

*Transforming Earth and Fire: New Narratives
of Identity and Place in the Northern Ireland
Peace Process*

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Declaration of Original Work

I, Lia Dong Shimada, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the cultural geographies of peacebuilding through a study of Belfast, Northern Ireland. I investigate the connections between transformations of contested landscapes, shifting meanings of place, and new narratives of identity and belonging emerging through the Northern Ireland peace process. The aims of my research serve two theoretical objectives: first, to examine how transformations of contested cultural landscapes provoke new perceptions of place and geographic scale; and second, to examine how these transformations shape the expression, creation and negotiation of identity in societies emerging from violent conflict. For this project, I have developed a collaborative, qualitative methodological approach that combines semi-structured interviews and participant observation. I ground my research in case studies of two contested landscapes, both of which bear symbolic and material weight from Northern Ireland's thirty-year civil war. The first case study explores republican cultural identities in relation to Divis Mountain, the highest point in Belfast, as it transitions from a British military base to a public recreational resource. The second case study focuses on peacetime transformations of the contentious 11th Night bonfire tradition and their implications for shifting expressions of loyalist cultural identity. Crucially, I cross-cut these case studies with a third strand of inquiry that explores transformations of contested landscapes in relation to identities and ideas of belonging among Northern Ireland's growing minority ethnic populations. I position this project as a challenge to existing models of analysis for Northern Ireland. By opening the dominant Protestant-Catholic binary to explore the less-studied perspectives of ethnic minorities, I highlight the diversity of cultural identities emerging in post-ceasefire Belfast. I argue that practice in and scholarship on Northern Ireland must expand beyond traditional, binary conceptualizations of sectarian conflict to acknowledge how diverse relationships, identities and communities are vital to the process of building peace.

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List of Acronyms

ACSONI	Afro-Caribbean Society of Northern Ireland
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MOD	Ministry of Defense
UDA	Ulster Defense Association
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

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Chapter One

Introduction: The Place of Peacebuilding

For everything is contingent and provisional; and the subjunctive mood of these images is tensed to the ifs and buts, the yeas and nays of Belfast's history.

– Ciaran Carson (1989: 67)
from 'Revised Version,' *Belfast Confetti*

Overview

This thesis explores the cultural geographies of peacebuilding through a study of Belfast, Northern Ireland. For societies emerging from civil war, peace accords merely punctuate a complex process of transformation that continues long after agreement has, ostensibly, been reached. My fascination lies with the aftermath, with its juxtaposition of simmering conflict and waking peace. For wars waged over contested land, a peace process may be particularly ambiguous. At stake is not just ownership of territory, but control over the very meaning and identity of the place in question. To this end, I explore peacebuilding as a process that reworks relationships to place and, in doing so, provokes new expressions and negotiations of identity. These are themes that speak powerfully to cultural geography and its potential to illuminate new dimensions – both theoretical and practical – to our understanding of peace processes. I situate my study in the nexus of several distinct academic literatures, with particular emphasis on peace and conflict studies and cultural geography. Within the latter, I draw heavily on interlinking dialogues around contested cultural landscapes, heritage, and multiple, poststructuralist identities, and I have developed innovative qualitative methodologies to address these debates. My research also develops scholarship on public geographies and, in the context of Northern Ireland, contributes to debates around community relations, diversity and environmental policy.

Northern Ireland offers an intriguing case study for investigating the dynamics between place, identity and peacebuilding in a delicate 'post-conflict' society. My initial entry point was an interest in environmental issues that I explored during a fellowship funded by the Thomas J. Watson Foundation. For fifteen months, from August 2000 through November 2001, I studied reforestation movements in Ireland, Nepal and Madagascar. I had conceptualized this project as a way to think about the cultural

dimensions of forested landscapes, and to understand how people and places shape each other through their tangled environmental histories. Of the many places I dwelled during this fellowship, Belfast resonated the most powerfully with my queries. In the autumn of 2000, I came to Northern Ireland to think about the role of trees in a place recovering from conflict. More broadly, I wanted to learn about environmentalism in a place where political stability cannot be taken for granted and perceptions of common good are anything but universal. Although my work at that time focused on reforestation, I became fascinated by the larger scope of urban environmental regeneration, its spatial expressions, and the possibilities for an environmental ethos to create common identities across partisan lines.

For my doctoral research, I have developed from these initial queries a broader, more complex interrogation of the relationships between place-associated identities and peacebuilding. In this chapter, I outline the scope and structure of my dissertation. I begin by discussing my research objectives, the approach I adopted, and my reasons for selecting the case studies on which I based my empirical research in Northern Ireland. The second section describes the structure of the thesis, comprising a brief overview of subsequent chapters and their key arguments. I conclude by highlighting the contributions of this thesis, which I will discuss in greater depth in the final chapter.

1. Research Objectives and Approach

My research traces two interlinking theoretical aims. The first examines how peacetime transformations of contested landscapes provoke new perceptions of place and geographic scale. How, I ask, do such transformations alter the meanings of places associated with violent conflict? How do they shape the ways in which people relate these places to wider scales of belonging? The second aim examines how these transformations shape the expression, creation and negotiation of identity. How do people negotiate their identities in a place of recovering conflict? How do interactions between shifting identities and transformations of contested landscapes address the legacy of conflict and contribute to the process of building peace?

I explore these aims through three striking transformations at work in Northern Ireland: the demilitarization of Divis Mountain, the redefinition of 11th Night bonfires, and the region's increasingly visible ethnic diversity. Divis Mountain and the 11th Night bonfires are, respectively, powerful republican and loyalist icons. In Belfast, their ability to inspire allegiance in one cultural population, while eliciting a sense of exclusion in another, renders them among the city's most contested spaces. Their complex peacetime

transformations invite reflection on how narratives of place and identity might be reworked and reconceptualized for a shared society. In Chapter Five, I explore this process through republican engagement with Divis Mountain, the highest point in Belfast, as it transitions from a British military base to a public recreational resource. Chapter Six, in contrast, focuses on loyalist engagement with the 11th Night bonfires, which are built and burned every July to commemorate the 1690 Protestant victory at the Battle of the Boyne. Loyalist communities are now responding to the need to redefine this sectarian tradition, spurred in part by municipal concerns about environmental pollution and risks to public health.

I chose these two landscapes – Divis Mountain and 11th Night bonfires – for their contrapuntal dialogue and the different dimensions they illuminate to the process of peacebuilding. Both inspire devotion amongst their respective communities, and their deep cultural resonance amplifies the conflict over place and identity in Northern Ireland's divided society. Both landscapes address current environmental debates taking shape through the peace process. For example, the transformation of Divis Mountain highlights issues around conservation for public recreation, while the 11th Night bonfires engage a different set of issues around pollution and urban regeneration. Moreover, these contested landscapes reframe cultural identity in a variety of scales, from local and civic to national and global.

The third transformation cross-cuts both landscapes. Northern Ireland's increasingly diverse society is one of the most visible changes of the past decade. The peace accords may go some way toward explaining the trend, but they are only part of a larger story of diaspora and migration. In Northern Ireland, the entwined discourses of conflict and peacebuilding frequently sideline minority ethnic residents. Through this research project, I attempt to address the imbalance, inspired in part by my own complicated identity as a Japanese-Chinese-American woman living in Belfast. By exploring minority ethnic perspectives and identities in relation to Divis Mountain and 11th Night bonfires, I deepen my analysis of how transformations of contested landscapes might complicate and contribute to the process of peacebuilding in a society emerging from violent conflict.

2. *Structure of the Thesis*

In the next two chapters, I develop my theoretical questions in the context of 'post-conflict' Northern Ireland, followed by a short chapter that describes my methodological approach. I then analyze my empirical research, devoting one chapter to

each of the three major transformations described above. I conclude with some reflections about this project and its wider contributions. Below, I offer a brief overview of the scope and key arguments of each chapter.

Chapter Two sets forth the theoretical framework for this dissertation, drawn from a range of academic literatures in cultural geography and peace and conflict studies. I begin with an overview of scholarship in peace research that illuminates the challenges involved with the ‘post-conflict’ phase of peacebuilding. I focus in particular on debates related to conflict transformation theory, to which I voice my own concerns about its insufficient spatial theorization. I argue that in addition to nurturing the transformation of inter-personal relationships, conflict transformation must also attend to the relationships between identity and place. To this end, I argue that cultural geography offers valuable theoretical contributions to the transformation of violent conflict. I explore ‘cultural landscape’ as a conceptual framework that mediates debates about contested meanings of heritage, memory, identity and place in a ‘post-conflict’ society. Ultimately, I argue that the challenge of peacebuilding is the challenge of reworking contested notions of place and identity.

In Chapter Three, I develop my theoretical framework in the context of my research site. Northern Ireland offers an intriguing case study for probing the theoretical contributions of cultural geography to the transformation of conflict. I begin with a brief historical overview of the region, tracing the creation of Northern Ireland in the first part of the 20th century, the political tensions that gave rise to violent civil unrest, the controversial 1998 peace settlement, and the subsequent challenges of ‘post-conflict’ peacebuilding. I focus in particular on Belfast, where ongoing and highly visible sectarian tensions offer rich scope for exploring how cultural geographers might theorize conflict over culture, identity, heritage, memory and belonging. Following Graham (1994, 2004) and Reid (2004), I argue that the absence of shared identity (re)produces Northern Ireland’s divisive conceptualizations of physical and imaginative place, and I ask how new expressions of identity might emerge through contemporary transformations of Belfast’s contested landscapes. Crucially, I highlight the absence of minority ethnic perspectives in scholarship on Northern Ireland, which focuses overwhelmingly on the conflict between Protestants/unionists/loyalists and Catholics/nationalists/republicans. In this dissertation, I seek to expand the scholarship beyond the traditional, binary model of Northern Ireland’s sectarian conflict. To this end, I argue that the inclusion of diverse perspectives is vital to both building and studying peace. I end this chapter by discussing some of the challenges of putting peace into practice, and in doing so I gesture toward the practical contributions of my research process.

Chapter Four outlines my research strategy and methodologies. In particular, I draw from methodological literatures in feminist geography and participatory research that emphasize reflexive, qualitative approaches. For this project, I adopted a suite of mixed methodologies – participant observation, semi-structured interviews, semi-structured group discussions, and maintenance of a research diary – that were designed to yield complex understandings about the Northern Ireland peace process. Moreover, I initiated collaborations with two non-profit organizations involved with the practical work of engaging people with contested spaces: Groundwork Northern Ireland with the 11th Night bonfires; and the National Trust with Divis Mountain. For both organizations, I offered to develop their outreach programmes to minority ethnic communities in exchange for logistical support for my research. In this chapter, I discuss in greater detail these collaborations, their ethical implications, and how they have shaped my methodological processes. I end by meditating on issues that arose around positionality and reflexivity with regard to my own negotiations of identity in Northern Ireland. This chapter articulates my sustained engagement with the shifting terrain between praxis and theory. I argue that my strategy represents an innovative approach for conceptualizing how geographic research can contribute – through its process as well as its products – to the scholarship and practice of peacebuilding.

In Chapter Five, the first of three empirical chapters, I explore the transformation of Divis Mountain from major military base to public recreational resource. Specifically, I examine the ways in which ideas of the mountain circulate in narratives of republican identity that are emerging from the history of conflict, and are now evolving through the peace process. I situate my analysis of Divis in theoretical debates about postcolonialism and its relevance for a shared, peacetime society. This case study excavates tensions between British imperial history, republican memories of resistance, and the need for wider ways of imagining the mountain as a shared identity resource. I begin by establishing Divis as a contested landscape, implicated in the British imperial project through its role in the 19th century Ordnance Survey mapping and its 20th century military occupation. Through interviews and participant observation with a wide array of residents, activists and artists in West Belfast, I develop my analysis of Divis as a shifting focus for republican consciousness and cultural identity. I examine debates around inscription of landscape and its role in articulating cultural ownership of place – first through efforts to reinstate Gaelic placenames, and then through a contemporary art project that draws the city of Belfast into dialogue with Divis. In conclusion, I gesture toward new developments that reframe the mountain in wider scales of belonging. More broadly, I argue that for republicans residing in its shadow, the transformations of Divis provokes

new conceptualizations of place and identity that both complicate and contribute to the process of peacebuilding.

Chapter Six shifts from republican to loyalist perspectives, focusing on the ‘post-conflict’ transformations of 11th Night bonfires. For this case study, I bring together several strands of work from my overlapping academic and practical projects. My professional engagement with Belfast City Council’s Bonfire Management Programme offered invaluable access to the loyalist communities in which I conducted participant observation and semi-structured interviews. In this chapter, I ask how shifting conceptualizations of heritage and tradition are shaping negotiations of identity and ideas of place in a society emerging from conflict. I begin by establishing 11th Night bonfires as a contested cultural landscape, tracing their evolution from historic origins to their current sectarian manifestations. I ask how peacetime transformations of the bonfire tradition are provoking loyalists to engage in new ways with culture, place, tradition and identity. I then respond to this question through three contemporary examples of bonfire management: Belfast City Council’s Bonfire Management Programme; its counterpart in Antrim Borough Council; and the innovative bonfire alternative known as the ‘beacon.’ Throughout this chapter, I explore the relationships between 11th Night bonfires and shifting dynamics of gender, paramilitarism, cultural heritage and peacebuilding. I argue that transformations of the contested bonfire landscape can be read as both a product and an agent of the peace process, which in turn reflect and provoke new expressions of identity in loyalist culture.

In Chapter Seven, I draw together the landscapes of Divis Mountain and 11th Night bonfires by exploring their contestation through minority ethnic perspectives. In this chapter, I locate the voices of ethnic minorities in the fraught dialogues around shared space and identity in ‘post-conflict’ Belfast. In doing so, I address implicit assumptions about the lack of impact of Northern Ireland’s long-standing conflict on ethnic minorities. My research challenges these assumptions by firmly engaging minority ethnic participants with the same contested cultural landscapes through which I explored Northern Ireland’s far larger republican and loyalist populations. The first part of this chapter focuses on Divis Mountain, where I led walking tours for minority ethnic community groups. I ground my research in academic debates about the racialization of ethnic minorities in representations of the countryside. In semi-structured group interviews that followed the walks, I queried how minority ethnic engagement with the mountain provokes insights into shifting scales of diasporic identity and the challenge of negotiating belonging in a territorial, sectarian city. The second part of this chapter focuses on 11th Night bonfires. I facilitated discussions about loyalist bonfires with a range of minority ethnic community groups in Belfast, drawing on the visual aids created

for the Bonfire Management Programme's travelling exhibit. My findings from these discussions address experiences of racism, politics of (in)visibility, meditations on identity and global conflict, and negotiations of belonging in peacetime Northern Ireland. In this chapter, I argue that scholarship on Northern Ireland must acknowledge how diverse relationships and communities are vital to the process of peacebuilding.

Each of these empirical chapters responds to the meta-argument that I set forth in Chapter Two for increasing engagement between conflict transformation theory and cultural geography. My empirical research draws from cultural geography's major themes of landscape, place, culture, heritage and identity, and illuminates how the discipline can frame relationships between people, place and belonging in a society emerging from conflict. Below, I highlight the key contributions of this thesis, which I will discuss in greater detail in the Chapter Eight, the final chapter.

Conclusion

This thesis contributes to a wide range of academic and practical debates. The largest contribution correlates to the argument I will set forth in Chapter Two for increasing engagement between cultural geography and theories of conflict transformation. Within cultural geography, my research on contested cultural landscapes contributes to debates on the politics of memory and concepts of public landscape, transition, and transformation. This thesis also holds relevance for interdisciplinary debates on multiple identities and new ethnicities, and I develop the ways in which these debates contribute to scholarship on peacebuilding. With regard to methodological contributions, this thesis introduces some innovative approaches in the form of guided walking tours and formal collaborations with non-profit organizations.

My research also makes a number of contributions to scholarship about Northern Ireland. This thesis amplifies the presence of cultural geography in published research about the conflict in Northern Ireland, thus bolstering the profile of geography in a field dominated by political scientists and legal scholars. Specifically, my work on transformations of contested landscapes and identities in republican and loyalist cultures contributes to collective knowledge about communities sympathetic to paramilitarism. Moreover, this thesis contributes to growing scholarly interest in Northern Ireland's ethnic minorities, but crucially it does so by drawing them into larger dialogues about the legacy of the Troubles and the transformation of violent conflict. In addition to its academic contributions, this thesis also contributes to the practical work of peacebuilding. For example, my collaborations with local non-profit organizations have increased their

capacity to deliver programmes, particularly in relation to minority ethnic residents in Belfast.

Archiving over this project are debates about ‘public geographies,’ to which my theoretical, methodological, empirical and practical approaches all contribute. Although geographers have long grappled with the challenge of producing research that is relevant beyond the academy, recent debates are bringing into sharper focus the concept of ‘relevance.’ Some authors advocate an expanded presence of the discipline in highly visible arenas such as public policy (Johnston and Plummer 2005) and in wider debates on political and social matters (Murphy 2006). Others, however, offer more nuanced conceptualizations. Fuller and Kitchin (2004: 5) criticize forms of ‘applied geography’ that call for the discipline to become more relevant by serving the interests of the state and business through consultancy. They maintain that ideological intent distinguishes radical and critical praxis from other forms of applied geography. Ward (2006: 496, original emphasis) cautions that ‘recent emphasis on public *policy* has taken place at the expense of proper consideration of what is meant, or might be meant, by the *publics*.’ He argues that dialogue about ‘relevance’ should allow room ‘for other ways of naming, defining and putting to work understandings of relevance’ (*ibid*: 501). According to Staeheli and Mitchell (2005), determination of relevance is a social and political process that is not easily measured and may not be directly observable. They argue that recent debates over relevance in geography have adopted a narrow view of where relevance is located or enacted.

The emerging debates around ‘public geographies’ respond to the challenge for new conceptualizations of relevance. The Birmingham Public Geographies Working Group (2010) defines ‘public geographies,’ at least provisionally, as the production of accessible academic work for broader ‘non-academic’ audiences; the co-construction of knowledge with non-academics; and the legitimation of non-academic or public geographical knowledges. Fuller and Askins (2007) assert that public geographies require recognition that ‘publics,’ while multiple and in flux, are also created. They argue that academic geographers need to think about ‘the different publics we inhabit’ (*ibid*: 587). Davies and Dwyer (2008) identify a series of gaps – between research context and policy application, between different enactments of public geographies, between articulation and silence – opened by methodological questions and the ‘different ways of articulating ‘publics’’ (*ibid*: 399). This dissertation can be read as a response to their call.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

At its heart, my doctoral project explores the potential for cultural geography to theorize the process of peacebuilding in societies emerging from violent conflict. With its thematic attention to space, place, scale and identity, cultural geography provides a dynamic frame for probing the transformation of conflicts based on competing territorial claims. Over the course of this chapter, I will outline the theoretical framework for my dissertation. In doing so, I will build an argument for the study of contested cultural landscapes to illuminate the complex interplay between place, identity and peacebuilding.

The chapter begins with an overview of academic scholarship in peace research. Throughout, I ground theoretical ideas with examples from around the globe. In the first section, I acknowledge the challenges involved with the volatile, delicate phase known as ‘post-conflict,’ as societies recovering from violent conflict attempt to establish normal relations. I describe the three main schools of thought that have developed from the body of academic literature on handling conflict. These are known as conflict resolution, conflict management and conflict transformation. I focus in particular on the theoretical debates related to conflict transformation, drawn primarily from the scholarship of John Paul Lederach. I end this section by affirming the value of the conflict transformation approach, even while observing its lack of attention to spatial dynamics.

In the second section, I develop this observation to argue for the importance of cultural geography to conflict transformation theory. In its current manifestation, the theory emphasizes the transformation of relationships, interests and discourses that underlie and fuel violent conflict. I argue that in addition to nurturing the transformation of inter-personal relationships, conflict transformation theory must also focus on transforming the relationships between identity and place. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three with regard to my work in Northern Ireland, these relationships – and hence their transformations – are crucial for building peace in conflicts over competing territorial claims. I draw upon existing scholarship to emphasize the ways in which cultural identity and sense of place are entwined, and I position my argument in this nexus. I then turn to a discussion of contemporary cultural geography, exploring the ways in which the discipline seeks to understand people and places. I argue that cultural

geography offers a useful framework for interrogating the relationships between place and identity that lie at the heart of conflict over contested territory.

To this end, I invoke ‘cultural landscape’ as a conceptual framework for studying places recovering from conflict. In this third section, I briefly describe trends in academic scholarship with regard to the concept of ‘landscape’ before focusing on more recent theorizations of people, place, culture and identity in contemporary cultural geography. I describe how tensions over competing territorial claims might be explored through the prism of contested cultural landscapes, drawing on recent feminist and poststructuralist interpretations of the co-constitutive relationships between landscapes, social practices and identities. I end this section by exploring the connections between landscape and memory, and I argue that the contestation of cultural landscapes for places of recovering conflict is based, in part, on contested narratives of heritage and identity.

I explore the concept of heritage in more depth in the fourth section, tracing connections between the study of heritage and its dialogue with community, history, identity and place. I argue that the process of building peace involves the search for shared forms of heritage from which to build a shared future. To illuminate this challenge, I draw on existing scholarship on heritage, primarily drawn from the academic literature of cultural geography. I discuss the relationships between heritage and memory, community, identity and conflict, describing in particular the fraught role that heritage performs in the creation and maintenance of collective cultural identities. I invoke Ashworth and Graham’s (2005) claim that the concept of heritage is ‘inevitably contested,’ and I point toward ways in which conflicting forms of heritage challenge the process of peacebuilding.

In the fifth section, I return to my argument that the challenge of peacebuilding is a challenge of reworking contested notions of place and identity. In this section, I outline my framework for theorizing identity, with particular emphasis on feminist and postcolonial approaches that destabilizes fixities and opens the concept of identity to multiple interpretations. I begin by discussing Massey’s (1994: 12) reconceptualization of place as ‘open and porous networks of social relations’ to provide context for other feminist critiques of identity, with particular focus on Valentine’s (2007) recent discussion of intersectionality. I then discuss how Hall’s (1992) concept of ‘new ethnicities’ might be invoked to articulate new expressions of identity and belonging in places recovering from violent conflict. Hall’s acknowledgement of identity as a transformation always ‘in process’ resonates with my own experience of ‘post-conflict’ transitions.

I conclude this chapter by synthesizing and framing the strands of my arguments as two overarching objectives for my doctoral project: To examine how transformations

of contested landscapes provoke new perceptions of place and scale; and how these transformations shape the expression, creation and negotiation of identity in places recovering from violent conflict. This sets the scene for my empirical work in Northern Ireland, which develops my contribution to cultural geographies of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. In Chapter Three, I explore these concepts in relation to Northern Ireland.

1. *Theorizing Peace*

Peace research and conflict studies emerged as academic disciplines in the first half of the 20th century. According to Lederach (1997: 3), their emergence was fuelled in part by the two world wars. Theoretical perspectives filtered through pre-existing academic lenses, most notably from the political sciences and, to a lesser degree, from sociology and psychology. As research on peace and conflict resolution coalesced into full-fledged academic study, predominantly European structuralists struggled against predominantly North American pragmatists to define the agendas (Miall et al 1999: 44). In contemporary times, this gap between theory and practice has narrowed, with increasing dialogue as both practitioners and scholars contribute to the burgeoning academic field. As I will elaborate in Chapter Four, my own research grounds theoretical insights in the practical work of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland.

The breadth of scholarship on peacebuilding reflects the complicated dynamics at work in divided societies attempting to move beyond violent conflict. Not surprisingly, much of the literature focuses on the overarching structures of governance that form the basis of most peace accords. Some form of power-sharing government often emerges as a compromise between warring factions, as recent examples from Afghanistan and Zimbabwe attest. In his study of ethno-linguistic conflict in South Tyrol, Italy, Wolff (2004) credits its successful resolution to a 1972 statute that combined autonomy with the sharing of power. For many other conflicts, however, power-sharing governments are far from panacea for peace, as the examples of Cyprus (Baier-Allen 2004) and Sri Lanka (Chadda 2004) attest. Rothchild and Roeder (2005b: 49) criticize the way in which ‘power-sharing in ethnically divided societies emerging from conflict unites former opponents in an unsteady coalition of convenience.’ The fragility of these new, hybrid governments is exacerbated further by the ‘dilemma of power-sharing’ which Rothchild and Roder (2005a: 13) define as the inconsistency between short-term benefits and longer term costs, and the broader strategy to achieve enduring peace. Rothchild and Roeder describe two inter-related phases in the transition from civil war. The first phase,

initiation of peace, begins with the cessation of hostilities. The second phase, consolidation, fosters belief in the legitimacy of the new government. However, a gap usually arises between the promises needed to initiate transition and the performance necessary to consolidate peace and democracy. In the real world, this gap represents a vacuum of continuing – often intensified – conflict.

Although ‘agreement creates the expectation that conflict has ended,’ (Lederach 2005: 44) the assumption is frequently, and at times dangerously, misleading. Recent findings by the Human Security Report Project (2008, cited in Dayton and Kriesberg 2009) suggest that since the end of the 1980s, violent conflicts end more frequently through negotiations or by petering out, rather than through the defeat of one side or the other. However, nearly 40 percent of peace agreements fail within five years (Harbom et al 2006), illustrating the impermanence of conflict termination. Simpson (1997: 476) observes: ‘The sources of social conflict shift over time, taking on new forms and manifestations. In this sense, there is no such thing as ‘post-conflict.’’ As Muggah (2005: 240-242) elaborates, the term ‘post-conflict’ is a particularly unhelpful designation, as it disguises a vast array of real and perceived threats that face most societies emerging from war. In the aftermath of its peace accords, a society frequently finds itself wracked not only with political strife but also with enormous economic, social and cultural instability. Steenkamp (2005) argues that periods of protracted violent conflict give rise to a ‘culture of violence.’ She highlights a number of reasons to explain this phenomenon, including official state use of violence that influences citizen attitudes toward its use, and the impact of war leading to greater social tolerance of violent behaviour.

In attempts to secure peace, the most visible efforts focus on elite-level actions, such as government-led peace accords. Although these high profile agreements may be vital for establishing structures for peace, they can become meaningless if the rhetoric fails to materialize into reality at all levels of society. As Lederach (2005: 53) observes, when ‘viewed from the ground by the people most affected by peace decisions and logistics, there exists a profound gap of authenticity in how peace and post-accord change processes operate and shape their future.’ Atashi (2009) argues that current practices and analyses of peacebuilding tend to focus on changes at the leadership level, rather than on the ordinary people who live with the realities of violent conflict. Although a peace agreement may lead to transformation at the national level, local problems (such as inequality, mistrust, economic deprivation, fear and violence) may still persist. She observes that uneven peace agreements reduce the likelihood of achieving sustainable peace, as marginalized groups disregard negotiated settlement and continue their struggles.

The gap between local- and elite-level action and experience points to complex interplays of scale. With regard to Northern Ireland, Boal (2000) emphasizes the complementary relationship between the different but inter-related scales of the local and the national/international. He points out that macro-political solutions provide the foundations for managing conflict at the local level, which in turn provide the day-to-day underpinning for higher-level constitutional framework. Ben-Porat (2005) extrapolates further in his comparative study of peace processes in Northern Ireland and Israel. He argues that by rethinking seemingly intractable ethno-national conflicts in a transnational context, changes toward de-territorializing sovereignty and the corresponding emergence of global institutions can offer new incentives and possibilities for resolution. Golan and Gal (2009), however, sound a cautionary note with their study of globalization and the ways it both contributes to and obstructs the transformation of conflict.

Scholarship on peace research has given rise to a large body of literature on handling conflict. In recent years, three main schools of thought have developed, which are generally known as conflict resolution, conflict management, and conflict transformation. As Miall (2004: 3) notes, these three schools not only articulate varying approaches to conflict intervention, but also reflect different conceptualizations of conflict itself.

Conflict resolution is the traditional, and perhaps most familiar, response to conflicts unable to 'resolve' themselves through violence or by other means. This theory is based in the belief that in communal and identity conflicts, people cannot compromise on their fundamental needs (Miall 2004: 3-4). Advocates of conflict resolution argue that it is possible to transcend conflicts if parties can be helped to explore, analyze, question and reframe their positions and interests. This approach emphasizes intervention by third parties to foster new thinking and to forge new relationships. The ultimate goal of conflict resolution is to move conflicting parties from zero-sum, destructive patterns to positive, constructive outcomes. Dayton (2009) points to the United Nations peacekeeping force as perhaps the best known example of third-party intermediaries in peacebuilding efforts. These peacekeepers respond to a diverse range of conflicts, from Haiti and Somalia to Sierra Leone and East Timor. Other well-known mediation efforts include those by United States Senator George Mitchell in the 1998 Northern Ireland peace accords, and the Norwegian Institute for Applied Social Science in the 1993 Oslo accords between the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel.

In contrast to conflict resolution, conflict management theory acknowledges that some conflicts may not have a readily available solution. Shirlow et al (2005: 70) suggest that advocates of this approach tend to view violent conflict as the result of differences of values, interests and power within and between communities. According to the conflict

management paradigm, resolution is an unrealistic goal for these conflicts. Thus, the best approach is to manage and contain them, generally through interventions to achieve political settlements. Miall (2004: 3) observes that these settlements usually reflect and form the basis of compromise between the warring parties. In her study of Corsica and the Åland Islands, Daftary (2004) explores the 'grey area' (McGarry and O'Leary 1993: 32, cited by Daftary 2004: 115) of autonomy as a conflict regulation method aimed at managing rather than eliminating differences. From a different angle, Joireman's (2004) study of Eritrea presents secession as an alternative conflict management outcome.

The approaches of conflict resolution and conflict management have both been criticized for their oversimplification of, respectively, the conflicts and the actors involved. With conflict resolution, the underlying philosophy suggests that conflict is destructive and that it can be resolved permanently through mediation or other forms of intervention. Such a belief ignores the reality that many conflicts emerge from legitimate injustices or inequalities. The 'resolution' of such conflicts often requires structural changes in society that may not be possible, at least in the short term (Shirlow et al 2005: 69-70). Miall (2004: 3) criticizes the simplistic core theories of conflict resolution, especially those that advocate win-win outcomes in two-party conflicts. For example, Parsons's (2009: 245) reflections on the 'unstable transformation' of Palestine expose the naïvete of the Oslo peace accords. He cites Israel's incorporation of the Palestine Liberation Organization into restructured governance without accommodating the key issues from the Palestinian nationalist agenda. Moreover, as Miall et al (1999: 21) point out, conflict resolution can be ambiguous, as the term refers to both the intention and the completion of the process.

While conflict management operates under more realistic assumptions than conflict resolution, its critics cite its 'power political view of conflict' (Miall 2004: 3-4). By treating violence as the problem, the conflict management approach draws attention from the real issues at the root of violent conflict, even as it suggests, problematically, that people can be directed and controlled. Moreover, the conflict management approach treats violence as the problem, and thus draws attention from the real issues at the root of conflict. Serbin (2009), for example, highlights in his study of Brazil's transition to democracy the individual and collective efforts of former revolutionaries struggling against vast social inequalities and authoritarian legacies of violence. More recently, theories of conflict have acknowledged that conflict situations are far from static; in short, that issues, actors and interests change over time (Vayrynen 1991, cited in Miall 2004: 5). By way of example, Buckley-Zistel (2008) draws on her work on social change in Uganda to expose the limiting tendency of traditional conflict management to maintain the *status quo*.

The third main theoretical school has emerged from this recognition of the inherent dynamism of conflict situations. The conflict transformation approach goes beyond the resolution and the containment of issues that fuel violent conflict. As an alternative to the other two approaches, conflict transformation may reflect a better understanding of the nature of conflict itself. In 1997, Lederach published a book titled *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, which peace scholars and practitioners widely recognize as a major milestone in the development of conflict transformation theory. Lederach argues that social conflict is ‘by nature lodged in long-standing relationships’ (*ibid*: 14) that are cyclical and episodic in nature, and that it holds the power to transform the people entrenched in these relationships. If left unchecked, these transformations can spiral the conflict into social destruction. Lederach’s conflict transformation approach aims to reduce this potential by helping to transform the relationships, interests and discourses that support the continuation of violent conflict. He proposes a model for understanding the ‘dynamic process’ of peacebuilding as based on two central concepts. The first concept views conflict as a progression that moves through different stages. The second concept views peacebuilding as a process made up of multiple interdependent roles, functions and activities. Significantly, this approach operates at a number of different levels. It recognizes that enduring peace depends on structural changes that address inequalities and injustices, as well as on individual- and community-level changes to beliefs and perceptions (Lederach 1995, cited in Shirlow et al 2005: 69-70).

The conflict transformation approach has been developed subsequently by both theorists and practitioners. In practice, conflict transformation is a comprehensive and wide-ranging approach that emphasizes the need to provide support for groups within the society in conflict, rather than relying on the mediation of outsiders. As Kriesberg and Miller (2009: 25) point out: ‘Many analyses of peacebuilding focus on external intervention, but the partisans themselves bear the greatest burden in building a stable and just peace.’ Constructive conflict is seen as a vital agent of and catalyst for change that ‘challenge(s) norms and values...and address(es) the distribution of power at the heart of political processes’ (Dayton and Kriesberg 2009: 1-2). Crucially, it recognises that conflicts change gradually through a series of smaller or larger changes, thus affecting different system levels at different times. Like many theories pressed into practice, it must be continually adjusted in response to the changing nature of the conflicts it addresses. According to Miall (2004: 3), conflict transformation is ‘best viewed not as a wholly new approach, but rather as a re-conceptualisation of the field in order to make it more relevant to contemporary conflicts.’

Conflict transformation may currently be the most widely embraced approach, but it is not without weakness. As Miall (2004: 17) notes, '(m)ost theories concentrate either on the causes and development of conflict or on the creation and sustenance of a peacebuilding capacity, and fail to sufficiently integrate an understanding of how the preventors and causes of conflict interact.' He argues that the conflict transformation approach still lacks precise theories to capture the 'emergent properties' of conflict. For Ryan (2007), the concept of transformation is as ambiguous as the concept of resolution. He argues that although transformation is considered an 'attractive word' (*ibid*: 1) associated with appealing traits like optimism, not all transformations are positive. Ryan points out that dictators like Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao and Hitler were all 'social transformers' who approached social problems with an ideologically-driven, messianic commitment to radical change (*ibid*: 26). Moreover, fear, loss and destruction in war could also be seen as an unintended experience of transformation (Frykman 1997, cited by Ryan 2007: 59). For Ryan, transformation is an underdeveloped concept that can be criticized for its vagueness and ambiguities. As with the concept of conflict resolution, conflict transformation likewise lacks clarity. In addressing mediation, it potentially confuses the process with the outcome. However, Ryan also argues that negative transformations may have a powerful role to play, providing clues and guidance with regard to the potential for positive transformation in the post-violence stage of conflict (*ibid*: 59).

Curiously, the scholarship on conflict transformation pays only cursory attention to the transformation of spatial relationships. In conflicts entrenched in competing claims to territory, people may form relationships across a broad spectrum, from physical to imaginary, with these contested places. In many settings, such as Israel-Palestine and Northern Ireland, the conflict may be rooted in competing struggles to define contested terrain. Following Graham (2004), I argue that the challenge of peacebuilding involves the creation of shared place-based identities among the conflicting parties. To this end, the spatial dimensions of cultural conflict cannot be underestimated. In the next section, I explore the scope for cultural geography in conflict transformation theory.

2. Conflict Transformation and Cultural Geography

In 2005, Lederach published a book titled *The Moral Imagination*. The type of imagination under discussion is no less than that which he believes to hold the capacity to transcend violence. The 'moral imagination,' according to Lederach, must be explored in two broad directions. In one direction lies the creative process itself, 'the wellspring that

feeds the building of peace' (*ibid*: 5). In the other direction, however, Lederach issues this call:

(W)e must understand and feel the landscape of protracted violence and why it poses such deep-rooted challenges to constructive change. In other words, we must set our feet deeply into the geographies and realities of what destructive relationships produce, what legacies they leave, and what breaking their violent patterns will require. (*ibid*: 5)

Lederach's language captures the geographic dimensions to conflict transformation theory, but few (if any) theorists in peace studies have interrogated their scope. This is surprising, given the importance of place-derived identities and relationships in conflicts that involve contested territorial claims. In these types of conflicts, the land itself becomes as important an actor as the conflicting parties. As Miall (2004: 8) notes, the meaning of a conflict depends largely on the context out of which it arises, with assumptions and attitudes shaped by previous relationships, and driving behaviours based on memories of the past. In this way, place – as both physical entity and symbolic concept – and the context for peacebuilding are closely entwined.

The conflict transformation approach emphasizes the transformation of relationships, interests and discourses that underlie and fuel the conflict. In general, these tend to focus on interpersonal dynamics, firmly couched in social relationships between the conflicting parties. But the 'relational space' that Lederach (2005: 7) describes could also apply to that between people and place. People in conflict, especially those conflicts involving competing territorial claims, may cultivate deep relationships with these contested places. The importance of place to the development of a conflict, and its delicate aftermath, cannot be ignored.

Conflicts in divided societies are often created by – and, in turn, re-create – situations of entrenched, antagonistic ethnic identity. Ethnic identity can be particularly fierce when linked to a collective memory of past or present traumas (Polkingham and Byrne 2001). Ross (2001) describes these polarizing events as 'psychocultural traumas,' or non-negotiable cultural claims in which chosen traumas are incorporated into a narrative of identity and passed on. In a landmark treatise, Smith (1986: 21-31) developed six components of ethnicity around which an ethnic group tends to cohere: 1) an identifying name; 2) a common myth of descent, involving either temporal or spatial origins; 3) a shared history, based on shared memories that serve to unite successive generations; 4) a distinctive and shared culture, such as common language, religion or

customs, that are reflected in the lifestyles and values of the group; 5) a link to place, for instance a homeland or territory; and 6) a sense of solidarity, derived from a meaningful sense of self-identity and self-worth. Smith synthesized these six criteria to define 'ethnic groups' as 'named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, *having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity*' (*ibid*: 32, emphasis mine).

Following Smith's definition, a sense of belonging to a place is fundamental to the formation of ethnic identity. Ashworth and Graham (2005: 3) describe the active process of ascribing identities to places: 'In defining the discourses of inclusion and exclusion that constitute identity, people call upon an affinity with places or, at least, with representations of places, which, in turn, are used to legitimate their claim to those places.' Community and place, both of which can be read as products of the imagination, thus form a reciprocal relationship:

The group is seen as being formed by the place ('we are what we are because we come from here') while the place becomes special through its association with the group ('here is where we were formed and thus belong.')...Space is transformed into place through traditions, memories, myths and narratives and its uniqueness confirmed and legitimated in terms of their relationship to particular representations of the past. (Ashworth et al 2007: 54)

If community and place are social constructs, then '(a)ll constructs of space and place, even those that pretend to 'neutrality,' carry an ideological intent (Ashworth et al 2007: 63). Not surprisingly, the assertion of ethnic identities on and over contested territory can create new sources of conflict, or provoke existing ones. Crang (1998: 162) describes the 'circular logic' whereby one's right to belong to a space is seen as dependent on possessing the culture that is also used to identify the territory, potentially 'forming a potent combination of 'blood and soil.'" Given that identity and sense of place are deeply entwined, the process of peacebuilding must address the ways in which their entanglement contributes to conflict.

Despite its relative nuance, the conflict transformation approach tends to sideline the importance of identity in building peace. Although conflict transformation recognizes the complex dynamics of relationships, the approach lacks an understanding of the ways in which identity profoundly shapes these relationships, alongside the discourses, perceptions and beliefs that also must be challenged and transformed. Peacebuilding in

contested territories involves not only the transformation of relationships between people but also, and crucially, transformation of the relationships between identity and place. For conflicts entrenched in competing claims over territory, geography could bring vital perspectives and dimensions to their theorization. I argue that conflict transformation theory could benefit from a deeper engagement with geography in general, and with cultural geography in particular. Cultural geography concerns itself with understanding people and the places they occupy, through analyzing cultural identities and cultural landscapes. Norton (2006: 21-22, original emphasis) succinctly summarizes the importance of place to cultural geography: 'Identity is not simply a matter of *who* we are, but also *where* we are.'

In recent times, cultural geography itself has experienced a transformation 'from an essentially descriptive, empiricist enterprise to a more conceptually varied search for understanding and meaning of both peoples and places' (Norton 2006: 2). Although cultural geography is a contested arena, with an abundance of vying approaches and research interests, at its heart is a fundamental concern with how cultural groups create landscapes that, in turn, shape their cultural identities. To this end, I argue that cultural landscapes can provide a conceptual framework for interrogating the relationships between place and identity that lie at the heart of conflict over contested territory. In the next section, I draw on scholarship from contemporary cultural geography to explore the potential for contested landscapes to serve as a theoretical framework for studies of conflict and peacebuilding.

3. *Contested Landscapes*

Although landscape is a basic organizing concept for the discipline of geography, 'landscape' itself is a fiercely contested term. The word is an English rendering of the German composite '*landschaft*.' The first part, *land*, refers to the area used to support a group of people; the second, *schaft*, refers to the molding of a social unity. Together, they refer to group activities and experiences that occur in a particular place. As Norton (2006) describes, early 20th century geographers inherited this conceptual framework, along with a pictorial meaning of landscape that emerged through the European tradition of scenic painting. In recent times, however, geographers have turned away from 'longstanding material and empirical traditions of enquiry' (Wylie 2007: 15) and their attendant interpretations of landscape, towards more complex and multi-faceted interpretations.

Within cultural geography, landscapes hold a pivotal and shifting focus of inquiry between people, place, culture and identity. Over the past century, geographers have

complicated the concept of landscape enormously, from ‘a transparent window through which reality may be unproblematically viewed’ (Moore and Whelan 2007: x) to an interpretation of landscapes as material and metaphorical sites of representation. In many ways, the evolution of contemporary cultural geography can be traced through the evolving concept of landscape itself (Wylie 2007; Norton 2006). More recently, the development of ‘new’ cultural geography has focused analysis of landscape on matters of cultural identity – the formation of identities with reference both to other groups of people and to places, as these places are themselves contested. In his historiography of landscape and memory, O’Keeffe (2007: 4) argues that scholars who embrace a contemporary, constructivist understanding of landscape see humans ‘as situated inside landscapes, forming and re-forming them.’ As Norton (2006: 2) notes, ‘new’ cultural geography, like its conceptual predecessors, is engrossed with a ‘fundamental concern with how cultural groups create landscapes that, in turn, reinforce their cultural identities.’

There is a question as to what constitutes ‘landscape,’ and particularly a ‘cultural landscape.’ On the one hand, and outside of academia, the latter has been pressed into service by organizations as diverse as the American Society of Landscapes Architects, the United States National Park Service, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). As Alanen and Melnick (2000: 7-8) point out, each of these organizations adopts its own definition of the term. UNESCO offers a particularly intriguing and high-profile example. The sites on its World Heritage List are perhaps the best known examples of ‘cultural landscapes.’ UNESCO (2009) defines the cultural landscapes on the World Heritage List as those sites that ‘testify to the creative genius, social development and the imaginative and spiritual viability of humanity.’ To UNESCO, cultural landscapes are distinct physical entities – cultivated mountain terraces, for example, or sacred temples – whose preservation the organization claims for the ‘collective identity’ of humanity.

In stark contrast are interpretations of the cultural landscape as more symbolic, and less moored to physical space. For instance, Ashworth et al (2007: 60-62) see landscapes as largely symbolic entities that ‘function as significant sources for unravelling present geographies of political and cultural identities.’ Matless (1998, 2000) removes the focus from the specificity of place; he describes ‘cultures of landscape’ that place the focus upon more multifaceted cultural movements, debates and practices, in which ‘landscape’ circulates both materially and symbolically, such as in debates over citizenship, identity and planning. In yet another contrast, Alanen and Melnick (2000: 16) describe landscape as ‘both artefact and system,’ as ‘product and process.’ Wylie (2007), however, may best capture the ambiguity by exploring landscape as a series of tensions

between proximity and distance; observation and inhabitation; eye and land; and culture and nature. He argues for an interpretation of 'landscape as both material entity *and* symbolic meaning, as both persistent in form and changeable in meaning' (page 193, original emphasis).

With respect to my own work, I have been influenced greatly by Matless, and to a far lesser extent by Wylie. Although both scholars represent a later phase of 'new' cultural geographies, their approaches to landscape differ significantly. Wylie works largely within the rubric of 'phenomenology,' a branch of European continental philosophy that emerged in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. In his overview of its recent applications to landscape, Wylie (2007) emphasizes that like most major philosophical traditions, phenomenology has been practiced and defined in diverse ways. Within cultural geography, phenomenological understandings of landscape have been harnessed to address issues of culture-nature relations, embodiment and performance (for example, Tuan 1974, 1977; Seamon 1979; Seamon and Mugerauer 1989; Relph 1976). In recent times, its primary advocates have grappled with these ideas through the rich theoretical movement of 'non-representational theory,' which emphasizes and foregrounds the body – with its attendant practices, performances and lived experiences – in the world (for example, Thrift 1996, 1997, 1999; Lorimer 2006). Lorimer (2005: 83) describes non-representational theory as 'an umbrella term for diverse work that seeks better to cope with our self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual multisensual worlds.' Although embodiment is not my primary focus, in its emphasis on tactility (see Hetherington 2003; Lewis 2000) and particularly Wylie's (2002, 2005) accounts of walking, phenomenological understandings of landscape resonate to a small degree with my own work in Northern Ireland.

However, for the most part I share the scepticism that other geographers have articulated with regard to non-representational theory and landscape phenomenology (for example, Castree and MacMillan 2004; Nelson 1999; Jacobs and Nash 2003). In an early review of the emerging oeuvre, Nash (2000: 661-662) observes:

Turning away from representation and texts would mean abandoning the tradition within cultural geography...of exploring the intersections between representations, discourses, materials things, spaces and practices – the intertwined and interacting material and social world...My wariness about abstract accounts of body-practices and the return to phenomenological notions of 'being-in-the-world' arises also from the danger...that they constitute a retreat from feminism

and the politics of the body in favour of the individualistic and universalizing sovereign subject.

Her critique emphasizes the tendency of these approaches to foreground a romanticized individual subject, but also points more broadly to their contextual limitations. As Wylie (2007: 181, original emphasis) himself admits, ‘the broader politics of identity construction have had difficulties with a phenomenological approach, because such an approach appears to neglect the constraining and determining effects of forms of *power*.’

To this end, my conceptualization of ‘cultural landscape’ draws more forcefully from what Matless (1998) describes as ‘cultures of landscape,’ which conceive landscape as one part of a constructed, circulating system of cultural meaning, in which everyday landscape practices are contextualized in relation to the broader cultural discourses that create them. He acknowledges that while what he calls ‘doubleness’ – for example, representation and materiality, financial and emotional value – may create difficulties for defining landscape, such complexity may also ‘be at the heart of contests over it’ (Matless 2003: 231). Fruitfully, he draws on Latour’s (1993) metaphor of the shuttle to describe how landscape ‘weav(es) through matters often held apart’ (Matless 2003: 231). To Matless (1998: 12),

‘the question of what landscape ‘is’ or ‘means’ can always be subsumed in the question of how it works; as a vehicle of social and self identity, as a vehicle of social and self identity; as a site for the claiming of a cultural authority...as a space for different kinds of living.’

His emphasis on *how*, rather than *what*, emphasizes landscape not as inert ‘backdrop to action’ but as ‘culturally charged’ (Matless 2000: 142). This understanding resonates powerfully with my own work, centred at the dynamic, ever-shifting intersection of culture, landscape and identity. Like O’Keeffe (2007: 4), I invoke landscapes ‘that exist reflexively in our cognitive as well as our corporeal experiences of the material world, shaping and being shaped by our simultaneously multiple identities as humans.’

