch paradoxically supports the work of the paramilitary museum by encouraging visitors to further disassociate declarations of national identity in these sites from the violent means through which these declarations were advanced during the Troubles – something that seemingly impacts local, intergenerational visitors to the site too. By treating kitsch as a barometer for visitor understanding, questions were also raised in this chapter as to how much cross over there is between local and non-local visitor understanding, and the generalisability of the museum's affective atmospheres, both of which are pertinent to the presence of empathy which, as Amy Coplan (2011a; 2011b) has raised, is based on the premise of accurate perspective taking, and the sharing of 'qualitatively similar' affects between observer and target.



Chapter Six developed the work around boundary-making, and the subjects and objects of empathy further, through an analysis of the way that humour is used on the black cab mural tour. Here, it was noted that humour fulfils multiple functions on the mural tour, some of which serve to draw tourists into closer identification with tour guides and their narratives, and some of which exposed and reinforced the distance between them. Earlier reflections in Chapter Four about the way that conflict heritage often reinforces sectarian approaches to the past were returned to through an analysis of the way that humour could at times be used to advance a form of ‘injurious speech’, which could subtly prejudice tourists towards sections of the community in West Belfast. However, it was also observed that such moments of injurious speech are also subject to humour’s double entendre, and could be viewed as a way in which tour guides navigate past feelings about ‘the other side’, as they transition into an altogether less fraught, less divided future.

The impact that such moments of humour could have on the tourists’ feeling about a place or a community were explored, and humour’s potentiality for creating a sense of commonality and empathy analysed. Empathy in this case was tied to the intimacy of the interactions between a single tour guide, and group of tourists, bringing it closer to those more traditional psychological accounts of the phenomena, which emphasise it as a shared occurrence between two human actors (Hoffman, 2000; Hoffman, 2011). In taking a decidedly more anthropocentric approach to the interpretation of another’s internal state, a broader and more elliptical range of cues for understanding the ‘other’ was dealt with, which included tonality, facial expression and body language. Here, the fallacy that ‘qualitatively similar’ (in this case, laughter or amusement) affective and emotional reactions automatically lead to empathy was raised, as it was observed (particularly in the case of injurious speech) that the creation of shared affects around a joke quite often masks a range of different motivations and interpretations in both the teller and receiver of that joke, the misinterpretation of which indicates a failure in cognitive empathic understanding.

Chapter Seven was the final analysis chapter in this thesis, and also the most optimistic in terms of signifying empathy's potentiality within troubles tourism. Here, it was purely empathy's affective and emotive dimensions that were engaged with, through a study of the impact that both the affective elements of performative authenticity, and tour guides' personal memories could have on tourist-audiences' own experience of moving through divided landscapes. Tour guides' claims to authenticity based on memories stimulated by being in certain places was explored, and the concept of 'affective synecdoche' was advanced as a way of analysing the micro-affects built into these tours. Such micro-moments it was argued, whilst not representative of the entirety of a mural tour, were significant in that they signposted the infinitesimal shifts in emotional relations between tour guides and West Belfast locals that have taken place under the guise of mural tourism, which have altered the psycho-dynamics of interface space in recent years. Here it was suggested that notwithstanding the staged and highly politicised nature of much of troubles tourism, sincere connection to individuals and broader histories of the Troubles is observable during some of these tours, which require greater attention from researchers.

What all of these chapters brought to the study of empathy was a more nuanced, more accountable reflection of the way that empathy is teased, negotiated, refracted and limited, developed in response to affective and emotive fluctuations 'as [they] appear in social life' (Wetherell, 2012, p.4). Where, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, other scholars have tended to treat empathy as an empirical actuality to be formulaically proven or disproven, this study has taken what Jane Gallop (2002, p.7) describes as an 'exorbitant' approach to the topic which, grounded in anecdote, and the autoethnographic micro-moment, has instead drawn attention to empathy's status as a protean socio-cultural phenomenon. In doing so, this thesis has spent a great deal of time studying the unlikelihood of empathy's occurrence, developing what is in general quite a pessimistic picture of its relationship to Northern Ireland, as Troubles heritage's links to sectarian motives, and politicised engagements with the past were frequently signalled. Such reflections very much mirror those critics of empathy who

have noted that, although ‘empathy proper’ (Coplan, 2011b, p.40) may be achieved, there is no guarantee that it will be extended to the ‘right’ sort of person, and that moreover empathy can, when deployed in the wrong setting, be a guarantee for cruelty, and the perpetuation of structural inequality (Berlant, 1999; Goldie, 2011; Prinz, 2011; Pedwell, 2012a; Pedwell, 2012b; Bubandt, 2015; Bloom, 2016). As Hannah Arendt (1963, p.89) observed, ‘without the presence of misfortune, pity could not exist, and it therefore has just as much vested interest in the existence of the unhappy as thirst for power has vested interest in the existence of the weak’. Likewise, although often fetishised in the literature on heritage, it must be admitted that claims for tourist empathy in Northern Ireland are (consciously or unconsciously) deeply invested in other peoples’ misfortune and unhappiness, meaning claims about its transformative effects must always be treated with caution.

Such criticisms bring us back to the plaintive raised by Cillian McGrattan (2013) in Chapter Four, about what the point of empathizing with another, or developing a model of empathy for Northern Ireland is, if it only serves to reinforce the existing structures of power, and help those who caused pain in the first place avert justice. For McGrattan (2013, p.40):

The idea that a proper approach to a violent past requires empathy and a suspension of critical judgment is difficult to entertain in any serious way unless one is committed to either a post-modern ethic of valorizing or dismissing all historical narratives, or a narrow, interest-driven, solipstic view of politics and social responsibility.

Certainly, concerns such as these have often been at the heart of objections to Northern Ireland hosting its own truth and reconciliation process. Imaginative speculations on how a model similar to the one deployed in South Africa might play out have been immortalised in David Park’s (2008) novel *The Truth Commissioner*, in which various scenes from the fictional court room emphasise the ‘formulaic’ nature of such dialogue, which provides little, if any, opportunity for reprieve and reconciliation between victims and perpetrators:

He has presided over the truth but little reconciliation and as each day goes by it becomes increasingly obvious that what the plaintiffs want is truth and the justice that they feel they've been denied. Stanfield has come to recognize it in their eyes, their need for the final assertion of some weighty moral imperative that will sweep the perpetrator to divine justice. Instead they get some formulaic, pre-learned response that expresses a vague regret for the pain caused and then presents the get-out-of-jail card that avoids personal guilt or moral culpability by stating that they believed they were fighting in a war.

(Park, 2008, p.246)

Park's almost dystopic vision of a dialogic process, in which victims and perpetrators gather together under the promise of forgiveness and reprieve, but dissolve under the weight of lasting resentment and hurt, points towards the limits of empathic identification that both this thesis and McGrattan have highlighted, and offers a fairly negative evaluation of its benefits for actual citizens in the North. Empathy does not, as this thesis has shown, arise automatically in response to another's suffering, nor does its arrival necessarily herald justice, or reciprocal feeling from another person. Empathy is instead a somewhat limited mode of engagement with the other that, whilst occasionally giving rise to transformative relations, is too often constrained and impeded by a broader spectrum of social relationships and affects, to be universally effective in a post-conflict setting.

However, these fears and criticisms, whilst understandable, are perhaps once again based on overly binaristic approaches to contemporary Northern Irish society, in which it is assumed that the main stakeholders in reconciliation and empathic identification are the immediate survivors of the conflict, rather than an ever-widening network of local and global citizens. Instead, as both links between contemporary racism and sectarianism (Rolston and McVeigh, 2007) show, and the ongoing impact that the conflict is having on younger generations suggest (Murtagh and Shirlow, 2006), the boundaries between those initially involved in, and traumatized by the Troubles, and those who continue to bear its effects are

steadily disintegrating and twenty years later, the economic, political and social impact of sectarianism and political atavism is felt by a wide range of individuals and groups. Whilst it would be supercilious to suggest that tourist engagements with such processes are identical to those living with sectarianism on a daily basis, what has consistently been shown over the course of this thesis, is that when it comes to the troubles tourist community, the boundaries between the 'insider' and 'outsider' of community heritage are increasingly blurred.