An understanding of landscape and identity as socially constructed resonates with an understanding that multiple values exist in the cultural landscape, thus giving rise to multiple interpretations. For example, Dubrow (2000: 152) illustrates how landscapes may be transformed into a ‘battleground of contested meanings’ through the example of late-19th century Asian-American immigrants to the United States. He draws his example from Washington State, in the northwestern corner of the country, in a time of rising anti-

Chinese sentiment. As Chinese labourers came to feel more settled, they developed a practice of storing potatoes and other food sources in underground pits; these could later be planted as part of the new season's crops. To the Chinese labourers, these storage pits represented wealth upon which they could draw in the coming year. To local white exclusionists, however, they represented a threatening transition from Chinese seasonal labour to year-round settlement. Dubrow's example highlights how different interpretations of a landscape might fuel conflicts involving competing territorial claims, in which different groups ascribe different meanings and narratives of identity to the same contested space.

Contested meanings and values in landscapes can have profound effects on identity, particularly with regard to territorial claims. As Hardesty (2000) explains, people invoke their own cultural and social images in the creation of cultural landscapes. These landscapes reflect and form the continuous process of 'world-making' (*ibid*: 171), changing as people themselves and their cultures change. Along similar lines, Crang (1998: 162) argues that the cultural landscape can be seen as an agent in the process of imbuing territory with the ideas of a specific cultural identity. Hence, the collision of different landscapes may create social and political controversies that involve the maintenance of cultural identities. Powerful, paradigmatic examples of the relationship between identity and cultural landscape can be found in scholarship on the Middle East. Selwyn (1995), for instance, illuminates how the Israeli landscape is used to provide a metaphorical setting to define 'us' versus 'other,' and to construct myths of defence. Symbols of activity on and attitudes toward Israeli land then find their way into the construction of cultural identity. Likewise, in his analysis of the contested symbolic landscape of the Rashidieh refugee camp in Lebanon, Ramadan (2009) explores landscape as a medium of competition between groups. He argues that through the visual display of posters, murals and flags, landscape becomes a medium through which different Palestinian factions attempt to articulate and reproduce their power, influence and ideologies.

Indeed, the co-constitutive relationship between landscapes and social practices has been widely explored in contemporary cultural geography, particularly within feminist and postcolonial critique (for example, Einhorn 2000). As Morin (2003: 319) points out: 'Debates about landscape do not simply rest on what landscape *is* but also on what landscape *does* – how it is produced and how it works in social practice' (original emphasis). She interprets landscape as an ideological and symbolic process that holds the active power to (re)produce relationships among people, and between people and the material world:

Landscape always carries with it a set of ‘representational practices’ [that] refer to how people see, interpret and represent the world around them *as* landscape, and how that represented landscape reflects and actually helps produce a set of lived relationships taking place ‘on the ground.’ (*ibid*: 320, original emphasis)

Her observation is particularly salient to places recovering from violent conflict, where messages conveyed within and through the landscape enforce the ‘lived relationships’ that underpin the processes of conflict and peacebuilding, as well as the spectrum between the two. Thus, I argue that the transformation of contested landscapes holds powerful implications for the people who live there.

Transformation, however, is no easy task, as conflicts involving contested landscapes and identity are frequently bound up in the politics of memory. As Schama (1996: 7; cited in Einhorn 2000: 710) observes: ‘Landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of work.’ In his overview of landscape research within cultural geography, Wylie (2007) identifies memory as perhaps the strongest focus of academic inquiry in recent times. Mitchell (2003: 790) describes landscape as a ‘concretization and maker of memory,’ echoing the emphasis that others have placed on the mutually constitutive properties of landscape and social practice. Morin (2003) illustrates this process in a discussion of monumental landscapes that carry laudatory messages about war heroes and military conquest. The messages that the monuments deploy (for instance, a particular version of the past that celebrates masculine values) actively reproduce these values in the present, thereby shaping current social practices and collective memories. In debates over the material use and symbolic meaning of landscapes, memorial and heritage sites, in particular, ‘(l)andscape is conceived in terms of struggle and conflict’ (Wylie 2007: 15).

In places recovering from violent conflict, the fraught politics of heritage – like those of memory – are embedded in contested landscapes. Indeed, Moore and Whelan (2007) point out that as loci of both power and resistance, cultural landscapes should be considered a key element in the heritage process. O’Keeffe (2007: 9-10) echoes their argument in the connections he draws between identity, culture, heritage and place: ‘communities invest in landscape formation, and...locate their identities within landscapes or have their identities metamorphized as landscapes. Thus all landscapes...qualify as somebody’s heritage.’ I argue that the contestation of cultural landscapes for places recovering from conflict is based, in part, on contested narratives of heritage and identity. Thus, the process of peacebuilding calls for the reworking of these contested, place-based narratives. In Chapter Three, I will develop this argument through

my case study of Northern Ireland. In the next section, however, I discuss heritage in greater depth and its role in creating and mediating social conflict.

4. *The Challenge of Shared Heritage*

The transformation of contested landscapes inevitably creates encounters between conflicting narratives of cultural heritage. As the study of heritage creates a dialogue between community, history, identity and place, the process of peacebuilding, therefore, involves the search for shared forms of heritage on which to build a shared future. Ashworth and Graham (2005: 4) are emphatic that heritage is not merely the study of the past. Instead, they define heritage as:

concerned with the ways in which very selective material artefacts, mythologies, memories and traditions become resources for the present. The contents, interpretations and representations of the resource are selected according to the demands of the present; an imagined past provides resources for a heritage that is to be bequeathed to an imagined future.

Heritage, in this context, is concerned primarily with meanings, which then give value to material resources. These values may shift over time, ‘when pasts have to be reinvented to reflect new presents. Thus, heritage is as much about forgetting as remembering the past’ (*ibid*). Ashworth and Graham (*ibid*: 7) then define heritage as ‘also a knowledge, a cultural product and a political resource,’ all of which serve crucial socio-political functions.

Heritage plays a powerful role in shaping identity, particularly at the scale of the community. ‘Collective identity’ is a powerful concept, which has been interpreted with varying degrees of suspicion by heritage practitioners and scholars. On one hand, and to return to an example from the previous section, UNESCO suggests that the sites on its World Heritage List form part of the ‘collective identity’ of humanity. According to this logic, these physical sites – regardless of position, location, or context – connect people globally in what Anderson (1991) describes as an ‘imagined community.’ In contrast, geographic scholarship on the concept of collective identity is careful to address its relationship to scale. For example, Robertson and Hall (2007) draw on their study of memorialization in the Scottish Highlands to argue that attention should be paid to local

identity and to the ways in which it is mediated through contested narratives of the past. Likewise, Ashworth and Graham (2005: 3) point out that:

(T)he concept of ‘collective identity,’ like the notions of ‘collective memory’ or ‘collective heritage,’ with which it is strongly related does not supersede or replace individual identity. It does, however, allow generalization and location of ideas of belonging within political and social contexts.

Their interpretation, while acknowledging the usefulness of invoking the notion, also suggests that collective forms of identity must work in tandem with those at other scales. This is particularly important in places recovering from conflict. As I discussed in the first section of this chapter, the process of peacebuilding requires the reworking of relationships at all levels of society.

The creation of collective identity is an active process, in which memory plays a critical role. As O’Keeffe (2007: 5) argues, ‘at whatever scale a collective is constituted, we have no collective capacity to share memories that are not in some way externally programmed for us.’ To Robertson and Hall (2007), these external programmes have distinctly geographic dimensions. In an evocation of the contested cultural landscapes I discussed in the previous section, they describe a ‘psychic terrain’ of symbolic spaces that attempt to fix collective memory, and act as prompts for a shared identity. Likewise, Busted (2007) draws on the contested and controversial commemoration ritual of the Manchester Martyrs – three Irish nationalists convicted and executed for the 1867 murder of a policeman in Manchester, England – to emphasize the process of selection in seeking historical justification for current political attitudes and practices. He argues that group memory ‘is a fluid, flexible construct subject to constant renewal’ (*ibid*: 70) that draws the past, present and future into complex dialogue.

In societies recovering from violent conflict, these connections are particularly fraught. Winter (2007) excavates this dialogue in his study of ‘post-conflict’ Cambodia and domestic tourism related to the annual Khmer New Year festival. He explores the cultural landscape of Angkor, itself a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site, as not merely a relic of an ancient past, but as a form of ‘living heritage,’ pivotal in the articulation of cultural, ethnic and national identities. Within the present-day site of Angkor lies the presence of ‘imagined pasts and futures’; the idea of memory focuses attention ‘to the ways places and times are actively constituted and reconstituted.’ Winter draws upon memory to illuminate how his Cambodian research participants simultaneously reappropriated, remembered and forgot recent traumatic events through

the personal experience of being a tourist at the heritage site of Angkor. He argues that the ‘twin processes of forgetting and remembering recent histories [is] vital to the (re)formation of collective identities’ (*ibid*: 134).

Given the complexities that surround heritage and its role in the creation of collective identities, the potential for contestation is rife, and nowhere more so than in societies recovering from violent conflict. Heritage may refer to past and future, but it is centred in the present and, hence, ‘is created, shaped and managed by, and in response to the demands of the present. As such it is open to constant revision and change and is also both a source and a repercussion of social conflict’ (Ashworth et al 2007: 3). Ashworth and Graham (2005: 5-7) declare that the concept of heritage is ‘inevitably contested,’ particularly when places and objects are involved in issues related to the legitimization of power structures. Tensions arise from the ‘continuous interplay of the official/unofficial and insider/outsider dichotomies that characterize every single manifestation of heritage’ (*ibid*: 11). Ashworth et al (2007: 5) attribute these dichotomies to the ‘zero-sum’ characteristics of heritage: ‘The creation of any heritage actively or potentially disinherits or excludes those who do not subscribe to, or are embraced within, the terms of meaning attending that heritage.’ Graham and McDowell (2007: 345) describe this bluntly: ‘All heritage is someone’s heritage, and therefore logically not someone else’s...any creation of heritage from the past disinherits someone else’s.’ As Robertson and Hall (2007: 22) argue, inevitable contestation and conflict emerge in any form of identity- and heritage-making, especially with regard to the question, ‘Whose heritage?’ They point out that ‘both heritage and identity are susceptible to contestation from within as much as they are from without’ (*ibid*: 34). Along similar lines, Busteed (2007) argues that while collective memory is central to the formulation of national identity, within any group there are alternative readings of events and how they should be commemorated.

The processes by which heritage creates and manages collective identities are ripe for rupture. As Ashworth and Graham (2005: 9) argue, ‘(t)he past validates the present by conveying an idea of timeless values and unbroken narratives.’ However, different people at different times create different narratives of belonging, suggesting that place images are unstable through time, and thus complicating the assumption of a common linear narrative of belonging. These narratives of belonging are forged through a connection to place that is fundamental to identity. The relationships between heritage, identity and place are mediated through a ‘complex series of overlapping imaginings (or non-imaginings) of a place that, quite inevitably, create conflicts of allegiance’ (Ashworth et al 2007: 54). As contemporary societies become increasingly diverse and fragmented, ‘many pasts become transformed through many heritages into many identities...which may support, coexist with or conflict with each other’ (*ibid*: 45). Moreover, an

individual's experiences of heritage are often plural, consumed for diverse purposes and often in combination, through an individual's capability to identify with different spatial, jurisdictional and imaginative scales.

For societies recovering from violent conflict, political settlements relating to competing territorial claims are only the beginning of the long process of building peace. Underpinning these claims to territory are deeply entrenched narratives of heritage that anchor people to place in the past, present and future. Northern Ireland, as I will discuss in subsequent chapters, provides a fascinating example of the tangled web of conflict and heritage in its multiple, contested variations. I argue that the process of peacebuilding must address how competing versions of heritage might be reworked and reimagined, in order to create opportunities for new, shared narratives of identity and belonging to emerge.

5. *New Places, New Identities, New Possibilities*

Conflicts arising from contested spaces may at their heart be rooted in contested ideas about the identities of place. As the process of peacebuilding transforms contested landscapes, new possibilities emerge for how people imagine these places and their relationships to them. The challenge of building peace is, therefore, also the challenge of reworking identities. In this section, I outline my framework for theorizing identity, with particular emphasis on feminist and postcolonial scholarship. Postcolonial and feminist theorizations offer a rich set of 'conceptual resources' (Young 2001: 64) for probing the complicated questions emerging from spatialized and ideological conflict; they attempt to destabilize fixities and to open the concept of identity to multiple interpretations. In doing so, these theoretical explorations suggest ways in which conflict might be transformed.

In societies recovering from violent conflict, the transformation of contested landscapes opens possibilities for new ways of thinking about place. Unlike the rigid interpretations of place and belonging that are invoked during the conflict, the 'post-conflict' aftermath calls for reinterpretations that can be shared by all. Massey's (1993, 1994) work offers a useful theoretical framework. In her influential book *Space, Place and Gender*, she argues forcefully for a new idea of place:

Thinking of places in this way implies that they are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations. It implies that their 'identities' are constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than by

counterposition to them. It reinforces the idea, moreover, that those identities will be multiple...and that what is to be the dominant image of any place will be a matter of contestation and will change over time. (Massey 1994: 12)

Massey (1993: 66) advocates a 'progressive concept of place' that resists reactionary notions of place as a single, essential identity constructed out of introverted history. She argues instead for a concept of place that is neither static nor bounded, and whose multiple identities are full of internal conflicts (Massey 1994). Although criticized within postcolonial literature for its assumption of white community as stable background (McGuinness 2002: 111), Massey's essay has also been lauded as nothing less than a reimagination of space. As Nash (2005b: 64) emphasizes, Massey reimagines the local via interconnection with wider geographies, thus refiguring identities as 'multiply scaled.' Her work is particularly relevant in theorizing the transformations of place – both physical and imaginary – that occur in the process of building peace.

Massey's re-orientation of place away from static essentialism and toward multiplicity illuminates similar possibilities for re-orientating the human identities and relationships that flow through and create her progressive concept of space. A sizeable body of scholarship challenges more traditional conceptualizations of essentialized identity categories. Feminist scholars – especially those who foreground issues of 'race/ethnicity/imperialism' (Beasley 2005) – are particularly engaged with this task. Critiques of the exclusivity of the mainstream, predominantly white women's movement led to the development of multiple feminist identities and the recognition that 'identity is always both internally fractured and externally multiple' (Bondi 1993: 97). As Brewer (2001) points out, many social identity theories now recognize that individuals derive identity from more than one social group, and that they develop strategies for managing these multiple identities. I argue that for societies engaged in the process of peacebuilding, an acknowledgment of identity as nuanced and multiple offers scope for reworking more rigid interpretations that previously had contributed to and sustained the conflict.

Alongside its other transformations, I argue that the process of peacebuilding creates opportunities for reframing senses of belonging by encouraging the derivation of identity from diverse and multiple categories. The concept of intersectionality offers a useful theoretical framework. Minow (1997: 38, cited in Valentine 2007: 12) defines intersectionality as 'the way in which any particular individual stands at the crossroads of multiple groups.' Valentine (2007: 18) argues that the concept offers a framework in which to develop 'geographical thinking' about the relationship between multiple categories of belonging. By emphasizing the fluidity and instability of intersections

between categories, the concept of intersectionality emphasizes the complex ways in which ‘identities are unmade as well as made, and undone as well as done.’ Valentine’s interpretation of intersectionality contains a welcome note of caution, acknowledging both the challenge of negotiating the crossroads of multiple categories of belonging and also the inherent messiness involved in such transformations of identity.

The reworking of identity also finds scope in Hall’s theorization of new ethnicities. To Hall (1992: 257), ethnicity ‘acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual.’ Hall goes beyond Smith’s (1986) six-point definition of ethnicity, which I outlined in the second section of this chapter. He calls instead for the decoupling of ethnicity as it currently functions in the dominant discourse. For example, and with regard to British identity politics, Hall describes the equivalence of ethnicity with nationalism, imperialism, racism and the state as the points of attachment around which a distinctive and reactionary English ethnicity has been constructed (*ibid*: 254). Instead, he presents an alternative conceptualization of ethnicity as ‘a new cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses *difference*, and which depends, in part, on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities’ (*ibid*: 257, original emphasis). In a resonance with Massey’s (1994) concept of unbounded place, Hall describes how a more flexible interpretation of ethnicity, ‘predicated on difference and diversity,’ might shape the construction of identity:

[There is a] recognition that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, a particular culture, without being contained by that position...We are all, in that sense, *ethnically* located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are. (Hall 1992: 258, original emphasis)

In this way, Hall acknowledges the specificity of place, history and culture, and their importance to ‘our...sense of who we are,’ even as he frees us from their constraints. Such an interpretation holds powerful ramifications for societies emerging from conflict, as they engage with the task of opening previously rigid narratives of cultural heritage to new, flexible ways of locating ethnic identity.

Indeed, the reworking of ethnic identities that underlie conflict holds powerful possibilities for developing new forms of belonging in a transforming social landscape. For example, Dwyer (2002: 185), in her study of young British Muslim women, argues that the negotiation of ‘new ethnicities’ and ‘hybrid identities’ can reveal how alternative

forms of national belonging in postcolonial Britain might be imagined. She draws on the concept of ‘diasporic identities,’ which cut across and displace national boundaries and, in doing so, challenge the fixity of place-bound identities (Brah 1996, cited in Dwyer 2000: 475). Dwyer argues that identities must be seen as discursive formations, constituted within particular social, cultural and economic relations. As with Valentine’s (2007) theorizing of intersectionality, Dwyer (2000: 484) describes ways in which her respondents articulated alternative identities that draw on an ‘alternative Islamic diaspora,’ and argues that such identities are ‘shaped by wider globalised discourses as well as local experiences.’ More broadly, Dwyer’s argument illuminates the powerful, shifting relationships between new forms of identity and new meanings of place. These are the relationships that lie at the heart of my research on Northern Ireland.

For societies recovering from violent conflict, the advent of peace creates and coincides with new forms of engagement with the wider world, which may lead to new relationships between place, heritage and identity. The process of redefinition, alongside its attendant transformations, holds both opportunity and challenge in equal measures. As Ashworth and Graham (2005: 4-5) observe, however, dissonance is not necessarily destructive. Paradoxically, it is also a condition of the construction of pluralist, multi-cultural societies that strive for inclusive conceptualizations of the past. The very lack of consistency embodied in dissonance offers scope for constructive imaginings of identity, drawn from shifting conceptualizations of transforming places.

The process of peacebuilding calls upon identities that are malleable and can develop in pace with the other transformations at work in societies recovering from conflict. To this end, Hall’s (1996: 2) discursive approach, which ‘sees identification as a construction, a process never completed,’ may best encapsulate the nuance necessary for this work. His concept of identity

accepts that identities are never unified and...increasingly fragmented and fracturing; never singular but multiple constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation...Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from,’ so much as what we might become. (*ibid*: 4)

In this way, Hall's conceptualization of identity points toward new ways of negotiating senses of belonging, and new possibilities for defining relationships. Yet lurking behind such optimism is the possibility that identities and ideas of place might become more – not less – entrenched and less inclined toward positive, creative change. These ambiguities, which I will explore in relation to Northern Ireland's peace process, speak to both the challenges and the possibilities in places of tentative, waking peace.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for the importance of cultural geography to developing a more nuanced and comprehensive theoretical framework for the conflict transformation approach. I understand conflicts involving competing territorial claims to be rooted in contested ideas about the identities of place, and I have argued that the transformation of relationships between cultural identities and senses of place is crucial to the process of peacebuilding. I developed this argument by drawing on existing scholarship on contested cultural landscapes, exploring their potential for serving as a conceptual framework for investigating the transformations at work in places of recovering conflict. Finally, I have positioned the transformations of contested cultural landscapes – their challenges and their possibilities – within broader discussions of cultural heritage and new forms of identity and belonging.

Given the spotlight in which the politics of heritage, memory, identity and belonging unfold in places recovering from conflict, the idea of 'public' may offer a clue to their 'post-conflict' possibilities. In this regard, the work of Mitchell (1995; 1996) is particularly helpful. Mitchell (1995: 121) argues: 'Definitions of... 'the public' are not universal and enduring; they are produced rather through constant struggle in the past and in the present.' His conceptualization carries a critical spatial element, in which public space 'is the product of competing ideas about what constitutes space (order/control versus free; dangerous, interaction) and who constitutes 'the public' (*ibid*: 111). Such ambiguities are apt for societies emerging from civil war, as their long histories of struggle shape the dynamics of a peacetime present. To this end, and although beyond the scope of this dissertation, I suggest that the work of defining a shared, inclusive 'public' may represent a new discourse of peacebuilding, in which contested landscapes evolve and contested resources such as heritage and identity move into a shared public domain.

Curiously, there is very little scholarship on the concept of ‘public landscape’ within cultural geography. A recent on-line search of the geography database Geobase¹ revealed only eight papers that had listed the term as a keyword; of these papers, only two engage with the concept with any depth. In their study of Cyprus, Kliot and Mansfield (1997: 499) designate ‘public landscape’ as a set of elements ‘such as public meeting-places, parks and squares’ that comprise a wider political landscape of material systems, behaviours and ideologies. Bell (1999) adopts a slightly different tack in his study of national identity in Uzbekistan, focusing on the ways in which political elites have redesigned Tashkent’s ‘official public landscape’ (*ibid*: 184) to rally citizens around symbols of national autonomy. For both of these studies, ‘public landscape’ is linked to material manifestations of governance. Although I acknowledge these dimensions as important, I am drawn to a broader conceptualization of ‘public’ as diverse and multiple, and I seek to understand how ‘public landscape’ might be invoked for a study of peacebuilding. Could ‘public landscape’ be read as a viable transformation of a contested cultural landscape? As a peace process provokes such transformations, drawing the resources of heritage and identity into shared public domain, might the concept of ‘public landscape’ offer a useful theoretical framework for exploring subsequent phases of peacebuilding? These issues hover over my empirical research, and I will return to them in the final chapter.

My research traces two interlinking theoretical aims, which in turn provoke related research questions:

Aim 1. To examine how transformations of contested landscapes provoke new perceptions of place and geographic scale.

Research Questions:

- How do these transformations alter long-held meanings of places associated with violent conflict?
- How do they shape the ways in which people relate contested landscapes to broader regional, national and international scales?

Aim 2. To examine how transformations of contested landscapes shape the expression, creation and negotiation of identity.

¹ Search conducted on 9 March 2010.

Research Questions:

- How do these transformations help to create new dimensions of identity?
- How do people negotiate their shifting identities in a place of recovering conflict?
- How do interactions between shifting identities and transformations of contested landscapes address the legacy of violence and contribute to the process of building peace?

In the next chapter, I discuss these questions as they relate to my research site, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Chapter Three

Northern Ireland: A Case Study for Conflict Transformation

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I outlined some key theoretical ideas and concepts that shape my research questions. In this chapter, I ground my theoretical framework more concretely in my research site, Belfast, Northern Ireland. This is a place where fraught politics of culture, identity, heritage and belonging collide in the complex transformations of long-standing social conflict. To this end, Northern Ireland provides a fascinating case study for exploring the nexus of cultural geography and conflict transformation.

I begin with an overview of predominantly 20th century history, tracing the formation of Northern Ireland and its subsequent, contested evolution. I briefly describe the political tensions that erupted in the 30-year civil war known euphemistically as ‘The Troubles,’ highlighting the roles played by paramilitary forces on both sides and their enduring legacy of violence and distrust. The latter part of this section focuses on the peace process that culminated in and flows from the landmark 1998 peace accords. I describe the settlement’s ambivalent reception, drawing on arguments by its critics to amplify the unresolved questions of identity and belonging that still simmer in Northern Ireland.

The second section explores ‘post-conflict’ Belfast, where I conducted the bulk of my research. I describe how sectarianism shapes the urban landscape, with its striking patterns of housing segregation and the ‘interface areas’ that form frequent flashpoints of violence between warring communities. I discuss the effects of Belfast’s iconic ‘peace lines,’ which are designed and implemented to contain such urban violence, but which tend instead to deepen antagonisms. Equally iconic are the ways in which residents of Belfast mark territory with the patriotic colours of their respective ‘mother countries’ – green, white and orange for Ireland; red, white and blue for Britain – and with murals that reflect and deploy narratives of cultural identity. I then turn to other societal challenges that haunt contemporary Belfast: patterns of educational segregation, drug use and ongoing paramilitary presence. By developing a detailed description of the city’s entrenched sectarian legacy, I contextualize the contested cultural landscapes that I will explore through my empirical research.

The third section meditates on the complexities of place and identity that underpin Northern Ireland’s conflict, and that lie at the heart of my research. I discuss how the absence

of a shared identity (re)produces Northern Ireland's divisive, sectarian conceptualizations of physical and imaginative place. I draw on existing scholarship to explore how these unagreed and contested representations are rooted in the region's fraught historical narratives, and how Protestant-loyalists, in particular, struggle to anchor a valid sense of belonging against the more confident cultural narratives of Catholic-nationalists. I then gesture toward new conceptualizations of place and identity that resist their fossilized territorialization, focusing in particular on work by Reid (2004, 2005, 2008) that calls for the development of multiple and shared senses of place and belonging. I end this section by querying how new types of identity might emerge through the transformations of Belfast's ever-shifting and contested landscapes.

I turn to a related challenge of peacebuilding in the fourth section, as I examine how people negotiate contested senses of place and identity through the prism of history and heritage. I begin with a discussion of Northern Ireland's ambivalent postcolonial status, drawing on work by Nash (1999, 2002) and Howe (2000) that complicates simplistic clichés and repositions Northern Ireland's relationship to colonialism with greater ambiguity. I then turn to the complex questions surrounding the role of heritage, exploring how contested processes of memorialization and commemoration, through the inscription of victimhood on public space, perpetuate the conflict. I explore the contested landscapes of identity through the burgeoning popularity of 'conflict tourism' and through controversial plans to develop two of the most iconic landmarks of the Troubles: the Maze prison and the Crumlin Road courthouse. In the final paragraphs, I discuss the potential for developing a shared sense of heritage, and the role that this might play in connecting Northern Ireland to wider dimensions of identity, geography and belonging.

The fifth section focuses on Northern Ireland's rapidly shifting social landscape, as people who belong to neither of the dominant ethno-religious designations become increasingly visible. I begin with a brief overview of the political framework for Northern Ireland's race relations dialogue, outlining how major legislative acts have emphasized new directions in social policy. I then describe some recent trends in migration – by workers, refugees and asylum seekers – that are leading to greater ethnic diversity. Next, I discuss the rising patterns of violence and antagonism directed at Northern Ireland's so-called 'ethnic minorities.' I contextualize this phenomenon through a discussion of sectarianism, racism and the complex relationships between the two. Finally, I explore the challenges that Northern Ireland's sectarian conflict poses for minority ethnic residents, as they negotiate their identities and senses of belonging in a deeply divided society. I argue that the inclusion of

their diverse voices is crucial for contemporary scholarship on Northern Ireland's peace process.

The sixth and final section discusses the challenges of putting peace into practice. I begin by describing high-profile strategies that place 'good relations' at the centre of work in the community/voluntary sector, and then by describing the gap between rhetoric and reality. Next, I discuss the attempted application of conflict transformation theory to Northern Ireland, outlining the challenges of moving beyond superficial cross-community engagement. I explore the controversial practice of 'single identity' strategies that focus exclusively on one community, with the intent of building a confident base from which to engage with other cultures. The section ends with a discussion of diversity and pluralism as enshrined within Northern Ireland's community relations policy. I draw on the work of Nash (2005a), who argues for an expansive concept of diversity that recognizes multiple types and scales of difference, from which to create the basis for strong, confident, inclusive identities in Northern Ireland's rapidly shifting society. As I will explore in later chapters, my research is both based on and emerges from the practical complexities of the peace process.

The Troubles and their aftermath invite analysis from a wide range of social science disciplines. For my own purposes, however, I emphasize the themes most relevant to cultural geography: place, identity, culture, heritage. Although this chapter takes deceptively linear chronological form, these themes circulate fluidly throughout my study. They illuminate the spectre of contested history in contemporary attempts to build peace, and emphasize the fraught spatial dimensions of the Northern Ireland conflict. Through this chapter, my major theoretical themes take material form. Here, I contextualize the contested landscapes that I will explore in my empirical research, and I frame their transformations as both possibility and challenge for a divided society emerging from violent conflict.

1. Historical Overview

In 1921, following years of insurgence and mounting public anger, politicians from both sides of the Irish Sea negotiated the fate of Ireland. They drew an invisible line around six of the nine counties of Ulster, the island's northernmost province. In doing so, they created two distinct entities: the small statelet of Northern Ireland, which promptly chose to remain a part of the United Kingdom; and, from the remaining twenty-six counties, the autonomous state that would eventually become the Republic of Ireland. Their decision

created two divergent countries rooted in the same island. Today, the repercussions resonate powerfully.

Northern Ireland occupies fewer than 5,500 square miles, but the six counties that comprise it are among the most disputed in the world. Northern Ireland's predominantly Protestant unionists claim this territory for Britain, while the predominantly Catholic nationalists claim it for the Republic of Ireland.¹ The contention has its origins in the 17th century, when the British government implemented a policy of plantation settlement in an attempt to bring the colony more tightly under control. Over the next centuries, waves of English and Scottish settlers moved to Ireland. The majority settled in Ulster, which until then had been the most culturally Gaelic of the four Irish provinces, and thus the most resistant to British rule (Bardon 1982). In what has become known as the 'Protestant Ascendancy,' the settlers assumed a position of social, economic and political superiority over the native Catholic population they displaced. When political pressures necessitated the partition of Ireland in 1921, unionist negotiators selected only the six northeastern counties of Ulster that would ensure a Protestant majority; the predominantly Catholic counties of Cavan, Donegal, and Monaghan became part of the newly created Irish Free State.

The partition of Ireland created a 'pressure-cooker effect' that concentrated the conflict within a smaller territory (Anderson and Hamilton 1999: 107). From its inception, sectarianism has featured prominently in Northern Ireland. The British government at Westminster adopted a hands-off strategy, delegating virtually all aspects of domestic governance to the Protestant-dominated assembly based to the east of Belfast in Stormont. These unionist officials made no secret of their pro-Protestant biases and agendas. Not surprisingly, their attempt to maintain the *status quo* came at the expense of Northern Ireland's Catholic population. In the decades following partition, Catholics faced institutional discrimination at all levels, of which job and housing discrimination were the most fractious. State-run schools in Catholic neighbourhoods were woefully underfunded, leading to an exodus toward church-run schools, and resulting in a pattern of educational segregation that continues today (Sales 1997; Kilpatrick and Leitch 2004). Long-simmering resentment and rising anger created a situation ripe for violent conflict.

¹ In reality, these designations are far more complex than the popular, conflated renderings of religious and political identification might suggest. For the sake of simplicity, however, I will refer to Catholics and Protestants as interchangeable with nationalists and unionists, respectively. 'Republicans' and 'loyalists' refer to those nationalists and unionists who embrace more fervent ideological orientations.

The era known euphemistically as ‘The Troubles’ erupted in the western city of Derry/Londonderry² in 1969. As Catholics marched to protest their disenfranchisement and lack of political rights, British military forces responded by opening fire, killing thirteen unarmed protestors and injuring many more. ‘Bloody Sunday,’ as it came to be known, unleashed waves of violence across Northern Ireland. The Troubles ushered in an era of violent conflict that claimed over 3,000 lives, most of them civilian. During this time, the Royal Ulster Constabulary became the world’s most dangerous police force in which to serve (Mulgahy 2000), as republican dissidents routinely targeted those they perceived as aiding the British state. The Troubles entrenched Northern Ireland’s patterns of segregation and left as their legacy a culture of violence, suspicion and mutual antagonism.

One of the most striking characteristics of the Troubles was the prevalence of paramilitary violence on both sides of the conflict. On one side, the Irish Republic Army (IRA) renewed the long-standing republican struggle for a united, 32-county Ireland.³ The bombing expertise of the IRA became a hallmark of their violent campaign. They claimed 1,300 bombings in 1972 alone, including 22 that exploded in the space of 75 minutes, within a one-mile radius of Belfast’s city centre (Oppenheimer 2009). On the opposite side, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) campaigned to defend the six counties of Northern Ireland for Britain. The UVF was a smaller, more professional organization than the UDA; its capacity to produce and carry out bomb attacks was due to a steady stream of gelignite and detonators from loyalist sympathizers working in the Scottish mining industry (Cusack and McDonald 2008). The UDA, the largest loyalist paramilitary organization, emerged from the rioting that engulfed Belfast in the early days of the Troubles, when local residents formed defence militias to block access to their areas. At its peak, the UDA had 40,000 members and a large reservoir of support within loyalist communities (McDonald and Cusack 2004).

When it became clear that officials based at Stormont could no longer contain the escalating conflict, the British government prorogued Northern Ireland’s parliament and

² Derry is the preferred name used by nationalists, and Londonderry, by unionists. As Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: 33) point out: ‘Divisive naming is symptomatic of the perpetual reality that Northern Ireland, despite significant and meaningful political change, remains as a ‘disagreed’ place within which politics remain disagreeable.’

³ The original IRA formed in the early 20th century and was pivotal to the 1916 Easter Rising. The Provisional IRA emerged from the turbulence generated by the 1960s civil rights movement in the North. During the Troubles, this organization became known simply as the ‘IRA,’ and its members as ‘Provisionals’ or ‘Provos.’ (English 2003)

instituted direct rule from London. Over the years, politicians attempted a handful of interventions, from the failed Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 to the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement that acknowledged the Republic of Ireland's stake in the Northern Irish situation. Not until the 1990s did sufficient momentum gather for a lasting solution to the conflict. The peace process began with the declaration of the first ceasefire in 1994, and proceeded in fits and starts to the signing of the peace accords⁴ in April 1998. The watershed agreement intertwined the pursuit of an equitable and shared society within the framework for political settlement (Hughes and Donnelly 2004). Nationalists overwhelmingly supported the Agreement, indicating a new priority of internal political change over the nationalist goal of a united Ireland (Tonge 2004). Largely viewed by Catholics (including Sinn Féin, the IRA's political arm) as a 'transitional constitutional framework' (McGovern 2004: 640), the Agreement called for a devolved, power-sharing government; the release of political prisoners; and, significantly, 'parity of esteem' for Northern Ireland's two predominant political, social, and cultural traditions.

The Agreement, however, is far from a perfect solution. Many view it with ambivalence, arguing that it can be seen as either half full or half empty (Gallagher 2004: 639). It has been roundly criticized for the contradiction at its heart – an agreement based on two political bodies and mutual respect for both traditions, thus reinforcing two sets of exclusive nationalisms (Brown and MacGinty 2003; Anderson and Shuttleworth 1998). Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: 32) refer to it witheringly as 'The Belfast Disagreement,' arguing that its construction 'provided for and legitimised the capacity of each ethno-sectarian bloc to quixotically raise the demands they make of each other' (*ibid*: 177). Complicating the dynamic of these demands is the inability of unionism and loyalism to match republicanism's 'ideological certainties,' thereby undermining the 'concept of equality between the 'two traditions'' (Graham and Nash 2006: 259). Moreover, as Graham and Nash (*ibid*: 276) observe, critics argue that by privileging universal group rights, the Agreement has led to 'attributes of individual identity such as culture, nationality and religion, that are understood to be matters of choice in pluralist societies, being reinforced as determining public identifiers in Northern Ireland.'

The peace process today remains fragile. In many ways, Northern Ireland resides in a twilight zone, caught in its spiral of history and hatred. Its nationalistic fervour for its parent

⁴ The terminology of this agreement is fraught with political connotation. Although the 'Good Friday Agreement' is the common name invoked in the international media, some unionists view it as a term that is biased toward nationalism. Following Shirlow and Murtagh (2006), I will refer to this political settlement as the 'Agreement.'

countries is hugely out of step with the more cosmopolitan cultures evolving in both the Republic of Ireland and mainland Britain (Brown and MacGinty 2003: 87; Shirlow and Murtagh 2006: 175). One major problem of the peace process may be its reliance on ‘consociationalism’ – an assumption that decision-making and consensus-building among elites will regulate conflict in a divided society (Byrne 2001). In reality, the Agreement’s overarching political solutions have yet to translate fully into change of consciousness at the local level of communities, neighbourhoods, and individuals.

The local level is where I chose to base my research. Although the peace process invites analysis of a broad timeframe and a diverse range of actors, my interests lie not with media-savvy political ingénues, but with ordinary people who ultimately underpin sustainable peace. For the purposes of my project, the 1998 peace accords can be read as the point from which my research begins. The date, however, is highly permeable, as questions of heritage and identity draw the region’s contested history firmly into the present, and its present into the past. Long after the ceasefires, the Troubles continue to shape Northern Ireland, and nowhere more so than its principal city, Belfast.

2. *‘Post-conflict’ Belfast*

Northern Ireland’s largest city rests in a glacier-carved valley at the mouth of Belfast Lough, at the lowest fordable point of the River Lagan. A small provincial settlement for hundreds of years, Belfast came of age in the 18th and 19th centuries. The city’s proximity to Scotland ensured a constant exchange of goods in and out of the province, thus ensuring its position as a vital port. The rivers that feed the lough flow from the hills that ring the city, generating power for the linen factories that, along with shipbuilding, propelled Victorian Belfast to its status as a prominent industrial centre (Gillespie and Royle 2007). Belfast’s booming industries relied on labourers from the poor, rural Catholic populations. They settled in slums outside the boundaries of the Protestant-dominated city, and in doing so established the basis for Belfast’s characteristic patchwork of segregated identities (Maguire 1993).

Sectarianism profoundly shapes the urban landscape and serves as ‘one of Northern Ireland’s strongest spatial determinants’ (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006: 18). In Belfast, the outbreak of the Troubles created a ‘desperate spatial sorting process that left jagged and uncomfortable edges to ethnic territory’ (Murtagh 2000: 190). In what is known as the ‘ratchet effect,’ segregation rises dramatically in the wake of violent episodes, which then

forms the base from which the next segregation increase builds (Doherty and Poole 2000; Boal 1996). In Belfast, the legacy of housing segregation continues today. Although modern urban policy strives to create ethnically neutral space in the city centre (Cebulla 1996), it can do nothing to mitigate the segregation found in the city's numerous housing estates. Segregation is particularly marked in working-class areas of Belfast, particularly in the public housing sector (Keane 1990, cited in Doherty and Poole 2000: 189; Morrissey and Gaffikin 2008: 27). The crescent street form and terraced houses that became staples of turn-of-the-19th-century English urban architecture feature prominently in Belfast. Sennet (1990: 193) describes these as unifying elements, reaching finger-like into new territory to connect it to the city. In Belfast, however, they have the opposite effect. Crescents and terraces curve in on themselves – often with a single entry and exit point – to create enclosures of dominant ethnicity. Within these boundaries, community identity is fiercely maintained and savagely protected. These are the neighbourhoods in which I ground my empirical research.

'Interface areas,' where one neighbourhood meets another, are frequent flashpoints of violence, leading to the erection of several 'peace lines' throughout the city (Figure 3.1). Some take physical form in high fences of concrete and iron; others are less obviously demarcated, taking shape in derelict homes, industrial buffer zones, or are simply understood as local knowledge. These barriers are striking features of the urban landscape, and their immediate impact is to create social, political and cultural distance between communities. In their attempt to contain the violence, they also have the regrettable effect of deepening antagonism. As Selwyn (2001: 234) observes of the bypass roads in contested Palestine, the effect of fences is to stir the imagination toward elaborate notions of an aggressive 'other,' thus reinforcing the desire for permanent separation. Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: 57-58), writing specifically about Belfast, echo his observation: 'Interfaces are also a constant reminder of harm done and of threat implied. Their existence compacts the performance of violence into space [and] compress space into sites that become the most notable places of violence and resistance.'

Contrary to popular assumption, antagonism in interface areas has increased in the years since the peace accords, leading to the erection of several new peace lines and provoking Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: 170) to lament that '(t)he issue of segregation is falling between the cracks.' As 'exit' becomes a coping strategy for upwardly mobile residents, those that remain discover that their community is decreasingly able to support local facilities and services. Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: 64) describe this process as 'residualisation,' whereby communities occupying marginal, dangerous or contested territory

are increasingly characterised by high rates of social deprivation and poverty. For residents of these communities, social deprivation is amplified by deeply entrenched sectarian antagonism. For example, Shirlow and Murtagh (*ibid*: 85) cite a 2004 survey that revealed high levels of people travelling twice as far to locate private sector services, even if the nearest was across the peace line in the ‘other’ community’s territory. They argue that the ‘(l)egacy of violence is not merely that it created competing discourses of harm but also that it embedded the logic and need for intercommunity separation’ (*ibid*: 79).

Territory in Belfast, which ‘replicates nationalist ideologies at the local scale’ (Graham and Nash 2006: 262), is emphatically marked through a variety of media. Both loyalists and republicans establish visual dominance in their neighbourhoods by flying their respective national flags and by painting kerbstones and signposts – red, white, and blue for Britain versus Ireland’s green, white, and orange (Figure 3.2). More overt signs of allegiance can be found in politicized graffiti and in the commemorative murals that adorn gable walls in predominantly working class estates (Figure 3.3 and 3.4). Cresswell (1996) argues cogently that street graffiti acts to transgress a normative landscape. In Belfast, however, I argue that politicized street graffiti and its related practices simultaneously transgresses and strives to create a normative landscape, whether unionist-loyalist or nationalist-republican. For example, nationalist neighbourhoods may subvert government hegemonic power (Winchester et al 2003: 74) by re-naming streets and by installing signposts written in Gaelic. For unionists and loyalists, the 12th of July parade tradition serves to mark territory in a spatial performance of identity and allegiance (Jarman 1997; Cohen 2007). These examples represent only a fraction of the ways in which local residents serve to assert identity on and ownership of Belfast’s contested terrain.

This is the landscape in which peace now struggles to take root, and in which I ground my empirical research. The process of peacebuilding is far from easy; as Simpson (2000) observes: ‘There is no such thing as a post-conflict society.’ In Northern Ireland, the situation remains tenuous as new societal challenges move into the vacuum once occupied by the Troubles. Even as Northern Ireland experiences a general decline in religious practice (Doherty and Poole 2002),⁵ it records higher levels of segregation than at any other period (Boal 2002). The vast majority of children – over 96% – still attend segregated schools (Kilpatrick and Leitch 2004). In addition, an explosion in general crime, particularly drug-

⁵ Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: 15) describe religion as a ‘boundary marker’ for competing aspirations of ‘Britishness and Irishness.’ In Northern Ireland, ‘Protestant’ and ‘Catholic’ act as cultural as well as religious designations. Even religiously non-observant individuals will self-identify as Protestant or Catholic, according to cultural affiliation.

related offences, has accompanied the peace process. Adolescent drug use, which was very low during the Troubles, has increased dramatically since the ceasefires: Northern Ireland now reports higher levels of inhalant drug use per capita than those reported elsewhere in either Europe or the US (Higgins et al 2004). During the Troubles, paramilitaries such as the IRA, which held a well-known anti-drug stance, enforced codes of conduct within their communities. In contrast, many of the post-ceasefire paramilitaries in existence today have discovered a lucrative trade in drug trafficking, and are assumed largely responsible for the rise of use in Belfast (Muldoon 2004).

Despite the ceasefires, paramilitary-associated activity continues to be a concern. In the years that followed the 1998 peace accords, paramilitary activity declined less steeply in urban than in rural areas, with Belfast continuing to experience the brunt of the violence (Poole 2004). Writing over five years after the signing of the peace accords, Monaghan (2004) reported that internal ‘punishment shootings,’ which are not considered breaches of ceasefire, were on the rise. Unlike the IRA, loyalist paramilitaries have been slow to declare their intention to decommission their arms (Smyth 2004). Edwards and Bloomer (2008: 2) observe that while the IRA’s move to dismantle its war machine had been widely anticipated, the failure of loyalist paramilitaries to enter into a ‘symmetrical decommissioning process’ was surprising. It was not until May 2007 – nine years after the signing of the peace accords – that the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Red Hand Commandos announced an end to their campaign, but ‘(e)ven then their statement fell dramatically short of decommissioning’ (Bloomer and Edwards 2009: 6). Within the republican movement, splinter factions continue to cause unrest. The IRA is historically prone to splits in times of perceived betrayal by its leaders; the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA have now assumed the militarized mantle of the now-defunct main IRA (Tonge 2004). According to Bloomer and Edwards (2009) the current threat from dissident republicans is at its most pronounced since 1998, although the recent declarations of disarmament by the Irish National Liberation Army and the Official IRA (BBC, 8 February 2010) offer a cautious note of hope. More broadly, within all paramilitary organizations at the turn of the 21st century, the leaders represent the second generation that grew up in Northern Ireland’s culture of violence. Bruce (2004) argues that these young members are a destabilizing influence on the peace process, as they are not inhibited by memories of the worst of the Troubles.

Northern Ireland’s culture of violence profoundly affects its residents, regardless of affiliation. The legacy of conflict reflects the tangled history of bitter grievances and powerful attachment to a deeply contested land. These fiercely held, place-centred identities

are themselves a legacy of Northern Ireland's complicated colonial history and its aftermath. They form the heart of my dissertation, and my exploration of how the 'post-conflict' transformations at work in Northern Ireland provoke new forms of engagement.

3. *Placing Identity*

At its heart, the struggle over Northern Ireland is a struggle over the contested identities ascribed to and drawn from the land. As Bowman (1993: 81) observes, 'For 'land' to serve as ground on which to build nationhood, it must be more than a geographical setting.' Instead, it must be a domain of the imagination where people can locate others with whom they see themselves sharing a present situation as well as a future nation. In Northern Ireland, Protestants and Catholics only tenuously share their present, and the shape of a future nation is, for many, too difficult to imagine together. Northern Ireland's inhabitants have developed strategies for coping with their landscape and the different ideas it holds for those living within it. Nationalists, for instance, may define the province Ulster historically as its nine-county, pre-partition version, thereby deriving a distinct identity from that which unionists derive from their own idea of Ulster as an unambiguous component of the United Kingdom.⁶

At ground level, though, the simplest coping strategy involves carving separate spheres and moving exclusively within them. Ten years after the peace agreement, the Northern Ireland conflict 'remains inherently territorial and the 'ground' a key political resource' (Graham and Nash (2006: 262), with crucial implications for identity and power. The act of social and spatial distancing then ensures the maintenance and re-creation of specific identity in new generations (Douglas 1997). As Graham and Nash (2006: 254) observe: 'Identity remains vested in traditional principles of ethno-nationalism that locate cultural belonging and citizenship in a 'living space' defined by clearly demarcated boundaries and zero-sum models of space and place.'

While the physical demarcation of territory may be more visually striking in working-class neighbourhoods, sectarian division is not bound by class alone. In 1998, writing in the prevailing mood of optimism that accompanied the signing of the peace

⁶ I draw here from Bowman's observation of Palestinian strategy: For Palestinians, territory is qualified historically (using the pre-1948 boundaries as the locus) and semantically (i.e., distinguishing between Israel and Palestine). Thus the identity that Palestinians derive from their land is kept distinct from that which the Israelis derive from the land they occupy. (Bowman 1993: 76)

accords, Graham and Shirlow (1998: 253) pointed toward the development of a political middle ground. This comprised people ‘who can reconcile inner tensions between cultural identity and citizenship aspirations,’ in whom political attitudes were no longer necessarily congruent with cultural identity. Along similar lines, Anderson and Shuttleworth (1998: 193) revealed ‘wide and overlapping continuums of political affiliation,’ as they argued that Northern Ireland’s sectarianism, like ethnicity, needs to be (re)produced continually in order to survive. Several years into the peace process, however, these early celebrations of a post-sectarian middle-class have proven premature. Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: 123) believe that it is ‘wrong to assume that this new socio-spatial class has forged an alternative cultural political identity.’ Although they acknowledge that the middle classes have managed to negotiate their way through conflict, tolerating the ‘other’ in their pursuit of material advantage, Shirlow and Murtagh (*ibid*: 101) maintain that ‘[the middle classes] have not constructed a shared identity that is capable of challenging the binary politics of Northern Ireland.’