The tour guide, whose interview served as an epigraph to this chapter and as title for this thesis, indicated as much in his own peripatetic description of the relationship between the tourist and tour guide, arguing that 'when you tell anyone anything -- the person inside it has to be part of it' (Tour Guide 1). Most noticeable about this soundbite (in contrast with those offered by the Paul Maskey/Eamon Mallie interview in Chapter Seven) was the lack of qualification over who the 'person inside' is, and what their relation to the one doing the telling is, when it comes to troubles tourism. Although this statement was prefaced by the familiar refrain that for the guide, 'if I was in a place with such history, I would want someone local to take me around there' (Tour Guide 1), the rest of the interview revealed that my participant's investment in localness was less about an individual's historical biography, or connection to a geographic area, and more about a vaguer investment in what the guide kept calling the 'real', qualified as an unmediated 'emotional attachment' (Tour Guide 1) to the history of the conflict.

Although unmediated encounters are by default usually associated with a geographic and biographic localness, as demonstrated by the previous chapter, when it comes to troubles tourism this isn't always the case. Indeed, confusion around what constitutes a 'local' in contemporary Northern Ireland, and who the 'person inside' is in these increasingly globalised emotional landscapes has been covered on multiple occasions across these chapters, where the distinctions between insider/outsider, tourist/tour guide, foreigner/local, whilst sometimes appearing as patent truisms, are also often blurred through the very

mechanisms used to engage troubles tourists in the first place. The impact of this upon studies of empathy is that the very distance that Sara Ahmed (2004a) and others (Boler, 1997; Young, 1997; Berlant, 1998) posit is at the heart of all true empathic identification, and which is the most cause for ethical concern, appears to collapse when it comes to highly politicised conflict heritage. Consequently, many of the preferred subjects of empathy (those 3,700 who died and 47,000 who were injured as a result of the conflict) are often obscured by Troubles heritage, as calls for empathy are refracted within a highly controlled, and gratuitous cycle of emotionality, which is increasingly directed towards tourist activity. Tourists in effect become key stakeholders in the Troubles heritage sector, and through this, increasingly dominant presences in the real emotional topographies of Northern Irish social and political life.

Yet despite the ethical dilemma that the tourist as ‘prosumer’ (Toffler, 1980) might bring to studies of Troubles heritage, the tendency towards a heavily restricted, and somewhat commodified version of empathy at these sites need not always be cause for concern. Partly this is because, whilst too often the architects of other people’s suffering, paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland were themselves not immune from genuine hardship during the Troubles. Indeed, as the high levels of social exclusion and worklessness amongst political ex-prisoners show, being part of a paramilitary group in the past certainly hasn’t inured members from the effects of PTSD, joblessness, or family breakdown in the present (McKeever, 2007; Dwyer, 2013; Rolston and Artz, 2014). Also, however necessary it is to make clear distinctions between those who actively and willingly involved themselves in conflict during the Troubles, and those who did not, but were forced to suffer injury and death regardless, the nature of the war in Northern Ireland was such that to be part of a republican or loyalist outfit was still to be part of a broader civilian community, and to have shared a history with its non-combatant members. Therefore, whilst caution should be exercised around proclaiming that paramilitary-controlled Troubles heritage is inclusive of all perspectives on the conflict, it’s also worth recognising that individuals’ involvement in

violence does not necessarily make them less deserving of empathy, or other forms of emotional identification. As the manager at the civilian-run Museum of Free Derry responded when I queried the presence of IRA paraphernalia at the site, 'this is part of our history. Of course it's going to be here' (MoFD Interview).

However, the other reason that extending even a restrictive version of empathy towards the activities and sites associated with Troubles heritage might not be quite as problematic as Cillian McGrattan and others have made out in the past is that, as Hannah Arendt (1963, p.86) has observed, 'as a rule it is not compassion which sets out to change the worldly conditions in order to ease human suffering', but solidarity, law and justice. As culturally powerful as the myth of empathy might be, it is also worth bearing in mind that, without an accompanying call to action, tourist identifications with the narratives on display in the paramilitary museum and on mural tours are unlikely to radically affect the status quo. Whilst peace is maintained in the region, paramilitary dominance over Troubles heritage in the North, although guilty of selling a very limited and prescriptive account of the past to curious tourists, does not actively promote conflict in the present although it may, as demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five, legitimise the actions of dissonant paramilitaries, and continue to ostracise those already on the fringes of debates around reconciliation and compensation. What should be guarded against however, is the threat that political upheavals in the future, such as Brexit might pose to this fragile peace in the North. However unlikely it seems right now, the existence of sites such as the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre and Irish Republican History Museum in particular can be seen as evidence of an ideological preparation for conflict in the future. Without more investment from the formal heritage sector in producing measured and critical engagements with the past, or at least in those community ventures already doing this, there is always going to be a risk, however small, that empathy's prowess in cultivating transnational associations will be used to paramilitarism's advantage in the future -- and the undeniable disadvantage of the majority in the North.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

As laid out in Chapter Three, there were some evident challenges that arose during the fieldwork process, which have limited the scope of this thesis in different ways. Firstly, the inability to fully connect with locals living around interfaces in Belfast has meant that, whilst issues around empathy, affect and emotionality have been canvassed in relation to the non-native visitor, these are mostly removed from the lives of those actually interacting with these spaces and places on a daily basis. To a certain extent, reflecting these questions back onto a 'native' demographic would in many ways signal a regression towards the very 'two-communities' paradigm that this thesis was trying to avoid. However, thinking about empathy in more detail in relation to these groups would also be both illuminating, and useful to those working museums and heritage in Northern Ireland, where they could encourage further debate over how best to develop approaches to the past going forward. Such work has already been carried out in part through the efforts of the organisation Healing Through Remembering, who have collated responses from their own travelling exhibition *Everyday Objects Transformed by Conflict*, and used these, and other workshops, to think in more depth about the possibility of creating a shared memorial museum for the conflict (Purbrick, 2007; Bigand, 2013; Healing Through Remembering, 2014).

A more specific direction that such research could be taken in this regard, would be to extend questions of empathy and identification to those who did not live through the conflict itself, but who are firmly entangled in the cultures and lives of those who did. An obvious demographic to look at would be the younger generation, who in many ways continue to live with the effects of the conflict, both in terms of their living arrangements and schooling, but who are also increasingly exposed to alternative lifestyles and interactions through their mixing in more cosmopolitan city centres. There has of course been a notable body of research that already explores sectarian attitudes amongst the youth population, whether in relation to the school system, or youth violence, and a number of community projects have also engaged with attitudes towards peace walls (Bell, 1990; McAloney *et al.*, 2009; Bell *et*



*al.*, 2010; Belfast Interface Project, 2014; Borooah and Knox, 2015). However relatively little work has been done on the attitudes that this demographic might have towards Troubles heritage in the North, beyond Bree Hocking's (2015) ad hoc engagement with some younger members of the public as part of her broader ethnographic work on public artworks, and Elisabetta Viggiani's (2014) inclusion of a few youth responses to her survey on attitudes towards memorials in Belfast. Such an oversight means that there is still a vast amount of work to be done in terms of distilling attitudes amongst the youth towards troubles tourism, museums, and key heritage sites in Belfast, which could be used to engage with ideas of empathy in relation to 'postmemory' and the conflict (Hirsch, 1997).

Another key demographic, whose relationship to Troubles heritage has been thoroughly neglected to date are the increasingly prominent migrant population in Belfast. Links have already been made between sectarianism and racism in Northern Ireland (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006; STEP, 2010; Knox, 2011), however again, the actual experiences of migrants living in interface areas of Northern Ireland has been generally overlooked, in spite of the fact that the relationship between this group, and key heritage sites around these interfaces could be a fascinating angle through which to explore the transmission of cultural memories of the conflict. Such considerations could also be extended to providers of troubles tourism, as an expanding sector has seen an increase in the number of people from outside Northern Ireland conducting tours of Belfast's interfaces. One of my own interview participants was an EU migrant, and I was aware of at the time of a number of other guides, also from migrant backgrounds, who were providing taxi and walking tours of Belfast's murals to non-English speaking tourists. Exploring the way that these guides, who have no immediate experience of the Troubles and no particular ties to either nationalist or unionist community, navigate such emotional landscapes and histories would have made for an additionally fascinating line of inquiry, and may have helped further unpick the affective relationships between tour guide, tourist, and the psycho-social dynamics of interface spaces.