In Northern Ireland, the absence of a shared identity is derived from and reproduces divisive, sectarian conceptualizations of place, both physical and imaginative. Northern Ireland is a political entity that is yet ‘to be imagined by the majority of its inhabitants’ (Foster 1991: 281; cited in Graham and Shirlow 1998: 245). Reid (2005) argues that the lack of an overarching narrative of place for Northern Ireland, and its territorial conflict, has resulted in fragmented, highly localized and strictly bounded senses of place. She points to the way in which Northern Ireland was founded in overt opposition to the professed characteristics of the Irish Free State. Reid (2004: 103) traces the central, powerful role that place has played in Irish nationalism since the late-19th century, ‘crystallising in a vision of essentially Irish place which explicitly rejects the urban, the industrial, and the non-global and non-Catholic’ (see also Gaffey 2004). Northern Ireland, she argues, ‘was brought into existence in self-conscious refusal’ of Irish nationalism’s cultural and political identity, forged in the imaginative crucible of the island’s western landscape. The power of the nationalist romanticized sense of place, along with the statelet’s existence on the island of Ireland, has ‘made difficult any separate or distinctive place-based imaginings of Northern Ireland’ (*ibid*: 106).

For Protestants, in particular, the lack of a place narrative is an ongoing challenge. Their insecurity is highlighted by a general feeling that Catholics have gained more through the 1998 Agreement and subsequent peace process (Hughes and Donnelly 2004; Boal 2000). Compounding this suspicion is Britain’s increasing disengagement from Northern Ireland

(Smith 1996: 181), leaving many Protestants struggling to re-negotiate the British dimension of their unionist identity. Graham (2004) argues that uncertain, unagreed unionist identity – not conflict, per se – lies at the heart of Northern Ireland's current problem. He points to the 'past political failure to develop a unitary geographical representation, a myth of place to legitimate and substantiate [Northern Ireland's] domicile in the island of Ireland' (*ibid*: 3). According to Graham, Protestants in Ulster lack a 'representative landscape' – a metaphorical encapsulation of a people's image of itself, based upon particular territory and a shared past, which helps to define communal identity. Ulster Protestantism has been defined by what it is not (Gaelic, Catholic) rather than by what it is, and the absence of an agreed representative landscape underpins the uncertainty of their identity. Their challenge now is to create a contemporary identity that opens their past to hold relevance in the present and validates their presence in this place. This is a challenge to which the reinvigorated Ulster-Scots cultural movement now attempts to respond, drawing identity from a cultural province of the Dalriadan Sea that incorporates Ulster as historically Scottish, and thus interpreting the 17th century Scottish Plantation as a reunification and reconquest by an Ulster-Scots people once expelled from their rightful territory by invading Gaels (Mac Póilin 1999, cited in Graham 2004: 496. See also McCall 2002; Stapleton and Wilson 2004).

Northern Ireland's malleability, of which the Ulster-Scots movement's westward extrapolation of the Scottish boundary to include Ulster is but one example, has been pressed into service time and again for a variety of cultural and political projects. Among the best known is the Field Day collective, formed in the 1980s by a group of prominent writers including the playwright Brian Friel and the poet Seamus Heaney. They envisioned an imaginary cultural space, a 'fifth province,' that would transcend the political morass and foster new dialogue through the arts. The collective has shown itself open to change. Eventually, their dialogue addressed gendered disparities, after Field Day's first three published volumes alerted readers to the lack of adequate representation of women in editorial practice; subsequent volumes addressed the absence (Bourke et al 2002).

Yet Reid (2004: 196) cautions against uncritical celebration: 'Northern Ireland may be described as a hybrid, borderline area, but this context has resulted more often in fossilisation of identity and difference than any kind of acceptance and celebration of ambiguity.' She draws hope, however, in imagery that constructs place as 'ambiguous in meaning, and resistant to attempts to fix its meaning and to political or cultural territorialisation' (Reid 2008: 521), suggesting that in order to fracture the monolith of spatial sectarianism, attention must be paid to imaginings and uses of place which move beyond the

tendency to exclude. These are ideas with which I grapple in my research on transformations of contested cultural landscapes.

The peace process has shaped Northern Ireland undeniably, and nowhere more so than in Belfast, where the sectarianism and rigid territoriality of republican and loyalist estates is juxtaposed with the increasingly global orientation of civic culture. Now is a time of massive change for Belfast, as the city connects economically, politically and culturally in new ways to the Six Counties, the province of Ulster, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, the European Union, and beyond. Reid (2005: 486) points to the gradual breakdown of the former unionist state, as Belfast demonstrates its ‘tendency to elude total control, threatening unionist and nationalist definitions of place and belonging based on territorial ownership, and exposing the need for new definition.’ For both republicans and loyalists, she predicts a ‘cultural displacement, no longer able to exclusively control and manipulate the image of the landscape in its relation to identity’ (Reid 2004: 104). The people of Northern Ireland, and particularly Belfast, need new ways to engage with both the changing physical reality and the idea of Northern Ireland. Stainer (2005: 373) calls for ‘disruptive reconceptualisations’ of social space and ‘the city’ that can ‘interject and subvert the sterile antagonisms of (sectarian) politics.’ Along similar lines, Neill (1999) calls for a new ‘place vision’ for Belfast – one that probes cultural identity by focusing on the issue of representational space and people’s identification with the city.

As I will argue in this dissertation, Northern Ireland is proof that one space can give rise to multiple, diverse identities among the people who inhabit it. This same space can also give rise ‘(f)or each setting and for each person [to] a multiplicity of place identities reflecting different experiences and attitudes’ (Relph 1976: 62). Through the peace process, these ‘place-centred identities’ (Graham 1994) are opening to new interpretations and variations that emerge from its transforming political, economic, cultural and social landscapes. Reid (2008: 531) calls for ‘complex, nuanced, provisional readings of...politically burdened places,’ suggesting that they offer grounds for hope for multiple and shared senses of place and belonging. My research is an attempt to answer her call: In Belfast, what connections can be mapped between physical space and global imagination? In the wake of the peace accords, what kinds of identities – and how – are the people of Belfast drawing from shifting, contested landscapes that are both shaped by and attempting to emerge from violent conflict? And how might they respond to what Graham (2004: 483) calls the ‘unresolved questions surrounding identity and allegiance [that] contain the keys to conflict and its resolution’?

4. *Dilemmas of Heritage and History*

In Northern Ireland, identity both creates and is created by fierce devotion to nationhood. A ‘nation,’ as Benedict Anderson (1991) famously defined, is an imagined political community distinguished by the style in which it is imagined. These ‘imagined communities’ need narratives that anchor the present to the past, and from which identity can be drawn. In Northern Ireland, the narratives of identity for the two dominant ethnic groups connect members to a common past and a shared future within their respective communities. Although their narratives differ markedly, each is drawn from chosen traumas incorporated over the years, which solidify and are re-articulated as the polarizing events and non-negotiable cultural claims that Ross (2001) describes as ‘psychological dramas.’ To imply continuity with the past, narratives of ethnic identity create practices governed by rules (the loyalist 12th of July parades, for instance) that Hobsbawm (1983) calls ‘invented traditions.’ Their repetition not only provides reference to the past but establishes and symbolizes social cohesion. The symbols and representations that develop through identity narratives reflect the imagined contours of a group, thus marking their difference from others (Woodward 2000: 2). Identity theorists Woodward and Jenkins both argue that identities marked by difference rely for their existence on the presence of ‘others’ (Woodward 1997: 2), for without this validation, the issue of identity claims would not exist (Jenkins 2003). In Northern Ireland, Protestant and Catholic identities have been heavily forged by mutual resistance to and negotiation of the other. Not surprisingly, the ways in which their narratives are imagined speak to radically divergent and unagreed historical perspectives.

Nowhere is the issue of contested history more apparent than in the debate over Northern Ireland’s status as a postcolonial entity. In the story of the dismantling of the British Empire, Northern Ireland remains an ambiguous footnote. Unlike the twenty-six Irish counties to its south, Northern Ireland to this day remains under British political governance, thus complicating assertions of Ireland’s postcolonial present. Scholars remain divided about Ireland’s colonial-settler history and about interpretations of its present-day condition, with more nuanced readings emerging in recent times. Howe (2000: 70), for example, urges caution in advancing the simplistic ‘cliché of Britain’s imperialist stake’; he points out that the common invocation of Northern Ireland as Britain’s ‘last colony’ became popular only in the 1970s. Likewise, Nash (1999: 460) criticizes the simple binary of colonized-colonizer as deeply problematic, particularly in the Northern Irish context. She calls for a ‘differentiated

sense of the post-colonial' to challenge the dualism and the polarized versions of history and identity in Northern Ireland. Crucially, she asks whether 'a reinvigorated notion of cultural location for all traditions in Ireland can avoid the ways those traditions have been based on opposition to each other' (*ibid*: 468).

Nash's challenge is a daunting one for a societal culture in which the past is considered a 'hard-edged political resource' (Graham and Whelan 2007: 477). In Northern Ireland, ancient grievances and the more recent spectre of civil war haunt a fragile society attempting to emerge from its shadow. The Troubles 'bequeathed both a tangible and intangible heritage of division and hurt' (McDowell 2008a: 405), and the challenge of addressing the past in the present continues to dog the peace process. Graham and Whelan (2007) argue that the 1998 peace accords were fashioned in a way to avoid creating mechanisms for addressing the legacy of the past. From this vacuum, the commemoration of fatalities has emerged as a major impediment to the transformation of conflict:

There is little sense of reconciliation through shared loss, but, instead, the commemorative landscape seems largely to form part of competing claims for hegemonic victimhood by trenchantly opposed identities and spatialities proclaiming their irreconcilable differences. (*ibid*: 480)

The armed warfare of the Troubles may have ended, but in Northern Ireland the conflict over space and identity continues by other means. As Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: 49) observe, 'for political actors capacity to win political support has been based upon delivering a singular narrative of victimhood and exclusion.' They identify the issue of loss and harm as 'a tool of political manipulation' (*ibid*: 180), as victimhood and memory continue to reproduce the past within the present.

Like 'the past,' political actors have also discovered a new political resource in 'memorialization,' which they deploy as a tool to alter the present-day parameters of the Troubles. McDowell (2007: 729) argues that 'memorialization contributes to the establishment of social control in 'post-conflict' Northern Ireland,' as memorial landscapes which document one community's suffering and resistance often serve to invoke continuing fear of the 'other.' She cites, for example, the ways in which memorialization serves the political purposes of the republican movement, as it must define the parameters of their struggle to undermine British control in a rapidly changing peacetime landscape. By way of

example, she draws on republican politician and ex-militant Gerry Adams, who in 2001 proclaimed the 20th anniversary of the infamous hunger strikes to be a ‘year of commemorations.’ In recalling the sacrifices made by republican prisoners, particularly those who lost their lives in their attempt to gain status as political prisoners, Adams not only tapped into the sense of victimization but also established his political party, Sinn Féin, as the ‘rightful heir to the history of militant Irish republicanism’ (*ibid*: 731). In this way, McDowell (*ibid*: 726) observes, ‘the process of remembering the past is inexorably fused with the politics of the present and plays a crucial role in the post-conflict negotiation of identity, power and place.’

Ten years after the peace accords, both ethno-sectarian camps now strive to inscribe their respective claims of victimhood on the ‘tangible public space’ (Graham and McDowell 2007: 359) of the cultural landscape. As Johnson (2002: 294) observes: ‘Memory is not simply a recollection of times past, it is also anchored in places past and visualized in masonry and bronze.’ These inscriptions of memory contribute to a community’s ‘representative landscape,’ which Graham (1994: 258) defines as ‘an encapsulation of a people’s image of itself, a collage, based upon the particularity of territory and a shared past which helps define communal identity.’ These landscapes, with their representations of memory, act as ‘identity resources’:

They assist in marking and bounding territory, shaping place identities, supporting political ideologies, and contributing to a group identity, which is often defined in contradistinction to the ethnic other and which is both sustained and legitimated by reference to shared memories. (Graham and Whelan 2007: 482)

In this way, as Graham and McDowell (2007: 345) argue, the politics of identity appropriate ‘both tangible material and intangible forms of heritage.’ These landscapes not only define identity in opposition to ‘the other,’ but also serve to reinforce particular messages of identity *within* one community. According to Johnson (2002: 294), ‘(t)he ordering of memory around sites of collective remembrance provides a focus for the performance of ritual of communal remembrance and sometimes forgetfulness.’ McDowell’s (2008b) own study of recent practices of commemoration in both republican and loyalist traditions, which serve to elide and erase the contributions of women, illustrates this point cogently.

Northern Ireland's heady promise of economic regeneration is raising uncomfortable questions about the contested materiality of the Troubles, as officials try to navigate the deeply divisive experiences of the past. In North Belfast, militant activists from both sides of the conflict were tried and sentenced at the Victorian-era Crumlin Road courthouse and imprisoned in its adjacent gaol. The gaol closed in 1996, and the courthouse in 1998; officials have subsequently attempted to address the question of how to develop the site (Building Design Partnership 2007). Today, the gaol is experiencing a limited revival as a tourist and educational site, with eventual plans to transform the building as part of a broader economic regeneration strategy. However, the fate of the courthouse remains in limbo; the deteriorating building, recently the object of an arson attack by local youths, is testimony to the unsettling consequences of official indecision. Even more problematic is the infamous Maze prison, located to the south of Belfast, which housed paramilitary prisoners from 1971 to its closure in 2000. Although the prison is a symbolic touchstone for people on both sides of the sectarian divide, it has achieved iconic status in republican mythology through the political protests that took place within its walls. Contemporary efforts to regenerate the now-defunct prison have stalled in stalemate. Graham and McDowell (2007: 363) describe the Maze as a 'zero-sum heritage site' that 'form(s) part of the struggle to achieve the hegemony of one particular discourse at the expense of others.' Consequently, they conclude that the site has limited potential to facilitate societal healing and reconciliation.

Yet despite these high-profile and highly contentious regeneration projects, there are other signs that Northern Ireland is engaging with its past in the present. Among the more visible transformations in Belfast is the explosion of so-called 'conflict tourism,' which now forms an important component of the growing post-conflict economy. The advent of peace sparked a rise in tourism to the region, with over 6.8 million visitors recorded for Belfast alone in 2006.⁷ Open-top bus tours now ply once-unthinkable routes, offering tourists a glimpse into the physical landscape of a divided society. The content, itinerary and, above all, messages deployed depend heavily on the person delivering the tour and the community – whether republican or loyalist – that designed it. McDowell (2008a: 406-7) argues that the visitors, in turn, 'reinforce both the legitimacy of the landscape in question and the narratives being evoked,' and in doing so, contribute to 'a spatial practice which...redefines and reinforces territorial politics' and ultimately prolongs the war:

⁷ Belfast Tourism Monitor, Belfast City Council.
www.belfastcity.gov.uk/tourism/docs/tourismfactsandfigures06.pdf. Accessed 16 February 2010.

The 'imagined' conflict needs sustenance in the construction of symbols, which remind the public that the conflict is not far away. These conflict signifiers represent continuing power struggles which symbolise contested identities and heritages and help keep the conflict ongoing. (*ibid*: 418-9)

These exclusive narratives are marketed to an external audience, while simultaneously reinforcing polarized interpretations of history within the communities on display. Rather than improving inter-community relations, McDowell (*ibid*: 407) argues that Belfast's community-based tourism 'instead has reified and formalised divisions through single-identity work, as communities market their own spaces and narratives through heritage that is deliberately exclusive.'

Nonetheless, signs of hope persist for the possibility of developing a shared sense of heritage. Even in a place with a deeply entrenched tradition of using history for sectarian purposes, there are new ways of addressing the contested issue of heritage. Nash (2005b) illuminates one such route in her exploration of local histories in Northern Ireland, pointing to research that refigures Northern Ireland as regionally (rather than merely politically) divided. She points toward recent accounts, undertaken by lay practitioners, that illuminate a sense of the landscape as a shared inheritance, as well as a 'sense of Northern Ireland as composed of a complex geography of distinctive local places' (*ibid*: 55). As Nash (*ibid*: 53) explains: 'The 'common ground' here is not, or not only, the land and landscape but a shared tradition of identification with the local.' In other words, the people who inhabit Northern Ireland, although divided by politics, share a 'sense of the significance of attachments to specific localities' (*ibid*: 64).

This shared passion for the land points to new opportunities for reimagining how the local connects with what Nash (2005b: 64) describes as 'wider geographies.' In doing so, 'identity is also refigured as multiply scaled: local, regional, translocal or transnational' (*ibid*). I draw on Nash's refiguring of identity as 'multiply scaled' in my empirical explorations of contested cultural landscapes in Chapters Five and Six. In the decade since the peace accords, the region has undergone tremendous changes that have provoked new interpretations. No change is, perhaps, more dramatic than Northern Ireland's rapidly shifting demographic – and, by extension, cultural – landscape.

5. *Ethnic Minorities: A New Social Landscape*

Although commonly defined by its high-profile conflict between (white) Protestants and (white) Catholics, Northern Ireland is also home to residents who belong to neither of the region's dominant ethno-national traditions. As demographic patterns shift dramatically, issues of cultural diversity have emerged to the forefront of Northern Ireland's 'post-conflict' social discourses. Their current framework began to take shape in the late 1990s, alongside the peace negotiations. The introduction of the Northern Ireland Race Relations Order in 1997, albeit twenty years after the introduction of similar legislation in the rest of the United Kingdom,⁸ outlawed discrimination on the basis of colour, nationality, race, or ethnic or national origin. Meanwhile, legislation in the 1998 Northern Ireland Act obligated the public services to ensure equal access for all. The 1998 peace accords themselves also contributed to the debate on cultural inclusion. For example, one clause in the Agreement stipulates that all political parties would:

recognise the importance of respect and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster Scots and the languages of the various ethnic minority communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland. (Governments of the United Kingdom and Ireland 1998)

For Northern Ireland, the cessation of violence has therefore created new opportunities to incorporate the presence of others in rebuilding a healthy 'post-conflict' society.

Among the most striking changes of the past decade is the increasing visibility of Northern Ireland's so-called 'ethnic minorities.' Accurate statistics, however, are notoriously difficult to quantify. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency conducted its last census in 2001, at which time 'minority ethnic groups' accounted for less than one per cent of Northern Ireland's population. In the intervening years, the region has experienced significant in-migration, generated by a growing economy and demands for workers which cannot be

⁸ When the UK government introduced the Race Relations Act in 1965, the Protestant-dominated government at Stormont requested that Northern Ireland be excluded, on the grounds that religion rather than 'race' represented the most serious locus of discrimination. (Dickey 1972, cited in Geoghegan 2008).

met from the local population. The 2004 expansion of the European Union, in particular, led to the arrival of thousands of migrants from central and Eastern Europe.

Although industrial centres located throughout Northern Ireland attract large numbers of newcomers, Belfast has been a particular site of inward migration. Jarman (2007) triangulates census figures with more recent data from a variety of sources⁹ to identify realistic, if conservative, demographic figures. By including dependants and those outside the formal recording system, Jarman yields a conservative estimate of 7,500 migrants arriving in Belfast during the two-year period from April 2004 to March 2006. Employment varies considerably by sector, with the construction sector employing migrants from Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, and the health sector employing people predominantly of Filipino, Indian and Malay nationalities. In his report, Jarman notes that the term 'migrant worker' covers a diverse range of nationalities, ethnicities and skills, and he cautions against generalizing about their experiences and needs.

Alongside the influx of migrant workers, Northern Ireland has also witnessed rising numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. The exact figures for Northern Ireland are difficult to establish, as figures are only available for the United Kingdom as a whole. However, the Belfast-based Refugee Action Group (2007) estimates that approximately 2,000 refugee and asylum seekers currently reside in Northern Ireland, of which a large majority hail from 19 different countries including Algeria, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, China, Iran, Sudan, Somalia and Azerbaijan. Asylum seekers and refugees reach Northern Ireland through a variety of routes. The border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is one of the most common points of access. As this border is difficult to discern along large rural stretches, some people may not even realize that they have crossed from the Republic into a different country. Until recently, asylum seekers could be held in prison in Northern Ireland, but following a campaign by Refugee Action Group, detainees are no longer held alongside convicted prisoners. The practice of removing them to secure immigration centres in Scotland and England, however, has created new concerns, particularly for those who wish to maintain contact with family and legal representation in Northern Ireland. Further complicating the lengthy review process are the negative attitudes and behaviours of the local population, many of whom conflate the definitions of 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker,' and who justify their hostility on the assumption that the presence of these individuals in Northern Ireland constitutes a drain on the public purse.

⁹ For example, new registrations for health services and National Insurance numbers; work permits issued; and school census figures.

Expressions of hostility are hardly confined to refugees and asylum seekers. Since the signing of the peace accords, Northern Ireland has garnered the dubious distinction in some media reports as the ‘race hate capital of Europe’ (BBC 17 June 2009), and Belfast ‘the most racist city in the world’ (McVeigh 2006: 33). The Police Service of Northern Ireland has reported an exponential increase in the number of racially-motivated crimes in the years since the ceasefires (Jarman and Monaghan 2003). Based on the size of its minority ethnic population, Northern Ireland now has one of the highest reported levels of racially-motivated crime within the UK (Jarman 2004). Crimes range from verbal and physical assault to property damage and, in areas with strong paramilitary presence, extortion. Although most reported attacks have occurred in loyalist areas, it is clear that racist violence is widespread across other areas as well. Particularly chilling is evidence of paramilitary involvement in a number of cases, such as those involving the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Young Militants (*ibid*: 37). More recently, a sustained intimidation campaign by local youths led to the forced evacuation of more than 100 Roma individuals, including small children, from their homes in South Belfast (BBC 17 June 2009). McVeigh (2006: 64) cautions: ‘The current reality is that many minority ethnic people live in well-grounded fear of becoming... ‘the next Stephen Lawrence.’”¹⁰

Not surprisingly, sectarianism has shaped racism in Northern Ireland in complicated ways, which commentators are only beginning to untangle. In 1998, in the introduction to a landmark publication on ethnic minorities and racism in Northern Ireland, Hainsworth (1998: 3) observed that the country’s preoccupation with the Troubles ‘left scant room for other agendas,’ in terms of addressing both violence and widespread institutional discrimination. McVeigh (1998: 12), contributing to the same book, linked the ‘specificity of Northern Irish racism’ to widespread denial of its presence in a society preoccupied with the Troubles: ‘It is not the absence of racism but rather the relative absence of discussion of racism which makes [Northern Ireland] different from most European countries’ (*ibid*: 14). In the intervening years, visible demographic shifts, political agendas and media commentary have succeeded in raising the public profile of Northern Ireland’s minority ethnic populations and the challenges they face. Although the dual issues of sectarianism and racism interact with each other in complex ways, they are frequently elided or treated as entirely separate problems. Geoghegan

¹⁰ Stephen Lawrence, a black British teenager living in London, was murdered in April 1993 at the age of 18 by a gang of white racists. The failure of the police and the criminal justice system to respond appropriately to this racist murder led to a campaign for justice. Ultimately, the British government instituted a public inquiry, which encouraged a wider re-evaluation of the place of racism in the criminal justice system.

(2008: 134) cautions against such simplistic treatment, arguing that Northern Ireland's policymakers and politicians must acknowledge 'the resilience of engrained sectarian ways...to attend to the...specific challenges of 'Race Relations' and the precarious situation facing many racialised groups living in a violent, divided society that is slowly moving out of conflict.'

Over the past decade, researchers have begun to illuminate the ways in which Northern Ireland's minority ethnic residents coped with the Troubles by compromising to fit in with existing power structures (Fawcett 1998) and by emphasizing their political neutrality (Donnan and O'Brien 1998). Donnan and O'Brien (*ibid*: 206) argue that Northern Ireland's divided society held some beneficial effects for local ethnic minorities, 'by diverting antagonisms along more deeply entrenched and historically sedimented channels.' For the most part, however, academic scholarship on the peace process has paid scant attention to the experiences of ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland. These trends reflect McVeigh's (1998: 17) description of racism in Northern Ireland as a 'dual majority problem,' in which minority ethnic people struggle for equality against a backdrop of conflict. Moreover, he argues that the widespread sectarian division has created further difficulties for ethnic minorities to negotiate a place for their identities.

Among their challenges is the prevalence of the competing narratives of history, all of which strive for dominance in Northern Ireland. Nash, for example, (2005b: 62) points to contemporary efforts that attempt to re-imagine and justify the presence of Protestants, figuring their history 'as one of waves of settlement that predate and include the arrival of English and Scottish planters in the seventeenth century.' While this revised history may provide a model of belonging that includes Protestants, Nash cautions that it may be a less inclusive model of belonging for those who have more recently arrived on these shores. In addition, standard narratives of migration may not accommodate the multiple journeys that shape the intensely diasporic identities of some of Northern Ireland's new inhabitants. The region's Portuguese-speaking population illustrates the nuance of diversity. While those who have settled in Northern Ireland may hold Portuguese citizenship and share a common language, their cultural origins reside in far-flung former colonies, such as East Timor, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde (Saores 2002; cited in McDermott and Odhiambo, forthcoming). Moreover, longer-standing Chinese and Indian populations now include a robust second generation, thus further complicating notions of belonging.

Northern Ireland now struggles to accommodate other dimensions of diversity. As the power of religious identity declines, the former binary model becomes increasingly

outdated (Doherty and Poole 2002). To complicate the problem, residents now attempt to re-define Northern Ireland's relationships with parent countries that are increasingly heterogeneous, multiracial and multicultural. For example, Britain, which has an extensive history of inward migration, has long been engaged in a dialogue to incorporate both anglo-centric and multicultural 'Britishness' into its heritage (Chambers 1993). In Northern Ireland, local community and civic organizations have begun to address this necessary dialogue. The current discourse in Northern Ireland revolves more around 'cultural diversity' than 'multiculturalism,' although ideas of both have been criticized for reproducing simplistic ideas of cultural difference and racialized notions of 'minority communities' (Nash 2005a: 285). As I will explore in Chapter 7, the region now faces a crisis of identity as it learns to accommodate a broader spectrum of diversity within the space of its six counties, and within the larger idea of Northern Ireland itself.

6. *Rhetoric versus Reality: Putting Peace Into Practice*

Northern Ireland's 'policy landscape' (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006: 143) has changed dramatically in the decade since the signing of the peace accords. The 'post-conflict' era emphasizes the building of positive relationships, which a range of governmental and non-governmental organizations now incorporate into their work. Belfast City Council, for example, sends a clear signal of intention through its Good Relations Unit, based at City Hall. The Council's strategy, titled 'Building our Future Together,' advocates four main themes: promoting community relations; celebrating cultural diversity; and promoting equality through service delivery and a representative workforce (Belfast City Council 2003). These themes are now embraced, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, by the organizations in the community and voluntary sector that engage with the practical aspects of promoting peace on the ground. They face sizeable challenges as they seek to enshrine an ethos of 'good relations' in a society recovering from the trauma of its civil war. Although high-profile policies may signal important shifts and new directions, the reality often struggles to match the rhetoric. Shirlow and Murtagh (*ibid*: 143) cite the 'scatter of unconnected initiatives, small-scale projects and funding streams aimed at a range of diverse problems.' More pointedly, Graham and Nash (2006: 263) criticize both 'the idea that 'a shared society' stands as an alternative to a divided society' and, crucially, government-led strategies that neglect

the very issues at the heart of the conflict: 'the deep relationships between historical memory, territorialized space and community identity.'

Although contemporary conventional wisdom, both academic and practical, tends to embrace conflict transformation theory as the best approach for Northern Ireland, its application proves to be problematic. As I described in Chapter 1, the conflict transformation approach aims to reduce the potential for violence by helping to transform the underlying relationships, interests and discourses. Ten years after the peace accords, Northern Ireland's Protestant and Catholic populations still struggle to bridge the divide. Like other critics (see Brown and MacGinty 2003; Anderson and Shuttleworth 1998), Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: 48) blame the peace agreement itself: 'The Agreement may well have established contact between oppositional groups, but that contact is based upon managing disorder as opposed to removing the meaning of communal mistrust and division.' This is evident in the 'good relations' practices of 'post-conflict' Belfast. While Gaffikin and Rafferty (2008: 58) acknowledge the many genuine examples of cross-community work in the city, they also criticize Belfast's myriad community organizations for their increasing practice of 'doing deals across the divide mainly to comply with funding requirements.' Such arrangements, they argue, do not constitute 'a real move forward toward healing and renewal' (*ibid*); in managing the conflict without transforming it, the problem will remain largely intact. Gaffikin and Rafferty, like Graham and Nash (2006), call for explicit engagement with Northern Ireland's fundamental challenges, such as how to resolve land use and territory.

Facilitators of the peace process recognize the impasse between managing and transforming the conflict. Although cross-community activities may generate a rosy view of progress, there is danger of outreach becoming an empty gesture. In reality, many individuals – particularly those living in working-class neighbourhoods where segregation is most entrenched – are simply not ready to interact across sectarian lines. As a result, 'single identity work' has emerged as a precursor to more ambitious schemes of cross-community engagement. The phrase refers to efforts that focus on exploring identity solely within one community, in order to create a strong and confident foundation that can lead to more critical explorations of identity (Nash 2005b: 51) and from which to reach across the sectarian divide (Kilpatrick and Leitch 2004). As Nash (2005a: 295) observes: 'The single identity strategy...reflects an understanding of the challenges of effective cross-community contact and encourages groups to face the discomforting work of critical self-reflection.' Critics such as Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: 50), however, argue that this strategy bolsters notions of cultural separation and competition for scant resources. Nonetheless, as Nash (2005b: 64-65)

observes, a sense of affirmation and security in one's own sense of place and belonging, which serves as a platform for recognizing the validity of another's, is a key dimension of Northern Ireland's contemporary community relations policy.

Specifically enshrined within community relations policy are issues of diversity and pluralism. These issues now heavily influence localized strategies, particularly those adopted by community and voluntary organizations that rely on government grants for operational funding. Not surprisingly, tensions frequently arise, with gaps widening between government rhetoric and practical reality. An extended government consultation process initiated in January 2003,¹¹ titled 'A Shared Future: Improving Relations in Northern Ireland,' illustrates these tensions nicely. Graham and Nash (2006: 276) argue that 'A Shared Future' is a state-led and elitist initiative that strives towards a pluralist society without acknowledging that such a society stems from a political process that, inadvertently, has concretized Northern Ireland's ethno-national allegiances. They criticize this consultation as a policy that 'necessarily foregrounds ideas of cultural diversity and pluralism...at the expense of a sustained engagement with the temporal and spatial dimensions of identities in Northern Ireland' (*ibid*: 256).

Government directives such as these, however well intentioned, pose challenges to the practical work of cultural relations. Nash (2005a: 289) suggests that the concept of diversity must also recognize differences in local contexts, such as different levels of violence, segregation and deprivation. She argues that these differences shape the degree to which groups feel willing and confident enough to engage with the demanding questions of community relations that are pivotal to true change in Northern Ireland. Nash applauds new developments and efforts by those working in the community relations sector to seek progressive ways of addressing the fraught issues of heritage, culture and identity:

(T)he approach to culture is not simply deconstructive. Traditions are not simply reduced to invention; identities are not simply destabilised. Instead, culture and heritage are presented as important sources of personal and collective identities *and* as more dynamic and more diverse than can be contained within the familiar model of two polarised 'communities.' (*ibid*: 294, emphasis in original)

¹¹ Initiated by the Community Relations Unit of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

This strategy is crucial, as confidence and security are vital for maintaining support for the ongoing resolution and transformation of the Troubles. In my empirical research, I will explore this strategy in greater depth.

Given Northern Ireland's extensive history of conflict, it is not surprising that the current discourse of culture revolves largely around cultural diversity, which has itself been replaced, to some extent, by the dialogue around 'community cohesion' in other parts of the UK (Dwyer and Uberoi 2009). As Nash (2005b: 295) observes, within community relations and cultural policy in Northern Ireland, the term 'diversity' refers to 'an approach to culture which recognises differences rather than imposing unwanted assimilation.' In this context, 'diversity' links anti-sectarianism to anti-racism: 'It...defies sectarian division, precedes new patterns of immigration, and extends diversity to include other ethnic groups' (*ibid*). These are ambitious projects for a society that has long operated within a binary model of ethnicity, and which now, understandably, struggles to expand that model. Northern Ireland's newly imagined social relationships and political structures face the additional challenge of 'accommodat(ing) divergent political perspectives, including those that reject pluralism' (*ibid*: 65). For Northern Ireland, perhaps, the challenge is now to progress an increasingly diverse society in which agreement may always be elusive.

Conclusion

The aftermath of Northern Ireland's conflict can be read in many different ways, and through a variety of disciplinary lenses. In the preceding chapter, I made the case for greater synergy between cultural geography and conflict transformation theory. In this chapter, I have outlined how the contested dimensions of peacebuilding must actively engage with contested cultural landscapes. The issues that underlie the conflict – the struggle over contested identities and ideas of place that are ascribed to and drawn from the land – are as prevalent today as at any previous point in the history of this troubled region. Graham (2004) argues that the key to resolving the conflict lies in creating a positively defined loyalist identity. I expand his argument beyond loyalism: I argue that the key to a sustainable 'post-conflict' future in Northern Ireland relies on a larger process of redefining and renegotiating place-derived cultural identities. To this end, I have chosen carefully the contested landscapes that will serve as case studies for my empirical research. In Chapter Five, I will explore 'post-conflict' republican cultural identities through the transformation of Divis Mountain, and

loyalist identities through the transformation of the 11th Night bonfire tradition in Chapter Six. Each landscape is part of specific, targeted policy initiatives designed to re-make contested spaces in peacetime Belfast. In their different ways, these iconic touchstones of loyalist and republican culture speak eloquently to themes of place, heritage, culture, and landscape, and they offer rich scope for exploring the interplay between conflict transformation and cultural geography.

In this chapter, I have also gestured toward under-explored aspects of the Northern Ireland conflict and its ambiguous aftermath. As Edwards and Bloomer (2008: 1) observe: 'That communities traditionally sympathetic to paramilitarism are now making moves towards abandoning the option of 'armed struggle' in the 'new' Northern Ireland is a phenomenon hitherto under-explored by academics.' Although recent work has focused on the political operations at work in these communities, particularly in their transition from terrorism to democratic politics (for example, O'Donnell 2008; Tonge 2008), I have chosen to bring my geographer's imagination to bear on the questions of place and identity that underpin these transformations.

Moreover, I have conceptualized this project to address gaps in the scholarship about Northern Ireland's ethnic minorities. Despite saturated scholarship on the Troubles and their aftermath, little academic attention has been dedicated to the experiences of minority ethnic residents. Although recent years have witnessed increasing numbers of research studies about ethnic minorities living in Northern Ireland, these projects tend to be executed in isolation from the much larger body of work around conflict and peace. In contrast, I have positioned ethnic minorities firmly within my study of 'post-conflict' transformations. As I will discuss in the following chapter, I conceptualized this project as a direct engagement with the communities I seek to highlight in both the academic and practical work of the peace process. I argue that scholarship on Northern Ireland must expand beyond its traditional binary model of sectarian conflict to acknowledge how diverse relationships and communities are also vital to the process of building peace.



Figure 3.1. Peace line at Springmartin, West Belfast. Photo by Mark Johnston.



Figure 3.2. Entrance to Tiger's Bay, a loyalist enclave in North Belfast. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.3. Republican mural, Falls, West Belfast. Photo by the author.



Figure 3.4. Loyalist mural, Mount Vernon estate, North Belfast. Photo by the author.

Chapter Four

Research Strategy and Design

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological framework for my research. This thesis takes engagement with landscape as a means for understanding identity and culture in ‘post-conflict’ Northern Ireland. I begin by positioning my work within larger academic debates, drawing in particular on the rich seam of methodological literatures within feminist geography and participatory research. Although my work in Northern Ireland sits outside the parameters of mainstream feminist and participatory traditions, both sets of literature have shaped my research strategy and my engagement with the ethical implications that arose from this project.

The second section outlines my research methods, or ‘ways of asking’ (Nairn 2002). For this project, I adopted a set of mixed, qualitative methodologies that were designed to achieve a balance of breadth and depth in my research materials. In this section, I elaborate on the various methods (participant observation, semi-structured interviews, semi-structured group discussions, and maintenance of a research diary) that I employed. I discuss the ways in which these methods intersect with and amplify each other to produce empirical material.

The third section focuses more broadly on my research strategy. I begin by discussing the 18-month timeframe of my fieldwork period, which allowed me to delve into three distinct cultural populations in Northern Ireland: loyalists, republicans and ethnic minorities. I pay particular attention to the formal collaborations that I developed with the Belfast-based chapters of two national non-profit organizations: Groundwork Northern Ireland and the National Trust. I elaborate on the reasons for selecting these two organizations, relating their remits to my research questions about cultural identity and the transformation of contested landscapes. I then discuss the practical outreach work that I spearheaded on behalf of both organizations in Belfast’s burgeoning minority ethnic community sector, and I relate these networking possibilities to my own research.

The fourth section focuses on the first of two case studies that I selected for this project. I briefly describe the 11th Night bonfire tradition as it relates to my research interests in contested cultural landscapes. Next, I describe how my collaboration with Groundwork

Northern Ireland created opportunities for practical engagement with this transforming tradition, which in turn shaped the evolution of this case study. For the remainder of this section, I discuss my strategy and the ways in which I drew upon various methodological components to explore how the transforming bonfire tradition provokes new relationships between place, culture and identity. The first strand of this case study relates to loyalist perspectives and experiences (Chapter Six); the second strand, to those of ethnic minorities (Chapter Seven). I discuss my methodological processes for each strand separately.

The fifth section focuses on the second of my two case studies, which explores the demilitarizing landscape of Divis Mountain. I begin with a brief rationale for selecting this site, contrasting its landscape to that of the loyalist bonfire tradition and describing the mountain's significance in the psyche of Belfast's republican communities. Like the bonfire case study, my research on Divis Mountain encompasses two strands. The first strand relates to republican perspectives (Chapter Five); the second, to those of ethnic minorities (Chapter Seven). I first discuss my research strategy with relation to local republicans. Next, I discuss my collaboration with the National Trust, my outreach work on behalf of their behalf in the minority ethnic community sector, and my research into minority ethnic perceptions of place, culture and identity in Northern Ireland.

The sixth section of this chapter addresses issues of positionality and reflexivity. I reflect upon negotiations of my own identity as a raced/classed/gendered individual in Northern Ireland's delicate political environment. I also discuss the advantages and disadvantages of my collaborative relationships with Groundwork Northern Ireland and the National Trust, and I describe some of the tensions that arose through the research opportunities they created. Throughout this section, I explore my experiences in dialogue with the feminist and participatory literatures that infuse my methodological approach.

I conclude this chapter with a reflection on my research strategy. I summarize the key features of my approach, contextualizing my methods with regard to the breadth of participants I sought to include. I discuss how this thesis contributes to rich academic debates on methodologies that engage landscape to understand identity and culture, and I push these concepts further to study peacebuilding in societies recovering from conflict. I end by highlighting some innovative dimensions of my methodological approach and the contributions that my research makes to scholarship and practice.

1. *Feminist and Participatory Research Debates*

As a cultural geographer, I explore the shifting meanings and identities that people in a post-ceasefire society derive from contested landscapes. This work requires great sensitivity to the contexts in which transformations of place, culture and identity occur. From the outset, I felt drawn to methodological approaches that could acknowledge the delicate dynamics involved with conducting research in such places. As Moss (2002: 3) reflects: 'Thinking about feminist research tends to sharpen an approach to a project in that understanding power and knowledge brings into focus the varied contexts in which the research takes place.' I found her observation to be particularly apt for Northern Ireland, where competing territorial and cultural claims overlay a general atmosphere of unease.

In an early retrospective article, McDowell (1997: 382) describes feminist geography as 'looking at the actions and meanings of gendered people...at the different ways in which spaces are gendered and how this affects people's understandings of themselves as women or men.' In the intervening years, the scope of feminist geography has widened. Moss (2002) argues that a feminist politics, broadly defined, influences all aspects of the research process. Along similar lines, Hall (2002) questions the possibility of feminist geography without gender. She comes to the conclusion that for herself and her postgraduate contemporaries, 'feminism is more intuitive than explicit and that it is inflected with postcolonialism and postmodernism' (*ibid*: 24). She points out that feminist critique often serves as initial exposure to the idea that places are permeated with power relations. Indeed, my own growing awareness of this idea, and its implications for my research site, was profoundly influenced by my engagement with feminist geographical scholarship.

Feminist geography also steered me toward the burgeoning literature in participatory research, with a number of feminist scholars conceptualizing participatory dimensions to their work (see Cahill 2007; Sultana 2007). The ideals that drive participatory research mirror the values of feminist research, for example, its emphasis on participation and collaboration, people's experience and knowledge, and knowledge for the purpose of political action (Gatenby and Humphries 2000: 90). The value that participatory research places on local and indigenous knowledge echoes feminist poststructuralist suspicion of overarching theories, and also the value it ascribes to multiple types of knowledge (Reason and Bradbury 2001, cited by Cameron and Gibson 2005: 317).

My project sits somewhat ambiguously within the parameters of participatory debates. Participatory approaches are frequently conflated with ‘action’ research. Reason and Bradbury (2001: 1) offer a working definition of action research as ‘a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview [that] is emerging at this historical moment.’ My own research deviates from their definition; at no point did I open this project to a democratic process of revision. Nonetheless, I listened carefully to my participants and to my collaborators, through whom I embedded my research. At various points, I reconsidered my approach and reshaped my questions in order to respond to perceived needs – both theirs and mine. Like many participatory projects, at its heart my doctoral research was a ‘form of praxis aimed at social change’ (Gatenby and Humphries 2000: 89) that engaged in dialogue with transformations at work on a number of different scales in Northern Ireland. As Cameron and Gibson (2005: 320) observe, a ‘micro-politics of self-transformation is an important part of a larger social change and macropolitical agenda.’ Like Parr (2007), they suggest that a participatory approach can contribute to social and economic change by focusing on forms of identity and subjectivity.

Alongside their advocacy of qualitative methodologies, feminist and participatory research traditions increasingly emphasize the importance of reflexivity in the research process. Sultana (2007: 376) describes reflexivity as a reflection on ‘how one is inserted in grids of power relations and how that influences methods, interpretations and knowledge production.’ She argues that practices of reflexivity are critical for the production of ethical research, by opening it to more complex and nuanced understandings of issues. Nairn (2002: 149), however, stresses the importance of ‘ongoing vigilance’ to the research process, emphasizing that reflexivity must be continuously invoked. Rose (1997) adopts an even more cautious approach, concentrating on the anxieties and ambivalences that surround reflexive methodologies and illuminating their limits.

As scholars in both participatory and feminist research traditions have turned their reflexive gaze on their own practices, the methodological traditions themselves undergo a process of revision. Kesby (2007: 2819) cautions that participation, like feminism, must now be seen ‘as a partial, situated, and contestable work in progress subject to future challenges and transformations.’ His warning is apt for my own project, with its focus on contested cultural landscapes that are at once transforming and transformative. The next section details the qualitative methodologies that I employed to explore and to interrogate these landscapes.

2. *Research Methods, or 'Ways of Asking'*

In this section, I outline my research methods, or what Nairn (2002: 148) describes as 'ways of asking.' For my doctoral project, I designed a complementary, integrated field programme that strove to create dialogue and interaction between its various components. To maintain a balance of breadth and depth, I deliberately chose a set of mixed methodologies. Reinharz (1992: 197) notes:

Multiple methods enable feminist researchers to link past and present, 'data-gathering' and action, and individual behaviour with social frameworks...By combining methods, feminist researchers are particularly able to illuminate previously unexamined or misunderstood experience.

The diversity of methods at my disposal allowed me to choose the most appropriate method for each respective phase of the research process, with an eye for the 'level of empathy that could realistically be expected at key points' (Nairn: 148). As Kong (1998: 80) observes:

Some methods may be more likely to yield certain insights into particular experiences, while others may yield other types of insight. In other words, different methods yield different 'truths,' all of which are valid.

Crucially, I emphasized qualitative methodologies 'to understand lived experience and to reflect on and interpret the understandings and shared meanings of people's everyday social worlds and realities' (Limb and Dwyer 2001: 6).

Participant observation was a vital element of my research strategy. Bennett (2002: 139) describes participant observation as the attempt 'to understand the everyday lives of other people from their perspective [by requiring] researchers to situate themselves in the lives of others.' Critics of the method cite its small sample size, its tendency to privilege depth at the expense of breadth, and its loss of detachment. However, participant observation is unparalleled in its ability to study behaviour in its natural setting, and thus offers great

depth of understanding (Dowler 2001: 158). Similarly, Nairn (2002: 149) argues that '(b)y participating in social phenomena we observe, we are more likely to learn the underlying meanings that produce that phenomena.' For my purposes, the strengths of participant observation outweighed its potential weaknesses. By working alongside the other methodological components, participant observation illuminated the human dimension of my research questions and helped me to examine the 'vying discourses' (Dowler 2001: 159) at work in Northern Ireland. With regard to my research objectives, this method allowed me to observe the transformations at work in my chosen contested landscapes, and to observe people's shifting experiences of and engagements with them. As I discuss in the next section, the formal collaborations that I developed within Belfast's voluntary sector led to numerous opportunities for participant observation. However, as I will discuss in the final section of this chapter, on the reverse side of these opportunities were challenges related to positionality and, at times, my dual professional and academic relationships with my research participants.

To balance the breadth of participant observation, and to engage with the voiced experiences of my research participants, I also pursued semi-structured interviews and group discussions. Through these methods, I explored in more depth my research questions of how transformations of contested landscapes provoke people to think in new ways about place, culture and identity. Initially, I found myself drawn to the 'dialogic character' (Bedford and Burgess 2001: 123-124) of group discussions, and to their potential to empower participants through exploration of 'social agency and collective knowledge production' (Hyams 2004: 106). As Pratt (2002: 215) argues, groups hold the potential to 'offer a safe space – literally safety in numbers – in which to discuss issues and experiences.' She argues that this type of group methodology is 'premised on the notion that we develop knowledge in context and in relation to others' (*ibid*) However, as Kong (1998: 81) observes, for issues that are sensitive and deeply personal, individual interviews may be more appropriate than the social context generated by group interviews.

In the end, I adopted both approaches. I organized 28 group discussions and 15 individual interviews. Of these, I recorded and transcribed 15 group discussions and one individual interview, with the permission of the participants. Over many months, I developed the facilitation skills necessary for these varied discussions. Likewise, I learned to gauge the level of delicacy required for any given interview participant. For republican ex-prisoners, for instance, whose personal histories were intensely political and deeply sensitive, one-to-one interviews were usually the wiser option. To the best of my abilities, I exercised discretion in

choosing one format over the other, always bearing in mind the delicate atmosphere in which I conducted this research project. At all times, I tried to follow the leads and signals communicated by my interview participants and other research contacts.

As with participation observation, the semi-structured conversations – whether group discussions or one-to-one interviews – harboured their own liabilities and disadvantages. Hyams (2004) argues that the attention given to ‘voices’ in group discussion reinforces the simplistic equation of silence with absence and voice with presence, thereby making it difficult to hear meaningful silences. With regard to one-to-one interviews, Valentine (2002: 122) observes that the interviewer and interviewee engage in a constant process of (re)production. She argues: ‘As a consequence of these complex ways that positionings are (re)negotiated throughout interviews it is impossible to fully know or understand how these shape the knowledge produced from the encounter.’ In my own work, I have tried to take their warnings to heart. Like Sultana (2007: 378), I acknowledge that ‘I was only able to partially access the lives of the people I was interested in’ and ‘tried to be faithful to the relations in that space and time...and the knowledge that was produced through the research, however partial.’

The use of multiple methods enabled me to amplify the strengths, and to compensate for the weaknesses, of my various methodological strands. I discovered that participant observation and semi-structured conversations interacted with each other in unexpected ways. For example, participant observation frequently gave rise to both the content of and participants for the group discussions and interviews. In return, the material generated by the discussions and interviews tended to sharpen my subsequent observations.