Conducting such a small-scale appraisal of approaches to the past by only focusing on one city, has also had the unfortunate effect of reifying the notion of Belfast as an exceptional place (Allen and Kelly, 2003), to the detriment of other, equally interesting heritage sites in Northern Ireland. By honing in on only a small selection of sites within Belfast itself, the generalisability of this thesis' findings has been somewhat restricted, although as already highlighted in the introduction and methodology, this has also allowed for much richer, and theoretically developed account of their affective lives to be developed. Finally, one obvious way in which a study of troubles tourism and empathy could be improved in the future would be to engage further with other troubles tourists, which could help identify a broader spectrum of emotional reactions and perspectives on these museums and tours. Brendan Murtagh, Philip Boland and Peter Shirlow's (2016) recent study of the activities of tourists to London/Derry during its year as the City of Culture has already generated some data on tourist perceptions of troubles tourism, however supplementing this with longer, more qualitative insights on tourist experiences of Troubles heritage through extensive interviewing or questionnaires, would be undoubtedly useful.

Whatever the limitations of this thesis, one thing that is clear is that heritage sites such as the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre and Irish Republican History Museum, and their attendant tourist audiences, are in no danger of going away. Indeed, since the writing of this thesis, two further paramilitary museums have been opened in Belfast alone, and plans are currently underway to develop an equivalent of the Irish Republican History Museum in London/Derry's Gasyard Centre, which would provide a more militant perspective on events such as Bloody Sunday, than those currently on offer at the civilian-run Museum of Free Derry. Belfast in particular, but Northern Ireland in general is, as poet Leontia Flynn (2008) has observed, a place both 'finished' and 'under construction'. As cultural identities across the UK harden in the wake of the Brexit vote, and Northern Irish politics are thrust onto the global stage once more, it seems likely that, as a nation still under construction, the demand for increased contact with Troubles heritage sites will increase. Only then, in this somewhat

hazy and uncertain future, will the tourist's impact on the emotional dynamics of Troubles heritage, and empathy's potentiality for shaping the post-conflict experience, be fully realised.

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**Appendix 1: Participant Key.**

<b>Key</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>
Tour Guide 1	Male, Black Cab Tour Guide, Catholic, Nationalist, Republican	29.10.2014
Tour Guide 2	Male, Black Cab Tour Guide, Catholic, Nationalist, not Republican	13.05.2015
Tour Guide 3	Male, Black Cab Tour Guide, Basque, Pro-Nationalist/Republican.	20.01.2016.
Tour Guide 4	Male, Black Cab Tour Guide, Catholic-mixed family, British Army	20.01.2016
Tour Guide 5	Male, Black Cab Tour Guide, Catholic-mixed family (British Army and IRA), Nationalist, not Republican	20.01.2016
Tour Guide 6	Male, Black Cab Tour Guide, Catholic, Nationalist, Republican, ex-prisoner	24.09.2015
Tour Guide 7	Male, Black Cab Tour Guide, Catholic mixed family, British Army.	21.01.2016
Tour Guide 8	Male, Black Cab Tour Guide, Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist	10.05.2016
Tour Guide 9	Male, Black Cab Tour Guide, Catholic, Nationalist, not Republican	20.01.2016
Tour Guide 10	Male, Black Cab Tour Guide, Protestant, Unionist, not Loyalist	20.01.2016
Tour Guide 11	Male, Black Cab Tour Guide, Protestant.	10.05.2016
Tour Guide 12	Male, Black Cab Tour Guide, Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist	26.08.2015

ATIC	Museum Volunteer Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, Protestant, Unionist, UDA	27.08.2015
LSA	Male, Shankill Community Worker, Protestant	02.06.2015
IRHM	Female, Volunteer Irish Republican History Museum, Catholic, Nationalist	23.01.2016 (Interview subsequently withdrawn)
MoFD	Male manager Museum of Free Derry	28.10.2014

## Appendix 2: Participant Information Leaflet.

**What will the interviews be like?**

The interviews are designed to be more of a discussion than a question and answer session. Whilst the researcher will have some key themes which they might want to cover, the content of the interview will be largely guided by you. You will NEVER be forced to answer any questions which you are uncomfortable with.

Interviews will always take place in a secure & comfortable meeting place which will be pre-arranged between yourself & the researcher.

You will NEVER be asked by the researcher to recount your experiences of the conflict.

However if during the course of the project you feel this is something you would like to share with the researcher, then you should feel free to.

**What are the advantages/disadvantages of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in this project, it is hoped that this work will build a picture of the way that the conflict is being represented by Northern Ireland's museums and memorial sites. The results of this project will be made available to all the museums involved, and may help guide and develop their practice in the future. Some people find that being involved in a research project is a significant time commitment. You should consider this before agreeing to the project. Some people also find that talking about their memories, particularly if they are difficult or traumatic, can be an emotionally challenging experience. Should you feel negatively affected by your participation in this project, you would be free to withdraw.

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

Yes. No one else, apart from the researcher's supervisors, will be informed about your participation in this project. The recordings of your interview will be kept confidential by the researcher, and stored in a secure place. After the interview(s) are completed, the researcher will transcribe them and send them to you. You will have the option to edit these transcripts, and send them back to the researcher, who will then make them anonymous.

The only exception to this rule, is if you disclose evidence of criminal activity, in which case the right to confidentiality will be waived.

Excerpts from the anonymised interviews will then be included in the final research document, as well as conference presentations, and academic publications. The final copies of the anonymised transcript will be lodged with the ESRC's Data Archive, which is a public resource. You will not be made identifiable from these transcripts.

**Who is funding the research?**

This PhD is being funded by the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of a White Rose Research network titled 'Reshaping Multiculturalism Through Cultural Practices'. Further details about the network can be found at: [www.whiterose.ac.uk/studentships/reshaping-multiculturalism-through-cultural-practices/](http://www.whiterose.ac.uk/studentships/reshaping-multiculturalism-through-cultural-practices/)

To find out more about this project & network, or to make a complaint, firstly contact the researcher directly using the details overleaf, or send an email to Paul Bagguley at [P.bagguley@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:P.bagguley@leeds.ac.uk)

**Memory, Conflict & Museums.**

A White Rose PhD project

**E.S.R.C. ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL**

**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

**White Rose Social Science DTC**  
University of Leeds, Shearhall & York

**Project Title:**  
*Memory and Empathy in Northern Ireland's Post-Conflict Museums and Memorial Spaces*

**Lead Researcher:**  
Katie Markham  
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University of Leeds  
Leeds LS29JT

**Email:** [sskjm@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:sskjm@leeds.ac.uk)

**You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.**

**Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part**

### What is the purpose of this project?

The research being done for this project is part of a three year PhD project running from September 2013-September 2016.

The aim of the project is to explore how museums and memorial sites in Northern Ireland shape people's understanding of the conflict. It explores the kinds of relationships which people form with each other through these historical sites, and the role that empathy plays in those relationships.

This project looks at a series of sites across Northern Ireland, including (but not limited to), the Museum of Free Derry, Ulster Museum, exhibitions organised by the group Healing Through Remembering, and murals around the Shankill/Falls road divide.

### Why have I been chosen?

You have been identified as a potential participant in this project, either because you work at, or are visiting one of the target museums, or because you live nearby a significant conflict-related memorial in Northern Ireland.

### Do I have to take part?

No. Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits you are entitled to. You do not have to give a reason.

### What can I expect if I do take part?

This project uses informal interviews with participants like yourself to answer its research questions. If you do decide to take part in this project, then your contact details will be collected by the researcher, and a time and place will be arranged to meet with you to start the interview process.

The length and number of interviews will depend on each participant. As a general rule, I will try to conduct between one and two interviews with participants. Most interviews will last between 1-2 hours, with as many breaks as you need. Whilst this research project will be ongoing until September 2016, you will not be expected to participate for the duration of this. After the initial interview, the researcher may invite you for further interviews, which you do not have to agree to. Any travel expenses will be refunded to you, and refreshments will be provided during the interview sessions.