Throughout the fieldwork process, I faithfully maintained a research diary to ‘show the unfolding of a story as it develops’ (Bennett 2001: 146-147). Following Bennett (*ibid*: 147), this diary contains three parts: 1) field observations; 2) attempts to make sense of these; and 3) my reflections in relation to the research. The research diary serves as my primary record for participant observation, but it also contextualizes each group discussion or interview that I conducted, and it details the lengthy process for recruiting research participants. In total, the research diary amounts to 185,437 words. The discipline required to maintain this diary, together with the monthly reports that I sent to my advisor, provoked me to grapple with my data as it emerged. The continuous process of reflection proved to be a valuable tool, helping me to identify new opportunities and directions for my work that I might otherwise have missed. The research diary forms an evolving narrative through which

I can trace significant shifts, both in the progress of my research studies and in myself as a researcher.

3. *Research Strategy*

Fieldwork began in February 2007 and ended in August 2008. Although I had originally planned to finish the previous summer, I realized that a six-month timeframe would be insufficient for my research objectives. Belfast is a complicated city; to negotiate it requires sensitivity and deep awareness. Moreover, the transformations that I sought to study inevitably unfolded at their own pace: The 11th Night bonfires changed enormously from one year to the next, and the demilitarization of Divis Mountain occurred fitfully, over months and years. With 18 months, I was able to immerse myself in my research setting and to develop strong networks for participant observation and interview/discussion recruitment. The longer I lived in Belfast, the deeper and more nuanced was my understanding of this place and its people. The eighteen-month period was a transformative one, as Northern Ireland approached and moved through the tenth anniversary of the peace accords. Watershed events in the political arena reverberated powerfully with people at the grassroots level; I wanted to study their perspectives as they lived through these transitions. As O'Reilly (2005:93) points out, a longer timeframe shifts the focus on the 'static elements' of people's lives to a focus on processes and 'how questions.' Indeed, as I illustrated in Chapter Two, 'how questions' are crucial to the over-arching research aims of this project.

Before the ceasefires, Northern Ireland's political situation and culture of conflict imposed considerable limitations on research designs; cross-community investigations were viewed with great suspicion.¹ Times are different now. The peace process has created research opportunities unimagined during the Troubles, not least of which is a wider range of research participants. Dowler (2001: 158), who conducted research in Northern Ireland in the early 1990s, argues that '(w)hen working with a community, it is important to obtain a range of backgrounds in the selection of respondents, especially if the community has undergone years of civil strife.' From the outset, I knew that I sought extreme perspectives on both sides

¹ For instance, Dowler conducted research (on which she later based this observation) in Belfast during a particularly tense time in the run-up to the first declared ceasefire. Concerned that her research participants might perceive her as a spy, Dowler chose to focus her study solely on Catholics living in one West Belfast neighbourhood (Dowler 2001: 153-154).

of the conflict, and that I would need to network separately in different areas. The contested landscapes that I chose to study are powerful cultural icons for their respective communities: bonfires for loyalists and Divis Mountain for republicans. By gathering in-depth information from these extremes, I felt that I could illuminate a more honest picture of present-day Belfast, ten years after the signing of the peace accords. Moreover, to probe a different dimension to the challenge of creating shared space in a conflicted society, I wanted to understand how ethnic minorities engage with these ‘culturally charged’ (Matless 2000: 142) landscapes.

Given the precarious political situation in Belfast, I decided to collaborate with established non-profit organizations that could vouch for me in a city long-accustomed to treating outsiders with suspicion. Benson and Nagar (2006: 584) define collaboration as ‘the combined insights of different persons, places and research contexts,’ and recognize its importance ‘in generating new dialogues and knowledges across socioeconomic, geographical and institutional areas.’ I sought collaborators that would provide logistical support for my research, expose me to new perspectives, and both challenge and enhance my existing knowledge of the peace process. Moreover, as I sought organizations for whom my work – both academic and practical – would be useful and important.

I chose an organization called Groundwork Northern Ireland as my initial collaborator. Like its counterparts in the UK-wide Groundwork Trust, Groundwork Northern Ireland works in partnership with local communities, statutory agencies and key funding bodies to facilitate community and environmental regeneration. Established in Northern Ireland in 1991, the organization has developed strong relationships with economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods – both Protestant and Catholic – which in Belfast were among the most severely affected by the Troubles, and which continue to experience the aftershocks today. Unlike similar environmental organizations, Groundwork Northern Ireland places equal emphasis on the social regeneration of these ‘post-conflict’ neighbourhoods. In addition to more traditional services in landscape architecture and project implementation, the organization also works closely with communities on building relationships, both internal and external, that can facilitate wider processes of regeneration and conflict transformation. Groundwork Northern Ireland summarizes its mission with the following motto: ‘Changing Places, Changing Lives, Changing Minds.’ As a geographer, I felt drawn to this triad of place, people and peacebuilding. I perceived Groundwork Northern Ireland as an organization that engaged on a practical level with the questions that previously I had

entertained only as abstract theory. At the beginning of my fieldwork period, I had yet to specify my particular case studies. I suspected that collaboration with Groundwork would open opportunities for engaging with appropriate participants and landscapes for my research project.

In February 2007, I contacted the director of Groundwork Northern Ireland. Sylvia Gordon, then the Assistant Director and the head of the Policy & Development Team,² met with me to explore the potential for collaboration. I proposed to join Groundwork Northern Ireland as a long-term volunteer, assisting the organization on projects that would feed my research questions. We agreed that I would join the Bonfire Management Programme, which would allow me to look closely at physical and cultural transformations in working-class loyalist neighbourhoods. Over time, my engagement with this programme solidified into a case study for my doctoral research. In exchange for Groundwork's institutional support and, eventually, introductions to interview participants, I offered to spearhead the organization's minority ethnic outreach efforts. In Belfast, the voluntary sector (of which Groundwork Northern Ireland is a part) is now realizing that its work must expand from a focus on 'two communities' to a model that is sensitive to and inclusive of Northern Ireland's growing diversity. Sylvia Gordon accepted my proposal immediately. 'I want you to help us be on the edge,' she said (Research Diary, 20 February 2007).

On behalf of Groundwork Northern Ireland, I joined the most prominent bodies in the emerging minority ethnic community sector: the Northern Ireland Council on Ethnic Minorities; the Black, Minority Ethnic and Faith Network; and the South Belfast Roundtable (formerly the South Belfast Roundtable on Racism.) Through these organizations, I cultivated relationships with numerous community groups. I later drew upon these relationships to organize discussion groups and to identify interview participants for my doctoral research. Throughout my fieldwork period, I included my interactions with the minority ethnic community sector as research material, with participant observation notes recorded regularly in my research diary.

My other case study, on Divis Mountain, developed in a less formal manner. On the advice of a local acquaintance in Belfast, who suggested that I might be interested in gathering oral histories of republican residents in West Belfast who live at the base of the Belfast Hills, I began to develop a separate line of inquiry with regard to the transformation of Divis Mountain. Its appeal was due in part to its striking parallels and contrasts with my

² Sylvia Gordon became Director of Groundwork Northern Ireland in April 2008.

first case study. Like the landscape of the loyalist bonfires, Divis Mountain resonates powerfully with members of one dominant ethnic population and is viewed with unease by those of the other. Yet unlike the loyalist bonfires, whose cultural landscape extends across Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland, Divis Mountain is anchored in one specific geographic site.

I selected my second collaborating organization, the National Trust, on the basis of its role in the mountain's demilitarization and subsequent public management. In contrast to Groundwork Northern Ireland, the remit of the National Trust extends throughout England and Wales as well as Northern Ireland.³ The organization acquires and protects threatened coastline, countryside and buildings, which they maintain for public access. In 2004, the National Trust spearheaded the purchase and acquisition of Divis Mountain. As a new public resource, the majority of the initial budget went toward clean-up and maintenance of the site, with little left over for community outreach. In August 2007, I contacted the National Trust's warden for Divis, and I offered myself as a volunteer. My familiarity and extensive contacts with the minority ethnic sector were an attractive resource to the National Trust. Like Groundwork Northern Ireland, the Trust's warden at Divis and other Belfast-based managers were eager to expand and diversify their outreach remit. The warden and I agreed that I would raise awareness of the mountain within the minority ethnic sector, and that I would coordinate and lead walking tours of Divis for any interested community groups. When possible, and following Burgess (1996), after each of these walks I would facilitate a group discussion to gather research material on their perceptions and experiences of the mountain. For the discussion venue, the site warden and his staff would make available to me the Second World War Nissan hut located near the entrance to the public footpath. Finally, I was given the option of volunteering in a more general capacity whenever I wished to do so. This primarily involved assisting the staff with large-scale public walks and with property maintenance. The latter proved to be particularly helpful for my research, as it allowed me to develop an intimate physical knowledge of the landscape. For research purposes, my interactions with the National Trust operatives at Divis, and with the mountain itself, were recorded as participant observation.

My collaborative relationships with Groundwork Northern Ireland and the National Trust required me to develop research practices that were 'necessarily fluid and flexible' (O'Reilly 2005: 27). With Groundwork, in particular, our relationship took some time to

³ The National Trust of Scotland is a separate, although related, organization.

settle, as we explored how our collaboration would work. I had to learn how to balance allegiance to my collaborators with the critical distance necessary for my research. Later in this chapter, I explore in greater depth these collaborations in relation to my own positionality as a researcher, volunteer and ordinary resident of Belfast.

4. Case Study: 11th Night Bonfires

The bonfire case study emerged directly through my collaboration with Groundwork Northern Ireland. The 11th Night bonfires form a vital part of the loyalist cultural landscape, but their continued presence and sectarian intent remain deeply controversial in a divided city. Although I had long been fascinated by the tradition, it rose to the forefront of my research on contested cultural landscapes when I was invited to join the Bonfire Management Programme.

Following two successful pilot programmes, Belfast City Council voted in September 2006 to introduce grant-aid framework for communities involved with the bonfire tradition. The purpose of this programme was three-fold:

- 1) To support communities in the celebration of their cultural tradition through positive engagement, whilst engaging with the perceived negative aspects that have become associated with bonfires.
- 2) To support local communities in improving the management of these bonfires, particularly with regard to cultural sensitivity, inclusion and safety.
- 3) To reduce the adverse health and environmental impacts of bonfires.

Groundwork Northern Ireland won the tender to administer this programme. Over the course of three years, the number of participating communities increased from 13 to 34. My research on 11th Night bonfires encompasses two strands: perceptions among residents living in loyalist neighbourhoods with an active bonfire tradition, and perceptions among ethnic minorities living in greater Belfast. Both strands drew upon participant observation and group discussions.

Strand 1: Loyalist Perspectives

Participant observation forms an extensive part of my research into loyalist identities and experiences of the transforming bonfire tradition. In the months leading up to July 2007, I shadowed staff members from Groundwork Northern Ireland on their site visits and meetings with local community leaders. During this time, I listened carefully to dialogue, both within these communities and amongst my colleagues. I witnessed the creation of local bonfire committees; followed their development over many months; and came to understand the challenges to and possibilities for change. Slowly, I began to frame these localized efforts in relation to the larger transformations at work across the city. As my research diary reflects, this period provided excellent opportunities, not only for participant observation but also for continuous reflection.

In the spring of 2008, at the beginning of the programme's second year, Sylvia Gordon asked me to take a more active role. She assigned me as the liaison to the bonfire committee in Donegall Pass, a loyalist neighbourhood located at the southern edge of City Centre. For nearly five months, beginning in March 2008, I met regularly with the members of the local bonfire committee. In this capacity, I supported their efforts to improve the neighbourhood's designated bonfire site. This work included facilitating discussions with children, teenagers and young adults on safety and environmental guidelines. I also worked with the committee members to design a programme to explore their cultural heritage. As part of this programme, I co-facilitated a discussion with a group of 24 young people, and I was also present at a discussion on increased consumption of alcohol during bonfire season. A colleague facilitated this second session, which allowed me to observe intently. Out of respect for the delicate dynamics involved in organizing these sessions, combined with pervasive suspicion amongst the participants – and in loyalist communities, more broadly – about their misrepresentation by outsiders, I chose not to make electronic recordings of either of these discussions. Nonetheless, they offered plenty of research material for participant observation, which I later recorded in my research diary. More broadly, my work in Donegall Pass provided excellent insights into one community's engagement with the transformation of the 11th Night bonfires.

The months that I dedicated to participant observation allowed me to identify more specific questions with regard to the relationship between bonfire transformation and shifting forms of loyalist cultural identity. Groundwork provided me with an excellent opportunity for

eliciting responses. In June 2008, I was asked to facilitate a series of discussions with nine communities that had recently joined the Bonfire Management Programme. These neighbourhoods received smaller grants to defray the costs of their community festivals. In return, each neighbourhood was required to identify and convene a small group of residents for a 45-minute discussion on cultural heritage and bonfires. From early-June through mid-July, I facilitated these discussions in eight loyalist neighbourhoods, with numbers of participants ranging from one to 15. These discussions covered a wide demographic range (see Table 4.1). For the purposes of my doctoral project, I am counting my notes from these nine group discussions as research material. In deference to the suspicion with which loyalist neighbourhoods tend to view outsiders, coupled with the delicate political environment in which the Bonfire Management Programme operated, I chose not to ask permission to record these discussions electronically.⁴

I did, however, record two group discussions that were organized with the help of colleagues at Groundwork and in the voluntary sector. The first of these discussions took place with the women's group in the North Belfast neighbourhood of Woodvale. Unlike the other communities participating in the Bonfire Management Programme, Woodvale's bonfire committee was composed almost entirely of women. Like the other discussions that I facilitated on behalf of the Bonfire Management Programme, this discussion focused on their perceptions of the transforming bonfire tradition and its relationship with transformations in their own loyalist identities. I also drew forth their opinions on the role of gender in loyalism, probing their thoughts on why and how they formed a predominantly female committee in the highly masculinized world of loyalist bonfires. As we arranged the logistics for the discussion, and as the discussion itself progressed, I chose to emphasize my role as a researcher, rather than my role with the Bonfire Management Programme.

With the help of a colleague in the voluntary sector, I conducted another formal, recorded discussion with senior loyalist leaders in the neighbouring town of Antrim. Although the Bonfire Management Programme brought me into regular contact with paramilitary members in Belfast, I felt that potentially sensitive research about paramilitarism should be kept separate from my professional responsibilities. These men, both of whom represent their respective paramilitary organizations to Antrim Borough Council, are heavily involved with efforts to transform their local bonfires. As they had no connection to Belfast's

⁴ Later in this chapter, I discuss issues of positionality that arose from my collaborative relationships with Groundwork Northern Ireland (and by extension, the Bonfire Management Programme) and the National Trust.

Bonfire Management Programme, I felt comfortable asking for their permission to record the discussion. Our conversation focused not only on the relationships between the bonfires and their shifting cultural identities, but also on their perspectives about transformations in loyalist paramilitary vision and culture. The material from this discussion, as well as from the interview in Woodvale, provided me with detailed transcripts, which I analyzed in conjunction with the notes from my extensive opportunities in participant observation. Out of respect for the privacy of my research participants, I use pseudonyms when writing about these interviews in subsequent chapters.

Finally, I conducted six interviews with individuals from a range of professional backgrounds who deepened my contextual understanding of 11th Night bonfires (Table 4.2). With one exception, I have withheld their names in this dissertation.

Strand 2. Minority Ethnic Perspectives

For the second strand of this case study, I explored perceptions of 11th Night bonfires among minority ethnic residents living in greater Belfast.⁵ This represents a new area of research in Northern Ireland, and the Bonfire Management Programme offered a solid base from which to conduct this project.

Unlike the loyalist strand, with the ample opportunities it provided for participant observation, this second strand of research focused primarily on group discussions (Table 4.3). To recruit participants, I networked through the Black, Minority Ethnic and Faith Network – an umbrella organization for people working in the minority ethnic community sector. With the help of colleagues in the Network, I organized discussions with community groups from the following populations: Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Muslim and Turkish. These populations represent a spectrum of Northern Ireland's growing ethnic diversity, ranging from the relatively longer-established Chinese and Indian populations to the more recent Turkish newcomers. Each discussion took place at the office or headquarters of the respective community organization. I also sought to arrange discussions with Polish, Portuguese and Lithuanian residents; with the expansion of the European Union in 2005, these groups are among Northern Ireland's fastest-growing

⁵ I chose not to include local nationalist/republicans in this project. In early 2007, the Belfast-based Institute of Conflict Research applied for funding to conduct a study of nationalist perceptions of loyalist bonfires. Although their application was unsuccessful, the Institute may re-apply in the future. If their future application bears fruit, my project on ethnic minority perceptions will dovetail nicely with their research.

minority ethnic populations. However, due to lack of interest on the part of their respective community representatives, group discussions for my research did not materialize. Later, in contrast to the other single-ethnic groups that I studied in this research strand, the Black, Minority Ethnic and Faith Network itself agreed to participate in a group discussion at one of its quarterly meetings, which I hosted on the premises of Groundwork Northern Ireland. Finally, I also recruited through a snowball technique a group of American students, all based at Queen's University. In doing so, I sought to create an opportunity to probe my own complicated perspectives of the 11th Night bonfires, becoming in this way a research participant in my own project.

I facilitated each of these discussions with the aid of posters created in early 2007 by a consultant for the Bonfire Management Programme. Paul Hutchinson designed a traveling exhibit comprising five pop-up stands, which were designed to provoke discussion within loyalist communities participating in the programme. Through simple text and striking photos, each poster addressed a different dimension of the 11th Night bonfire tradition: Framework, Fun, Flags, Fire and Future questions (Figure 4.1). Together, they provided a general sense of the bonfire process within loyalist communities. At my request, Groundwork made a smaller, portable set that I took to my interviews with minority ethnic community groups. I began each discussion session by inviting participants to view the exhibit. Frequently, these posters provided the participants with their first images of the bonfires. I then facilitated a discussion about their experience of the 11th Night tradition, drawing forth their thoughts on the relationships and disconnections between the bonfires and their larger senses of belonging and identity in Northern Ireland. The photographic exhibit remained in place throughout the entire session, at times entering into dialogue with the group's discussion. By serving as a visual focal point, the images helped participants to articulate their questions about and opinions and experiences of this tradition.

5. Case Study: Divis Mountain

To balance the intensely loyalist 11th Night bonfires, I focused my other case study on perspectives from the opposite side of Northern Ireland's conflict. Divis Mountain, the highest of the Belfast hills, has long been considered iconic to republicans living in its shadow. In the aftermath of its occupation by the British military, Divis remains a deeply

contested landscape, posing sizeable challenges to efforts to develop the mountain as a shared cultural resource. As with my bonfire research, this case study encompasses two strands: Perceptions among residents living in staunchly republican neighbourhoods in West Belfast, and perceptions among ethnic minorities living in greater Belfast.

Strand 1. Republican Perspectives

Participant observation formed an important baseline for my research on Divis Mountain. Elsewhere in this chapter, I detail how my collaboration with the National Trust revolved primarily around the minority ethnic outreach that I conducted on the organization's behalf. However, this collaboration also proved beneficial to my research in less targeted ways. The National Trust propelled the public acquisition of Divis Mountain, and was subsequently awarded the remit to maintain the mountain for public use. Its wardens were an invaluable resource for my research on the mountain's extraordinary transformation from a British military base to a place of public access. The research insights that I acquired through participant observation, via the National Trust, helped me to contextualize and to frame the discussions that I posed to republicans and to ethnic minorities about their relationships with this contested landscape.

In republican West Belfast, I sought participants for a series of semi-structured interviews and group discussions; I hoped that these encounters would yield insights into the relationship between the transformation of Divis Mountain and expressions of republican cultural identity. In July 2007, I contacted *Fáilte Feirste Thiar*, West Belfast's local tourism board. I emerged from this initial meeting with names and contact information for three individuals; recruitment for this case study snowballed from there. Networking proved to be fairly straightforward in the tight-knit communities of republican West Belfast.

Initially, I had hoped to facilitate a series of group discussions across the age spectrum, with one group comprising elderly residents; a second group comprising middle-aged residents who came of age during the Troubles; and a third group comprising younger residents born during the Troubles. I anticipated that these discussions, when analyzed in relation with each other, would yield insights into the different experiences of the mountain and its shifting history of militarism. Due to a combination of logistical difficulties with organizing a group of younger residents, and the preference of middle-aged residents to speak to me individually, I conducted only two group discussions along the lines of my original

plan. The first group discussion took place with a group of elderly residents at Bleach Green Court, a care home located at the very edge of the city, on the lower slopes of Divis Mountain itself. The second discussion focused on two members of a prominent republican family: Terry Enright, an environmental campaigner, and his son Feargal Enright, an Irish language specialist. In each of these discussions, I sought to understand their experiences of Divis Mountain, through its fraught history of militarism and its subsequent demilitarization, and the mountain's shifting implications for their cultural identity and sense of belonging.

The individual interviews were facilitated along similar lines. Although I had initially intended to prioritize discussion groups over one-to-one interviews for this case study, it quickly became clear that individual conversations were the preferred option of many participants, particularly those who had fought for the IRA. Today, Northern Ireland remains a sensitive political milieu, and I realized that the tight-knit atmosphere that facilitated my networking could also pose a risk to my research participants, were they to share their narratives in a group discussion. For the convenience of my participants, I conducted the interviews in venues that they chose. As a result, the research materials for this case study were gathered in a variety of settings, for example, in the homes or offices of my participants. Less conventional venues included an artist's workshop in a renovated mill and the front passenger seat while interviewing on-duty taxi drivers.

Table 4.4 details the range of semi-structured group discussions and one-to-one interviews conducted as part of Strand 1 for my case study on Divis Mountain. For additional context, I interviewed three people who are not residents of republican West Belfast: the National Trust employee who spearheaded the public acquisition of Divis Mountain, and who subsequently presided over the British military's withdrawal from the site; the director of the Belfast Hills Partnership,⁶ an independent charity that seeks to improve the management of the hills; and a middle-aged Protestant man, from a neighbourhood in South Belfast, whom I met while assisting with a public walking tour organized by the National Trust in March 2008. Due to his ethnic background, he had long regarded Divis Mountain with fear, based on its territorial associations as a republican stronghold. The National Trust event marked his first time on the mountain. I sought to include his voice as research material, in order to complicate and to contextualize Divis Mountain's strong associations with republican

⁶ The organization's partners include local councils, government departments, community groups, conservation organizations, and businesses committed to caring for the Belfast hills.

cultural identities. With the exception of Terry and Feargal Enright, and the artists Christoff Gillen, Deirdre Mackel and Frank Quigley, I have changed the names of people interviewed.

Strand 2. Minority Ethnic Perspectives

For the second strand of this case study, I explored perceptions of Divis Mountain among minority ethnic residents in greater Belfast. On behalf of the National Trust, I publicized the mountain within Belfast's minority ethnic community sector. By August 2007, when I joined the National Trust as a volunteer, I had built strong networks with the same minority ethnic groups to which I also represented Groundwork Northern Ireland. It was a mutually beneficial collaboration; the National Trust was eager to diversify its outreach efforts, and I was well-positioned to help them do so. Over twelve months, I worked with a variety of minority ethnic community groups to organize day-trips to Divis. In an evocation of Burgess's (1996) methodologies on walking, I led guided tours of the mountain. In this way, participants could experience the terrain of the mountain itself and, from the vantage point of the summit, position the mountain within the wider regional landscapes. I drew upon participant observation to reflect on these walking tours, and I entered my observations into my research diary. When possible, I brought the groups back to the National Trust's Nissan hut for tea, lunch and discussion. The research material that I sought to gather from these discussions included their thoughts on the mountain, and how it provoked them to think more broadly about cultural identity and their sense of belonging in Northern Ireland.

These group discussions required a high degree of flexibility on my part. With one exception, the walking tours were designed as family-orientated events. The presence of small children posed some challenges to the group discussions, although I quickly learned to prioritize my interview questions. To entertain the children, I provided art supplies and environment-themed activity sheets donated by the Belfast Hills Partnership. Table 4.5 outlines the groups that participated in walking tours of Divis Mountain.

Section 6. *Positionality*

As a geographer working in a delicate 'post-conflict' environment, my own personal narrative entered unavoidably into this project. Smyth and Robinson (2001: 207) argue that

researchers working in violently divided societies struggle to connect with the mainstream research community because concepts like neutrality do not export easily to these contexts. Although I maintained a presentation of political neutrality while in Belfast, I nonetheless became what Hermann (2001: 89) calls an ‘involved outsider.’ She defines this figure as ‘one who is personally connected to the conflict...because of an identification with a general political stance such as anti-racism, anti-colonialism or non-violence that is relevant to the analysis of the specific conflict’ (*ibid*: 89-90). With regard to Northern Ireland, I divided my attention equally between loyalists and republicans, between the 11th Night bonfires and Divis Mountain. My neutrality, however, ended there. I devoted the rest of my energy and collaborative resources to my research in the minority ethnic community sector. In doing so, I advanced my own political agenda, that of bringing alternative voices into the larger dialogue of the peace process.

My collaborations with Groundwork Northern Ireland and the National Trust allowed me to immerse myself in the practical aspects of peacebuilding. These collaborations, although rewarding, were not without challenge. Like most organizations, charitable or not, Groundwork and the National Trust are rife with political intrigue, the specifics of which I had to discover and negotiate. For example, the valuable contacts in the minority ethnic sector that I brought to my work on Divis Mountain provoked resentment among other properties owned by the National Trust. One senior employee asked if I would be willing to conduct outreach to minority ethnic communities on behalf of other National Trust sites. In the interest of time and my research objectives, I had to decline. With regard to Groundwork, the organization underwent a series of managerial shake-ups in the first year of our collaboration, which resulted in Sylvia Gordon, my primary contact, eventually taking the directorship. During this time, particularly in the early months, I struggled to understand how my interests could, in practice, dovetail with the broader work of the organization. Even after three years of collaboration, and although grateful for what I have accomplished by forging contacts in the minority ethnic community sector, Groundwork’s employees still seem uncertain as to how they might incorporate these new dimensions into their work in environmental and community regeneration.

Occasionally, other challenges arose in relation to external perceptions of my collaborating organizations. The National Trust, for example, is frequently viewed as a predominantly English charity that panders to its middle- and upper-class membership base. While conducting interviews about Divis Mountain with residents of working-class

republican neighbourhoods, I would often be guarded about my affiliation with the National Trust. Concern, however, flowed in both directions. For example, I wondered whether my research engagement with former IRA members might damage my relationship with the National Trust, which was keen to position itself outside the Northern Ireland conflict. For these interviews, I was careful not to identify myself as a volunteer of the National Trust.

My collaboration with Groundwork and, subsequently, the Bonfire Management Programme, offered a different set of challenges. From the spring of 2008, I held a semi-professional role in the organization as a liaison to loyalist bonfire sites. This change in status, from volunteer to Project Development Officer, had an inevitable impact on my research. Although grateful for the rich opportunities for participant observation that stemmed from the Bonfire Management Programme, I was careful not to take advantage of my position. In part, I was afraid that conducting research interviews would not only confuse the people in loyalist communities with whom I worked, but might also lead them to voice negative opinions about situations, with the expectation that I, in my professional role, would be able to fix. As a result, I chose to use only participant observation for research encounters with communities with which I worked in a professional capacity. However, to gather the deeper insights of a semi-structured conversation, I organized discussions with two groups with whom I had virtually no professional connection: the bonfire committee in Woodvale, and loyalist paramilitary leaders in Antrim. The women's group from Woodvale, although part of the Bonfire Management Programme, had no contact with me prior to my request for a research discussion, which I arranged with the help of their liaison, who was also my colleague at Groundwork. The discussion in Antrim was arranged with the help of colleague in the voluntary sector, and the men who took part had no formal ties to the Bonfire Management Programme. For both group discussions, I highlighted my identity as an independent researcher and mentioned only in passing my affiliation with the Bonfire Management Programme.

In addition to the challenges discussed above, these collaborations required me to devote considerable time and energy for administrative purposes to the organizations, which I might otherwise have directed elsewhere. However, the disadvantages were outweighed by the rich opportunities created through these collaborations. The relationship with Groundwork was particularly helpful, in that it allowed me to see how I, in my multiple academic and professional roles, might apply my research questions on the ground. Before I began fieldwork, I articulated this challenge to myself:

One challenge that I foresee is to let the peace process be what it will be, without pinning my own hopes and visions on it. How, I wonder, can I maintain a rigorous honesty while investing myself in peacebuilding work that may be predisposed toward a rose-tinted outlook on progress?⁷

As Bennett (2002: 140) notes: ‘Participant observation can be a bit of a contradiction because it is about both taking part and observing.’ I certainly found this to be true, yet I also discovered great benefits within this contradiction. In doing so, I believe that my research became more honest and, perhaps, more attuned to Northern Ireland’s complex realities than if it had been a purely theoretical exercise.

Collaborations aside, the other perplexing challenge of positionality came from my own complicated, multiple identities. Feminist methodological philosophies have deeply inspired my approach, not least of all this observation by Jenkins et al (2003: 58, original emphasis):

Thinking and doing the ‘F’ word implies a sensitivity to power relations in the field, an awareness of the ethical role of the researcher and a commitment to the progressive role of the research *as well* as an understanding of how the researcher and the researched have been gendered, sexualised, raced and classed.

I found this to be particularly apt in the rapidly shifting society of post-ceasefire Northern Ireland, where I learned to make complex ‘identifications and disidentifications...with many different notions of sameness and differences operating at the same time’ (Valentine 2002: 120).

As a female, middle-class, educated American of mixed Japanese and Chinese ancestry, I experienced Belfast through the lens of my own shifting identities. Depending on circumstance, each of these dimensions could be an asset, a liability, or (more frequently) both at once. My educated, middle-class upbringing, for instance, provoked uncertainty in

⁷ This extract was taken from my upgrade report, submitted in December 2006.

working-class loyalist and republican neighbourhoods, but it also marked me as a ‘safe’ outsider through whom sensitive personal stories would not trickle back into the community. As a woman studying the highly masculine loyalist bonfire culture, my presence provoked a sense of camaraderie among other women, and both consternation and amusement among male bonfire builders, at once opening and closing windows into their world.

Most interesting, however, were reactions to my ethnic heritage. Like many of my research participants, I experienced my share of racist behaviour in Northern Ireland. At 5 foot 7 inches, with unambiguously Asian features, I was a visual anomaly in Belfast. My own experience of racist aggression, whether implicitly or explicitly acknowledged, helped me to develop strong rapport with other ethnic minorities whom I interviewed. To Belfast’s local Protestant and Catholic residents, my mixed ancestry and American citizenship frequently challenged their concepts of national identity. I learned to negotiate my multiple identities, drawing forth or muting aspects as a situation required. In republican West Belfast, for example, I met families still angered by the British government’s practice in the early 1970s of interning suspected paramilitary members. With these people, I shared stories about the internment of my Japanese grandparents by the American government in the Second World War. When I met community activists planning a *Gaeltacht* quarter for Irish language and culture, I drew parallels to Seattle’s Chinatown, where my maternal grandmother has lived for over forty years. In loyalist communities, I connected with devout Protestants by introducing myself as the granddaughter of a Methodist minister. More broadly, I came to feel that my mixed Japanese and Chinese heritage traced its own role in Northern Ireland. The tension between the two halves of my own heritage – so similar in appearance, yet strikingly different in culture – helped me to empathize with the fraught work of negotiating Northern Ireland’s two dominant ethnic traditions. Through my own story, I feel that I have brought to Belfast an appreciation for the subtle dynamics at work in both the conflict and the process of peacebuilding.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined an innovative strategy that enabled me to gather high-quality empirical material for this research project. By adopting a suite of qualitative methods (participant observation, group discussions, one-to-one interviews), a flexible approach, and

an 18-month timeframe, my research yielded complex understandings about politically sensitive, ‘post-conflict’ Northern Ireland. Moreover, I have conceptualized a project that encompasses extraordinary breadth in its participants and addresses known gaps in the academic literature on Northern Ireland. Edwards and Bloomer (2009: 1) lament the lack of academic interest in ‘communities traditionally sympathetic to paramilitarism [that] are now making moves towards abandoning the option of ‘armed struggle’ in the ‘new’ Northern Ireland.’ These are the communities – both loyalist and republican – that form the basis of my research. From the outset, I deliberately sought contested cultural landscapes that would draw me into the communities where memories of paramilitarism, whether past or present, complicate the peace process. Furthermore, as I will discuss in greater detail below, I devoted an equal portion of my energy, attention, and analysis to the little-explored perspectives of Northern Ireland’s ethnic minorities.

My thesis engages with landscape to understand identity and culture in a rapidly-changing, ‘post-conflict’ society. In doing so, I follow a long tradition of cultural geographers who embrace similar projects in a variety of ways. Bondi (1992, 1998) and Domosh (1996), for example, explore the gendering of the urban landscape through its symbolic coding, consumption patterns, and processes of gentrification, while Lorimer (2005), Hetherington (2003) and Crouch (2003) emphasize ‘embodied acts of landscape’ (Lorimer 2005: 85, cited in Wylie 2007: 166). In an interesting resonance to my own work, Wylie (2002, 2005) explores these ‘embodied acts’ through the practice of walking through landscape. Like not only Wylie but Burgess (1996), on whom I modeled parts of my methodology, I sought to develop a research practice that emphasizes walking alongside talking. My strategy diverges from other research practices in its emphasis on practical, participatory engagement as a means of understanding, and contributing to, the transformation of conflict as it relates to shifting conceptualizations of place and cultural identity.

To this end, my collaborations with local non-profit organizations highlight some of the more innovative dimensions of my research. Groundwork Northern Ireland, in particular, was pivotal to the development of my research strategy. As I discussed previously, their motto – ‘Changing Places, Changing Lives, Changing Minds’ – encapsulates my argument for the intersection of conflict transformation theory and cultural geography. Amplifying the theoretical scope is Groundwork’s practical emphasis on people, place and peacebuilding. Over the course of my fieldwork period, I engaged with this triad conceptually and practically. In this way, theory and praxis became intimately entwined.

The most apparent outcome of this approach is my work with minority ethnic communities. At the outset, I conceptualized this research project as a way to address their silence in scholarship on Northern Ireland. Although a handful of studies focus on ethnic minorities, with several more published in recent years, they tend to do so in isolation of the larger spectre of the Troubles. I wanted to produce a piece of work that explored minority ethnic perspectives of ‘post-conflict’ Northern Ireland, invoking the same contested cultural landscapes on which I centred my research on republican and loyalist identities. In doing so, I simultaneously drew on my collaborations with Groundwork Northern Ireland and the National Trust to reposition ethnic minorities within the practical, public work of conflict transformation in the community relations sector. I argue that both scholarship on and praxis in Northern Ireland must expand beyond its traditional, binary model of sectarian conflict to acknowledge how diverse relationships and communities are also vital to the process of building peace.

Table 4.1. Bonfire discussions in loyalist communities

<i>Name of Community</i>	<i>Number of Participants</i>	<i>Gender Composition</i>	<i>Age Composition</i>	<i>Date of Discussion</i>
Antrim*	2	male	adults	8 April 2008
Ballysillan	12	mixed	youth	10 July 2008
Donegall Pass	24	mixed	youth	11 June 2008
Donegall Pass	14**	mixed	youth	17 June 2008
Fairhill	1	male	adult	9 July 2008
Glencairn	9	mixed	youth and adults	24 June 2008
Graymount	8	male	youth	2 July 2008
Knocknagoney	9	mixed	adults	3 July 2008
Lisburn Road	8	male	youth and adults	23 June 2008
Walkway	7	female	adults	26 June 2008
Westland	15	mixed	youth	25 June 2008
White City	8	mixed	youth and adults	18 June 2008
Woodvale*	8	female	adults	3 April 2008

* Discussion recorded electronically

** Approximate number

Table 4.2. Individual bonfire interviews

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date of Interview</i>
Belfast City Council Cleaving Services	Enforcement Officer	16 August 2007
Belfast City Council, Good Relations Unit	Good Relations Officer	26 November 2009
Belfast City Council Waste Management Service	Waste Manager	23 February 2006
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health	Director	14 February 2006
Harvard University School of Public Health Department of Environmental Health	Dr David Christiani, Professor of Medicine	1 May 2007
Orange Order	Chief Archivist	23 January 2009



Figure 4.1. Selected panels from the Bonfire Management Programme's traveling exhibit

Table 4.3. Bonfire interviews with minority ethnic community groups

<i>Community Group</i>	<i>Number of Participants</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Date of Interview</i>
Afro-Caribbean Support of NI	8	mixed	8 February 2008
American students**	4	mixed	12 October 2007
Bangladeshi Association	5	mixed	7 July 2008
Chinese Welfare Association	7	mixed	21 August 2008
Indian Community Centre	7*	mixed	20 August 2007
Belfast Islamic Centre	8*	men	30 November 2007
Belfast Islamic Centre	3	women	17 June 2008
Turkish Community	13	men	25 March 2008
BMEF Network ***	12	mixed	8 April 2008

* Approximate number

** Not a formal organisation

*** Greek, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Muslim, American, Malaysian, Northern Ireland Protestant and Catholic

Table 4.4. Interviews and discussions for Divis Mountain case study, Strand 1

<i>Group Discussions</i>	<i>Participant(s)</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Date of Interview</i>
	Terry and Feargal Enright	Environmental campaigner and Irish language specialist	male	25 February 2008
	Residents (7) of Bleach Green Court		mixed	12 February 2008
<i>Individual Interviews</i>				
	Seamus	Taxi driver and former IRA prisoner	male	5 June 2008
	Padraig	Former IRA prisoner	male	27 June 2008
	Cormac	Former IRA prisoner	male	19 October 2007
	Christoff Gillen	Artist	male	24 June 2008
	Deirdre Mackel	Artist and community worker	female	13 August 2008
	Frank Quigley	Artist / Former IRA prisoner	male	4 July 2008
	Jim Bradley	Director, Belfast Hills Partnership	male	24 September 2007
	(Name withheld)	Divis warden, National Trust	male	2 June 2008
	(Name withheld)	Protestant participant of public walk	male	19 March 2008

Table 4.5. Walking tours of Divis and discussions with minority ethnic community groups

<i>Community Group</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Age Composition</i>	<i>Gender Composition</i>	<i>Date of Tour and Discussion</i>
Afro-Caribbean Support of Northern Ireland	5	5 adults	mixed	22 September 2007
Belfast Islamic Centre	12	4 adults, 8 children	mixed	29 June 2008
Latino America Unida	14	9 adults, 5 children	mixed	11 November 2007
Turkish Community	10	10 adults	male	1 April 2008

Chapter Five

Transforming Earth: Divis Mountain and Republican Identities

Introduction

At 1562 feet above sea level, rising from the western edge of the city, Divis Mountain is the highest point in greater Belfast. On a clear day, its summit offers sweeping views of Northern Ireland and glimpses of Scotland and northwestern England. In its time, Divis has served as the burial ground for ancient Irish kings; the source of rivers that fueled the linen industry, propelling Belfast from modest provincial town to linchpin of the British Empire; and, perhaps most controversial in recent memory, a major operational base for the British army. Over the past decade, as peace has settled in Northern Ireland, the mountain has undergone dramatic transformations. In the late-1990s, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) deemed its holdings on Divis to be no longer necessary, thus paving the way for the mountain's acquisition for the public. Underpinning the demilitarization of Divis, however, are multiple, contested readings that complicate the mountain's transformation into a shared identity resource for 'post-conflict' Northern Ireland.

In Chapter Two, I argued for a deeper engagement between conflict transformation theory and cultural geography, to interrogate the relationships between place and identity that lie at the heart of conflict over contested territory. In this chapter, I draw on Divis Mountain to explore the challenge of reworking notions of culture, heritage, identity and place for a 'post-conflict' society. The mountain's transformation from militarized terrain to public open space provokes important questions about the diverse, shifting expressions of cultural identity in the republican heartland that resides in its shadow. This case study addresses the tensions between anti-imperial narratives of Divis in contemporary republican culture, and the need for new and wider ways of imagining this identity resource. I situate my analysis of Divis within Matless's (1998) framework of 'cultures of landscape,' in which 'landscape' circulates materially and symbolically in the multifaceted cultural movements of identity, authority and belonging (Wylie 2007: 95). Throughout this chapter, I invoke the concept of a 'culturally charged' (Matless 2000: 142) landscape to engage with the tensions that emanate from the mountain's – and, by extensions, Northern Ireland's – colonial past and ambiguous postcolonial present.

Postcolonialism and geography are intimately linked, with geography lying at the heart of postcolonial critique (Blunt and McEwan 2002: 1) and its challenge to conceptualizations of space, power and 'imperial imagination' (Mitchell 1994). Nash (1999: 458) defines the concept of postcolonialism as 'a set of perspectives formulated in theory and cultural practice, which...share a critical focus on colonialism and its legacies.' Among the many contributions of postcolonial theory are new frameworks for theorizing identity, most notably Bhabha's (1992, 1994) concept of 'hybridity.' As Carroll (2003: 7) acknowledges, hybridity 'has the advantage of restoring a more complex sense of the often conflicted subject positions of the colonized both through resistance and collaboration.' She cautions, however, against invocations of hybridity that rewrite history as 'a matter of mutual and neutral interactions [and thus] denies the power relationships under imperialism then and now' (*ibid*).

As a postcolonial entity, Ireland is a particularly ambiguous case, viewed as both 'a transgressive and a founding site for postcolonial theory' (Carroll 2003: 3). From one perspective, Ireland can be considered England's first colony (Cleary 2003) and thus the training ground for colonists to other locations, as well as the context of the first English discourse – which racialized Ireland's inhabitants as non-European and pagan (see Gibbons 2001) – on the rationalization and the process of colonization. From a different perspective, however, Ireland's cultural and political membership of the West makes it an uneasy site for theories that have been generated in the more obviously postcolonial, 'subaltern' (Spivak 1988) contexts of Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia. Further complications to Ireland's postcolonial status include the participation of Irish people in processes of colonization around the globe, its fuller incorporation (compared to other former British colonies) into the United Kingdom and, of course, the spectre of Northern Ireland.

The 1920 Government of Ireland Act released from Britain the 26 counties that would eventually become the Republic of Ireland, creating a clear break in political colonial status. For the six counties that remained within the United Kingdom, however, the 'interpenetrating effects of colonial and postcolonial conditions' (Carroll 2003: 2) are particularly acute. In a landmark publication in the development of postcolonial theory, McClintock (1992: 88) stridently referred to Britain's 'colonial grip' on Northern Ireland: 'Ireland may, at a pinch, be 'post-colonial,' but for the inhabitants of British-occupied Northern Ireland...there may be nothing 'post' about colonialism at all' (*ibid*: 87). Yet developments of the past decade, such as Northern Ireland's delicate power-sharing legislative assembly, complicate McClintock's forceful interpretation of Northern Ireland as a colonial entity, and signal a need 'for a more differentiated sense of the post-colonial' (Nash 1999: 460).

In Ireland, colonialism and its complicated aftermath have profoundly shaped a nationalist republican ideology that advocates a united, independent, 32-county Ireland. Although adherents from both sides of the border agitate for political change, republicanism as a cultural movement is particularly pronounced in Northern Ireland. In Belfast, Divis Mountain serves as a lens that refracts the concept of postcolonialism and its tensions around memory, authority, identity and change. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which an idea of the mountain circulates in narratives of republican identity that are emerging from the history of conflict, and are now evolving through the peace process. For this case study, I focus on the republican heartland of West Belfast, where neighbourhoods that nestle at the base of Divis (Figure 5.1) are intimately bound to the ongoing narrative of the Troubles. As I discussed in Chapter Four, I conducted participant observation and semi-structured interviews with local residents, including former volunteers of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), ex-prisoners, activists, National Trust employees, Irish language specialists and artists. I drew my interview participants from a broad age spectrum, ranging from young men in their mid-20s to a group of elderly residents in a care home. Through this research, I intended to glean diverse experiences, memories and ways of relating to the cultural landscape of Divis.

I begin this chapter by establishing the mountain's contested colonial history. I ground my analysis in two separate but related dimensions of the British imperial project in Ireland: the 19th century Ordnance Survey mapping process and, in the latter half of the 20th century, the controversial military presence during the Troubles. I draw on Woodward's (2004) work on 'military geographies' to connect the mountain's central role in the mapping process to its overt militarization in the 20th century. Running through this first section are themes of vision and power, in which the 'imperial gaze' (Jacobs 1996: 159; Blunt and Wills 2000) of the Ordnance Survey's cartographic programme finds new material and political form in the surveillance of local republican residents by 20th century British soldiers. Finally, I describe the effects of the peace process in the transformation of Divis Mountain from militarized terrain to a place of public access. Trailing in the wake of this transformation are the tensions and shadows of imperialism that continue to resonate in the contested landscape of Divis.

In the second section, I enlarge this imperial reading to explore the relationship of Divis to republican resistance in the cultural heartland of West Belfast. The juxtaposition of these two sections emphasizes the mountain's discordant, contested narratives. I begin with a contextual overview of republicanism, tracing its evolution from a movement that became synonymous with the IRA's violent campaign for national liberation, to one that today supports non-violent constitutional politics in Northern Ireland's power-sharing government. On the ground, however, republican ideology remains entrenched in both the

idea and the material fact of community. I explore its continued, widespread valorization in West Belfast through interviews with three former IRA volunteers, all of whom served time in prison for militant activities during the Troubles. Their narratives illuminate connections between the iconic presence of Divis Mountain and republican consciousness, resistance and cultural identity. I end my reflections on resistance by discussing a public art sculpture that speaks to the expression of Divis in contemporary republican cultural identity. *Herald of Jericho* was created in 2002 from the demolished ruins of a controversial British army base located at the edge of the mountain. The sculpture's story of emergence – its provenance, conceptualization, production, reception – illuminates strong links between republican culture, identity, heritage and the (de)militarization of Divis Mountain.

In the third section, however, I complicate republican claims to the mountain by exploring tensions around language, location and identity. I draw on two different aspects of landscape inscription on Divis. The first focuses on etymologic inscription, which I trace through the 19th century Ordnance Survey and the mapmakers' alteration of the Irish linguistic landscape. Following Nash (1999), I argue that contemporary efforts to reinscribe Gaelic placenames may perpetuate simplistic, anti-colonial narratives that counteract other efforts to create shared cultural space in peacetime Northern Ireland. To explore these possibilities, I then turn to a very different material inscription of Divis. For Christoff Gillen, an artist and activist who grew up in republican West Belfast, the mountain serves as a space for provoking a city-wide dialogue on questions of identity and belonging. His installations evoke the bleaching greens of the industrializing city, thus reworking the historic landscape on a contemporary canvas. Gillen's creations ask provocative questions about home, belonging and equality. I argue that his inscriptions gesture toward ways of opening the republican icon of Divis as an identity resource for a broader, peacetime public.

I conclude this chapter by reflecting on new possibilities for conceptualizing Divis in wider scales of belonging. As well as its role in public art, to which the work of Christoff Gillen alludes, the mountain's increasing popularity as a recreation site invites dialogue with debates in cultural geography about walking, landscape and cultural politics.

1. *Imperial Legacies*

The Ordnance Survey

In an early article that pre-figured the explosion of interest in mapping among geographers and other scholars of postcolonialism, Harley (1988) described maps as socially constructed forms of geographical knowledge that reveal intimate connections to power. These ‘value-laden images’ (*ibid*: 278) distort the world through the modes, content and hierarchies of representation that a mapmaker chooses to employ. In this way, maps contribute to ‘wider cultural stereotypes [that] enshrine self-fulfilling prophecies about the geography of power’ (*ibid*: 292). Similarly, Blunt and Wills (2000: 194, original emphasis) argue that the mapping of places, particularly those previously unknown to Europeans, ‘came to *create* such places in an imperial imagination that was also quite clearly a *geographical* imagination.’ The connections between mapping and power provide fertile ground for a number of geographic, postcolonial studies (for example, Carter 1987; Huggan 1989).

The Ordnance Survey was one of the most extensive aspects of the British imperial project, with military surveyors dispatched to the far corners of the empire (see also Clayton 2008; Edney 1997; Seymour 1980). According to Seymour (1980), the Board of Ordnance, to which the national survey owes its name, is one of England’s oldest institutions, with roots in the Middle Ages. The Ordnance Survey extended a long tradition of military cartography for the rapidly expanding empire. The etymologic roots reflect imperial intent: ‘ordnance’ derives from the Latin *ordināre*, meaning to order, regulate or rule; while ‘survey,’ from the French *sur* (over) and *voir* (to see) implies a view from a commanding position (Ó Cadhla 2007: 1). At one level, maps served administrative purposes for the British state, fostering better economic and political control of and access through local-level landscapes. They amounted, however, to acts of ‘colonial domination’ (Smith 2003: 71), ‘accession and a significant step towards political social and cultural hierarchization’ (Ó Cadhla 2007: 7). Smith (2003: 74) looks beyond the maps themselves to their process as a means of ‘internal control...which required an army of soldier-surveyors to plot the landscape.’ Their prolonged presence in these landscapes served as a constant reminder of British colonial rule.

The mapping of Ireland began in July 1825 (Andrews 2002). Three years previously, the surveyors had observed Divis Mountain from a vantage point in Scotland. Its summit became the first point for the interior triangulation of the island; the second point (Figure 5.2) was the slightly lower elevation on the eastern flank that was

subsequently named Black Mountain. In total, the surveyors observed no fewer than 200 points from Divis, which they combined with observations made from Scotland to frame the trigonometric skeleton for the map of Ireland. Andrews (1997:1-2) describes this ‘cross-channel intervisibility’ between the two islands as ‘a kind of geodetic imperialism.’ By linking Irish coordinates into the existing British triangulation system, the survey method sent a message that Ireland was part of Britain (Smith 2003: 84). Moreover, the presence of soldier-surveyors required for this project further emphasized the mapping process as a reminder of colonial rule (*ibid* 74).

Parallel to the material process of the Ordnance Survey, Britain continued to flex its imperial authority through the naming of places (Withers 2000). According to Andrews (1997: 300), the Ordnance Survey had its own policy for the spelling of placenames. Surveyors would collect existing versions of each name and then select whichever of these spellings came closest to the presumed original Irish form. Kiberd (1995: 619) describes the result as ‘an English grid...remorselessly imposed on all Irish complexities,’ reflecting an imperial desire ‘not so much to translate Irish values into English words as to translate English values into Irish terms.’ To Ó Cadhla (2007: 223), the anglicization of Irish placenames left a ‘physical trace of a wider translative energy that fuelled the survey’ and rendered ‘the place, the name and the language...as mute anachronisms, vestiges of barbarous inarticulacy, of the world before English civilization’ (*ibid*: 80).¹ At the edge of Belfast, itself an anglicization of *Beal Feirste* for ‘mouth of the sandbars,’ the highest summit became known through the ‘paper landscape’ (Andrews 2002) as *Divis*.² The name is an anglicized version of *Dubh*, the Irish word for ‘black,’ by which the mountain had been known to the local Gaelic-speaking population. In the process of mapping the mountain, the surveyors formally partitioned it, assigning ‘Divis’ to the summit and ‘Black Mountain’ to the slightly lower elevation on the eastern flank.

The role of Divis in the mapping of Ireland pre-figured its military occupation during the Troubles. As I described above, the mapping process emerged from a history of militarism, but it also shaped future military activities on the mountain. Woodward (2004:107-108) argues that ‘the history of cartography is bound up with the history of military-led imperial expansion.’ The process of mapping consolidates ‘military readings of landscape,’ representing ‘physical three-dimensional space in order to serve tactical

¹ *Translations*, the best known of Brian Friel’s (1981) plays, explores these issues. Set in a hedge school in County Donegal in August 1833, it describes the attempt by British soldiers of the Royal Engineers and their Irish collaborators to transliterate the local Gaelic placenames and anglicize them, in the process of mapping the area for the Ordnance Survey. The play was first staged in 1980 to launch the Field Day Company, which I discussed in Chapter 3.

² Later in this chapter, I explore complications that arose from this name, as well as contemporary efforts to retrieve the mountain’s original Gaelic appellations.

and strategic military purposes' (*ibid*). Below, I describe how these 'military purposes' drew the mountain firmly into republican narratives of the Troubles.

Military Geographies

The British military asserted itself unambiguously on Divis Mountain in the 20th century. For several decades, beginning around the Second World War, the army maintained an active and controversial presence in the Belfast hills. The MOD first formally leased a large swath of the Belfast hills from local landowners in 1953. Later, during the height of the Troubles, it purchased this property outright (Interview, National Trust, 2 June 2008). On Divis, the highest summit, the MOD erected communications infrastructure, including a series of aerial towers that could be seen from virtually anywhere in the city below (Figure 5.3). In nearby fields, soldiers honed their skills on the rifle training ground. And on the lower slopes, which once served as bleaching greens for the linen industry, a large army fort loomed over West Belfast. For local residents, the occupation of Divis by the British military became one of the most iconic injustices of the Troubles.

Woodward (2004) defines 'militarism's geographies' as the control of space. Divis Mountain was only one focal point in the larger conflict in Northern Ireland, but it provided the British army with a superb base for exerting control over West Belfast. I spoke to one young man, born in the early 1980s, who compared West Belfast during the Troubles to 'an open prison.' He described helicopters flying overhead, regular army patrols on the streets and, intriguingly, the 'all-seeing eye' of Divis Mountain (Research Diary, 6 November 2007). Dandeker (1990: 38) describes surveillance as the 'basis of a relationship of domination between ruler and ruled.' Along similar lines, Feldman (1997, cited in Zurawski 2005) argues: 'Visual appropriation [becomes] a metonym for dominance over others.'

In the late 1990s, as the Troubles were winding to a close, the MOD quietly began to examine its vast holdings. Divis Mountain became classified as 'surplus to requirements' (Green Balance 2006: 52). This was a startling reversal for what, in recent memory, was heavily militarized terrain. Not long after the re-classification, the MOD announced its intention to sell the property. In Belfast, an employee of the National Trust became captivated by the idea of purchasing Divis for the public (Interview, National Trust, 2 June 2008). Although perhaps best known for the preservation of stately homes, the National Trust also acquires and protects threatened coastline and countryside in

England, Wales and Northern Ireland.³ The public acquisition of Divis required extensive community consultations and intricate negotiations between the MOD and three separate funding bodies. The National Trust, the Environment and Heritage Service, and the Heritage Lottery Fund raised £2.9 million for the acquisition of the mountain and a three-year project that would transform Divis from abandoned military property into a place fit for public use. From these funds, the three organizations purchased the bulk of Divis in November 2004.

The National Trust assumed primary responsibility for managing the property. They retained as sole tenants the family from which the MOD had purchased Divis; throughout the Troubles, the army had granted this family permission to graze their cattle on the mountain, and a delicate, symbiotic relationship had developed between the animals and the land (Interview, Belfast Hills Partnership, 24 September 2007). A skeleton staff, led by the newly-instated warden for Divis, worked tirelessly to make the site fit for public use. According to the National Trust employees who coordinated the effort, this was no easy task (Research Diary, 5 November 2007; Interview, 2 June 2008). Toward the end of the 1990s, as peace promised to settle in Northern Ireland, the soldiers left their posts on Divis, and fly-tipping began in earnest. For several months after the 2004 acquisition, the warden, his staff, and a handful of volunteers cleared rubbish and installed miles of fencing around the perimeter of the property. They constructed an 'eco-grid' made from recycled silage bins (Figure 5.4), and laid it across the boggy ground from the MOD's paved road to the viewpoint on Black Mountain where the base for the Ordnance Survey theodolite still stands. They sifted through the wreckage of airplanes, some dating from the Second World War, and they worked with archaeologists to map ancient ruins. They began to dream about turning a derelict 18th century stone barn into a visitors' centre (Figure 5.5). On 24th June 2005, Divis Mountain opened to the public.

Tensions, however, continue to resonate in the complicated legacy of the MOD and its military occupation. The British military could easily have placed Divis for sale on the open market, where the property would have sold for far more money. Instead, the MOD's willingness to forgo a larger profit allowed the National Trust, the Heritage Lottery Fund, and Environment and Heritage Service to acquire the mountain for the public. Moreover, the long military occupation protected the mountain from development and the worst effects of pollution. According to the site warden, Divis 'is one of the most pristine places in Europe, thanks to the MOD' (Research Diary, 14 November 2007). Although this perspective is voiced by a civilian who was born and bred in republican West Belfast, it resonates with what Woodward (2004: 89) calls 'discourses of military

³ The National Trust of Scotland is a similar but separate organization.

environmentalism' – a key strategy for marketing military establishments as places of environmental protection.

Woodward (2004: 53) cautions that 'conversion' – in which military resources are transferred to the civilian sector – is best conceptualized as a process rather than a 'once-and-for-all change.' The example of Divis Mountain illustrates her theory. Even after the transfer of Divis to public ownership, the mountain's ongoing military occupation could be interpreted in the MOD's decision to retain nine acres of land on the summit. This compound, comprising aerial towers and buildings encircled by barbed wire, remained visible from virtually any point in the city below, and served as a stark reminder of the continuing military presence on the mountain. The MOD eventually relinquished its holdings on the summit to the National Trust in 2009, nearly five years after the original sale, but its footprint remains. Despite the removal of the barbed wire fence and appropriation of the existing infrastructure for civilian use, the imprint of its concrete base is a visible reminder of the mountain's military history (Figure 5.6).

Lurking behind these visible manifestations are the *invisible* ways in which the military continues to control the space. Woodward (2004: 54) observes: 'There is a basic lack of information available on the conversion of military holdings partly as a result of its invisibility in public policy.' With regard to Divis, the MOD has been less than forthcoming about its activities on the mountain during its long period of ownership and occupation. (Interview, National Trust, 2 June 2008; private e-mail correspondence with local journalist). As Woodward (2004: 35) observes, 'military control over space is reliant in part on controlling data or information about military occupancy.' Divis may now belong to the public, but British military control persists in the secrecy that shrouds its former activities on the mountain. These tensions amplify readings of Divis Mountain as a landscape of imperial control, through which and on which the British state exerted colonial rule in Ireland. In the next section, I heighten the tensions in this contested landscape by exploring how the mountain circulates in discourses of republican cultural identity.

2. *Republican Landscapes*

The Romance of Resistance

The origins of the Irish republican movement are grounded in anti-colonial resistance. In the 20th century narrative of independence, 1916 resonates as the year that proclaimed the Irish Republic as a sovereign, independent state. The Easter Rising of that

same year marked the beginning of the end for British rule in the 26 counties that eventually became the Republic of Ireland. However, the partition of the island in 1921 left under British control the six northeastern counties, and necessitated new articulations of republican ideology. As McGovern (2004) observes, Irish republicanism in the latter half of the century drew its support base overwhelmingly from the northern Catholic working class. Their lived experiences, framed by the sectarian division of the state in which they lived, have largely defined the trajectory of a movement that became synonymous with the IRA and its violent campaign for national liberation.

The peace process has marked a significant movement away from the historical position of classic Irish republicanism as it was articulated in the 1916 proclamation. Notably, the 1998 peace accords fell substantially short of the republican goal of a united, independent Ireland. McGovern (2004) argues that although rhetoric of nationalist aspirations remains, the concept of equality has become the meta-discourse of contemporary republicanism. He describes Irish republicanism as ‘an historically rooted ideological resource [that] fuses the values of civil rights and national liberation’ (*ibid*: 637). According to Tonge (2008: 59), the ‘need for national reconciliation has replaced the vernacular of smashing Northern Ireland.’ He argues that the romanticized republican narrative of the 1916 Easter Rising ‘is now largely ghettoised within the discourse of...republican ultras’ (*ibid*: 72). Dissident republican groups continue to emphasize the colonial nature of British rule by (re)creating the need for repressive, visible security measures in Northern Ireland, giving the impression that the British Army and the police service are ‘forces of occupation’ (Tonge 2004: 690). On the whole, however, non-violent constitutional politics has replaced armed resistance within Irish republicanism, provoking Bean (2007: 250) to quip that ‘the IRA is quickly passing into history and is thought sufficiently harmless to be re-packaged as heritage for Troubles tourism and theme bars.’

On the ground, republican ideology remains entrenched in both the idea and the material fact of community, and republican identity continues to find tangible expression in West Belfast and other staunchly republican areas. Bean (2007: 57) describes these areas as ‘resistance communities’ that were characterized by a strong sense of place, and that became battlefields between the British state and the emerging counter-hegemony of the anti-state insurgency. He argues that the development of the IRA was shaped by the civil society of the nationalist community, which provided the resources (material, symbolic, human) that facilitated an activist, militant nationalism, and proved decisive in mobilizing large sections of the nationalist population to support republicanism (*ibid*: 13).

In West Belfast today, support for contemporary non-violent republican values sits alongside devotion to the IRA. Its legacy is a potent source of pride and identity for

republican communities that endured the long civil war. The prevalence of former IRA volunteers, many of whom served prison sentences during the Troubles, serve as a living link to a glorified past.⁴ In the following extract from my research diary, I recount a conversation with a young community worker in the West Belfast estate of Ballymurphy:

‘Is there much of a paramilitary presence?’ I ask. Almost immediately, I realize that I have overstepped the line.

‘There are no paramilitaries here,’ Liam answers sternly. ‘Not since the British military left.’ He emphasizes the importance of terminology – a rebuke that I accept. Ballymurphy, in Liam’s eyes, is neither terrorist nor sectarian. He frames the struggle in terms of people willing to fight for their ideals. ‘Is this neighbourhood proud to be republican?’ he asks rhetorically. ‘Yes, it is.’ (Research Diary, 9 November 2007)

By equating paramilitarism with the ‘British military,’ Liam de-legitimizes Britain’s claim to and presence in Northern Ireland. In contrast, he presents the IRA as a legitimate expression of idealized hope for a united Ireland. Although this excerpt refers specifically to the well-known republican stronghold of Ballymurphy, the estate is by no means unique in its continued celebration of armed republicanism (see de Baroid 2000). Liam’s defiant resistance to my line of questioning illuminates the widespread, continued valorization of republicanism in West Belfast.

For the generation of republicans in West Belfast who came of age during the Troubles, Divis Mountain provokes a complicated constellation of memories. Although the British military dates its presence on Divis to the Second World War, it managed to co-exist peacefully for several years with the local republican neighbourhoods clustered at the base of the mountain. As Padraig, a middle-aged interview participant, commented: ‘For people my age, the mountain pre-dates the conflict’ (Interview, 27 June 2008). Like many others whom I encountered through casual conversation, he possesses vivid childhood memories of Divis as an idyllic outdoor playground. But as Northern Ireland edged toward civil war, and the military presence intensified in response, the nationalist neighbourhoods of West Belfast became a nexus for republican resistance. Many of the

⁴ Estimates for the number imprisoned are difficult to calculate, but some sources suggest approximate totals of 15,000 republicans and somewhere between 5,000 to 10,000 loyalists (McEvoy 2001, cited in Shirlow and McEvoy 2008: 2). Under the 1998 peace agreement, 447 prisoners were released back into their communities, of which 241 came from republican areas (McEvoy et al 2004: 646).

children who had played on the mountain in calmer times now took up arms, while others resisted in subtler ways (see Dowler 1998). For example, an environmental campaigner named Terry Enright told me that he routinely defied the army by entering its off-limits property for recreational walks on the mountain. He remembers stumbling across soldiers participating in surveillance exercises, as they lay half-hidden in the bracken (Interview, 2 November 2007).

Today, the young men and women who came of age in the Troubles are now middle-aged leaders of their communities. Their defiance continues to energize West Belfast, and their memories shape the cultural landscape – a heritage of resistance expressed through murals, memorials and, for many, the iconic presence of Divis Mountain. Below, I explore how the mountain circulates in narratives of identity for three former IRA volunteers from West Belfast, all of whom served time in prison for their activities during the Troubles.

Padraig grew up in the Turf Lodge estate, located at the edge of the mountain. Lying alongside his fond childhood memories of Divis are unpleasant associations with military violence. Padraig recalls that British soldiers would take local residents into the hills and ‘give them a good hiding.’ Moreover, memories of military surveillance are particularly potent. Padraig recalls cameras dug into the face of the mountain, and the chilling knowledge that from their vantage point at Fort Jericho, the army looked directly into his neighbourhood. In the following excerpt from my research diary, I recount a conversation with Padraig, in which memories of military surveillance entwine with memories of his growing republican activism:

‘What was it like,’ I ask, ‘Living at the foot of the mountain and knowing you were watched?’

‘When I was young, I didn’t know that I was being watched.’ Padraig’s awareness increased as he...became ‘more actively Republican, in a military sense’...‘As an active republican in Turf Lodge,...you had to learn how to move across the estate in a particular way.’ (Research Diary, 27 June 2008)

Padraig can trace his growing awareness of military surveillance alongside his emergence as an ‘active Republican’ – a euphemism for his participation in the IRA. He describes an intricate relationship between the mountain, with its British military observers, and his changing experience with the local landscape. Like many other republican activists, Padraig developed skills for hiding from the network of cameras that criss-crossed his estate. The mountain, as the vantage point of the enemy, became dangerous to Padraig.

That the mountain is both a source of danger and a site of great affection speaks to a complex juxtaposition. In our interview, when I ask him to describe the relationship between Divis and his sense of identity, Padraig links the mountain to the development of his republican political consciousness: ‘At the same time that I became an active Republican, the mountain became an escape.’ He feels the same way toward it today:

‘There are parts of the mountain that are as beautiful as Donegal. And there’s nowhere as beautiful as Donegal.’

Although local republican residents could access, with varying degrees of ease, some of the lower reaches of the mountain during the Troubles, it seems likely that the ‘escape’ to which Padraig refers is metaphorical in meaning. The word takes on greater significance considering that Padraig, like many of his compatriots in the IRA, spent several years in prison during the Troubles. He further heightens the mountain’s symbolic value by comparing it to Donegal, the westernmost county in the province of Ulster. The 1921 partition of Ireland is the result of political gerrymandering, based on unionist fears that the large Catholic populations in three of the nine northern counties (Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan) would complicate their attempt to create a Protestant-dominated Northern Ireland (see Bardon 1992). The resulting political border effectively separated Donegal from the rest of the Irish Republic, bounded to the east and south by three counties of Northern Ireland, and by the sea to the north and west. Donegal’s isolation from the rest of the Republic, and the status of its Irish-speaking *Gaeltacht*,⁵ evokes great affinity amongst republicans living in Northern Ireland. Indeed, Donegal looms large in Padraig’s imagination as a place of great beauty to which no other can compare.

For Padraig, the mountain offers transformative personal properties. In our interview, he describes ‘conversations on the mountain that you wouldn’t have anywhere else.’ As an example, he recounts a walk he once took with a friend. On the mountain, he recalls that they spoke freely about poetry and about their lives with a depth that, once they had descended from Divis, they never experienced again. Intriguingly, Padraig then attempts to describe in another way these dimensions of himself that he discovered on the mountain: ‘During the conflict, you would become a different person when you crossed the border to the 26 counties.’ He equates crossing the political border with the ability to express himself as a ‘different person.’ As a committed republican, Padraig fervently advocates a united, 32-county Ireland. His comment suggests that the strain of living in British-ruled Northern Ireland dissipated in the homeland, whether real or imagined, of

⁵ “Gaeltacht” refers to an Irish-speaking region. In Ireland, the *Gaeltacht* is refers to the districts, located primarily in the west of the island, where Irish is the predominant language.

the Irish Republic – the ‘26 counties,’ as he describes it. The new identity that Padraig identifies in the physical crossing of borders is replicated through his presence on the mountain, as though the mountain allows him to tap into dimensions of his identity only found outside of Northern Ireland. In this way, the mountain appears to connect him to wider possibilities of identity, linked to his desired republican vision of a united, independent Ireland.

The imagined homeland that Divis evokes for Padraig resonates in a different way for Seamus, for whom the mountain is linked inextricably with his prison experience. During the Troubles, Seamus spent 11 years, two months and two weeks inside the notorious Maze prison; his original sentence of 18 years was reduced to nine on remission, but the prison authorities added time back on to his sentence for each day in which he participated in the IRA’s organized protests. Within the walls of the Maze, republican prisoners launched a raft of actions, aided by a sophisticated paramilitary command structure capable of reorganizing itself behind bars. As McEvoy et al (2004: 650) observe: ‘A central feature to the Republican resistance project was their determination that the prison experience be a collective one.’ The ‘blanket protest’ began in 1976, in which prisoners chose to wear their prison-issued blankets rather than the uniforms issued to criminal – rather than political – prisoners (Coogan 1980, 1987, cited in Shirlow and McEvoy 2008). It escalated into the ‘dirty protest,’ in which republican prisoners refused to bathe and smeared the walls of their cells with their own excrement. Along with hundreds of his fellow prisoners, Seamus ‘went on the blanket,’ participated in the ‘dirty protest,’ and was present at the Maze during the high-profile hunger strikes that led to the deaths of ten colleagues. Although the long-running ‘blanket’ and ‘dirty’ protests ultimately came to be regarded as self-defeating (McKeown 2001, cited in Shirlow and McEvoy 2008: 37) and were suspended by the IRA leadership, they intensified the oppression of the prison experience for incarcerated republican activists like Seamus.

In 1986, one year before his release, Seamus was taken by prison authorities to Musgrave Park Hospital in Belfast to see a doctor. The hospital’s military wing was located on the westernmost edge of the grounds. From the car park, Seamus saw the mountain for the first time in a decade:

Childhood memories came flooding back – memories of bluebells and gullies, of sheep and aerals...[Seamus] said, ‘I have to go back there...I want to go home.’ (Research Diary, 5 June 2008)

These vivid memories of wildlife, and even the military ‘aerials,’ contrast sharply with the bleak interior world of the Maze prison. Particularly striking is the sense of ‘home’ that the mountain evokes. In this way, Divis can be read as a ‘synecdoche for the unreachable lost home’ (Morley 2000: 44) that focuses Seamus’s memories of his past life. Heller (1995, cited in Morley 2000: 24) defines ‘home’ as ‘awareness of a fixed point in space, a firm position from which we ‘proceed’...where we feel safe and where our emotional relationships are at their most intense.’ For Seamus, Divis Mountain serves as this ‘fixed point’: ‘You knew where it was...where you lived’ (Interview, 5 June 2008). This unexpected encounter with Divis, which Seamus vividly recounted for me over 20 years later, speaks to the power of emotional memory. As Jones (2005: 215) observes: ‘The emotions of childhood are imprinted onto whatever landscape they are acted out in.’

The enshrined resonance of love and landscape is mobilized in a variety of ways. Padraig, for example, recently participated in a sponsored walk on Divis designed to raise funds for the controversial defense of former IRA colleagues. The ‘Colombia Three’ were arrested in Bogotá in August 2001 and accused by the Colombian government of training rebels from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. In conceptualizing the event, Padraig and his fellow organizers recognized the mountain’s power to garner attention: ‘We came to the conclusion that people would remember a walk across the mountain much longer than a function’ (Interview, 27 June 2008). And in 1998, as the peace agreements put to rest the need for armed conflict, a group of former IRA members and ex-political prisoners founded a social walking club called the ‘Irish Ramblers Association.’ Today, membership hovers between 30 to 50 people, and the Ramblers meet several times a year for walks on Divis. The founding of the club can be read in many ways: as a transformation of the Irish Republican Army; as continued, symbolic resistance through its deliberate acronym; as reclamation of a mountain long controlled by the British army; as all of these at once. For Cormac, one member of the club, the British military occupation was a brief anomaly:

The British were only here for a blink of an eye...We’ve held the mountain for thousands of years...We’ve had the mountain for longer than they had it. (Interview, 19 October 2007).

He sketches a long history, covering ‘thousands of years,’ of the mountain’s deep significance to local republicans. Although the Troubles have ended, republican resistance to British imperial control is still articulated through the landscape of Divis.

As former IRA volunteers and ex-prisoners, Padraig, Seamus and Cormac are obvious figures for examining republican resistance. The IRA, which emerged in direct response to British colonial rule, is an excellent example of what Jacobs (1993: 217) calls a ‘tectonic’ form of resistance. In the next section, however, I excavate subtler expressions in which ‘resistance’ is ‘articulated through a range of more fragmented formations in which stark oppositions give way to more complex subversions’ (*ibid*). As Pile (1993: 3) observes, identities of resistance are

taken up not only in relation to authority...but also through experiences which are not so quickly labelled ‘power,’ such as desire and anger, capacity and ability, happiness and fear, dreaming and forgetting.

These emotional capacities allow for more nuanced readings of resistance that complicate what Cresswell (2000) describes as the tendency toward romanticism, and offer scope to engage with acts and attitudes of resistance that are not defined by the Troubles alone.

The Fort and the Herald

This section explores the expression of Divis in republican cultural identity through a public art sculpture created in 2002. *Herald of Jericho* (Figure 5.7) hangs in the foyer of the Upper Springfield Development Trust, a community regeneration and economic development charity based at the westernmost edge of Belfast. The organization’s remit encompasses the densely populated neighbourhoods that once stretched across the vast, rural bleaching greens of the linen industry. Deirdre Mackel, Arts Officer for the Upper Springfield Development Trust, coordinates public art projects for West Belfast, whose residents tend to face barriers, both real and perceived, to visiting art galleries located in the city’s wealthier areas. The mountain is of particular interest to Deirdre. She frequently incorporates its image and story into her projects, of which *Herald of Jericho* is a dramatic example. In the summer of 2008, I conducted interviews with Deirdre and Frank Quigley, the artist commissioned to lead the project. For Frank, the process of conceptualizing and producing the sculpture is intimately entwined with his activist republican identity; during the Troubles, he too served time in the Maze prison for his association with the IRA. The sculpture’s story of emergence – its provenance, conceptualization, production, reception – illuminates the links between culture, identity, heritage and the (de)militarization of Divis Mountain.

The *Herald's* origins lie in the military forts of the Troubles. By the 1970s, the British army occupied three military bases in West Belfast, known as Forts Monagh, Pegasus and Henry Taggart. According to Padraig, whom I introduced in the previous section, the three bases were all 'within eyesight of each other' (Interview, 27 June 2008). To the republican population of West Belfast, these military bases were sources of resentment that proclaimed British military power in both symbolic and material form. For example, the army built Fort Pegasus on the grounds of the Gaelic Athletic Association, a site of deep cultural significance to local republican communities. Fort Henry Taggart, in contrast, was created from a former Presbyterian church; during sectarian riots at the beginning of the Troubles, its Protestant parishioners fled to safer ground (de Baroid 2000). In my interviews, two republican ex-prisoners identified the forts as sites of torture, and Fort Henry Taggart as the base from which British soldiers shot dead eleven people in August 1971 (Interviews, 27 July 2008, 4 July 2008).

Despite the proximity of their three existing bases in this corner of Belfast, the British military decided to spearhead yet another. Fort Whiterock, located at the eastern edge of Divis Mountain, was the last and largest operational base built in a nationalist area of Belfast (Figure 5.8). To amplify the controversy, the land identified for the project was an industrial cooperative of workshops owned collectively by local residents. In the face of soaring unemployment, the Whiterock Industrial Estate had embodied the economic hopes of residents in this corner of West Belfast. Consequently, the army's decision to claim this site provoked further outrage amongst local republicans. From this position, high in the hills and backed by the mountain, the fort offered superior surveillance opportunities for observing republican activists in the neighbourhoods below. In November 1979, the British military moved on to the site. During construction, the MOD erected temporary metal walls to hide from view the fort's layout and building progress. The wind, however, kept blowing down these walls, evoking the ancient city of Jericho and the biblical story of its fall. To West Belfast's residents, Fort Whiterock became widely known as Fort Jericho (see de Baroid 2000). Once built, Fort Jericho blocked the view of the mountain for decades. In our interview, Frank described the effect: 'It was a huge, grey lump...Just a blot on the landscape, to use a cliché. The mountain just disappeared. You wouldn't have seen the mountain after that' (Interview, 4 July 2008).

In our interview, Padraig described his development as a republican activist alongside the erection of Fort Jericho. When construction began in the late 1970s, Padraig was a fifteen-year-old student living in the nearby republican stronghold of Turf Lodge. He took an active role in protesting the fort's presence, attacking it every day on his way to school (Interview, 27 June 2008). For today's younger generation, however, the

military bases formed their known landscape and created a more complicated dynamic of resistance than that embraced by their elders, who came of age in the Troubles. Twenty-six-year-old Feargal Enright, an Irish language specialist, grew up in the Dermott Hill neighbourhood, wedged against the mountain and beneath the looming shadow of Fort Jericho. In spite of the British military presence, some children continued to play on the mountain's more accessible slopes, including the popular Hatchet Field. In an act of defiance, Terry Enright, Feargal's father, encouraged his son from a young age to roam the mountain, when and where he could. Like his father, Feargal also remembers stumbling across soldiers hiding unsuccessfully in the bracken.

In an interview that I conducted with both Enrights, Feargal described a nuanced relationship between local republican youth and the soldiers stationed at Fort Jericho. According to Feargal, the fort became a popular gathering spot for local teenagers, who would congregate directly beneath the watchful eyes of the soldiers:

And we would've sat there, right below them. There was a patch where we would've played football...But I can remember when we were there, there was a couple of British soldiers who were friendly...Now, a lot of us had a policy of not talking to them. We just ignored them. If you seen them in the street, you ignored them...Some of the kids that I can remember that we played with, they weren't in any way political. They just took things as they were and they did speak to them...There were young soldiers who supported Celtic,⁶ and they would've thrown fags [to us], and some of the kids would've ended up giving them a cigarette back and so on. And that went on for years, until the fort was dismantled.

In this excerpt, Feargal illustrates that amongst his contemporaries there was a diverse range of opinions about and ways of engaging (or consciously disengaging) with the British military presence. Feargal acknowledges that this diversity may be due to a generational shift: '[Talking to the soldiers] would have been the '90s as well...I imagine in the '80s it wouldn't have happened. There would've been less civil relationships.' Yet beneath these friendly interactions there simmered a far different dynamic, which erupted in the tense period leading to the 1994 ceasefire declaration.

⁶ A football team in Glasgow, popular with republican communities in Northern Ireland. Celtic's primary rivals, the Rangers, are popular with loyalist communities.

So we would've been throwing petrol bombs at [the fort] rather than throwing cigarettes at them. So it was through the changing times as well. Although I can remember when the IRA ceasefire was called, the 31st of August '94...There was a statement put out [that] from midnight, there would be a cessation of all the military operations. But about 10 o'clock, we were all going down to the fort, and the IRA came and attacked the fort. With coffee jar bombs and stuff like that...The next day, kids gathered around to see the damage...That was great, come in the next day and see what damage there is.

As the friendly exchange of cigarettes gave way to destruction by petrol bombs, Feargal and his friends were drawn into the militant political struggle of their elders. Although Feargal is too young to remember a time before Fort Jericho, the enthusiasm that he recalls when recounting the damage speaks to the power of inherited memories of injustice in republican culture.

On 18 May 1999 – after nearly twenty years of military occupation – the British army drove the last of its vehicles through the gates of Fort Jericho, returning what remained of the Whiterock Industrial Estate to the local republican community (de Baroid 2000: 386). Demolition began shortly thereafter, and over several months, local residents observed the process with delight. The demolition of Fort Jericho transformed the landscape, offering residents of West Belfast their first unobstructed view of the hills since the fort's inception. Frank Quigley noted in our interview: 'It just went from grey steel to green mountain when they were finished' (Interview, 4 July 2008). His observation found echoes in the participatory workshops that Deirdre Mackel organized for local residents, in which she asked them to conceptualize the sculpture that would eventually emerge as *Herald of Jericho*. According to Deirdre, 'people that we were talking to said: 'Well, [we've] got the view of Black Mountain back'' (Interview, 13 August 2008).

The demolition of Fort Jericho represented a huge and long-delayed triumph for republican West Belfast. Frank recalls: 'It was a certain victory. The British army hadn't won. They left before the IRA did' (Interview, 4 July 2008). Nearby, from her office at the newly-built premises of the Upper Springfield Development Trust, Deirdre conceived an idea for creating a public art sculpture from materials sourced from the fort's ruins. With difficulty, she arranged for clearance to enter the demolition site and to gather materials. Deirdre recalls the control that the MOD continued to exert, even as it

dismantled its stronghold: ‘We had to go in and just tell them which bits we wanted’ (Interview, 13 August 2008).

To design the sculpture, Frank and an Irish-Canadian artist named Farhad O’Neill consulted with groups of ex-prisoners and young people. Through talking with one another and through sharing their memories, the idea for *Herald of Jericho* began to take shape. In our interview, Deirdre describes the concept as one of transformation and reclamation:

The notion was...taking something from a bad period in history and doing something positive with it. Because it was also a time of political change as well...and it was significant for people of the area that this fort was being dismantled. And it was a way to say, ‘This is a new time now. Good-bye’...And this provided a symbolic way of doing that...Heralding the new dawn.

Frank and Farhad, a metal-working specialist, proceeded to collaborate with local residents to produce the sculpture. From the materials gathered from the demolished army base – palisades, corrugated metal, rocket wire – the artists and residents cut, welded and fashioned a large metal angel with outstretched wings, holding a bugle in her hand. They inscribed the angel with republican identity, through decorative Celtic designs and, less visibly, inscriptions of their own names. Twelve ex-prisoners, many of whom Frank knew from his own time at the Maze, lifted the sculpture into place, where it now hangs from the high-ceilinged atrium of the Upper Springfield Development Trust.

In February 2002, *Herald of Jericho* took flight. Those present at its launch included local residents, ex-prisoners, former members of the cooperative at the Whiterock Industrial Estate, the chief executive of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and Gerry Adams, a former IRA commander who now serves as a member of Northern Ireland’s power-sharing government. Also present was Father Des Wilson, a priest whose active presence in West Belfast during the Troubles, against the wishes of the Irish Catholic Church, is now legendary (see de Baroid 1999). At the launch, Father Wilson’s speech encapsulated the narrative of transformation embodied in the sculpture:

There is a great saying in our tradition, that swords will be melted down and made into ploughs, that the weapons of war will be made into instruments of prosperity, and here we have a piece of an army barracks reworked into a symbol of hope and

work and prosperity for the future...Nothing could be more suitable to our situation and more expressive of its meaning than that. (*The Irish News*, 26 February 2002)

Yet this ‘symbol of hope and work and prosperity’ is a bittersweet and incomplete memorial to recent history. When sunlight filters through the foyer, the angel’s skirt of palisades casts shadows shaped like prison bars, evoking the memories and embodied experiences of the prisoners who helped to design and position the sculpture.

I interpret the demolition of Fort Jericho as a microcosm of the larger demilitarization of Divis. These transformations, although widely celebrated by local republican residents, nonetheless trail darker memories in their wake. Deirdre reads these shadows as a narrative for the larger republican community:

Well, the fort, when it was there, it was so imposing. It actually cast physical shadows...It obliterated the view of the Black Mountain, but also cast shadows that aren't seen on the people. Like a negative impact on people’s lives. So whatever way [the sculpture] is lit, it casts shadows. (Interview, 13 August 2008)

Herald of Jericho captures some of these complex, emotional resonances. Its creation from the fallen walls of Fort Jericho, reworked by and for the community, underscores continued resistance to the idea of British military presence, and reclaims the mountain for republican culture. In the next section, however, I consider how republican cultural reclamation of Divis challenges efforts to cultivate the mountain as a shared landscape for a wider peacetime society.

3. *Inscribing Identity*

(Re)naming Places

Language is an emotive force in the transformation of Divis, and in republican culture more broadly. Connections between the Irish language and Irish national identity have been well established. Nash (1999: 461) argues that these connections emerged from cultural projects of romantic nationalism, particularly in the late-19th century, in which ‘land and language were twinned in an imaginative, political and economic geography of

rural land and native land ownership' that invested the Gaelic language and the soil of Ireland as 'deep repositories of the native spirit.' According to O'Reilly (1999: 26), for Irish language enthusiasts known as *gaeilgeoiri*, 'Ireland can be fully and completely imagined only through the medium of Irish.' Across the island of Ireland, both north and south of the border, the Irish language and the places it describes forms a linguistic heritage that links the cultural and physical landscapes:

Placenames are an integral part of our everyday language and are an indispensable component in defining our relationship with our physical environment...Placenames also carry within them an important cultural resonance in that they are constant reminders of the dominance of the Irish language in the countryside over the last two millennia. (Mac Giolla Easpaig 2008: 164).

Yet the 'empowered inscription' (Ó Cadhla 2007: 7) of the Ordnance Survey map altered and erased Ireland's linguistic landscape. Indeed, on the first edition of Ordnance Survey (1833) map for Belfast, 'English Town' appears just south of Black Mountain, imposing not only a new name but a new national identity on the place it occupied on paper.

In 1946, the Irish Free State (which in 1949 would become the Republic of Ireland), established *An Coimisiún Logainmneacha*, otherwise known as the Placenames Commission (Nash 1999). The commission's remit was to examine the placenames of Ireland and, where possible, to search for their correct original Irish versions. From this work, the commission prepared lists of these names for publication and official use. The project was incorporated eventually into later editions of the Ordnance Survey, and the 1970 edition of a general map of Ireland reinstated several Irish placenames. North of the border, however, six counties still remain under British jurisdiction. With no official equivalent of *An Coimisiún Logainmneacha*, the placenames of Northern Ireland's contemporary Ordnance Survey maps continue to reflect the efforts of the 19th century mapmakers.

In West Belfast, contemporary names in the local landscape evoke the historical geography of Divis. For example, the Springfield Road, which arcs from the infamous Falls-Shankill interface and serves as one of Belfast's westernmost arterials, recalls both the springs that rose from Divis to power the mills and the bleaching fields pressed into the service of the linen industry. The Whiterock Road connects the heartland of the Falls Road to the neighbourhoods that perch at the edge of the city, in the mountain's shadow. 'Whiterock' refers to the exposed escarpments that gleam against the dark earth, while

the etymological origins of Divis itself reside in *dubh*, the Irish word for ‘black,’ so called for the mountain’s dark peat soil.

Today, considerable confusion abounds over the mountain’s name. Divis, an anglicized version of *dubh*, was formalized by Britain’s 19th century mapping endeavor. At the time of the first Ordnance Survey map for Ireland, surveyed in 1832 and engraved in 1833, the mapmakers split the mountain into two parts. The lower hump became known as Black Mountain, from whose plateau of 1275 feet rises the summit now known as Divis. Further heightening the confusion are their overlapping definitions: the anglicized ‘Divis’ and its English translation. The National Trust labels the property as ‘Divis and the Black Mountain’ on the signpost for the entrance (Figure 5.9). The singular form of ‘mountain,’ enshrined formally not only on in this sign but also in the National Trust’s maps and brochures, provokes and reflects lingering semantic confusion among local residents who have known the mountain by different names. The following excerpt is taken from a group interview that I conducted at Bleach Green Court, a residential home for the elderly located near the top of the Whiterock Road. I begin this extract by attempting to clarify the location of an event that one participant had described:

- Lia This was on Divis Mountain or Black Mountain?
- Ciaran Divis. The foot of the Divis. And then –
- Danny No, at the foot of Black Mountain. At the top of –
- Ciaran That’s Divis up there. The Black Mountain’s further on
up...
- Danny No, the Black Mountain’s the first one you get [to]...
- Ciaran Well, the two of them mirror each other, don’t they?
- Danny Yeah.
- Ciaran They do mirror each other. Like, you know. (Interview,
12 February 2008)

As this exchange illuminates, the multiple names by which the mountain(s) is known generate confusion even among lifelong residents of West Belfast. Their differing perceptions may deviate from the official versions published by the Ordnance Survey or in the National Trust’s promotional literature. In this interview excerpt, the argument resolves itself when Ciaran states that the two parts of the mountain ‘mirror’ each other, to which Danny agrees. The concept of the mirror, which Ciaran reiterates moments later, is particularly striking. Although the elevations of their summits differ by 287 feet, he seems to suggest that the two are nonetheless equal, or perhaps two parts of the same.

According to Irish language enthusiasts Terry and Feargal Enright, the confusion dates to Britain's 19th century mapping project, which split an entity formerly considered one mountain into two:

Terry (A)t one stage, we believe they all might have been called *Dubh*, from the Irish which is ‘black hill.’ And then for your Ordnance Survey, or private ownership, they split the two and called one Divis and one Black Mountain...

Lia Do you know why they did that?

Terry I haven't a clue. On the old Ordnance Survey maps...up to 1832 you'll see references to them, so it must have been around that period. So it could have been for private ownerships, you know. ‘This is Black Mountain. This is Divis.’ (Interview, 25 February 2008)

Although not mentioned explicitly in this exchange, private ownership in the historical context of Northern Ireland connotes colonial bias to Terry and many other republicans. Historically, the people with the financial resources to own land in the Belfast hills tended to be Protestant, and were therefore implicit beneficiaries of British colonial policies. Terry's conflation of private ownership with the Ordnance Survey exemplifies the linked processes of the British colonial project. Where previously the mountain was perceived as an integral element of the Irish cultural landscape, now it was named, mapped and distributed for ownership by and among the British colonizers.

While the 19th century Ordnance Survey map may represent the metaphorical colonization of Divis, the 20th century witnessed its incontrovertible physical occupation. For 26-year-old Feargal, the mountain crystallized into two distinct – and distinctly named – zones:

See, there was a British army base at the top of Divis...People just would've usually went on Black Mountain, and they don't even call it Black Mountain, though. It's called ‘the mountain,’ or ‘the hill.’ And then you would've went exploring there, and then Divis was kind of a place that you wouldn't have went. Uh-huh. You wouldn't have went. Because...there was an army base on top, so kids just

used to do their own thing, stay away from it. (Interview, 25 February 2008)

In this extract, Feargal makes clear distinctions between Divis and Black Mountain, as remembered and filtered through his childhood experience. The ‘mountain’ and ‘the hill’ suggest intimacy and familiarity. Intriguingly, he refers to these in singular form, as though ‘mountain’ condensed into the terrain that was accessible and thus known to him. In contrast, the forbidding summit of Divis, with its army patrol, lay beyond the reach of familiarity. His discomfort echoes the ambivalent relationship that other residents of West Belfast express with ‘Divis.’ According to Deirdre Mackel of the Upper Springfield Development Trust, ‘Divis’ is a name ‘invented by the British military’ (Interview, 24 October 2007). Her own practice of calling it ‘Black Mountain’ can be read as contempt for this British linguistic legacy.

For Irish language enthusiasts, the demilitarization of Divis represents a long-delayed opportunity to reinstate Gaelic placenames. Nash (1999: 462) argues that the process of renaming can be read as a post-imperial ‘countermapping project’ that rectifies the Ordnance Survey map of the British imperial project. In our interview, Terry Enright recounted how he had urged the National Trust to restore the original Irish names of several geographic features in their publications and on signposts on the site itself. In the following extract, Terry describes his frustration with the process:

Terry There’s a couple of issues which are still ongoing in terms of the National Trust and myself. One has been the whole thing with the language, and the fact that there is so many of the sites who already have Irish place names. You know. And the fact that [the National Trust] not necessarily have ignored it – They keep saying, you know, ‘We’re going to do it later.’

Lia Mmm-hmm. You mean, in terms of giving places names?

Terry Give places their names in Irish, their proper names. (Interview, 25 February 2008)

Terry’s attempts to restore the Irish language on Divis is part of a larger movement for Gaelic cultural revival in West Belfast. In May 2008, politician Gerry Adams put forward a proposal to create a ‘*Gaeltacht* Quarter’ as part of an urban regeneration drive. The proposed Irish language district would encompass four city wards, including two of the

most deprived in Northern Ireland. Adams's proposal builds on existing enthusiasm. West Belfast is already home to a number of Irish-language primary and secondary schools, as well as an Irish language radio station (*The Andersonstown News*, 9 October 2006). The diverse array of Irish language institutions in this part of the city highlights a fierce sense of cultural pride and reclamation.

Yet projects to reinstate Gaelic placenames in contemporary Ireland, both north and south, raise complicated questions about cultural identity, authenticity and diversity – issues that Nash (1999) identifies as central to postcolonial cultural politics, and which may also explain the reticence of the National Trust that Terry describes above. Nash (*ibid*: 458) argues that interpretations of the 'story of topographic naming and renaming often return to the drama of anti-colonial models of Irish history, which set the purity of pre-colonial culture against the corruption of colonial influence.' The simplistic narrative of 'colonial erasure and post-colonial retrieval, or of sectarian and cultural antagonism' (*ibid*: 457) does a disservice to the nuanced history of the Irish language revival. Despite its early non-political stance in the late-19th century, and the active and influential participation of several Protestant enthusiasts, the Gaelic language revival movement ultimately became linked to Catholic nationalism and an exclusive Catholic, Gaelic and rural ideology of Irish republicanism (Nash 1999: 463, citing Mac Póilin 1997). As Watson (2008: 166) argues, the idea of 'revival' incorporated more than language: 'The revival of the Irish language went hand-in-hand with the construction of an Irish identity...In fact, to a large extent, Irishness was constructed in contrast with notions of Englishness.'

In Northern Ireland, the 'contested politicization' (Nash 1999: 469) of the Irish language may be exacerbated by an interpretation of Gaelic placenames and projects for their recovery as 'a sectarian version of cultural belonging, location and purity' (*ibid*: 463). During the Troubles, the Irish language became a focal point of pride and resistance when imprisoned IRA volunteers studied the language and sparked its larger 20th century revival in republican areas across the North (Mac Ionnrachtaigh 2008, McEvoy 2001). Today, the Irish language takes its place alongside other politicized symbols of republican culture – St Patrick's Day and Gaelic sporting events, for example – that continue to polarize a divided society. Like Graham (1994), Nash argues that Northern Ireland needs new models of belonging, new senses of place and cultural location. Although placenames have frequently been harnessed in ways that emphasize rootedness and exacerbate cultural conflict, Nash (*ibid*: 476) also points to their potential as 'located identities expressed through attachments to place [to] help shape a plural sense of culture.'

The ‘countermapping’ (Nash 1999: 462) of Divis by Irish language enthusiasts may be read as an exercise in postcolonial retrieval of a republican cultural landscape, but it also raises uncomfortable parallels to British imperial mapping and power. Through the strength of their claims, drawn from a long and almost mythic history, the republicans whom I interviewed seek to establish Divis as an incontrovertible resource for their heritage and identity. In Chapter Two, I discussed how heritage resources in ‘post-conflict’ societies are particularly complex. As Graham and McDowell (2007: 345) point out: ‘All heritage is someone’s heritage, and therefore logically not someone else’s.’ I had argued that the process of building peace involves the search for shared forms of heritage on which to build a shared identity and future. The demilitarization of Divis offers rich scope for reworking a contested landscape caught between the competing cultural claims of Irish republicanism and British imperialism, both of which inscribe identity – and therefore ownership – through (re) naming the landscape. To address this challenge, I turn to a very different act of inscription.

An Activist Alphabet

As one of Belfast’s most visible features, the eastern flank of the mountain offers a tempting surface on which activists and artists can convey messages to the wider public. For Christoff Gillen, an artist and activist who grew up in republican West Belfast, the mountain provides a canvas for provoking a city-wide dialogue about place, identity and belonging. Although in our interview (24 June 2008) he did not choose to define himself in these terms, Christoff’s intentions contribute to a movement loosely known as ‘Land Art’ or ‘Earth Art,’ in which landscape and the work of art are inextricably linked. As Andrews (1999) observes, the emphasis is on the relationship between the object(s) deployed and the otherwise untouched site. Given the great diversity of works associated with this movement, ranging from minimal, ephemeral interventions in a site (for example, works by Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy and Michael Singer) to large-scale sculptural works (eg, Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson), Brady (2007: 257) advises adopting an approach that emphasizes ‘family resemblance’ rather than firm definition. Although the emergence of the Land Art movement is commonly attributed to the 1960s, in its ‘active modelling of the land’ (Andrews 1999: 204) the movement evokes human intervention in a variety of forms, from gardening to ancient ritualistic earthworks.