And French Jails  
Once you have agreed to participate in this project, and we have agreed on dates for the interview(s), I would appreciate it if you could keep to them, unless there is a good reason for cancellation.

STOP...STOP...STOP  
The Political Break in  
The Border Country

SCAGS' YEAR SAIR THE YIG IARD

## Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form

Faculty of Education, Social Sciences & Law (ESSL)

### Participant Consent Form.



<p><b>Project Title:</b> "Memory &amp; Empathy in Northern Ireland's Post-Conflict Museums &amp; Memorial Sites".</p> <p><b>Researcher:</b> Katie Markham  <b>Contact:</b> <a href="mailto:sskjm@leeds.ac.uk">sskjm@leeds.ac.uk</a> or School of Sociology &amp; Social Policy          University of Leeds          Leeds          LS29JT</p>	<p><b>Add your initials next to the statement if you agree.</b></p>
<p>I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated [ / / ], explaining the above research project, and that I have had opportunity to ask questions about the project.</p>	
<p>I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to leave at any time without giving reason and without there being any negative consequences.* In addition, should I not wish to answer any question or questions, I am free to decline.</p> <p><i>*Any data which has already been provided up to the point of withdrawal will be destroyed. The only point at which withdrawal will not be possible in this project is once the final research document has been written up, and submitted to the University of Leeds, and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).</i></p>	
<p>I agree for this interview to be recorded by the researcher, with the understanding that all raw data is kept in a secure place by the researcher, which will be destroyed after the interview has been transcribed and anonymised.</p>	
<p>I understand that the researcher will provide me with copies of my interview transcript, which I will have the option to edit within an allotted period of time before the researcher uses the information I provide.</p>	
<p>I give permission for the researcher to use my anonymised responses for their research, in the form of publications, conference presentations &amp; the final research report. I understand that my name will not be linked to the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the reports that result from the research.</p>	
<p>I understand that my right to confidentiality can only be maintained so long as I do not disclose any information of a criminal nature. If I do disclose something which the researcher feels is relevant to an ongoing criminal investigation, then this right will be waived.</p>	
<p>I understand that after this project has ended, anonymised copies of my transcript will be stored with the ESRC Data Archive, where they <i>may</i> be publicly accessed.*          * restricted access to this data can be negotiated between the researcher &amp; the ESRC</p>	
<p>I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research in an anonymised form.</p>	
<p>I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change.</p>	

<b>Name of Participant</b>	
<b>Participant's Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Name of lead researcher</b>	Katie Markham
<b>Researcher's Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	

*A copy of this consent form will be given to you, along with the information sheet. Please ask for one if not provided.*

#### **Appendix 4: Interview Framework – General Questions for Tour Guides**

- Can you tell to me how you first became interested in the idea of conducting your own political tour of the murals?
- Have your initial reasons for doing these tours changed at all since then?
- Who are your most typical clients for these tours?
- What has the response from the wider community been to your tours?
- What is the most challenging aspect of doing these tours?
- Are there any personal challenges involved in doing these tours?
- To what extent are these tours shaped by your personal memories/experiences of the conflict?
- Can you describe the typical route that you take your clients on during a mural tour?
- Why do you feel it is important that your clients see the particular murals that you introduce them to?
- Are there any sites/murals which (for time constraints or otherwise) you feel are missing from your tours?
- If you could add one site/mural which is off-route to your tour, which would it be?
- Are there any sites along this route which are particularly significant to you? Tell me about them.
- Tell me about how you gather the stories for your tours. Are there any particular stories/narratives that speak to you?
- What is your relationship to other tour guides in the area like?
- Describe to me the most memorable experience you have had since becoming a tour guide in West Belfast
- Describe to me the most positive experience which has come out of doing these tours
- What is the most negative experience you have had whilst doing these tours?
- What does the word/idea of ‘authenticity’ mean to you in relation to your tours?
- If your clients could take away one thing from the tours that you run, what would it be?
- Sum up what makes your tour different from others in roughly three words.