In Belfast, Christoff’s projects reflect these diverse ideas. As he notes in his arts degree proposal:

[I] propose to use the Black Mountain overlooking the capital city of Belfast. Upon this I will place text or symbols of significance and forward thinking for the peoples of Belfast and beyond...One of the key issues behind my thinking for this project is how can we approach and deal with the legacy of the Troubles and how to address this, by making a Public Art work on the...face of the mountain that is all inclusive for the people of Belfast. (Gillen, unpublished)

More recently, the practice of writing on the mountain has its precedent in the Troubles. According to former IRA volunteer Pádraig, in 1980 ‘people became very imaginative about how to publicize the hunger strike’ (Interview, 27 June 2008). Giant H’s, symbolizing both hunger and the infamous H-shaped blocks of the Maze prison, appeared on the mountain. Pádraig remembers people digging the letter into the surface of the mountain, and then filling the depression with lime to make the letter more permanent and visible. The ‘H,’ designed to raise awareness of the prisoners’ plight, quickly became contentious. At the time, there was considerable controversy over the absence of the letter ‘A’ to symbolize the women’s jail in County Armagh, where female republican activists were imprisoned.⁷

Christoff himself was born in County Armagh, to a Polish father and a Catholic mother. At the age of ten, he moved to West Belfast. Now 40, Christoff calls himself a ‘nomad’ (Interview, 24 June 2008) and grapples with vexed questions of belonging and identity. The mountain provides the space to explore them. In our interview, he showed me photos of large-scale landscape etchings that inspired his own. Of these, the most influential are the chalk horses of Wiltshire, England and, in Ireland, the recent protests against the proposed motorway through the valley below the Hill of Tara. In large white letters, startling against the emerald turf, protesters wrote ‘Save the Valley’; below the text they drew the chalk outline of a Celtic harp.

Christoff began his project in the spring of 2008. His aim was ‘to build up a dialogue and a language on the Mountain by using a letter from the alphabet every week with the view of forming a word’ (Gillen, unpublished). Every Saturday, beginning the 5th of April, Christoff and a handful of volunteers traveled to the mountain to create their contribution to the dialogue. According to Christoff, the journey itself was a vital part of the process. He and his volunteers would congregate in front of the gates of City Hall and proceed by black taxi – the iconic community transport system – through West Belfast to

⁷ The absence in the gendered landscape continues today. A public art campaign led to the creation of several large ‘H’-shaped monuments throughout West Belfast. However, no monuments exist to the letter ‘A.’

the top of the Whiterock Road. From there, they walked to the site along the ancient pathway known as the 'mountain loney.' As he explained to me in an interview, this journey contributes to a sense of community that he seeks to invoke and promote through his art.

In a contemporary reworking of the historic landscape, Christoff creates his letters and images from pieces of white cloth that evoke the bleaching greens of Belfast's industrial linen industry (Figure 5.10). For the first installation, Christoff and his volunteers created a large, slender question mark (Figure 5.11). The following week, they created the letter 'U,' which could be read as shorthand for the word 'you,' directed to the people of Belfast. These early attempts comprised the steepest part of the learning curve. By the end of the second week, Christoff knew that he would need to enlarge the letters to make them legible from the city below.

Over the course of four consecutive weeks, Christoff created the following large-scale letters: H, O, M and E (Figure 5.12). One letter appeared each week, replacing that which had preceded it the previous week. In this way, the word unfolded not across space but across time. For Christoff, the interrogation of 'home' is central to his art and to the questions he poses to his wider audience:

'What does 'home' mean in the context of now?' muses Christoff. Although it's tempting to think of the mountain as a 'blank canvas,' Christoff resists the assumption: 'It's not blank in many ways. There's a lot of history.' (Interview, 24 June 2008)

One particular challenge to this project was the intrusion of external forces, for example the weather or, more commonly, local youth who re-appropriated the letters to their own purposes. Christoff described a series of photographs that he took from below, shortly after completing the letter 'E.' In place of his installation were the wobbly outlines of the letters 'K' and 'A.' Loyalist youth were presumably behind these changes: 'KAT' is a popular acronym for 'Kill All Taigs,' itself a derogatory term for Catholics. Christoff assumed that the 'T' lay just beyond the camera's frame. Scattered on the slope were tiny figures, suggesting that local youth must have moved in shortly after Christoff and his team departed. These are acts of transgression that amplify Christoff's own; the site on which he writes his letters is private property. By trespassing, he emphasizes his advocacy for the mountain as a public resource, which he underscores with the inscription 'HOME.'

In June 2008, Christoff harnessed the mountain to make a statement against US President George W Bush, who was visiting Belfast as part of a larger tour of Europe.

Alongside other protest activities taking place across the city, Christoff planned to write 'NO TO BUSH' in 50-foot white letters on the mountain. Seventeen volunteers from diverse backgrounds, including myself, joined Christoff at City Hall for the journey to the mountain. He had recruited the others primarily through word-of-mouth in local anarchist activist networks. The following excerpt from my research diary describes the process of creating the artwork:

At five minutes to nine, we reach the site. Christoff surveys the slope, dismayed. A short string of expletives follows. Apparently, there's far more vegetation than he had expected. We stand knee-deep in a carpet of ferns...

We set to work. Christoff produces a spool of white ribbon...He busies himself with a retractable tape measure, with the help of a couple of minions. Laboriously, they unspool the ribbon, draping it over the ferns to mark the outline of the shape that will, eventually, be filled by white fabric. While the select few toil with the tape measure, the rest of us stand around, chatting...Every now and then, in an effort to look like I'm pulling my weight, I half-heartedly tromp a few ferns to the ground...

From their rucksacks, the organizers pull out swaths of old, white fabric. We lay these inside the ribbon outline, affixing them to the ground by way of nails, tent poles and even chopsticks. Due to the abundance of ferns, this process is far more difficult than it sounds...

By 9:20pm, we've completed only the two legs of the 'N.'

'Has this gone a bit wonky?' wonders Dick.

Ten minutes later, the guerilla *artistes* start to notice the fading light...This is only one of many problems to plague Operation 'No To Bush.' I now understand the allure for the MOD to harness the hills for surveillance training. I remember Terry Enright's story about stumbling over horizontal soldiers. Drop a hammer, or a pair a scissors, and you'll never find it again. The most distressing problem, however, is the dwindling supply of fabric...

First, we scupper the outline process. It's an uprising of the masses – a miniature revolution against our fearless (and increasingly testy) leader. Then the second word – the ineffectual 'TO' – falls by the wayside. The final 'N' looks perfectly respectable, but its siblings suffer by comparison. As we work against fading light and diminishing

materials, the letters become smaller and smaller. Christoff is close to explosion.

I'm working on the 'S,' nailing linen napkins into the gaps between frayed lace curtains. To my right, the 'H' team contemplates a lone gorse bush that occupies the space where the horizontal band needs to lie. When I look again a few minutes later, the gorse is no more. One bush sacrificed for another.

The sun sinks ever lower in the sky...Christoff looks ready, if he could, to fire us all on the spot...Someone suggests that we should have spelled 'NOB.' I agree. It's a fine message – straight to the point, and requiring three letters instead of six.

Christoff stomps through the ferns, muttering to himself. 'They're not going to be able to see it. Not going to be able to *SEE IT!*' ...

At 10 o'clock, everyone except Christoff is ready to call it a day...We'll have to live with it. Christoff's most ardent minions continue to putter, while the rest of us stand back and admire our handiwork. (Research Diary, 16 June 2008)

Due to the lack of white fabric and the fading daylight, the final product spelled 'NO BUSH,' with each subsequent letter growing progressively smaller and more difficult to discern. The installation stayed in place through Bush's visit to Belfast, although the message proved difficult to read from City Centre. The following week, Christoff removed all letters except the adjacent 'U' and 'S.' Through this ambiguous result, which could refer either to the word 'us' or to the United States, Christoff drew the mountain into a multiply-scaled dialogue, at once local and global.

The 'No to Bush' installation could be read simply as a form of protest graffiti, similar to other examples that cropped up around the city in the days before Bush's visit to Northern Ireland. However, Christoff's decision to locate this project on Divis Mountain complicates an iconic landscape intimately associated with republican cultural identity, opening it to a larger global dialogue. The 'No to Bush' installation involved the participation of a diverse, multinational group of volunteers whose presence requires new interpretations of the mountain that go beyond anti-colonial Irish resistance and reclamation.

Christoff's work on Divis offers a ripe study to probe the relationship between landscape, identity and meaning(s) of place within cultural geography. As Foster and Lorimer (2007: 426) observe, 'artists employ a spatialized vocabulary to label, describe

and explain their work that geographers recognize as their own.’ Like Hall’s (1997) study of Raymond Mason’s fiberglass sculptures in Birmingham, or Revill’s (1994) work on the Forest of Dean’s Forest Sculpture Trail, my own analysis of Christoff ‘plots the shifting place of *landscape art* within a wider *art of landscape* (Daniels 2008: 431, original emphasis). Specifically, I seek to understand how landscape art can shape new discourses of place and heritage in a ‘post-conflict’ society. Through the arc of his work, Christoff draws out new dimensions of Divis Mountain. Running throughout is the pervasive theme of his first installation. The slender question mark conveys the ambiguities and uncertainties of the peace process, which Christoff distills into and projects from the contested, shifting landscape of Divis.

Conclusion

The demilitarization of Divis Mountain is a dramatic transformation of post-ceasefire Belfast, and its evolution is ongoing. In 2007, the National Trust acquired another large swath of land to the south and east, effectively increasing its holdings on the mountain by almost one-third. More recently, the transfer of ownership of the summit opens new possibilities. Under the stewardship of the National Trust, the mountain now has official museum status, which will expedite the transfer of the first Ordnance Survey theodolite base from its current storage site at the Natural History Museum in London. Its reinstatement on the summit will recall the mountain’s multiple layers of imperial, military history, even as efforts by Irish language advocates to restore Gaelic placenames recall a different narrative. Other ongoing projects include the site of Fort Jericho, earmarked for return to the local community as an industrial estate, although efforts to develop it prove to be complex and protracted.

Community regeneration organizations and cultural heritage bodies increasingly seek new ways of engaging with Divis. In our interview, Deirdre Mackel of the Upper Springfield Development Trust predicted: ‘Tourism is going to bring a lot of opportunities for local people...especially in and around the Black Mountain, there’s going to be a lot of things in the future happening there’ (Interview, 13 August 2008). Fáilte Feirste, the republican-centred tourism board for West Belfast, seeks to promote the mountain locally. Their efforts dovetail with those of the West Belfast Taxi Association. The fleet of black taxis, the ex-prisoners who drive them, and Divis

Mountain form a constellation of iconic images in the culture of republican West Belfast.⁸ As the manager of the Association explained to me, an interest in tourism is a natural progression from the recognition that the mountain forms the background to all their services. Tentative plans are in progress for the creation of a taxi tour of West Belfast, which would develop an environmental focus alongside the more traditional political, economic, cultural and social foci of current tours. This new tour will feature Divis Mountain as integral to West Belfast's cultural landscape (Research Diary, 20 May 2008).

Yet this cultural landscape continues to shift, as does the place of Divis Mountain within it. Earlier in this chapter, I introduced a former IRA combatant and prisoner named Pádraig. His ardent political ideals, and his repeated invocations of the Irish Republic through references to County Donegal and the '26 Counties,' suggest that he might harbour antipathy toward the English-based National Trust and its role in managing the mountain. However, in our interview Pádraig expressed a surprising level of ease:

'How do you feel about the National Trust purchasing Divis and Black Mountain?' I ask.

'Brilliant,' Pádraig replies promptly. 'For two reasons.'

Reason One is obvious: It 'starts to remove the army presence from the mountain.' The fact that this is an English organization is insignificant to Pádraig. 'Why would you cut off your nose to spite your face?'

Reason Two: 'The change in people using that mountain is fabulous.' (Research Diary, 27 June 2008)

The National Trust, which is widely perceived as a middle-class, English organization, could easily be read as an arbiter of British colonial history. Many of the stately homes managed by the Trust are relics of British imperialism. For instance, Florence Court in the western county of Fermanagh is a mansion built by wealth from the slave trade. Moreover, most of the manor houses on the island of Ireland are vestiges of British colonial plantation history. Yet despite these associations, Pádraig expresses satisfaction with the presence of the National Trust on Divis. His rhetorical question to me – 'Why

⁸ During the Troubles, bus services in West Belfast were frequently disrupted in a cycle that involved both the unionist civic government and local republican residents. Out of this vacuum emerged the black taxi cooperative to serve local residents in this part of the city. Today, the West Belfast Taxi Association is a cooperative enterprise that co-exists alongside the municipal bus service. The Association employs a large number of ex-prisoners as drivers. In doing so, it invokes the suspicion of people outside of the area, many of whom view the black taxi service as a funding mechanism for republican paramilitary efforts.

would you cut off your nose to spite your face?’ – suggests an element of strategic internal negotiation: On balance, the National Trust is a far preferable alternative to the British army. Moreover, the second reason that he cites, ‘The change in people using the mountain,’ suggests that his hopes align with those of the National Trust – to encourage public ownership and use of the mountain. The softening of this former IRA volunteer toward a major British heritage organization indicates new possibilities for reframing an iconic republican cultural landscape as a shared resource for a wider public.

In the years since the acquisition, the National Trust and other environmental organizations have worked actively to promote Divis as a recreational landscape open to all. For Seamus, the former IRA volunteer imprisoned for eleven years, the National Trust was pivotal to fulfilling the promise he made to himself at the height of the Troubles, while standing in the car park of the military hospital in Belfast. In our interview, he recounted his thoughts as he glimpsed the mountain for the first time in a decade: ‘I said, ‘I have to go back there.’ It took eighteen years to fulfill that promise’ (Interview, 5 June 2008). Seamus finally returned Divis when he took part in one of the National Trust’s sponsored walks.

More broadly, the re-casting of Divis as a public recreational resource engages with debates in cultural geography around walking, landscape and cultural politics (for example, Burgess 1996; Brennan 2005; Wylie 2002). As Wylie (2005: 235) argues, ‘notions of the walking self...advance ineluctably into cultural politics, into complex histories of protest and access and discursive entanglements of walking, gender, neutrality, health, fitness, happiness, patriotism.’ Phillips (2005: 509), in a meditation on the artist Tim Brennan’s *Mercator manoeuvre*,⁹ observes that walking is ‘enchanting because it offers a way of ‘writing’ the landscape,’ and in doing so inscribing new meanings.

In this chapter, I excavated the competing, overlapping layers of inscription and meaning on Divis Mountain to examine their role in the transformation of conflict. As a historic site for British military imperialism, the mountain serves as a rallying point around which a defiant, postcolonial republican culture can cohere. Yet the roles and meanings of Divis during the Troubles are now shifting in a time of waking peace. Expressions of cultural reclamation – embodied above in *Herald of Jericho* and attempts to restore Gaelic placenames – emphasize republican claims to the mountain. In doing so, they potentially threaten attempts to develop shared space in Northern Ireland’s fragile,

⁹ In *Mercator manoeuvre*, Brennan leads a group of participants on a guided walking tour. He takes his route from the line of sight offered by a statue of Ernest Shackleton outside the headquarters of the Royal Geographical Society, and then proceeds to lead the participants on a tour of certain monuments in Hyde Park, linked thematically to concepts of historical and contemporary colonialism. (Phillips 2005)

‘post-conflict’ society. My research, however, suggests that the demilitarization of Divis provokes wider possibilities for republican cultural identity. Padraig provides a poignant example: a staunch republican and former combatant who now welcomes the presence of the contentiously-named National Trust. The contradictions that he embodies find wider resonance in West Belfast, where contemporary support for non-violent constitutional politics sits alongside valorized memories of republican struggle. These contradictions point toward ways in which the peace process complicates existing narratives of conflict, rendering simplistic, anti-colonial justifications in more nuanced variations. Trailing in their wake are transformations, both physical and metaphorical, of contested cultural landscapes. In this case study, I have drawn on the demilitarization of Divis Mountain to explore how its attendant transformations provoke individuals and communities to negotiate multiple, overlapping and, perhaps, conflicting identities in a society recovering from conflict.

I will return to Divis Mountain in Chapter Seven, to explore in greater depth the challenge of opening such a culturally charged landscape to a wider public. In the next chapter, however, I develop the theme of ‘post-conflict’ negotiations of cultural heritage and identity through an exploration of the loyalist bonfire tradition.



Figure 5.1. West Belfast with Divis in the background. Photo by Christoff Gillen.

Figure 5.2. Ordnance Survey theodolite base on Black Mountain. Photo by the author.





Figure 5.3. Ministry of Defense compound on Divis. Photo by Dermot McCann, National Trust.



Figure 5.4. Eco-grid trail leading to Black Mountain. Photo courtesy of Belfast Hills Partnership.



Figure 5.5. Derelict 18th century stone barn, eventual site of visitor's centre. Photo courtesy of Belfast Hills Partnership.



Figure 5.5. Concrete imprint of Ministry of Defense compound, now designated for civilian use. Photo by the author.

Figure 5.7. 'Herald of Jericho.' Photo by the author.



Figure 5.8. Fort Whiterock, known locally as Fort Jericho. Photo courtesy of www.ballymurphy.org.

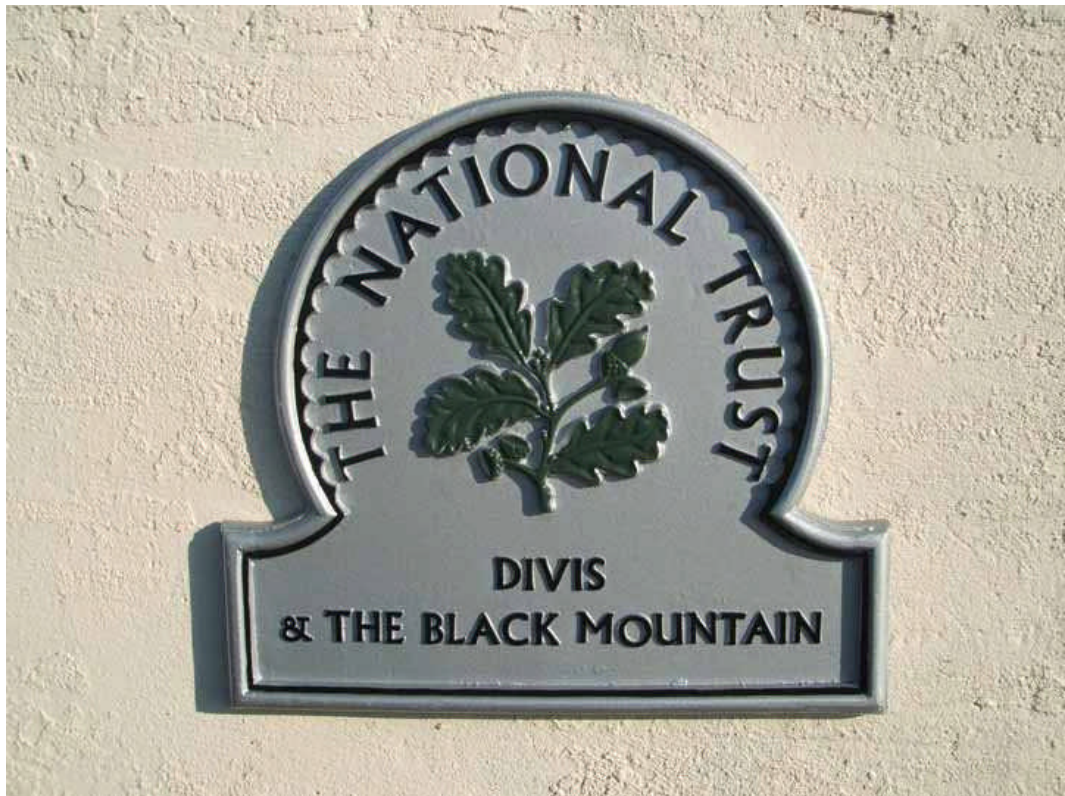


Figure 5.9. National Trust entrance sign. Photo courtesy of Belfast Hills Partnership.



Figure 5.10. Christoff Gillen with a white sheet. Photo courtesy of Christoff Gillen.



Figure 5.11. Question mark on Black Mountain. Photo by Christoff Gillen.



Figure 5.12. The letter 'H' on Black Mountain, from Christoff Gillen's 'HOME' installation. Photo by Christoff Gillen.



Figure 5.13. 'NO BUSH' on Black Mountain. Photo by Christoff Gillen.

Chapter Six

Transforming Fire: 11th Night Bonfires and Loyalist Identities

Introduction

At the zenith of the loyalist cultural calendar, the 11th Night bonfires provide an intriguing counterpoint to the cultural landscape of Divis. Unlike the mountain's solid mass and fixed geographical coordinates, loyalist bonfires are ephemeral and widely dispersed in space and time. While the peacetime transformation of Divis highlights issues around conservation, the bonfires engage a different set of environmental concerns around pollution and regeneration. Yet like Divis, their current transformations implicate cultural identity in conflicts over contested territory, and their redefinition is crucial to the peacebuilding process. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the transformation of conflict provokes encounters between conflicting narratives of cultural heritage, which in turn play powerful roles in shaping community identity. Thus, the transformation of conflict calls for new ways of engaging with 'culturally charged' (Matless 2000: 142) landscapes and their attendant contentions of heritage and memory. In this chapter, I draw on the contested landscape of loyalist bonfires to explore the (re)negotiation of cultural heritage and identity in a divided, rapidly changing 'post-conflict' society.

The 11th Night bonfires celebrate the victory of the Protestant King William III over the Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. Like the 12th of July parades that they herald, the bonfires inscribe loyalist cultural ownership over the space they define (Jarman 1997; see also Cohen 2007). In recent times, the peace process has provoked massive changes to these traditions. For example, parades are now closely monitored and frequently re-routed to avoid sectarian conflict as they pass through predominantly Catholic neighbourhoods (Bell 2007). With regard to bonfires, the changes are particularly poignant. In the decade since the peace accords, urban regeneration in Belfast has claimed many of the sites on which loyalist communities build their bonfires. Moreover, people both within and outside of these areas are gaining confidence to complain about a divisive sectarian tradition that poses widespread risks to the environment and to public health. Today, as the discourse of peace champions the ideal of shared space, loyalists struggle to redefine their tradition and, by extension, the connections they draw between place and identity.

These transformations are unfolding in a very different context than that which I explored in the preceding chapter. Unlike Irish republicanism, which emerged from and defined itself in opposition to British imperialism, loyalism has evolved from allegiance to the crown and to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. While republican cultural identities can be situated within wider postcolonial discourses, their loyalist counterparts call for different analytical frameworks. As I discussed in Chapter Three, loyalist desire to maintain an unsustainable political *status quo* stems from deep-seated insecurities about the peace process and the place of loyalism in it. In response, community practitioners in loyalist areas frequently invoke ‘single identity work’ to develop group confidence ‘to face the discomfiting work of critical self-reflection’ (Nash 2005a: 295). At first glance, engagement around bonfires appears to fall under the rubric of ‘single identity.’ In this chapter, however, I aim to destabilize and complicate this assumption by exploring diverse, multiple expressions emerging in ‘post-conflict’ loyalist identities.

Gender is one theme that cross-cuts assumptions of monolithic loyalist identity. Throughout this chapter, I will analyze the gendering of bonfires to complicate the ways in which loyalist cultural heritage is (re)defined. This is rich yet surprisingly under-explored thematic territory. As Meyer (2000: 114) observes: ‘The politics of Northern Ireland are unambiguously gendered, yet gender has remained a largely ignored variable in explaining the ongoing conflict.’ McDowell’s (2008b) analyses of gender nuances in the peacetime commemoration of the Troubles reveal similar findings: ‘In a conflict orchestrated largely by men against men, the experiences of women and their varied interpretations have often been elided from localized narratives of the past.’ (*ibid*: 335). These patterns are particularly striking within loyalism. Ward (2002: 167) points to the predominantly male ‘public face of unionism’ and gendered national symbolism that lacks positive female imagery. Like Ward (2004), Meyer (2000: 120) locates the lack of available political space for women in the gender constructions used in sectarian symbols and identities. She argues that the Protestant-unionist-loyalist identity draws heavily from masculine warrior imagery that reflects staunch patriarchal values and excludes women from political leadership. According to Meyer, these values are taken up and re-emphasized through the prevalence of political murals in working-class loyalist estates:

The most frequent and menacing figures in these murals are the armed and faceless male bodies representing the loyalist

paramilitaries themselves. Always wearing balaclavas to hide their faces, typically dressed in black, their rifles aimed and cocked in phallic readiness.’ (Meyer 2000: 132)

The striking absence of female imagery in loyalist visual culture leads McDowell (2008b: 350) to question: ‘So what roles can women play in the present if they have been written out of the past?’

In many ways, the 11th Night bonfires seem to reinforce traditional gender roles and symbolic values in loyalist culture. Yet as I argue in this chapter, recent transformations are challenging people in these communities to re-think assumed cultural norms. In doing so, they rework the ‘identity resource’ (Graham and Shirlow 2002: 882) of the bonfire tradition for a new phase of peacebuilding. When positioned against larger transformations in loyalist culture, the bonfires offer insight into connections between contested cultural identities, new meanings of place, and the redefinition of contemporary loyalism. More broadly, I argue that transformations in the contested bonfire landscape can be read as both a product and an agent of the peace process, which in turn reflect and provoke new expressions of identity in loyalist culture.

For this case study, I bring together several strands of work from my overlapping academic and practical projects. My data is based primarily on participant observation, which I arranged through my collaboration with Groundwork Northern Ireland and Belfast City Council’s Bonfire Management Programme. I also draw on transcripts of semi-structured interviews that I conducted with a wide array of participants, most notably paramilitary members, civil servants, community activists and bonfire builders residing in loyalist communities throughout greater Belfast. As I discussed in Chapter Four, my collaborative relationship with Groundwork Northern Ireland offered both opportunity and challenge. On the one hand, our collaboration gave me an excellent vantage point from which to conduct participant observation and to network with potential interview participants. On the other hand, this collaboration required me to balance my academic pursuits with sensitive professional responsibilities. Tensions occasionally and inevitably arose between these different roles, but they also heightened my awareness and deepened my understanding of the complex dynamics at work in the transformation of contested traditions.

I have organized this chapter into two overarching parts. In the shorter first section, I contextualize the 11th Night bonfires against the shifting backdrop of loyalism, tracing their

evolution from historic origins to contemporary practices. As I build layers of complexity to these descriptions, I develop my interpretation of loyalist bonfires as a contested cultural landscape. I end the first section by pointing toward complex dynamics surrounding ‘post-conflict’ transformations, and I ask how these changes provoke loyalists to engage in new ways with culture, place, tradition and identity. I devote the remainder of the chapter to responding to these questions.

The chapter’s second overarching section explores how loyalist communities negotiate change through three interlinking case studies on bonfire management and transformation. The first of these focuses on a municipal programme based in Belfast. The Bonfire Management Programme was a three-year grant framework structure, funded by Belfast City Council and administered by Groundwork Northern Ireland, that aimed to address key issues around the environment, good relations, community development and cultural tradition. Through this case study, I explore some of the complex dynamics around bonfires, gendering and cultural identity in a time of transition.

In the second case study, I trace connections between contemporary bonfires and loyalist paramilitary culture through a separate bonfire management programme in the nearby borough of Antrim. Drawing on a semi-structured interview with two senior paramilitary members, I explore how transformations in the bonfire tradition challenge these former combatants to engage with wider social trends emerging through the peace process, thus provoking them to re-examine their political loyalties and cultural identities.

The third case study explores the gendering of bonfire transformation through the ‘beacon’ – an alternative structure designed through the Bonfire Management Programme in collaboration with the neighbourhood of Woodvale in North Belfast. I describe the beacon’s controversial history of development; the tensions it provoked within the larger loyalist population in Belfast; its successful public launch in July 2008; and the pivotal role played by Woodvale’s female bonfire committee. I argue that the beacon can be read as one of the most powerful and controversial symbols of bonfire transformation and, by extension, of transformations within loyalism itself.

Finally, I conclude this chapter by outlining future directions for 11th Night bonfires. A new municipal programme in Belfast aims to support loyalist communities in the positive celebration of the cultural heritage and identity. I contextualize bonfire transformation as part of a larger process of re-imagining the place of loyalist culture and identity in a time of

growing peace, and I gesture toward ways in which this example can illuminate the roles and challenges of shared heritage for divided ‘post-conflict’ societies.

1. *‘Loyalism in Transition’: Fire, History and Heritage*

A Brief History

Unlike the 12th of July parades, 11th Night bonfires have garnered little formal research attention. The Orange Order¹ (2008) traces the history of the tradition to ancient and early Christian rituals involving fire, as well as to practices of signaling and communicating through fire. In early modern Britain, for example, fire played an important role in signaling the sighting of the stricken Spanish Armada of 1588, and again in the 1605 Gunpowder Plot. However, the crux of the loyalist bonfire tradition lies in the so-called ‘Glorious Revolution.’

In 1688, as religious and political tensions mounted across Europe, the ‘Glorious Revolution’ began when a group of English parliamentarians overthrew Catholic James II. The parliamentarians replaced the deposed king with his daughter, Mary II, and her Dutch husband, William Henry of Orange, who would become King William III. Crucially, both Mary and William were Protestant – a cause for celebration in Ireland amongst the plantation settlers and their descendents. According to legend, news of the coronation sparked a celebration of bonfires across the hilltops of Ulster. Elsewhere in Ireland, though, the predominantly Catholic supporters of James greeted the news with antagonism. The ‘Glorious Revolution’ was secured by a series of major battles, not in Britain but on the island of Ireland. The most famous of these took place on the 1st of July 1690, on the banks of the River Boyne. The Battle of the Boyne marked William’s decisive victory and the end of James’s attempts to regain the British crown. More broadly, William’s victory secured Protestantism for the British throne. The Battle of the Boyne etched itself deeply in the cultural psyche of Ireland’s pro-British Protestants, and King William III, or ‘King Billy’ as he is fondly remembered today, became one of loyalism’s most revered icons.

¹ The Loyal Orange Institution, more commonly known as the Orange Order, is a Protestant fraternity founded in 1795. Despite its origins among the labouring classes, the Order today is perceived as largely professional; throughout the 20th century, Northern Ireland’s most prominent political, civic and economic leaders all claimed membership. Today, the Orange Order is most strongly associated with the 12th of July parade tradition.

When the Julian calendar gave way to the Gregorian in the 18th century, the 1st of July became the revered 12th.² Although the 12th of July holds sway as loyalism's most important date, celebrated by the marching tradition and flute band parades, the eve of the 12th is nearly as significant. On 11th Night, the bonfire tradition re-enacts the campfires lit by soldiers on the banks of the River Boyne, on the eve of their victorious battle in 1690. The following year, when the western city of Derry/Londonderry fell under siege, Governor Colonel Lundy advocated surrendering the city to King James II's army. The loyalist defenders refused, and Lundy fled the city under the cover of darkness. Lundy entered loyalist folklore as a notorious traitor, giving rise to the tradition of burning effigies atop bonfires.

The bonfires of today bear little resemblance to the rural campfires by which 17th century soldiers kept watch. Although bonfires are built in loyalist areas throughout Northern Ireland, the majority are constructed in urban, working-class areas. Belfast's sheer density intensifies the spectacle, to which Northern Ireland's successive unionist governments have tended to turn a blind eye. As the ethos of peace takes hold, however, activities once assumed as given are increasingly challenged by the larger public. This is a time of great change for loyalist communities, particularly for estates where paramilitarism holds sway. 'Loyalism in Transition,' a recent initiative of the political arm of the Ulster Defense Association, attempts to steer the transformation of a militarized, indoctrinated population into peaceful participants of post-ceasefire Northern Ireland, which will 'ultimately enable Loyalism to emerge out of...conflict to play a full and meaningful role in a process of reconciliation' (Hall 2006: 19). Bloomer and Edwards (2009), however, sound a note of caution. They observe that while paramilitaries may have dismantled their active service units, 'non-militarised, civilianised' power structures remain in place, with former paramilitary participants now 'unashamedly engaged in colonising jobs' in the community and voluntary sector, thus repositioning themselves as 'gatekeepers of public service provision' (ibid: 7).

This is the complicated local context in which 11th Night bonfires are grounded, yet they also provoke broader questions about national belonging and allegiance to Britain. Their peacetime transformation reworks these multiple scales of engagement, emphasizing loyalism's unresolved questions around place and identity in Northern Ireland. In the

² The irony is not lost to some contemporary loyalists. As the Orange Order's chief archivist commented to me: 'We only commemorate the Battle on the 12th because the Pope told us to' (Interview, 23 January 2009).

following two sub-sections, I describe contemporary practices and problems related to 11th Night bonfires, in order to develop my interpretation of this contested cultural landscape.

Building and Burning

Bonfire season begins in the early days of spring. Across loyalist neighbourhoods in Belfast, young people begin to collect their building materials: wooden pallets, rubber tyres, odds and ends of refuse. As the materials amass, other residents (and, at times, complete outsiders) contribute to the growing pile. For those wishing for cost-free disposal of old furniture, carpets, and household appliances, bonfire season is a golden opportunity. In neighbourhoods where the bonfire site is well-known and highly visible, people may come from miles away with their contributions.

As the days pass and materials accumulate, the risk of theft increases from rival bonfire sites. Communities with ample participants will post guards – a task that frequently falls to younger children. More ambitious communities may build small huts, from which to guard the ‘boney,’ as bonfires are often called.³ Those with smaller numbers are less fortunate, as this extract from my research diary illustrates:

Unlike other neighbourhoods, the builders at Dunluce Avenue don’t have the manpower to guard their site from raiding parties. The builders from nearby Donegall Road are frequent culprits. They can cut easily across the grounds of the hospital to lift the wood from poor, unguarded Dunluce.

The other day, the boys discovered that 200 of their pallets had been taken. They seem put out – hurt, even – by the raiding of their site. ‘We don’t steal from other people,’ Tommy points out, perplexed...

I ask if they would ever steal the wood back from the bonfires in Donegall Road. Not likely. And from nearby Sandy Row? ‘People know better than to steal from Sandy Row,’ says

³ According to Gailey (1977), the English language is unique for having a term to apply to seasonal fires. ‘Bonfire’ is derived from ‘Bone-fire’ – a curious etymology, given that bones are not particularly combustible.

one young man, as a collective shudder ripples through the group. (Research Diary, 23 June 2008)

As this example illuminates, the tradition of raiding and stealing reveals hierarchies between loyalist communities, often tied to paramilitary prowess. Of the two neighbourhoods mentioned above, Donegall Road is a known stronghold of the UVF; Sandy Row, the UDA. The young men whom I interviewed knew the limitations of their own neighbourhood's social and political standing within loyalist Belfast. Although angered by the theft of their bonfire wood, they had no intention of retrieving it.

The construction process itself is highly strategic. Build too early and you risk someone setting fire to your structure in the days before the 11th. Build too late and you risk ridicule for not finishing your bonfire in time for its burning. In most loyalist communities, bonfire construction begins in the week leading up to the 11th July. Designs vary according to location, local tradition and available materials. The advent of wooden pallets, from which most contemporary bonfires are constructed, allow for greater stability in building designs. Today, most bonfires are beehive-shaped, wide at the base and narrow toward the top, although variations abound. In my notes, I described one bonfire in North Belfast as 'bulging out of the hillside like an enormous, tyre-filled tumor' (Research Diary, 11 July 2007). The largest reach heights of fifty feet or more (Figure 6.1). In contrast, teenagers in one small loyalist enclave in North Belfast build their bonfire with the materials at hand on the 11th, regardless of how paltry the supply; their trademark bonfire design is tall and skinny. Others opt for airy towers more akin to skyscrapers. This passage from my research diary describes the structure and the building experience of a prominent inner-city bonfire:

Sandy Row builds its bonfire in the middle of a car park. The base is enormous, from which rises a skinnier chimney. I notice a Dublin vehicle registration plate tacked about two-thirds up the structure. A couple of young men are still hard at work. With the help of a rope, they're pulling yet another wooden pallet to the top. I hold my breath; it's a long way to fall. (Research Diary, 11 July 2007) (Figure 6.2)

Injuries are, not surprisingly, all too common. In June 2008, while facilitating a discussion with a group of teenage boys in North Belfast, I questioned them about the safety risks involved with bonfire building:

When I ask them if they can remember any accidents, they divulge a litany. Nail punctures are common, as are falling tyres. The boy sitting to my right tips his head toward me, so that I can see the scar, hidden amidst whorls of brown hair, where a door once landed on him. (Research Diary, 2 July 2008)

Despite the risks, teenagers in another North Belfast neighbourhood (Research Diary, 18 June 2008) implied in our discussion that great honor is bestowed on the person brave enough to climb the finished structure to tack on the last piece of wood.

The bonfire may be the focal point of the festivities, but it forms only part of the visual landscape. In the days and weeks leading up to the 11th, loyalist communities deck their streets with patriotic bunting, strung from one lamppost to the next. Wealthy benefactors may donate funds for the purchase of flags and decorative bunting. In other communities, neighbourhood leaders, often with paramilitary connections, may coordinate door-to-door collections to cover the cost of the decorations. Against this backdrop of red, white and blue, the bonfire may also be draped with flags of a different sort. In some communities, the flags of the Union Jack, Northern Ireland, and loyalist paramilitary organizations may wave briefly from the structure. Out of respect, these are removed before the midnight burning. Universal to nearly all loyalist bonfires, however, is the Tricolour flag of the Irish Republic (Figure 6.3). Other cultural symbols of the enemy include effigies of the Pope, campaign posters of politicians (usually from Sinn Féin, the political party most closely associated with Irish republicanism) and, as with Sandy Row in the example above, vehicle registration plates from south of the border.

On 11th July, many communities host parties – whether impromptu or planned – for local residents. Alcohol and, in some places, drugs may feature prominently. Overnight, smaller bonfires appear throughout the city. These may represent a tradition for families who shun their community's primary bonfire, or they may indicate more serious factions within an estate. In some neighbourhoods, the builders may create smaller structures, which can be burned earlier in the evening for the benefit of local children. As midnight nears, residents

gather around the bonfire. To facilitate ignition, the bonfire is doused liberally with petrol (or, as some are rumoured, explosives like semtex) and then set alight (Figure 6.4). This description of the South Belfast neighbourhood of Donegall Pass describes the spectacle:

At ten minutes to midnight, I suggest that we move outdoors. We join the stream of people...In the empty lot behind us, a few men are setting up a fireworks display; they instruct us to move further down the street...Judging by the numbers of both prams and grannies, this is definitely a family affair.

A man prepares a torch from a small fire that has been burning in the car park. Circling the bonfire, he lights the base at a few different points. Before long, flames are leaping up the sides. The speed with which the structure burns is due, no doubt, to a generous dousing of petrol. When the first Tricolour catches fire, the crowd erupts in an audible cheer. Behind us, fireworks whistle overhead, exploding in bright showers as the bonfire flames crackle loudly. (Research Diary, 11 July 2007)

In some places, masked men may fire live rounds of ammunition into the sky, in a display known colloquially as a 'paramilitary show of strength.' The party runs full throttle as local residents celebrate through the night. Many will still be awake come morning, when the members of the flute bands will don their uniforms, assemble for the 12th of July parade, and celebrate, once more, the triumph of 'King Billy.'

Contested Landscape; Divisive Tradition

Bonfires may represent a cornerstone of loyalist tradition, but their negative effects reverberate throughout the region. In the months leading up to July, bonfire sites become *de facto* rubbish dumps, in which rat infestations are common. The wooden pallets that comprise the bulk of most contemporary bonfires are taken, without compensation, from local businesses. At a cost of £6-12 per pallet, the loss of income to local businesses can run into thousands of pounds (Interview, Good Relations Unit, Belfast City Council, 26 November 2009). Furthermore, and for a variety of reasons (intimidation by paramilitaries, for instance,

or loss of clientele) many small businesses feel compelled to close during the days leading up to the 12th of July.

Despite the recent pledges of the UVF and UDA to place their weapons beyond reach, paramilitarism maintains its stranglehold over some loyalist communities. The ‘hard men’ wield their power from the local pubs or social clubs that serve as unofficial headquarters. As bonfire season approaches, they may solicit monetary donations (often mandatory) from local residents for the purchase of decorations. In the minds of many, both within and outside of loyalist areas, 11th Night bonfires and paramilitarism are closely entwined. The rounds of live gunfire that mark the midnight burning may be the most obvious example, but paramilitaries may also show their strength in other ways. The following extract, drawn from a discussion that I facilitated in the Westland estate, illustrates how a bonfire can serve as fertile ground for recruiting new members:

This is UDA heartland. Westland was home to the dreaded and infamous Shoukri, who tyrannized the estate. From 2000 to 2004, he and his cronies would order people to participate in the bonfire. The older lads in tonight’s discussion group harbor uncomfortable memories from this time. As at most bonfires, people would drink to excess on 11th Night. In their inebriated state, some might agree to join the UDA. (‘They would sign a form?’ I ask for clarification. ‘No,’ answers Phil. ‘You just had to say ‘Yes.’’) One could retract the promise without physical harm, but only if willing to pay 2000 pounds. (Research Diary, 25 June 2008)

Whether through intimidation or, some would say, collusion, authorities have traditionally turned a blind eye to 11th Night bonfires and the illegal activities that trail in their wake. Although authorities have sought, albeit half-heartedly, to regulate bonfires since at least the 1950s, unionist politicians at the height of the old Stormont government would suspend laws on burning fires during the month of July (Graham 2008).

Also ignored until recently are the enormous environmental implications of the bonfires. On 11th Night, petrol is poured over the bonfire to help it ignite. When lit, its contents – wood, foam furniture, rubber tyres, and plastics of all types – go up in flame. On

11th Night, thick plumes of smoke are visible throughout Belfast. The city's topography – a glacial valley edged by ranges of steep hills to the west and east – tends to concentrate the pollutants. According to the director of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health for Northern Ireland, Belfast's air quality is one of the city's major environmental health issues (Interview, 14 February 2006). Along with their associated environmental concerns, bonfires also pose a threat to public health. Smoke comprises gaseous components, carbon monoxide and tiny particles of matter that, when inhaled, can cause neural disorders and inflammation, affect heart rhythms, and increase the risk of stroke. The particles present in Belfast's bonfires are particularly toxic. Epidemiologic studies conducted at the Harvard University School of Public Health (Interview, Dr David Christiani, 1 May 2007) suggest that particles from painted wood can contribute to lead poisoning, while those from rubber tyres are known carcinogens. Although the people living closest to the burning bonfires would be at greatest risk, air pollution knows no geographic boundaries.

In Belfast, the bonfires place significant strain on the statutory services. On 11th Night, the Fire and Rescue Service responds repeatedly to calls, struggling to contain bonfires that burgeon out of control and threaten nearby homes and buildings. Firefighters tend to have a wary and uncertain relationship with these communities. Revelers – some in an alcohol-induced haze – may interpret the firefighters' actions as an attack on their bonfire, leading to reciprocal attacks on the service itself. This account by a long-serving firefighter illustrates a common scenario:

He tells me about a bonfire to which he once responded. It sounds like a classic disaster: foam furniture, alcohol, and a fire that quickly grew out of control and spread to nearby houses. The crew managed to contain the blaze before it resulted in too much property damage, but in the process, some of the water they sprayed on the houses ended up in the bonfire itself. The locals took offense; they demonstrated their displeasure with the firefighters by slitting the hoses. (Research Diary, 30 September 2007)

Even in neighbourhoods where the Fire and Rescue Service can contain the bonfire, adjacent houses may suffer collateral damage from smoke and heat. Repairs frequently fall to the

Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which owns most of the social housing stock in loyalist estates. Due to their size, the ruins of the bonfires may continue to smolder for days. When they finally die out, the tarmac on which they rested must be re-paved at the taxpayers' expense, disturbing both vehicular and pedestrian traffic during the process (Figure 6.5). Moreover, patriotic flags and bunting are frequently left to moulder on public lampposts, sometimes well into the autumn. As these trends suggest, the environmental imprint of the bonfires lingers long after the 12th of July.

Archiving over these myriad problems is the spectre of symbolic aggression. A loyalist bonfire is considered incomplete until draped with the flag of the Republic of Ireland. Although the Union Jack and a community's associated paramilitary flags may adorn the bonfire briefly, these are taken down before the midnight burning. Alongside the Irish Tricolour, bonfire builders may also drape the structure with photos of Republican politicians, effigies of the Pope, and other symbols of 'the enemy.' Outside of, and sometimes within, loyalist communities, the public image of bonfires is understandably negative. Among Catholic nationalists, in particular, they strike a deeply disturbing chord.

In spite of – or, perhaps, because of – their detractors, bonfires serve a vital role in loyalist culture. In a time of uncertain identity, 11th Night represents the one time of year that draws a loyalist community together. In several discussions that I facilitated in the spring of 2008, young people from loyalist estates emphasized that bonfire season gives them a sense of purpose. With few youth programmes or useable greenspaces in these areas, young people spend most of the year loitering on street corners, playing football in the road and engaging in anti-social behaviour. Come spring, they turn their energy to the multitude of tasks required to provide a bonfire for their community.

The importance of place to the bonfire tradition cannot be understated; depth of feeling for bonfires and bonfire sites runs strong. For example, I visited a fiercely loyalist estate at the southern edge of Belfast in April 2007. Community leaders described a long waiting list of people wanting to move into the neighbourhood. They informed me that although they could sell the land for profit, they would never do so because of its importance as the community's bonfire site. The extract below is drawn from my first visit to this community:

At the far end of the field, the local residents have begun
the transformation from field to fly-tip to bonfire site. Flotsam

and jetsam lie scattered on the grass; I can see wood for shelving, interior doors, a couple of mattresses. ‘You could outfit an entire kitchen,’ [my colleague] says in disgust.

It’s a lovely spot, despite the stockpile of household detritus and the paramilitary mural looming nearby. Grass a vibrant shade of emerald, a healthy grove of young tree saplings stretching to the right, a cheerful peppering of white-petaled daisies – and an abrupt line where they end. The daisy line delineates the parameters of last year’s bonfire. (Research Diary, 24 April 2007)

I read this swath of recovering grass as a landscape both inscribed by conflict and contributing to it. Like the 12th of July parades, the 11th Night bonfires connect people to place through a revered tradition that reaffirms loyalist claims to Northern Ireland, and reinforces the triad of identity, culture and territory. Moreover, the bonfires connect participants beyond their local sites to celebrations of the wider loyalist community, across both space and time. In this way, bonfires are an important feature in the cultural landscape of loyalism, firmly anchored in physical space but refracting cultural and social values from the past to the present and into the future. To borrow from Wylie (2007: 193, emphasis in original), bonfires form a cultural landscape that is ‘both material entity *and* symbolic meaning,’ ‘both persistent in form and changeable in meaning.’

Increasingly, the discourse of post-ceasefire Belfast revolves around the creation of shared space for a shared city. In an essay titled *Archetypes of an uncertain future*, Graham (2008: no page number) describes 11th Night bonfires as ‘a double throwback’:

They carry an aura of a pre-Partitioned, urbanizing Ulster, in which the remnants of a rural tradition have survived disingenuously in the life of a city. In our current moment, they are an out-of-sorts relic of the Troubles mentality, giving them a future which may be as out of joint with the times as the Twelfth they prologue...Eleventh night bonfires are potentially an embarrassing sign of recalcitrance in a Northern Ireland which is

unsure of whether its future is one based on shared spaces or the accommodation of ongoing and perpetual differences.

As the peace process moves into its second decade, people across Northern Ireland increasingly challenge the environmental, political and cultural sustainability of loyalist bonfires. These forces of change hold tremendous implications for loyalist communities in general, and for their bonfires in particular. In the remainder of this chapter, I draw on my empirical work to explore how transformations in the contested landscape of 11th Night bonfires illuminate new debates around culture and identity in loyalist communities.

2. *Transformations: Negotiating Change*

Although bonfires long predate Northern Ireland's 20th century conflict, the Troubles cemented their symbolic importance to loyalist enthusiasts and, inevitably, their notoriety to everyone else. The limited archive of bonfire history captures the delicacy with which the public and voluntary sectors have approached the practice. A pamphlet published in 1992 by Bryson House, a local environmental and human services charity, marked an early attempt to establish a formal bonfire code for Belfast. In a sign of the precarious political environment, the pamphlet blandly encouraged the preservation of 'a good environment to live in':

Lots of people are now working to make Belfast a better place to live in and visit...They are planting trees and flowers and improving landscapes. Some people are putting out window boxes and hanging baskets. A bad bonfire may interfere with some or all of these activities.

The authors of the pamphlet euphemistically appeal to 'everyone' to 'look after the environment.' They suggest to bonfire builders that they collect other suitable material for burning, leaving young trees to grow. Strikingly, the pamphlet makes no reference to the reasons behind the bonfires; in focusing solely on ways to develop good environmental practices, the authors tiptoed around the real issues. Even as recently as 2004, the Inter-Agency Working Group published a guidance pamphlet on good practice around bonfires,

but made no mention of sectarianism. The authors – all drawn from statutory bodies with civic responsibilities and, theoretically, enforcement powers – described bonfires euphemistically and apolitically as ‘one of the ways in which Northern Ireland people celebrate their history.’

The political sea-change of the peace process has had profound effects on the bonfire tradition, most notably in public attitudes toward it. In the mid-1990s, as the ceasefires calmed the Troubles, environmental roles began to emerge in local government, reflecting the visibility of broader public support for and awareness of the environment (Interview, Waste Management Service, Belfast City Council, 23 February 2006). Alongside the emergence of environmental awareness is increased confidence to criticize the 11th Night bonfires. A long-serving employee of Belfast City Council’s Cleansing Services division told me that if a complaint about bonfires had come through to his office five years previously, no one would have taken the call (Interview, 16 August 2007). Of primary concern was the safety of the City Council staff. Today, local residents both within and outside of loyalist communities feel increasingly emboldened to voice their concerns.

The peace process has profoundly transformed the physical and imaginative spaces for bonfires. One of the most visible manifestations of the peace process is the influx of economic investment in Northern Ireland. The regeneration of Belfast now transforms the urban landscape, as property developers purchase swaths of derelict land and place it beyond the reach of local residents. As a result, vacant lots where bonfires are built are rapidly diminishing in number. The displacement of bonfires from their traditional sites has disconcerting effects on these communities. The following extract is drawn from a discussion with members of a bonfire group in South Belfast. For many years, this group built a notoriously large bonfire, before their displacement to a smaller and, in their opinion, markedly inferior site.

Before, the Tates Avenue bonfire drew huge crowds on 11th Night. Andrew tells me that people used to pack the bridge to see it. 2004 was their last year at Tates Avenue. Then, seemingly overnight, the developers moved in. The bonfire moved to its current site on Dunluce Avenue, surrounded by fences and hemmed in by the railway line. These days, no one from outside the community comes to see it. (Research Diary, 23 June 2008)

This is a common phenomenon throughout Belfast; even the potential for loss casts shadows. At a public forum for loyalist bonfire communities, hosted by Groundwork Northern Ireland in June 2007, the following comment by a resident from an inner-city neighbourhood reflected a common anxiety: ‘Every year we ask, ‘Is this our last year?’ There just isn’t any more space’ (Research Diary, 31 May 2007). In the West Belfast neighbourhood of Shankill, property developers cordoned off the neighbourhood’s traditional bonfire site with high fencing. Local residents articulated their anger; graffiti on the fence reads: ‘Meet local needs, not developers’ greed’ (Figure 6.6). To date, amidst rumours of paramilitary intimidation, construction at the site has yet to begin. Curiously, the urban planning sector in Northern Ireland has dedicated little formal dialogue, either academic or practical, to the subject of bonfires. The omission is remarkable, given the obvious intersection between planning concerns and 11th Night bonfires, particularly in the densely built inner-city areas of Belfast.

The transformations that I have described above illustrate how external factors affect the bonfires, yet even more remarkable transformations are taking place within loyalist communities themselves. As the cessation of conflict increasingly emboldens public criticism of the bonfires, those who build them must redefine their tradition for a time of peace. To this end, loyalist bonfires offer a way to examine larger questions about the shifting roles of divisive traditions in ‘post-conflict’ societies. I argue that transformations of contested traditions take shape as much internally – in the ways in which their adherents must rework their own relationships to place, culture and identity – as externally. Below, I explore these transformations through three case studies drawn from empirical research in and around Belfast.

Belfast: Piloting Progress

In 2006, following two successful pilot attempts, Belfast City Council voted to fund the Bonfire Management Programme as a three-year grant framework for loyalist communities.⁴ The programme operated under three overarching aims:

⁴ In the second year, the Bonfire Management Programme added an auxiliary site in the nationalist/republican Falls neighbourhood to address a more recent bonfire tradition that commemorates the widespread internment – without due process – of alleged republican activists in 1971. Loyalist bonfires, however, were the original reason for the programme, and thus its primary focus. As my research on bonfires focuses exclusively on transformations in loyalist communities, I will not address the republican site in this chapter.

- 1) To support a number of communities in Belfast in the celebration of their cultural tradition through positive engagement, whilst engaging with the perceived negative aspects that have become associated with bonfires.
- 2) To work with and support local communities to bring about improvements in bonfire management, particularly in terms of inclusivity, safety and increased family atmosphere.
- 3) To further reduce the adverse health and environmental impacts of bonfires on the city, including the illegal disposal of waste.

Each participating community signed an agreement to abide by a series of guidelines. The following are a selection from the 2008 programme:

- A local bonfire committee should be formed and in place by the 1st of March
- Collection of material should not commence before 16th May, although communities that refrain from collecting before 1st June would receive an additional financial incentive.
- Local communities, in conjunction with Groundwork Northern Ireland, should develop locally based community engagement programmes
- Tyres should not be collected or burned on the bonfire; building materials should be restricted to wood.
- Communities should refrain from displaying racist, sectarian or paramilitary trappings such as flags, emblems, or effigies either on or in the vicinity of the bonfire site.
- The safety and well-being of City Council employees, its partners and contractors should be respected at all times.
- Members from the local bonfire committees should attend the Participants Forum held in the neutral space of Groundwork Northern Ireland.

If communities met these targets, they were eligible to receive an award of up to £1,500 to fund a family-oriented bonfire festival – for many neighbourhoods, the first of its kind. In this way, Belfast City Council sought to encourage wider community engagement around bonfire management.

Groundwork Northern Ireland won the tender to administer the scheme, building on its extensive experience with developing environmental regeneration projects in loyalist areas. Project Development Officers from Groundwork, including myself, were assigned to participating neighbourhoods to liaise with the local bonfire committees. We maintained lines of communication to ensure that the bonfire builders in these communities understood and complied with the guidelines, particularly around the collection start-date and acceptable building materials. When illegal dumping or fly-tipping occurred, we arranged for a designated, external cleansing contractor to clear the site of debris. Crucially, we hosted regular 'Participants Forums' at Groundwork, which brought together community representatives from participating loyalist communities across the city.

Over the course of three years, the number of participating communities increased from 14 to 34, with some of the more recent additions involved in more limited capacities. The program was overseen by an inter-agency forum comprising City Council representatives, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, the Department of Regional Development, the Roads Service, the Environment and Heritage Service, the Community Relations Council, the Northern Ireland Community Safety Unit, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and Groundwork Northern Ireland. In this way, the Bonfire Management Programme drew loyalist bonfire communities into dialogue not only with each other, but also with a range of relevant statutory agencies.

Although many people cautiously welcomed the Bonfire Management Programme, critics also abound. As a City Council initiative, the programme was ultimately funded by the public, thus inviting criticism about financing loyalist paramilitaries with taxpayer money. Moreover, although the Bonfire Management Programme worked with the most prominent loyalist communities in Belfast, its remit covered only a fraction of the bonfires built for 11th Night. Even within participating neighbourhoods, local factions and fractures sometimes led to the construction of multiple alternative bonfires. For example, in East Belfast in 2008, young people cooperated outwardly with regard to their official site with the Bonfire Management Programme, whilst channeling the bulk of their energy and materials into an enormous, non-participating bonfire. The resulting structure was one of the largest in the city, built with materials, such as rubber tyres, considered contraband for sites that were participating in the programme. This example encapsulates the tensions between the aspirations and the realities of the Bonfire Management Programme. Frequently, members of the local bonfire committees were caught in the middle.

Alongside wider public disapproval, criticism also emanated from the communities participating in the programme. Individual members of the bonfire committees frequently found themselves in the difficult position of communicating unpopular guidelines, particularly around acceptable building materials or the collection start date. Confusion and resentment were exacerbated by communities that chose not to participate; young bonfire builders looked to those sites and saw rubber tyres and other building materials now forbidden for their own bonfire. Most important, many participants in the Bonfire Management Programme articulated in various meetings and public forums that they felt under-consulted about the guidelines of the programme, which many interpreted as top-down and bureaucrat-driven. Some participating neighbourhoods perceived Belfast City Council's primary agenda as enforcing change, thus heightening anxiety and a sense of vulnerability within loyalist communities who feared the loss of their bonfires. In a discussion that I facilitated in a North Belfast neighbourhood, one local community volunteer leveled angry accusations at City Council: 'They're trying to take [the bonfire] away! They're killing our culture!' (Research Diary, 18 June 2008). His comment encapsulates the quandary at the heart of bonfire transformation, and the broader crisis of loyalist identity.

The 12th of July may be the most important date in the loyalist cultural calendar, but its adherents increasingly struggle to articulate its contemporary relevance. In many communities, bonfires have become an exercise in structural engineering, unmoored from history and relevant only in the spectacle of their construction. Alcohol has become firmly entrenched in bonfire culture, frequently replacing the Battle of the Boyne as the primary reason for celebration. As the peace process encourages changes in the physical manifestation of the bonfires, their transformation also represents an opportunity for loyalists to rework and redefine the meaning of their tradition.

To this end, in 2008 the Bonfire Management Programme developed a separate but related strand to address issues of cultural heritage and identity. The 'Programme of Reflection and Capacity-Building' allocated resources for each bonfire committee to select a series of facilitated discussions (for example, on alcohol consumption, cultural heritage or media portrayals) for participants within their community. In addition, members of the bonfire committees were invited to attend workshops on practical skills related to funding applications, event management, and community audits. The 'Programme of Reflection and Capacity-Building' engaged loyalist communities with less tangible dimensions of change, thus positioning the physical transformations of the bonfires within a larger dialogue about

cultural heritage and identity. Groundwork's Project Development Officers assisted the bonfire committees in delivering this programme. Our assistance frequently involved facilitating discussions with constituent groups (usually young people) from within these communities. In addition to my responsibilities as a liaison to designated sites, I was also assigned to facilitate discussions on cultural heritage in nine other loyalist neighbourhoods. As I discussed in Chapter Four, my dual roles as practitioner and researcher offered unique opportunities. My supervisors at Groundwork gave me wide latitude in choosing the content of these discussions, which I facilitated in ways that addressed my own interests around gender, identity and (as I will discuss in Chapter Seven) minority ethnic engagement.

Nowhere is the crisis of cultural identity within loyalism more apparent than in the widespread practice of burning the flag of the Irish Republic. In a neighbourhood in North Belfast, I facilitated a discussion with a group of children on the afternoon of 10th July 2008. They had completed construction of their bonfire, one day ahead of schedule. At the top of the structure, the Union Jack waved from the position usually reserved for the Irish Tricolour. One young girl assured me: 'We don't burn that. We'll put the other flag up later' (Research Diary, 10 July 2008). I did not press her to elaborate, but her vague reference to 'the other flag' strongly suggests that the widespread practice of burning the Tricolour stems from habit rather than conviction, particularly among young children. In a different neighbourhood, I asked a group of slightly older children what they thought the bonfire is about. 'You burn the Tricolour,' one replied (Research Diary, 24 June 2008). These responses underscore the tendency within loyalism to define itself negatively, in opposition to Irish republicanism, rather than framing a positively defined identity of its own (Graham 1994, 2004).

As I engaged with loyalist communities across Belfast, I discerned widespread ignorance not just about the historical basis for the bonfires but about the larger meaning of the 12th of July itself. At a discussion that I facilitated with a mixed-age group in West Belfast, I asked the teenagers present if they knew the history behind the celebrations. Their answers were startlingly inaccurate:

'Guy Fawkes Day,' hazards one girl. 'St Patrick's Day,' ventures the spiky-haired boy. The other lad looks down and mumbles something I can't hear. Only one guesses correctly: 'Something about King Billy?' (Research Diary, 24 June 2008)

The response of 'St Patrick's Day' is particularly surprising. In Belfast, it is widely interpreted as a holiday claimed solely by Irish republican culture, in which loyalists have no place. The five adult women who were present at this discussion seemed embarrassed by these responses, yet when pressed they fared no better. As I observed later in my notes: 'Even for the women, the sense of history seems hazy at best' (Research Diary, 24 June 2008). However, their lack of understanding is by no means unique to this community. At a meeting that I attended in South Belfast, an experienced community worker identified the problem as cyclical in nature: Parents pass their ignorance along to their children, who will themselves become parents one day (Research Diary, 24 April 2007).

The uncertainties of meaning that arose in my visits to and discussions with loyalist communities highlight the importance of the Bonfire Management Programme's emphasis on 'reflection and capacity-building.' I discovered a similar lack of reflection through my queries about the gendered dimensions of bonfire practice. These emerged forcefully around the division of and ideas about labor. With few exceptions, these ideas emphasize bonfire construction as a masculine activity. Below, I draw the following extract from a discussion that I facilitated with eight participants, aged 15 to early-30s, of the all-male bonfire group in a loyalist neighbourhood in South Belfast. Although I gathered from our conversation that building the bonfire was an exclusively male activity, I wondered whether females in this community participated in related practices such as sourcing wood.

The absence of females at this discussion is striking. *Do they collect wood?* I ask. An explosion of laughter greets my question, which gives me a gauge of how ridiculous they find it. No, girls don't collect, although they may come to hang out on the day of the bonfire. (Research Diary, 23 June 2008)

The 'explosion of laughter' that forms their initial response offers a clear insight into the mindset of these men, in which females are positioned conditionally and peripherally: 'they *may* come to hang out,' (emphasis mine) but only 'on the day of the bonfire' itself.

Through discussions in other loyalist communities, I explored the depth of these gendered dimensions and the extent to which females themselves participated in their exclusion. The following example relates to a discussion that I facilitated with a group of teenagers and young adults in North Belfast. When I arrived at the estate, a large crowd was

in the process of building their bonfire. As the community worker shepherded them to the room where I would facilitate the discussion, I realized that the individuals building this bonfire were exclusively male. The following extract begins with the community worker's attempt, of his own initiative, to rectify the gender imbalance:

Several minutes into the discussion, the doors open and [the community worker]...shoves three girls into the room. When I ask if they're involved with building the bonfire, everyone laughs – including the girls. 'Aye, they make the sandwiches.' (Research Diary, 25 June 2008)

As in the previous excerpt, the initial reaction of laughter underscores a shared perception of female involvement as ridiculous. Moreover, the laughter of the girls themselves illuminates the extent to which they participate in their exclusion from the building process. At the end of this excerpt, a young man replies, 'Aye, they make the sandwiches.' His response grants the girls a role in a parallel process of construction, but through sandwiches rather than the bonfire itself. A similar division of labour repeats itself throughout Belfast in the lead-up to mid-July, with males in loyalist communities involved with bonfire-building and females supporting their work from the periphery.

The gendered symbolism of the bonfire tradition is, perhaps, most apparent in the widespread and overwhelming emphasis on size. On loyalist estates across Belfast, prevailing wisdom holds that a bigger structure equals a better bonfire. I heard this belief repeated at several different bonfire sites on the afternoon of 11th July 2007, as my Groundwork colleagues and I visited each community participating in the Bonfire Management Programme to wish them luck with their festivities. The following exchange took place at an estate in South Belfast, where we encountered a small group of bonfire builders:

We tell a group of teenagers (all male) that we have just come from Finaghy [a nearby loyalist estate]. 'Ours is bigger,' a skinny, bespectacled boy announces. Then, worriedly: 'Isn't it?' (Research Diary, 11 July 2007)

In this extract, the boy responds initially with confidence, but he follows this with a worried plea for reassurance. This juxtaposition of bravado and anxiety suggests that his engagement with the bonfire reinforces masculine identity while simultaneously exposing it to vulnerability.

A sense of masculinized competition was rife not only amongst loyalist communities, but also amongst my Groundwork colleagues, for whom bonfires formed a familiar element of their cultural heritage. The following extract, drawn from our site visit on 11 July 2007 to a neighbourhood in North Belfast, illuminates the complex gendered dynamics between the bonfire builders; Eddie, their Groundwork liaison; and I.

This is Eddie's site. He struts around the bonfire site, clearly pleased to be on his own turf. To the builder: 'Prettiest bonfire, mate.' Then he calls me over: 'Show him the other bonfires.'

I set my camera to the first photo of Finaghy. The images offer no sense of relative scale, but the builder is nonetheless intrigued. I assure him that his is the biggest. (It's not, but what harm is a little lie?)...

We report that we have just driven past Lower Shankill, and that they're still hard at work.

'Not a chance. Not a chance,' says one builder smugly. 'They don't know how to build a bonfire.'...

As we return to the car, Eddie thumps his chest with pride. I have to laugh; it's so funny, these tough men and their crazy competition for the biggest bonfire in Belfast. I wonder if this is how they talk about their penises. (Research Diary, 11 July 2007)

Although it would be tempting to draw a clear line between a bonfire's size and perceptions of success, this extract illuminates a more complex interplay. As Eddie's proclamation ('prettiest bonfire') and the builder's disdain ('They don't know how to build a bonfire') suggest, the desire for the biggest bonfire is tempered by aesthetic design and building knowledge. Moreover, I argue that the role of the audience is also central to this dynamic. In this extract, aspects of my own gendered identity entered unavoidably into my engagement with this bonfire. My inclination to soothe the builder – 'I assure him that his is the biggest' –

reinforces uncomfortable stereotypes of women placating men. Moments later, however, I deride ‘these tough men and their crazy competition,’ likening it to ‘how they talk about their penises.’ This juxtaposition of my responses illuminates the cautious negotiations that take place around gender, identity and bonfires.

These negotiations are increasingly important, if loyalist bonfires are to adapt to a rapidly changing society. For example, conceptions of masculinity must now be re-negotiated alongside the transformation of bonfires. As property development increasingly consumes traditional sites, loyalist communities who have long competed to build the biggest bonfire now struggle to re-align their sense of worth with the options available. Amplifying this transition is the Bonfire Management Programme’s emphasis on gender inclusion, and its active encouragement of local bonfire committees to include women as representatives. In this way, the Bonfire Management Programme itself is driving new aspirations and expectations for participating loyalist communities, thus expanding the scope for these communities to engage with different aspects of bonfire transformation.

I have highlighted the Bonfire Management Programme not only because it is the largest of its kind in Northern Ireland, but because it illuminates the co-constitutive dynamics at work in the transformation of a contested landscape. On the one hand, the Bonfire Management Programme is a clear outcome of the peace process – a public service unimaginable even ten years ago – that seeks to instill an ethos of good practice for the benefit of a wider peacetime public. At the same time, the programme also drives many of the transformations it seeks to implement – for example, reduction in size; regulation of building materials; and clear lines of communication between bonfire builders and relevant statutory agencies. Yet there are intangible transformations at work as well within loyalist culture. Through its emphasis on ‘reflection and capacity-building,’ the programme encourages participating communities to explore new roles and places for the celebration of loyalist heritage in a transforming ‘post-conflict’ city.

The Bonfire Management Programme may be the largest, but other initiatives are starting to emerge across Northern Ireland. Some, like Belfast’s are publicly funded and implemented by civic officials; others are developed locally within a single neighbourhood. Despite their differences, however, these efforts all emerge from a shared recognition that the divisive, sectarian bonfire tradition must adapt to a rapidly changing ‘post-conflict’ society. Next, I pursue these ideas further through a case study drawn from the local bonfire program in the nearby town of Antrim.

Antrim: The Changing Place of Paramilitarism

Like its counterpart in Belfast, the programme administered through Antrim Borough Council encourages loyalist communities to develop good practices around the 11th Night bonfire tradition. Antrim's programme, however, differs from Belfast's in the overt paramilitary presence of its community leaders. Unlike Belfast, where the machinations of behind-the-scenes paramilitarism are acknowledged quietly, the conduit between the Lord Mayor of Antrim and participating local communities is maintained by two middle-aged men who represent the leading loyalist paramilitary organizations. Although my work as a Project Development Officer for Groundwork brought me into regular contact with paramilitary members in Belfast, I felt that potentially sensitive research about paramilitarism should be kept separate from my professional responsibilities to the Bonfire Management Programme. With the help of a colleague in the community relations sector, I arranged to interview the two liaisons to Antrim Borough Council in the lead-up to the 2008 bonfires. I wanted to explore how transformations to their bonfire tradition are yielding new insights into identity, place and paramilitary culture.

During the Troubles, two prominent paramilitary bodies emerged for the loyalist cause: the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defense Association (UDA). These organizations, in turn, gave rise to a number of splinter groups, such as the Red Hand Defenders, the Red Hand Commandos and the Loyalist Volunteer Force, and the youth wings known as the Ulster Young Militants and Young Citizens Volunteers. Members of the UVF, the smaller of the two main organizations, trace their lineage to a predecessor of the same name. The original UVF, inaugurated in 1913, formed the 36th (Ulster) Division of the British Army and served on the Western Front for the duration of the First World War (Cusack and McDonald 2008). Half a century later, in 1966, loyalists revived the UVF for the conflict closer to home. In contrast, its main rival, the UDA, emerged in the early days of the Troubles and quickly became the largest loyalist paramilitary organization. At its peak, the UDA had 40,000 members and a large reservoir of support within loyalist communities (McDonald and Cusack 2004). Although united in their political aims and their opposition to Irish republicanism, loyalist paramilitarism imploded into feuds between and within the main organizations only two years after the signing of the 1998 peace accords. The prominent presence of both Davey and Rob, representatives of the UDA and UVF, respectively, in

Antrim Borough Council's bonfire management program speaks to the Council's acknowledgement of tensions that persist within loyalist paramilitarism.

In the minds of many, particularly among non-loyalists, 11th Night bonfires are intimately associated with paramilitarism. The bonfires themselves form part of a cultural landscape in which murals, patriotic colors and other visual markers serve as striking affirmations of territorial identity and ownership. According to Davey, local paramilitary structures may also contribute to this visual dialogue:

Even through the peace process people were still very territorial and defensive of their territories. You'd have come in and found Ulster Volunteer Force and Ulster Freedom Fighters⁵ and Ulster Defense Association flags adorning every lamppost. You know, and for anybody, even people within the Protestant communities, driving into that sort of went: 'Whoa'...It was very territorial. (Interview, 8 April 2008)

As a high-ranking paramilitary member, Davey is aware of how symbols can be manipulated to invoke awe and fear, which he captures in his imagined response of a person entering the territory. The flags 'adorning every lamppost' broadcast the presence of paramilitary organizations within the defined physical space of the estate.

In this context, bonfires play their own role of intimidation, both material and symbolic, in the heightened atmosphere of 11th Night. Davey describes how, previously, local paramilitaries would emphasize their menacing presence through what is known colloquially as a 'show of strength':

And on [bonfire night] both fields suddenly went quiet...The tempo of the music changed, and then you had the masked men coming out with the balaclavas and the firearms, shooting up into the air. And there was a lot of paramilitary trappings.

There is a performative quality to the spectacle that Davey describes, from the sudden descent of silence to the quickened music that accompanies the 'masked men' and their

⁵ When it served their purpose, members of the UDA would carry out sectarian attacks under its *nom de guerre*, the Ulster Freedom Fighters. (McDonald and Cusack 2004)

volleys of gunfire. The ‘firearms’ evoke not only the armed warfare of the 20th century Troubles but also the 1690 battle that gave rise to the bonfire tradition. I read the juxtaposition of these two conflicts as an attempt to legitimate the armed struggle of the Troubles by framing it as an extension of the historic Battle of the Boyne. Moreover, as bonfires are frequently built by and celebrated within communities with a strong tradition of sectarian murals, the ‘show of strength’ reworks in three dimensions some of militant loyalism’s most threatening and iconic images, such as armed men with balaclavas. Thus, the performance of the bonfire brings to life the static images that adorn the estate’s built environment, further emphasizing the connections between paramilitarism and place. In this way, bonfires and loyalist paramilitary culture co-constitute each other: one emphasizes the power of the other, and in doing so, defines and reinforces a particular type of place-associated loyalist identity.

Yet despite the tendency to think of loyalist communities (or indeed, any community) as monolithic, these places may actually fracture into warring factions. In the Antrim estate that Davey and Rob describe, the flags of different paramilitary organizations divide the area into more nuanced spheres of loyalist identity and influence. As Davey acknowledges in the excerpt above, the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Defense Association and the Ulster Freedom Fighters each laid claim to a distinct spatial zone and then communicated their ownership through the visual medium of flags. In a similar way, bonfires are used to stake territory and to proclaim the power of various paramilitary organizations within the microgeography of one estate. Davey and Rob describe how bonfires were previously placed ‘literally a hundred yards from each other,’ built by warring loyalist factions. In the following excerpt, they discuss how these bonfires, acting as territorial demarcations, shape how people move through and engage with the estate:

Lia A few years ago, would you have people from the...different bonfires visiting each other’s bonfires?

Rob Only could’ve had violence...

Davey [Uses hands to sketch an imaginary map]...If you imagine one great estate, you’d a bonfire here, you’d a bonfire there, and a bonfire here. Well, this upper and this far bonfire would’ve been practically followers of the same organization. Whereas this one in the middle

was a completely different loyalist organization. And everybody, rather than going this way from this bonfire to that one, would've went [motions with hands to describe a longer route]. Because chances are if you'd even been caught in the wrong field, you could've ended up *in* the bloody bonfire.

Davey's interpretation of the consequence – 'you could've ended up *in* the bloody bonfire' – recalls the practice of effigy-burning. Although the contemporary burning of effigies is predominantly anti-Catholic in intent, with the Pope the most common figure burned on bonfires, the historic origins of this practice involve the treachery of a fellow loyalist. Robert Lundy, the governor of Derry/Londonderry, fled the city as the forces of King James II approached in 1689 (Bardon 1992). Lundy is reviled in loyalist lore, and his historic treachery continues to underscore multiple tensions within loyalism. In the excerpt above, Rob and Davey's portrayal of warring bonfires highlights the extent to which different paramilitaries of the same loyalist persuasion can shape and control a single estate. In this context, place-knowledge is crucial; those with inadequate knowledge of the area, or of the nuances within loyalist paramilitary politics, expose themselves to grave danger vis-à-vis the bonfires.

In recent years, as the peace process spurs broad shifts in public opinion, some loyalists have recognized that the public image of the bonfire tradition must change. In Antrim, the bonfire programme has given more visionary leaders an opportunity to move away from the stark paramilitarism that characterized their bonfires previously. In our interview, Davey reports that when yet another paramilitary bonfire began on their estate, 'it gave us an avenue to jump ship.' He and Rob shifted their focus to young people, seeking to engage them with the process and the cultural history of bonfire-building. Rob took the radical step of redesigning the structure entirely. Rather than following the tower- or beehive-shaped design typically employed in contemporary bonfires, Rob and the young people in his area constructed their bonfire in the shape of a castle (Figures 6.7). They built a square-shaped frame using large sheets of plywood and carved crenellation on top. The young people then painted the castle, piled wood inside its four walls and, as usual, decorated the structure with the Irish Tricolour. Despite the sectarianism connoted by the Irish flag, the new

design represents a significant symbolic break from the more typical paramilitary-controlled bonfires in the estate.

New designs aside, where these new bonfires differed most dramatically is in their movement away from the culture of violence that characterized their predecessors. In the following extract, Davey, who also supervised the building of another new bonfire on the estate, describes the difference between old and new:

Initially when you first came down to our bonfire...you hit this wall that had two camouflaged men with machine guns. As bold as you want, red, white and blue letters: UDA, UFF, UYM, Kill All Taigs. The bonfire was absolutely demonic. It was swamped every night of the week by hooded faces...It was like something out of the Wild West. And see now where we are now, we're probably the most timid fire in Antrim. Although we still have our fire.

Davey describes a constellation of militant loyalism's iconic imagery: sectarian graffiti, patriotic colors, and 'camouflaged men with machine guns.' The graffiti refers not only to prominent paramilitary branches within the community – the Ulster Defense Association, Ulster Freedom Fighters and Ulster Young Militants – but also contains a direct call to violence: 'Kill All Taigs' is a derogatory anti-Catholic slur frequently employed through visual media in loyalist areas. Although Davey most likely describes a local mural in this excerpt, his description elides with that of the 'demonic' bonfire built in its shadow, with sinister 'hooded faces' tracing the bonfire's progress in the days leading up to 11th Night. Through this conflation, the bonfire that Davey describes feeds into and from the dense tapestry of identity and place in this loyalist estate. In stark contrast, Davey interprets the bonfire that he now oversees as 'probably the most timid fire in Antrim.' This shift away from a highly masculinized and glorified culture of violence applies not only to the bonfire, but may also describe larger shifts within paramilitary culture itself, as the peace process and public opinion encourage demilitarization. Davey's final comment in this extract – 'Although we still have our fire' – is striking. It emphasizes the centrality of the bonfire itself, in a far simpler form, to a loyalist cultural identity that seeks to move away from paramilitarism.

The peace process may signal a shift away from paramilitarism, but real transformation struggles to take root in a pervasively sectarian environment. As Davey describes below, the bonfires as practiced previously offered a narrow interpretation of cultural identity:

Because up until three years ago, especially over our end of the estate, you had two fires which were Protestant culture, generally as you understand. But they were...representative of two different loyalist organizations. One of them would've been the Ulster Defense Association, and the other being the Ulster Volunteer Force.

He describes the 'two fires' as both 'Protestant culture' and 'representative of two different loyalist [paramilitary] organizations.' In doing so, he conflates 'Protestant culture' with paramilitarism, thus suggesting the extent to which loyalist communities themselves actively limit the horizons of their own identities. Davey and Rob comment on this process in the following extract, illuminating how a narrow definition of Protestant identity perpetuates itself in future generations:

Davey Our kids grew up in an environment...of...inbred sectarianism.

Rob Well, you know yourself...You hear the word 'UVF' and [the kids] think: 'Well, that's them boys'...UVF to them kids is presence.

Davey It's presence.

Rob It's not a history. It's not a history.

As this dialogue suggests, the absence of genuine historical understanding creates a cultural vacuum, which is then filled by the charismatic Ulster Volunteer Force. The word 'presence,' which takes on additional weight with Davey's echo in the following line, may also point to the limitations they perceive with a loyalist culture moored in the present. As Rob twice points out, 'it's not a history,' suggesting that – despite his own membership in the organization – he considers the Ulster Volunteer Force to be an inadequate substitute for

knowledge of a deeper historical narrative. Their challenge now is to define loyalist culture in positive terms, beyond the sectarian and paramilitary framework by which it has come to be known. Davey articulates this task: ‘We want to be seen as people that are remembering who we were, and where we came from, to the present day...making it more culturally acceptable.’ In doing so, he identifies the importance of locating Protestant culture within the context of its history, from which to re-frame more nuanced forms of loyalist cultural identity that can be sustained in time of peace.

There is a growing awareness within loyalist communities that the transformation of the bonfire tradition creates valuable opportunities for cultural education. While the cultural heritage aim is less formally articulated in Antrim Borough Council’s programme than in Belfast City Council’s, its loyalist leaders are committed to educating young people about the historic relevance of the tradition:

Lia I mean, how would you say that bonfires are important to your sense of cultural identity?

Rob Our kids aren’t ever taught their own culture or their own identity. And we see the bonfires as an opportunity...We bring lambege drums onto the field, flute bands, different things. And the kids become inquisitive then: ‘What’s that for?’ So it gives us an opportunity to bring our communities together. And through lifting a few pallets or whatever, give them a wee bit of education and, you know, help them understand that it’s not...about burning the Tricolour. It’s about the kids understanding who they are, because, you know, if these kids are gonna be a part of our future, they have to understand their past.

Alongside the bonfire itself, Rob draws on the material artifacts of the 12th of July – ‘lambege drums..., flute bands, different things’ – to pique the children’s interest in their cultural heritage. The bonfire site becomes a tangible space for learning, where the embodied experience of ‘lifting a few pallets’ connects the young people powerfully to their history. In this way, Rob traces direct connections between the bonfire tradition and the development of

a positively defined cultural identity that is ‘not about burning the (Irish) Tricolour.’ He suggests that a successful future for loyalist culture depends on the capacity for young people to develop a robust and positively defined cultural identity enriched by collective understanding of loyalist history.

Bonfires are only part of the larger process of re-imagining the place of loyalist culture. Other expressions of paramilitarism, such as flags and murals, still serve as vivid declarations of territorial identity. The peace process may encourage loyalists to reconsider these contested place images, but memories of the Troubles slow the progress. In the sensitive atmosphere of post-ceasefire Northern Ireland, former figures of terror – both loyalist and republican – now work side by side in new political structures, inevitably exacerbating existing tensions. Not surprisingly, Antrim Borough Council’s controversial relationship with Rob and Davey invites public criticism. From Davey’s perspective, these working relationships, however fraught, are a necessary reality:

Unless you work with the people that we have to work with, you don’t have any success. But there are still councilors in these chambers who say: We’re not working with terrorists, full stop...They shout about these offensive murals, and we’ve always had the policy: Let’s try and get the gunmen off the streets before we worry about cardboard figures and walls...A lot of them don’t give us the opportunity, because unless you’re prepared to work with paramilitaries and engage with them and try and help them come out of conflict – through bonfires, through flags, through murals, through whatever process – you’re never gonna be successful. You have to speak to them.

This excerpt highlights Davey’s understanding of the connections between the process of peacebuilding and the process of re-imagining the meanings attached to place. He identifies the markers of loyalist identity – bonfires, flags, murals – as symbolic and physical material with which loyalist paramilitaries must now engage in order to ‘come out of conflict.’ As I argued in Chapter 2, a more holistic approach toward conflict transformation should consider the transformation of relationships not only between people in conflict, but between people and the ideas of place that underpin the conflict. As Davey points out in the excerpt above,

this is a multi-pronged process whose success depends on developing relationships with the very people perceived to be entrenched in and fueling the conflict.

Even beyond the transformation of physical space, Antrim's bonfire management programme is provoking the bonfire builders to think critically about their tradition in relation to wider scales of impact and, possibly, belonging. Although outsiders to loyalism may view bonfire builders as parochial, provincial in outlook, and selfishly blasé toward the environment, Davey and Rob demonstrate a sophisticated grasp of environmental processes and an awareness of their own impact. In our interview, Rob makes a solid and unambiguous connection between bonfires and the growing threat of climate change: 'Bonfires have a direct effect. There's no doubt about it.' Over the course of the interview, and unprompted by me, he twice refers to their 'carbon footprint.' This concept refers not only to the defined physical space of the site on which a bonfire is built, but also connects loyalist builders and bonfire celebrants to a wider global dialogue about justice and responsibility:

And I mean, if you think the amount of bonfires that are lit in Northern Ireland on the 11th Night...The bonfires would be the equivalent of taking millions of cars off the road. Let's not kid yourself about that.

Rob's estimation of 'millions of cars' sits oddly with Northern Ireland's relatively small population size of 1.7 million, suggesting that he considers the bonfires' scale of impact to extend far beyond the region. To Rob, the future for bonfires is inevitable: 'They're going to change dramatically over the next five to ten years. They have to.'

These changes, already in progress, are revealing tensions in the increasingly ambivalent relationship between working-class loyalists and the broader unionist political leadership (see Graham and Shirlow 2002). In the following excerpt, Rob enacts an imagined dialogue with a government official:

I feel that through time they're going to enforce law, right...All the bonfires are all constituted, to a community-based group festival or whatever. So there'll come a stage where they'll come...Say they come to me and say: 'Right, you're involved. You're the chairman of that group that runs that bonfire.' 'Aye.'

‘Here’s a summons.’ ‘What’s that for?’ ‘Pollution.’ And make no doubt, that’s what’s gonna happen.

Rob predicts the eventual demise of bonfires, when the force of law will override the voluntary transformations taking place at present. This will be a dramatic change from the relationship that held sway previously, when predominantly unionist government officials routinely turned a blind eye to the tradition. (Indeed, despite recent efforts such as Belfast’s and Antrim’s bonfire management programmes, statutory agencies across Northern Ireland continue to remain largely powerless at present to stop 11th Night bonfires.) Rob posits the faceless and nameless ‘they,’ to which he refers in the excerpt above, as a force that holds power over working-class community leaders like himself. The government’s current inaction may be the legacy of previous unionist-dominated governments and their overt sympathy to the bonfire tradition, but the following excerpt illustrates Rob’s resignation to an eventual sea-change:

There’s no way is the British government gonna let [the bonfires] happen. They can’t go on about China and America and the carbon footprint, and let this continue to happen. They can’t...You’ll see that happens.

As a loyalist, Rob’s political sympathies lie with the sovereignty of the British government. However, in this extract he acknowledges that the very government whose historic victory his bonfires commemorate is the force that will spell their end. He points to the complex political dialogue in which the British government is engaged, and the necessity of assessing the ‘carbon footprint’ of Northern Ireland’s bonfire tradition alongside those of ‘China and America.’ In doing so, Rob acknowledges the hypocrisy inherent in the government’s current practice of ignoring 11th Night bonfires. His musings illustrate a growing rift between political unionism and cultural loyalism, and gesture toward the need for loyalist paramilitaries to re-examine their relationship with the two.

Former fighters like Rob and Davey are now negotiating new identities that extend beyond the paramilitary framework of their former relationship to loyalism. In the following extract, Davey describes the shift from militant to political expression of his ideals:

Like, I make no beef...I am a political representative of the Ulster Defense Association, Ulster Freedom Fighters...I wear who I am and what I am on my sleeve. I was prepared to go to jail, and worse, for the struggles of this country. We're now in an environment where we want to end that. I don't want to be in jail and visit my kids through a glass visor. I don't want my kids burying me because I've been murdered at the hands of whoever else. We have to take the struggle on...It's...more than bonfires now, you know.

As Davey points out, bonfires are just the starting point for re-defining loyalism in a changing political environment. The transformation of the bonfire tradition is only a part of the larger transformation of loyalist paramilitarism, and of loyalism itself. The place of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland, in terms of both physical manifestation and symbolic value, must now be re-negotiated through the peace process. In communities like Davey's and Rob's, the transformation of the 11th Night bonfire tradition offers scope for redefining loyalist identities in a post-ceasefire – and one day, perhaps, post-paramilitary – Northern Ireland.

In many ways, my study of Antrim can be read as a response, in microcosm, to the research aims that I set forth in Chapter Two: To explore how transformations of contested landscapes provoke new perceptions of place and scale, and how these new perceptions, in turn, shape the expression and negotiation of identity. Drawing on the voices of Davey and Rob, I began by sketching the bonfire tradition in Antrim in its former heyday, when paramilitary culture entwined with local bonfires in a co-constitutive creation of fear, territory and power. Against this backdrop, I explored contemporary transformations in this tradition: the introduction of new designs; the reduction of violence; and the harnessing of bonfires as a resource for cultural education. I then broadened my exploration to wider scales, exploring how Rob and Davey now (re)position their bonfires in relation to larger dialogues that connect local activity to global environmental and geopolitical ramifications. The case study ends by considering how Rob and Davey now negotiate paramilitary culture – and their relationships to it – for a time of peace, in which positively defined identities might reinvigorate new forms of loyalist culture in a 'post-conflict' society.

My decision to emphasize paramilitarism in this case study highlights an intriguing dimension to the bonfire culture that Rob and Davey portray. Running throughout are hyper-masculine descriptions and images of loyalist paramilitary cultural identity, for example Davey's recollection of masked men shooting volleys of gunfire over a lit bonfire. My analysis of their interview, however, suggests that bonfire transformation appears to involve, in part, a process of *de*-masculinization, as Rob and Davey come to terms with new parameters of size and style. I read this process as a more complex negotiation of 'multiple scripts that construct and constrain the performance of acceptable and respected masculinities' (McDowell 2003: 221-222). I carry this gendered theme into the next case study, which explores the work of a local women's group in a paramilitary-controlled neighbourhood that gave rise to an innovative bonfire alternative.

Woodvale: From Bonfire to Beacon

In contrast to the vast fields and open spaces of Rob and Davey's estate in Antrim, the North Belfast neighbourhood of Woodvale struggles for even a small site on which to build a bonfire. According to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, this loyalist enclave comprises one of Northern Ireland's most impoverished wards.⁶ Its location at the top of the infamous Shankill Road – heartland of loyalist paramilitarism during the Troubles – marked Woodvale for its fair share of violence. The estate's narrow streets, crumbling terraced housing and, despite its name, utter lack of greenery all contribute to the general air of decay. On paper, Woodvale appears an unlikely frontrunner in the process of change. Yet from this neighbourhood emerged one of the most innovative transformations of Belfast City Council's Bonfire Management Programme, due in no small part to the efforts of its female bonfire committee.

The 'beacon' is the brainchild of Lee Mouncey, a landscape architect employed by Groundwork Northern Ireland.⁷ As a former resident of Woodvale, Mouncey was acutely aware of the neighbourhood's predicament. Two years previously, Woodvale had lost its last suitable bonfire site. Due to a shortage of open space in the estate, bonfires in Woodvale were

⁶ Multiple Deprivation Measure (2005). Data available from Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk. Last accessed 16 February 2010.

⁷ Shortly after designing the prototype and participating in its trial burning, Mouncey left the community/voluntary sector for private practice. His bonfire designs and architectural plans remain with Groundwork Northern Ireland.

typically built in the middle of roads, often in dangerously close proximity to nearby houses. Mouncey, in consultation with local residents, conceived a design for an alternative bonfire structure, which eventually became known as the beacon. He conceptualized a metal framework that could be filled with wood and draped with hessian cloth. In a nod to the contemporary practice of building bonfires from standardized industrial pallets, Mouncey designed a square base which could hold 50 pallets, topped by a large pyramid filled with carbon-neutral willow chips. The beacon would be set atop a sand pit to protect the surface underneath. When Mouncey had completed his design, Belfast City Council took on the task of building a prototype beacon. In the meantime, Mouncey facilitated a workshop with local children in Woodvale to design the artwork that would be painted on the beacon's hessian cover. In September 2007, roughly a year after Mouncey began to design the structure, the beacon prototype underwent a controlled trial burning at the premises of the Fire Service Training Ground (Figure 6.8). In attendance were a large contingent from Woodvale, including bonfire committee members, paramilitary representatives and the children who had designed the artwork; Groundwork staff; and several officials from Belfast City Council and various statutory agencies.

The idea for the beacon may have originated with Mouncey, but Woodvale's bonfire committee shepherded it to reality. Unlike the other loyalist areas participating in the Bonfire Management Programme, Woodvale's was the only committee managed exclusively by women. Although Woodvale, like other loyalist areas across Belfast, continues to suffer from the legacy of the Troubles, the neighbourhood benefits enormously from the strong capacity of its local women's group. For several years, the members of this group have worked on behalf of their community; their activity long predates the Bonfire Management Programme. Over the years, the women's group has coordinated local youth programmes, organized projects to improve the area, and pressured the Housing Executive to install PVC windows in the neighbourhood's crumbling social housing stock. In many ways, Woodvale's participation in the Bonfire Management Programme can be read as an extension of its long-standing neighbourhood improvement advocacy.

The women of Woodvale were pivotal in the development of the beacon. Although the controlled trial burning of the prototype demonstrated its structural viability, the beacon might easily have slipped into obscurity, ignored by civic officials loath to confront complicated logistical details. Through the Bonfire Management Programme, however, Woodvale's committee applied sustained pressure on Belfast City Council to fund the

development of the beacon. Nervous about potential insurance liabilities, Belfast City Council commissioned further testing of the beacon at one of the University of Ulster's structural engineering laboratories. As the beacon entered this new phase in the bureaucratic system, Woodvale's bonfire committee ramped up its campaign. Due in part to the committee's determination, the engineers finally approved the design and declared the beacon fit for purpose. Groundwork Northern Ireland then oversaw the building process, and the beacon was ready in time for the 2008 bonfire season. Fittingly, the honor of launching it went to Woodvale.

In July 2008, Northern Ireland's first official beacon was erected in Woodvale Park, and the local community hosted a large festival to showcase it as part of a larger, positive interpretation of loyalist culture. With the help of their Groundwork liaison to the Bonfire Management Programme, Woodvale's bonfire committee secured a sizeable amount of funding and, in the months leading up to July, worked closely with officials from a variety of City Council departments and statutory agencies to prepare for 11th Night. The festival on 11th July was free to the public; it began at mid-day and attracted over 6,000 people. Politicians from across the unionist political spectrum and members of the Linfield Football Club made high-profile appearances. Journalists flocked to the park, providing substantial news coverage to local, regional and national media networks (for example, BBC, 8 July 2008). Children clambered on inflatable bouncy castles that had been hired for the day, while a long list of cultural acts – Scottish dancers, folk musicians, and loyalist rock bands – took their turn on the stage. The festival provided business opportunities to several small food vendors, and over 100 volunteer marshals patrolled the festival in the name of community safety. So successful was the attempt to portray a positive interpretation of loyalist culture that, later, one Groundwork colleague observed to me, 'In a couple years, you could picture a Catholic family coming here during the day' (Research Diary, 11 July 2008).

The festival's focal point was the beacon. In a nod to its uncertain reception as an alternative to a bonfire, the festival organizers scheduled its burning for 11pm, thus giving on-lookers time to travel to other sites by midnight. In doing so, they removed any element of competition between the beacon and the more conventional bonfires built in other parts of the city. This excerpt from my research diary describes the burning:

In the darkness, the beacon appears larger than it did in the
harsh light of day. Two lads light the base. For a couple of

minutes, nothing exciting happens. Then, the flames begin to burgeon from the frame, leaping up the sides. The canvas covering, decorated earlier by the kids, catches fire.

‘Ooh,’ the crowd murmurs. Cheers erupt as a large expanse of canvas floats free and drifts to the ground. Is this the same reaction that the incineration of the (Irish) Tricolour would invoke? It’s hard to tell.

Several yards away, firecrackers begin to whistle their ascent. They explode in huge blooms against the night sky.
(Research diary, 11 July 2008)

Throughout the day, community safety marshals had carefully guarded the beacon, lest someone (whether from inside or outside the Woodvale community) attempted to decorate it with flags. Their vigilance paid off; based on my observations of other loyalist bonfires, Woodvale was probably the only site in Belfast devoid of sectarian symbolism on 11th Night.

The beacon shouldered a heavy burden of responsibility in Woodvale Park. In an earlier operational meeting of Groundwork staff involved in the Bonfire Management Programme, a Chief Executive of Belfast City Council’s Good Relations Unit explained how the beacon’s viability would be based on its reception in Woodvale Park:

‘It’s a test for public reaction. If the reaction is ‘that’s crap,’ obviously the design goes out the window.’ (Research Diary, 3 June 2008)

Not surprisingly, praise has been far from universal, and the beacon has emerged as one of the most contentious symbols of bonfire transformation. In the months leading up to July 2008, I was assigned to facilitate a series of discussions about cultural heritage with nine loyalist communities across Belfast that had recently joined the Bonfire Management Programme. Through these discussions, enforced by observations that my colleagues at Groundwork shared in our regular operational meetings, I noticed a widespread belief amongst loyalist communities that the beacon comprised a plot by Belfast City Council to eliminate bonfires entirely. In contrast to the largely positive consensus of those who had attended the trial burning at the Fire Service Training Ground, a community worker from a

loyalist estate in South Belfast commented to me: 'We heard that the beacon was a disaster' (Research Diary, 22 February 2008). Others expressed reservations about the prospect of burning the young people's artwork; the designs painted on the beacon's hessian covering at the controlled trial burning had included pictures of symbolic importance to loyalist culture, such as the lambeg drum.

A common point of concern related to securing the cooperation of local young people. In early June 2008, representatives from communities participating in the Bonfire Management Programme gathered at Groundwork Northern Ireland for the annual Participants Forum to discuss progress and concerns about their specific sites, and about the programme as a whole. Given that plans were well underway for the festival at Woodvale Park, the beacon featured heavily as a collective concern amongst those attending the forum. The following extract conveys a sentiment affirmed by many who attended the Participants Forum held at Groundwork in June 2008:

Travis...looks at the photos [of the beacon], shakes his head, and snorts. He says that he's trying to imagine telling the kids, *That's what you've got*. 'I'd have to leave the area.' (Research Diary, 3 June 2008)

The prediction he draws from this hypothetical scenario – that he would 'have to leave the area' – may be melodramatic, but it illuminates the difficulties that community workers face as they attempt to implement the Bonfire Management Programme's unpopular guidelines in their own communities. As I learned through facilitating a wide range of discussions on cultural heritage in loyalist neighbourhoods across the city, the hostile reaction that Travis imagines is not limited to his community alone. For example, in one neighbourhood in North Belfast I facilitated a discussion with a group of teenagers. Unavoidably, the subject of the beacon arose, their curiosity piqued by the rumours they had heard of the festival planned for Woodvale Park. I described the design of the beacon and the trial burning I had witnessed the previous September. The young people were deeply unimpressed with my reports of the beacon's size and height. Of greater concern, though, was the loss of the building process itself, and how they would occupy themselves in the weeks and months when, normally, they would be collecting wood (Research Diary, 18 June 2008)

At the outset, Woodvale's bonfire committee may not have wished to deviate from the norm, but as they confronted their predicament and how their lack of a suitable bonfire site affected their community, they began to pursue their new course with determination. Their actions provoked a range of responses from other loyalist communities in the Bonfire Management Programme and beyond. Although some expressed cautious support, more often their reactions took the form of skepticism, anger and jibes about 'selling out.' At the Participants Forum in June 2008, the controversial plans for the beacon's launch at Woodvale Park led to a heated exchange, compelling the representatives from Woodvale's bonfire committee to hotly defend their actions:

'It's better than nothing.'

'It's the only option we have.'

'It's either that or nothing. And if there's no fire, that's your culture gone.' (Research Diary, 3 June 2008)

Their responses frame the beacon as a final effort and the sole alternative to losing the tradition entirely. The last comment, with its straightforward equation of 'fire' to 'culture,' emphasizes the speaker's belief in the bonfire tradition as crucial to loyalist cultural identity. At a time when the peace process is sparking massive urban regeneration and threatening bonfire sites across the city, loyalists must confront the frightening prospect of change. In this context, the beacon can be read as one of the most powerful and contentious symbols of bonfire transformation and, by extension, of transformations within loyalist culture itself.

In April 2008, I conducted an interview with eight residents from Woodvale, all of whom belong to the neighbourhood's long-standing women's group and now bonfire committee. At the time of this interview, as the engineers at the University of Ulster continued to test the structure, the members of Woodvale's bonfire committee were waiting anxiously for confirmation that the beacon would be ready in time for their festival on 11th July. Through this interview, I wanted to understand how their engagement with the beacon reworks their notions of cultural heritage and provokes new perceptions about the relationship between peace, place and identity.

The installation of the beacon marks a dramatic shift from Woodvale's 'traditional' bonfire practice. In our interview, when I ask how 11th Night bonfires affect the estate, their responses could apply to virtually any loyalist neighbourhood across the city. The

participants describe wood lying haphazardly about the streets, alcohol-fueled anti-social behaviour, young people running wild, and no proper organization for the process. For one participant, in particular, the dangers strike close to heart, crystallized in an act of violence directed at her young son. Five years previously, the 11-year-old boy was attacked in the days leading up to the 11th by a group of young adults who were drinking and smoking marijuana around the growing bonfire. They threw the child into the hot ashes of a small fire that had been burning on the site and then, according to his mother, they ‘went on about their business.’

To Woodvale’s bonfire committee, the beacon represents an opportunity not only to address the loss of space to housing development, but also to tackle bonfire season’s entrenched negative elements. Nonetheless, local residents reacted with skepticism and anger toward Woodvale’s participation in the Bonfire Management Programme. In the following extract, one participant describes the challenge of garnering support within the community:

It was really hard. You know, people...in the area thought that we were selling our souls, take the [beacon] for a few pounds. But it’s not like that at all...The money has really, really helped us. Not us personally. For the likes of children, the old people – It’s helped the community come together, young and old.

This excerpt illuminates the reverence for bonfires within loyalist culture, to the point where the committee’s acceptance of the beacon could be compared to a treacherous act of biblical proportions: ‘selling our souls’ in exchange ‘for a few pounds.’ As this speaker points out, however, the funding that Woodvale receives from the Bonfire Management Programme facilitates community-wide engagement that would have been impossible previously, when every street sported its own separate bonfire.

In addition to reducing the sheer number of bonfires built on the estate, the beacon’s implementation required substantial spatial changes to local bonfire practice. Previously, Woodvale built its bonfires in the heart of the estate, along the dense network of narrow residential streets. As plans for a large festival developed around the beacon, however, nearby Woodvale Park began to emerge as the logical venue. Despite the park’s name and proximity, the proposed shift in venue disturbed local residents, many of whom perceive the park as located beyond the neighbourhood’s invisible boundaries. As one interview

participant explains, the local youth view Woodvale as their ‘own wee comfort zone’ – a sentiment that could apply equally to adults. Despite the bonfire committee’s advocacy of Woodvale Park, the following interview extract nonetheless conveys tensions and ambivalence around their decision:

- Lia Do you use the park for [other] activities as well?
 [Multiple voices – No, we use the streets]
- Sally Get the streets. Seal it off. So it’s safe.
- Joan Och, everybody moves their cars and that there.
- Lia Oh, that’s nice too. Just kind of reclaiming the streets as well.
- Patsy Yeah.
- Joan I think if you take it to the park, you’re taking it out of your area.
- Sally It’s not that. If you take it to the park, you sort of –
- Joan Everybody can come and go.
- Patsy There’s so much of the park but you can’t really...be in so many places at once. Aye.

Despite the dangers they acknowledged previously about bonfires built in the streets, in this excerpt the participants appear almost nostalgic. They describe the streets as an intimate venue that can be ‘seal(ed) off’ and made ‘safe.’ In contrast, they articulate a fear of moving the bonfire to the park, of ‘taking it out of your area.’ Unlike the sealed streets, the park is a space in which ‘everybody can come and go.’ Hence, the streets offer a familiar space for familiar people; conversely, the park rests outside the perceived sphere of influence and control. For the bonfire committee, securing widespread local support for the beacon requires a community-wide transformation in how residents perceive not only the place of the bonfire tradition in Woodvale, but the psychological borders of Woodvale itself.

Furthermore, the beacon provoked concern within Woodvale about how local youth would respond to massive changes to their bonfire tradition. At our interview, the bonfire committee members tell me that they went to great lengths to involve the young people in the process of the beacon, particularly around the structure’s decorative artwork. Also reassuring was the knowledge gained from the prototype’s controlled trial burning in September 2007,

when the beacon burned far longer than anticipated. One of the biggest challenges, however, relates to the tradition of wood collection. In the extract below, one participant describes this transformation through the eyes of local children:

I mean, it was hard for them. They were told they weren't allowed to collect wood. You know? Since they're home from school, their old trainers on from...about April, May. And they were away, seeing what wood they could get. You know? And then they were angry that they had to wait until the last day, really.

As this speaker elaborates, bonfires follow a seasonal rhythm that engages children for several months leading up to mid-July. In contrast, the beacon would be filled with willow chips during its construction, thereby offering minimal opportunities for local children to participate in the eagerly-anticipated process of wood collection.

Yet the beacon presents other opportunities for youth engagement, particularly around environmental education. At the beacon's controlled trial burning in September 2007, its designer gave a short demonstration about the environmental effects of bonfires, which he geared toward the younger members of Woodvale's delegation:

Lee [Mouncey] sets up a small table, on which he places a number of small items. He begins with a brief introduction. We learn that carbon-neutral willow is good, and that chemically-treated pallets are bad. Lee shows us a box full of nails, collected from the pallets burned in last year's bonfires in Woodvale. He tells us that a single nail takes fifty years to decompose...Next, Lee lays a large, white sheet of paper on the table, on to which he pours debris from various soup cartons. These small piles of ash, sand and hessian strips represent the end-products of a 'clean' beacon fire. As proof, Lee mixes these into a mesh-lined coffee press, pours in some water, plunges, and then – for dramatic effect – takes a sip of the murky liquid. 'Ewww!' we all screech. (Research Diary, 30 September 2007)

In our interview, the members of Woodvale's bonfire committee refer enthusiastically to Mouncey's demonstration, citing its educational benefits to local children. One participant comments: '(T)hey're learning about the different woods and what's good to burn, and where toxic fumes and all come from. So this is good for them.' Woodvale's bonfire committee intends to develop the beacon's educational potential. In our interview, they describe their desire to take the young people on a field trip to 'a wood plant sort of a thing,' in order to learn about different types of wood. Although 'Woodvale' may be an ill-fitting description for the neighbourhood, the name suggests a rich local woodland heritage. Perhaps the beacon will spur local residents to excavate the cultural connections between wood, history and tradition in Woodvale.

The beacon raises fascinating questions about the nature of change. In the following extract, I query how this specific transformation might affect Woodvale's bonfire culture:

- | | |
|-------|--|
| Lia | As the bonfires change – You know, as you move from having an old-style bonfire to doing the beacon, how do you think that's going to...affect the sense of tradition for the younger generations? |
| Sally | They grew up with it, just as we grew up with the, what we would call the traditional bonfire. |
| Joan | When they're older, they'll look back on their time, and that's all they'll probably know. |
| Patsy | That will be their tradition. So it will. |

In response to my question, these three participants identify how the collective memory of Woodvale's young people will eventually incorporate the beacon into their concept of 11th Night. As Joan acknowledges, the beacon will be 'all they'll probably know.' As a generational shift reshapes the cultural knowledge held within the community, the concept of 'tradition' likewise will shift. Sally's hesitation – 'we grew up with the, what we would call the traditional bonfire' – suggests her active revision of her definition of 'traditional.' Patsy emphasizes the definition's transience by proclaiming that for Woodvale's children, the beacon 'will be their tradition.' Indeed, the beacon already highlights generational shifts in the cultural tradition of wood collection. Contemporary bonfires bear little resemblance to the

‘traditional bonfire’ to which Sally refers, which were built before the advent of the standardized industrial pallets widely used today. Belfast City Council agreed to supply the carbon-neutral willow chips for Woodvale’s beacon in 2008, but in future years local residents may need to source their own wood for the structure, marking yet another shift in cultural practices of wood collection. To this end, the beacon is provoking Woodvale to rework its notions of ‘tradition.’

Although the bonfire committee could not predict success at the time of our interview, Woodvale’s festival would be lauded widely as a triumph in Belfast and beyond. The following year, three additional loyalist communities followed Woodvale’s lead and opted for a beacon instead of building a large-scale bonfire. However, the months leading up to the festival were full of uncertainties and heightened tensions around the prospect of the beacon. Over the course of my research fieldwork, I heard concerns articulated – often as gendered, sexualized ridicule – about the beacon’s comparatively shorter height and the fixed dimensions of its structure. Given the logistical obstacles and the lack of support from the wider loyalist population in Belfast, the role of Woodvale’s women’s group in the beacon’s development is particularly poignant. In the following interview extract, I query the dynamics that facilitate Woodvale’s unique female bonfire committee:

Lia In other neighbourhoods...people are really struggling to get women on to the committees there. But it seems like Woodvale is the exception.

[Laughter]

Sally We’re in charge. Women are in charge of the Woodvale, definitely, like. We just bring the men on board that day.

Joan We don’t even ask.

Sandy Yeah, I don’t know what we need them for. We’ve been doing everything else ourselves. I think the men in this area are glad that the women are –

LeeAnn They are. They are.

Sally They don’t know what to do.

Sandy We intimidate the men. [Laughs]

Joan They would...support us all the way. The men in the area.

This exchange portrays a confident and gendered leadership identity amongst those present at the interview; as Sally claims, 'Women are in charge of the Woodvale.' Their dialogue illuminates attitudes toward and relationships with local men that are collaborative and complex. In a reversal of the patterns in other loyalist bonfire communities, which involve women peripherally and for limited timespans, in Woodvale the women of the bonfire committee 'just bring the men on board that day.' In this way, Woodvale inverts the gender dynamics prevalent in other loyalist areas. Likewise, this community also inverts stereotypical ideas of gender, power and fear. According to the interview participants, local men 'don't know what to do' and 'are glad' that these women advocate within and on behalf of the community. Despite Sandy's rueful acknowledgement that local women 'intimidate the men,' these appear to be relationships rooted in respect. Joan emphasizes this sentiment by affirming that Woodvale's men 'support us all the way.'

Yet although it may be tempting to frame the beacon's success in terms of female empowerment, Woodvale's gendered dynamics complicate this seemingly simple story. Woodvale's controversial pursuit of the beacon illuminates how these dynamics entered into the process of negotiation:

Lia I mean, was it a challenge getting the men on board with the beacon?

Joan No, not really.

Patsy No, because it was a man's [Lee Mouncey's] idea at the beginning, and he got us involved with the bonfire committee. So he came along with us too, but he's other commitments...So Joan and myself, we've gone to most of the meetings, and then the last few meetings Sandy and Sally were able to go. Because there's strength in numbers.

In this extract, Joan and Patsy acknowledge how the beacon's male architect paved the way for its advocacy by the local women. As Patsy suggests, the local men were more receptive to

the idea ‘because it was a man’s idea at the beginning.’ Woodvale’s gender dynamics also surface in perceptions of strength. When ‘other commitments’ drew Mouncey away from the beacon, the local women’s group took on the responsibility as a collaborative effort. But in the predominantly male environment of Belfast’s Bonfire Management Programme, the women of Woodvale sought ‘strength in numbers.’

Furthermore, despite the tireless efforts of Woodvale’s bonfire committee, the support of the local, exclusively male paramilitary unit was ultimately crucial to the community’s acceptance of the beacon. In an operational meeting for the Bonfire Management Programme, Groundwork’s Project Development Officer for Woodvale informed us that the local members of the UVF had met in December 2007 – shortly after the controlled trial burning of the prototype – and agreed to support the beacon: ‘[The paramilitaries] see beacons as the way forward’ (Research Diary, 10 January 2008). Without their backing, it is unclear how far the bonfire committee would have progressed. Channels of communication with the UVF helped the bonfire committee to present a united front for Woodvale, thus ensuring wider community support for a transformation as major as the beacon. These dynamics illustrate nuanced relationships between men and women in Woodvale, and the complex negotiations that sustained the support for the beacon.

Despite the odds against it, the beacon has emerged as one of the most innovative transformations of the Bonfire Management Programme. Its successful development, from architectural idea to built reality, was due in large part to the efforts of Woodvale’s female bonfire committee, and I have drawn from their story the nuanced, gendered complexities that shape the transformation of this local tradition. Woodvale, as presented here, contrasts sharply with the hyper-masculine paramilitary culture of Antrim, yet both case studies suggest that the transformation of the bonfire tradition provokes loyalist communities to negotiate, at some level, new ideas and practices of gender. In the story of its emergence, the beacon illuminates gendered dynamics in the process of redefining tradition. In doing so, it points toward possibilities for developing inclusive forms of cultural heritage in a shared city.

Conclusion

The future for bonfires has never looked more uncertain. Across Belfast, loyalist communities wonder how long their tradition will last. ‘Where do you see the bonfires in ten

years' time?' I asked in every discussion that I facilitated. Some groups voiced anxiety about disappearing sites, as developers purchase land for commercial and residential property. Such fears may not apply to sites with ample greenspace, for instance the estate in Antrim or areas near public parks, but even those communities are questioning how long the statutory services will turn a blind eye to the bonfire practice. Some participants suspect that bonfires will be made illegal soon. (In reality, they already are illegal, although not enforced.) The biggest changes, however, seem to emanate from the communities themselves. Demographics are now arrayed against Northern Ireland's Protestant population, leading to a dearth of children in loyalist areas. One neighbourhood in East Belfast foresees that their community will have no bonfire in ten years' time, because no one will be left to build it. How, they wonder, will they raise a new generation of bonfire builders to keep the tradition alive?

The long-term survival of the tradition will most likely depend on the ability of loyalist communities to adapt their bonfires to Belfast's rapidly changing 'post-conflict' realities. An extensive, independent consultation with communities participating in the Bonfire Management Programme underscored a need for bonfires to be addressed within the larger context of culture and tradition (Byrne and O'Riordan 2009). As the three-year Bonfire Management Programme draws to a close, Belfast City Council now seeks to support loyalist communities in framing longer-term objectives. In May 2009, the Council approved a new programme to succeed the Bonfire Management Programme. Unlike the previous emphasis on individual bonfire committees, the new programme creates six 'Cultural Networks' located throughout Belfast. These networks will run throughout the year, thus re-positioning the 12th of July as only one date in the larger cultural calendar and the bonfires as only one event. Crucially, guidelines around bonfires will be agreed in collaboration with Belfast City Council, but developed and delivered by the people in the communities themselves. Each 'cultural network' will develop a locally appropriate vision, mission and plan to address issues such as bonfires, murals, flags, sectarian graffiti and physical barriers. In doing so, they will take responsibility for addressing controversial bonfire practices such as the flying of paramilitary flags and the burning of the Irish Tricolour. Above all, this new programme seeks to support loyalist communities in the positive celebration of their cultural heritage and identity.

In Chapter Two, I argued that the process of peacebuilding must address how divisive, contested versions of heritage can be reworked and reimagined for a shared future. Although genuine enthusiasm for 11th Night bonfires may never extend beyond loyalist

communities, the changes taking shape at present indicate potential for a divisive tradition to evolve into a more inclusive, less antagonistic celebration. As Ashworth and Graham (2005: 4) observe: 'The contents, interpretations and representations of the [heritage] resource are selected according to the demands of the present.' My observations of loyalist bonfires suggest that Belfast has entered a time in which the 'demands of the present' necessitate new ways of thinking about and engaging with cultural tradition. In the interview in Woodvale, three participants described how young people in the area will eventually incorporate the beacon into their concept of 11th Night. Their faith in this eventual transformation speaks also to a faith in group memory as 'fluid, flexible [and] subject to constant renewal' (Busteed 2007: 70).

In this chapter, I have drawn on the contested landscape of 11th Night to explore the (re)negotiation of cultural heritage and identity in a new phase of peacebuilding. The three distinct but interlinking case studies on bonfire management illuminate different aspects of transformation. I have queried how various forms of loyalist identity are reworked through the shifting tradition. My explorations of the gendering of bonfires, in particular, support McDowell's (2003: 221) argument that 'gender, class and ethnicity are mutually constituted to construct identities that are fluid and variable.' My research findings subvert conventional assumptions of monolithic practices of gendered identity in loyalist culture. Although some communities emphasized traditional labour roles – for example, bonfire-building as an exclusively masculine activity, and sandwich-making as exclusively feminine – others illuminated more complex gendered dynamics to the bonfire tradition. In Antrim, the loyalist leaders with whom I spoke are actively redefining the militarized and hyper-masculine culture around 11th Night. In Woodvale, the female bonfire committee successfully introduced the innovative alternative of the beacon, albeit with the explicit approval and support of the community's all-male paramilitary command structure. Ultimately, I argue that transformations of the contested bonfire landscape can be read as both a product and an agent of the peace process, both complicating and contributing to practices of peacebuilding.

My findings also indicate that as loyalists negotiate the changing material parameters of their tradition, they are re-framing territorial identities within wider, multiple scales of engagement. By way of example, I invoke the paramilitary leader named Rob from Antrim. His observation of the bonfires' 'carbon footprint,' and the response they will elicit eventually from the British government, suggests a sophisticated awareness of global environmental politics that re-scales both the bonfire tradition and himself as participants in

larger dialogues. On a more localized scale, the Bonfire Management Programme's Participants Forum represents a space in which Belfast's territorial, and sometimes warring, loyalist communities come together to strategize around the shifting tradition. In doing so, they evoke not only the historic purpose of communication that bonfires once served, but also gesture toward new possibilities for community cultural identities.

Loyalist bonfires illuminate larger debates around the politics of belonging in a 'post-conflict' society. In Chapter Two, I suggested the possibility for the concept of 'public landscape' to represent the transformed, peacetime continuum of a contested cultural landscape. The transformations at work in loyalist estates indicate potential for deeper public engagement with the 11th Night bonfire tradition, for example through the Bonfire Management Programme's emphasis on, and support for, family-oriented festivals. In the case study on Woodvale, I recounted my Groundwork colleague's prediction: 'In a couple years, you could picture a Catholic family coming here during the day' (Research Diary, 11 July 2008). His observation captures the ambiguities of the transformations at work in the peace process. On the one hand, the presence of a Catholic family at a loyalist bonfire represents, against sizeable odds, a triumph of inclusive change. On the other hand, my colleague simultaneously hedges his optimism: The family that he imagines would not be welcome for 'a couple years,' and even then only 'during the day.' I raise this example to illustrate the challenges of defining and engaging diverse 'publics' in a divided society attempting to emerge from conflict. In the next chapter, I probe these challenges further through an analysis of ethnic minorities and their complex negotiations of belonging in Northern Ireland.



Figure 6.1. 11th Night bonfire. Photo courtesy of Antrim Borough Council.



Figure 4.2. Bonfire under construction. Photo by the author.



Figure 6.3. Bonfire with Irish Tricolour and posters of republican politicians. Photo by the author.



Figure 6.4. Burning bonfire. Photo by Paul Hutchinson.



Figure 6.5. Aftermath of a bonfire. Photo by Norman Watson, Belfast City Council.



Figure 6.6. Anti-development graffiti on the Shankill Road. Photo by Mark Johnston.



Figure 6.7. Bonfire designed as a castle. Photo courtesy of Antrim Borough Council.



Figure 6.8. Trial burning of the beacon. Photo by the author.

Chapter Seven
**Diversity in a Divided City: Ethnic Minorities and
New Narratives of Belonging**

Introduction

In Chapter Two, I argued that conflict transformation theory must address relationships not only between people, but between people and *place*. In doing so, the conflict transformation approach offers potential to re-frame contested cultural landscapes, opening them to new expressions of cultural identity. In the two previous empirical chapters, I explored how peacetime transformations of iconic, contested landscapes are provoking new forms of loyalist and republican cultural identities. I now turn to a discussion of Northern Ireland's minority ethnic residents, to locate their voices in the shifting matrix of identity in 'post-conflict' Belfast. Ultimately, this chapter explores the challenge of locating multicultural diversity in a divided and territorial city.

The peace process is opening new social fractures, further complicating Northern Ireland's traditional sectarian politics and drawing ethnic minorities into larger, fraught dialogues around shared space and 'post-conflict' identity. Although far more nuanced than simplified trends allow, the rise in racially-motivated crime and harassment in Northern Ireland charts a parallel course to the advent of peace, begging the question of how the two are related. One theory, popular in the public imagination, traces a linear trajectory from the ceasefires to the rise of racism, and thus frames racism as a legacy of sectarianism. In reality, the relationship between racism and sectarianism is complex and long pre-dates the peace accords. As McVeigh (1998: 20) argues, Northern Ireland's pervasive sectarian culture 'structures the way in which racism is reproduced and experienced.' He points to a common local joke, one variation of which I heard in an interview I conducted with a civil servant in Belfast City Council's Waste Management Services. He described the challenge of assigning staff to rubbish collection routes in this highly territorial city:

I want to send in thousands of Muslims to collect their bins, but they'll probably just be asked, 'Are you a Catholic Muslim or a Protestant Muslim?' (Interview, 23 February 2006)

A simplistic trajectory, from sectarianism to racism, masks long-standing forms of discrimination against groups such as the Travellers (Noonan 1998) and eclipses the history of ethnic and faith diversity, however limited, in Northern Ireland (see Warm 1998). Furthermore, I argue that reliance on sectarianism to explain racism denies ethnic minorities their own agency and experience with regard to the Troubles. To this end, I seek to highlight the voices of Northern Ireland's minority ethnic communities in an exploration of how they, too, struggle to reconcile their diverse and multiple identities with the rapidly shifting cultural landscapes of 'post-conflict' Belfast.

In Northern Ireland, the presence of ethnic minorities opens into larger questions about 'postcolonial politics of belonging' (Nash 2002). The province perches on the periphery of the 'Mother Country,' at once part of the imperial power yet also itself a colonial site and a product of Britain's imperial past. The tensions around its unfinished (post)colonial history, made manifest in the Troubles, shape the ways in which new migrants and existing minority ethnic populations engage with Northern Ireland. Minority ethnic residents refract Northern Ireland through their own 'lived landscapes' (Tolia-Kelly 2006: 341) of migration and diaspora. Although sidelined from the general discourse of sectarian conflict, their presence offers insight into the ways in which diverse identities and varied place relationships might enrich the peacetime transformations of contested cultural landscapes. In her study of British Asian cultures of English landscape(s), Tolia-Kelly (2006: 355) situates identity between 'a set of landscapes' comprising 'geographical coordinates of the present, past, and utopian landscapes of belonging' (*ibid*: 351). She points to the ways in which identity embeds itself in 'remembered landscapes' (Tolia-Kelly 2004: 280), particularly for diasporic people who 'have migrated through varied landscapes, but who have also varied political connections with territory and national identity' (*ibid*: 285).

To illuminate the complicated dynamics between landscape, territory, identity and belonging for minority ethnic residents of Belfast, I offer the following quotation by Ugur, a Turkish man who moved to Northern Ireland at the time of the 1998 peace accords. He describes his reaction to the strange scenes of conflict that unfolded before him:

But everywhere [were] army and tank. I said...'Probably the Palestinians and Israelis have a fight here'...I say, 'Where are we?' Because, uh, Northern Ireland, you know, it's a European country, but I was...surprised at that time when I see armies and tanks in the

road...I says, 'God, you know, what country [is] here?'...I thought, you know, 'Arab Middle East?' (Interview, 25 March 2008)

Coming from Turkey, itself located at the crossroads between Europe and the Middle East, Ugur attempts to understand the contested landscape of Belfast through his imagined geographies of Europe as a site of peace and security, and the 'Arab Middle East,' as a site of conflict. The scene he describes of urban conflict, replete with armies and tanks, would cause no surprise to people from Northern Ireland who have lived through the Troubles. But Ugur's evocation of another conflict zone and his bewildered sense of dislocation – 'Where are we?' – highlights the challenges for minority ethnic residents to locate a sense of belonging in the contested and territorial landscapes of urban Belfast. As Hirsch and O'Hanlon (1995: 23, cited in Tolia-Kelly 2006: 356) argue: 'There is not one absolute landscape here, but a series of related, contradictory moments – perspectives – which cohere in what can be recognised as landscape as a cultural process.' In Northern Ireland, this process encompasses the complex negotiations of cultural identity amongst minority ethnic individuals and communities.

In this chapter, I draw on insights from the contested landscapes – Divis Mountain and the 11th Night bonfires – that I explored in Chapters Five and Six, but my analysis now turns to Northern Ireland's minority ethnic residents and their own engagement with those same landscapes. Early in my research, I became intrigued by the silences surrounding ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland and their experiences of the conflict. Recent efforts by various statutory and local community organizations to include ethnic minorities in their work struck me as an exercise in token diversity and essentialism; the superficial nature of these efforts only highlights a lack of deeper engagement. In addition to my research on shifting loyalist and republican identities, I developed a parallel line of inquiry around the expression of minority identities. As I discussed in Chapter Four, my curiosity emerged, in part, from my own minority ethnic identity and the complex negotiations I perform while living in Belfast. The following excerpt describes my reaction to an early operational meeting for the Bonfire Management Programme, when Paul Hutchinson, the programme's external arts consultant, unveiled the travelling exhibit he had designed to provoke discussion in loyalist communities (Figure 4.1):

Paul has created five separate panels: Framework, Fun, Fire, Flag, and Future Questions. He has also prepared a facilitation guide, which he runs through with us. To illustrate this guide, he

frequently morphs the meeting into a practice discussion session, with the rest of us as participants.

The other [Groundwork staff members] are, of course, extremely familiar with bonfires and the surrounding culture. It's all new to me. At first, I feel that I don't have anything to offer. Then, slowly, it dawns on me that I am precisely the type of person I want to include in this discussion. (Research Diary, 15 March 2007)

In the absence of the dynamics that I sought to explore, I initiated formal relationships between minority ethnic communities and the contested cultural landscapes of my research project. In effect, I staged the encounters that I wanted to study. I sought, and received, permission from the director of Groundwork Northern Ireland to use the visual display about bonfires, described above, in my interviews and discussions with community groups. I also contacted the National Trust and offered to develop their minority ethnic outreach programme for Divis Mountain. For both organizations, my offers came at a time when the community/voluntary sector was awakening to the need to diversify its traditional remit.¹ As I discussed in Chapter Four, my collaborations drew Groundwork Northern Ireland and the National Trust into dialogue with the Minority Ethnic and Faith Network, and gave both organizations a presence in Northern Ireland's emerging minority ethnic community sector. Through my research encounters, I query how transformations of contested landscapes provoke ethnic minorities to negotiate the complex dynamics of alienation, belonging and identity in 'post-conflict' Belfast.

I have divided this chapter into two overarching sections, each focusing on the contested landscapes on which I drew my earlier analyses of republican and loyalist identities. The first section explores minority ethnic engagement with the transforming landscape of Divis Mountain. I begin with an overview of literature on ethnic minorities in the English countryside, drawing on the black British photographer Ingrid Pollard's landmark exhibit, *Pastoral Interludes*, to frame academic discussion on racialized bodies in a symbolically white landscape. I then expand this discussion to Northern Ireland, tracing the different ways in which rural discourses have shaped conflicting nationalist and unionist identities, and their implications for the current transformation of Divis Mountain from off-limits military property to a place of public access. I situate my analysis of ethnic minority engagement within the framework of this contested space, based on

¹ Indeed, the latest round of European Union Peace III funding, which drives much of the community relations discourse in Northern Ireland, now stipulates that funded projects must emphasize a cross-community dimension.

participant observation drawn from guided walks and interviews with two different minority ethnic community groups. I explore how engagement with the mountain provokes insights into shifting scales of diasporic identity, and the challenge of negotiating belonging in a territorial, sectarian city.

In the second section, I return to the 11th Night bonfires. I begin by contextualizing the scope for minority ethnic engagement within loyalist communities. Against this backdrop, transformations of the 11th Night bonfires offer rich scope for exploring how ethnic minorities negotiate a sense of belonging in ‘post-conflict’ Belfast. I then introduce the experiences and perspectives of ethnic minorities themselves, looking first at the intersection between peace and racism, and the politics of visibility and invisibility. Next, I look at the contested practice of flag-burning, examining how the practice provokes articulations of identity and how other global conflicts and peace processes intersect and cross-cut Northern Ireland’s. Finally, I probe the relationship between bonfires and belonging, and the negotiations that develop in response to this transforming, contested landscape.

1. Divis Mountain

Divergent Perspectives: Breaking Down Barriers

My research about ethnic minorities and Divis Mountain contributes to an established academic dialogue on the challenge of negotiating diversity in the ‘white landscape’ of the English countryside (Agyeman and Spooner 1997: 197; see also Agyeman 1990). It draws inspiration, in part, from the photographer Ingrid Pollard’s *Pastoral Interludes*, first exhibited in 1984. In this visual critique of the countryside, Pollard explored her own discomfort as a black British woman in these traditionally white landscapes. Through images that disturbed pastoral myths, Pollard drew attention to material, cultural and ideological barriers that shape perceptions of black identity in relation to the countryside. By exploring the construction of these identities, Pollard’s photography can be read as an effort to ‘reshap(e) the imaginative geography of the English landscape’ (Kinsman 1995: 308).

The countryside, as Neal and Agyeman (2006a: 4) argue, is not neutral but ‘a politically charged space...that has been adept at signifying nation.’ Furthermore, the idea of the English countryside ‘occupies a particular and racially coded place in Britain’s ‘national story’ (Neal and Agyeman 2006b: 99). Agyeman (1990: 232) cites the role of the British environmental movement

and the media in propagating a myth of the countryside as a repository of the ‘true keeper of Anglo-Saxon culture,’ thus excluding the presence of black people from this pastoral vision. Other scholars, however, warn against racialized readings of the countryside that theorize ‘visible communities’ (Askins 2006: 150) as outsiders to rural space and national identity, thus denying their claims to both. As Askins (*ibid.*, original emphasis) cautions: ‘(T)here is a danger that if we *only* focus on visible communities as ‘rural others,’ we reconstruct people from non-white backgrounds as *always already* marginalised in the countryside.’

In Northern Ireland, a dialogue about diversity in the countryside is only beginning to emerge. Recently, the Environment & Heritage Service attempted to address the silence by commissioning a study titled *Barriers to Participation* (Countryside Access & Activities Network for Northern Ireland 2008). However, due to its small sample of ethnic minorities and its limited methodological scope, the report offers little illumination. The challenge of engaging ethnic minorities with the countryside is complicated further by the very different roles that rural discourse plays in Northern Ireland’s competing political projects. Irish nationalism has forged its sense of identity, in part, on romantic images of an essentially rural Ireland (Gaffey 2004, Duffy 1997). Furthermore, Connolly (2006: 23) argues that ‘(T)he timeless depiction of Irishness and the continued evocation of an ancient and mystical past have ensured that such an identity remains essentially White.’ In stark contrast to the Irish nationalist project, and despite its own emphasis on the land of Ulster, unionism is far less influenced by rural discourses. Connolly (*ibid.*: 24) reads this ambivalence toward ‘the rural’ within unionist identity as a rejection of its strong associations with Irish nationalism.

These divergent roles of rural discourse become evident with regard to Divis Mountain. As I discussed in Chapter Five, the mountain is an important touchstone in republican cultural identity in Belfast – a narrative landscape of struggle, resistance and victory. In contrast, loyalist perceptions of the mountain are decidedly ambivalent. As one middle-aged Protestant man commented to me: ‘It’s a cold mountain...I suppose it sounds cruel, but do you find that people just don’t care about it?’ (Research Diary, 19 March 2008). His perception of a remote mountain contrasts sharply with those of his republican contemporaries, many of whom participated in the armed struggle of the Troubles, and for whom Divis represents a rich cipher of cultural heritage and identity.

Not surprisingly, sectarian politics of territory play a large role in the divergent perceptions of Divis Mountain amongst republicans and loyalists. In an interview, the National Trust employee who spearheaded the mountain’s public acquisition described the process of garnering support. To his surprise, nationalists in West Belfast were ‘dead easy’ and raised no

objection to the idea of the National Trust, a ‘perceived English organization,’ managing the mountain for the public. His observations resonate with the remarks of Padraig, the former IRA prisoner, in Chapter 5. Loyalists, in contrast, expressed anxiety during these consultations:

‘Here be dragons,’ [the National Trust employee] remembers. It takes a moment for me to catch up with his train of thought. He is referring to old maps, on whose edges lurk fantastical monsters. Perhaps the local loyalists perceive Divis as the edge of the known world: You just don’t go there. (Research Diary, 2 June 2008)

Despite the acquisition of Divis for public use, territorial politics continue to wield substantial power. The mountain’s points of access adjoin territory that is perceived to lie within republican boundaries, thus heightening anxiety amongst loyalists reluctant to travel through hostile areas.

The transformation of the contested landscape of Divis, located at the edge of and overlooking the city, offers intriguing potential for engaging minority ethnic residents with Belfast and the rural hinterland of the Belfast hills. In a society long-entrenched in sectarian conflict, however, new dimensions of diversity have proven difficult to incorporate:

When I asked [the director] about the Partnership’s plans for incorporating ethnic minority participation, the question stumped him. He sat for a long moment, looking thoughtful and a bit rueful. Finally, he told me that it was a good question, and one to which he would give more thought. (Research Diary, 20 February 2007)

In this exchange, I question the director of the Belfast Hills Partnership – a non-profit network of various interest groups related to the Belfast hills, including the National Trust. His response reflects, at that time, a wider lack of awareness across the city’s community/voluntary sector with regard to ethnic minority inclusion. This was the niche that I identified and sought to address through my doctoral research. With the support of both the National Trust and the Belfast Hills Partnership, I began to publicize Divis Mountain within the minority ethnic community sector and organized guided walks for community groups that expressed interest (Figure 7.1). I took inspiration for this research strategy from Burgess’s (1996) pioneering qualitative methodology based on leading group walks in a forest.

These walks also drew inspiration from Ingrid Pollard, whose 1984 exhibit highlighted ironic tensions of the word ‘pastoral.’ According to Snape (2004: 143) the concept refers to a pre-industrial ‘primitive communal lifestyle’ that came to be romanticized in Victorian times, when 19th century cultural critics advocated this interpretation of the countryside as a cultural and spiritual alternative to the industrial city. The pastoral countryside came to symbolize an idealized – and implicitly white – English nationalism (see also Snape 2009; Woods 2005; Daniels 1993). In the deliberate introduction of minority bodies to the countryside, the walks that I led on Divis echo Pollard’s resistance to the idealization of a white, pastoral landscape. Like Pollard, I attempt to ‘disrupt the construction of visible communities as ‘others’” (Askins 2006: 168). In my research, I push this exploration further, contextualizing the relationship between diversity and rural space in the larger legacy of the Troubles.

Scales of Belonging

Divis Mountain inhabits multiple worlds. Located at the periphery of Belfast, it holds obvious urban links yet simultaneously comprises the rural countryside of the Belfast hills. Its contested history as both a republican cultural touchstone and a former British military base provokes questions about the shifting scales of national belonging. The mountain mediates distinct and overlapping scales of relationship between places and people, and between places and identities. In part, I staged encounters between ethnic minorities and the complex landscape of Divis to explore not only the ways but the scales in which they construct and negotiate their identities in ‘post-conflict’ Belfast.

I draw on interview transcripts from two community groups that I accompanied to Divis for a guided walk of the mountain,² both of which raise intriguing questions about scales of individual and communal identity. The Afro-Caribbean Society of Northern Ireland (ACSONI), based in Belfast, claims an ethnically, culturally and geographically diverse membership; many are migrants from former British colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. Despite their disparate origins, however, in Northern Ireland they unite around the shared experience of their racialized presence in a predominantly white society. Along similar lines, Latina America Unida is a smaller, pan-national community body whose members hail from diverse regions of Spanish-speaking Central and South America. Through these community groups, members of both

² The group from ACSONI comprised five participants; Latino America Unida, fifteen, including three children.

ACSONI and Latina America Unida juggle distinct and overlapping scales of identity related to geography, culture and their shared, lived experience of visible difference in Northern Ireland.

Conventional wisdom suggests that ethnic minorities have only limited engagement with the Troubles (Hainsworth 1998). Unlike the republicans whom I interviewed in West Belfast, the minority ethnic participants whom I interviewed knew little about the contested history of Divis Mountain or its transition from military ownership to public open space. As one participant commented: 'I just think it belongs to the telephone company...because you can see masts' (Interview, 22 September 2007). However, the interview I conducted with ACSONI members reveals the extent to which sectarian conflict shapes not only their perceptions of Belfast but their embodied experience of the city as well:

Lia So what [makes you feel unsafe] on Divis?

Arthur Well, the past history of this area, because there is conflict, and where it is located. It is right up beside where there is two interface areas.

Cal Yeah.

Arthur So...you never know, I mean, because...you have not been there. We are not aware of what's actually happened there. Was that place used for some sort of, you know, some sort of activity before? So, we cannot – I mean, it would be brave of someone to just take off and go there at night or something. (Interview, 22 September 2007)

In this extract, Arthur describes how the mountain's location – 'right up beside...two interface areas' – renders it unsafe. In a continuous mapping process, the geographical knowledge that he gathers about the city informs his sense of where he can and cannot go. His delicate allusion to an imagined atrocity – 'Was that place used for some sort of, you know, some sort of activity before?' – suggests his reluctance to engage with a place about which he holds little knowledge. In effect, Arthur's mental map of Belfast positions Divis in vague but threatening territory. Unlike the city's republican and loyalist residents, for whom an interface would signify a territory of affinity on one side or the other, for Arthur the sectarian structure is a threatening feature best to be avoided.

For many of my interview participants, West Belfast holds a particularly lawless and dangerous reputation, concretized in the high-profile peace line between the republican area of Falls and the loyalist area of Shankill. The guided walking tour of Divis, however, signifies an opportunity to move, en masse and accompanied, through the area. In a discussion after Latina America Unida's guided walk, one man acknowledged: 'It helps to de-demonize West Belfast.' Furthermore, from the height of Divis, Belfast's disjointed territorial fragments assemble into a cohesive, visual whole (Figure 7.2). For one participant from Peru, the new perspective shifts her geographic understanding of the city:

It's really interesting because we always talk about West Belfast, East Belfast, North Belfast and South Belfast. But then as you see...it's so small. But you hardly [ever] see it together. (Interview, 11 November 2007)

This participant divides Belfast into rough quadrants of well-known sectarian territory: republican West Belfast, loyalist East Belfast, the mosaic of interface walls in North Belfast. Like most residents of Belfast, regardless of national affinity, minority ethnic residents navigate the city based on their knowledge of sectarian geography. The view from Divis, however, condenses Belfast's territorial intricacies, eliding – if only temporarily – the sectarian patchwork of neighbourhoods that ethnic minorities must navigate. Moreover, Divis Mountain further disrupts Belfast's territorial microcosm by reframing the city in relation to the rest of Northern Ireland, parts of the Republic of Ireland and, on a clear day, to Scotland. In doing so, it (re)engages the city with other scales and landscapes of nation and identity.

Likewise, the local landscape of Divis Mountain may evoke broader landscapes of home and diaspora. Askins (2006: 165) stresses the importance of rurality within nationality as cross-national and cross-cultural. She points to the ways in which individuals can develop attachment to the countryside through connections between one rural landscape and another, for example, the English Peak District and the Himalayas. The following interview extract, spoken by a participant named Chudi from Nigeria, illustrates this concept:

Oh, we have fantastic views in Africa. Breathtaking ones... I mean, you wouldn't want to actually go up [to Divis] as somebody who comes from, say, close to Kilimanjaro. He wouldn't want to go to

Divis Mountain...But without Kilimanjaro, in Belfast, suddenly it will do. (Interview, 22 September 2007)

For Chudi, Divis Mountain evokes a very different and distant mountainous landscape, which he summons rhetorically for comparison. Although Nigeria frames a powerful identity for Chudi, which surfaces repeatedly in other conversations, he conjures 'Africa' as his point of origin and belonging. Kilimanjaro may rise on the far side of the continent from his Nigerian birthplace, but Chudi nonetheless claims it as totemic of home. He compares Divis unfavorably to the 'breathtaking' view of Kilimanjaro, yet in its absence, 'suddenly it will do.' In this way, Divis Mountain connects him to another, preferred landscape of his narrated past while simultaneously serving as a substitute in that of his present.

For the participants from ACSONI, Divis Mountain invites speculation on a strange point of connection, or disconnection, between land, culture and identity:

As we walk, I point out the Mourne Mountains, the military towers, and the bulk of earth to our right that comprises Black Mountain. Cal and Chudi pretend to take offense at the name. I suggest that maybe they should claim it as their own. 'Yeah!' cries Cal. 'We'll use it for ACSONI meetings.' (Research Diary, 22 September 2007)

As I discussed in Chapter Five, the summit of Divis and the lower elevation of Black Mountain comprise one mountain, and 'Divis' derives from the Irish word for 'black,' in reference to the dark peat soil. In the absence of this etymological knowledge, however, Chudi and Cal bring their own embodied experience of 'black' to the landscape. They seize, perhaps jokingly, its negative implications. 'Black' becomes a trope that, momentarily, links land to identity for these new migrants to Belfast. At my suggestion, Cal and Chudi invert its potential negative connotations and 'claim it as their own.' By embracing the dual meanings of 'black,' they inscribe their own identities – reinforced imaginatively, if provisionally, through Cal's enthusiastic vision of a meeting venue – in the landscape of Divis.

In its transformation from off-limits military property to a place of public ownership, Divis Mountain represents the type of 'shared space' envisioned through the peace process and enshrined in government policy (for example, Lownsbrough and Beunderman 2007). Tolia-Kelly (2006: 348, citing Anderson et al 2000), drawing on her research of British Asians in the English landscape, argues that their experiences 'create a space for imagining inclusive, utopian visions

of territory, which enable a sense of enfranchisement and ownership.’ On Divis Mountain, however, these ‘utopian visions’ prove to be elusive:

- Lia I mean, do you feel that you would be able to go up to the mountains and feel like they belonged to you, as well?
- Cal No, I never think that nothing in this country belongs to me. You know? I always feel like – I never think that anything in this country belongs to me...I’ll always be Jamaican. You know? (Interview, 22 September 2007)

This exchange with Cal exposes the fragility of his earlier, playful inscription of belonging on Black Mountain. When I raise the prospect of Divis Mountain and the Belfast hills as sites of public belonging, Cal counters with a forceful assertion: ‘I never think that nothing in this country belongs to me.’ He highlights an interesting interplay between the concepts of belonging *in* a place versus a place belonging *to* him. For Cal, the limitations of the latter shape his experience of the former; his proclamation of Jamaican identity can be read, in part, as a reaction to his sense of exclusion. Although the only Jamaican present at this interview, his repeated invocation – ‘You know’ – suggests a desire for validation, directed toward the other participants or even toward myself. By implicating his audience in a shared experience of exclusion, he positions his singular Jamaican identity in a broader, shared, communal context of difference.

The encounters that I describe between ethnic minorities and Divis Mountain offer a glimpse into the multiple place identities that the participants carry to Belfast, and up the mountain, contributing to the disruption of what Askins (2006: 161) describes as the ‘white rural myth’ of the countryside. Yet what distinguishes Divis from other landscapes perceived as white and rural are the long shadows of sectarian conflict to which my interview participants allude. Their negotiations of multiple identities encompass not only the racialized dynamics of a predominantly white society, but its sectarian fractures as well.

2. *11th Night Bonfires*

Unlike Divis Mountain, with its fixed coordinates and singular physical presence, the 11th Night bonfires form a varied landscape across loyalist Belfast, differing dramatically in size, circumstance and location. In this way, the bonfires provide an excellent counterpoint to Divis,

and offer a distinctly urban dimension for exploring the expression of minority ethnic identities in a city recovering from violent conflict. In Chapter Six, I discussed the transformation of the bonfire landscape with regard to loyalist cultural identity, heritage and tradition. From this thematic intersection, I now situate and develop my analysis of minority ethnic identities in the peace process.

As I discussed in Chapter Four, my role as a community practitioner gave me unparalleled access to the process and players of the loyalist bonfires, while my research interests around ethnic minorities contributed, in a small way, to the discourse around their transformation. In the spring of 2008, roughly the half-way point for the three-year Bonfire Management Programme, I was assigned to facilitate discussions about cultural heritage with nine loyalist neighbourhoods new to the Bonfire Management Programme. In these discussions, I inquired gently about the participants' relations with their ethnic minority neighbours. My queries at times provoked hostile reactions, as this exchange with a local youth worker in North Belfast illustrates:

I explain my affiliation with Groundwork, with the [Bonfire Management] programme, and I mention a little bit of the work I do around ethnic minority engagement.

'Excuse me,' interrupts Trevor, 'but what do ethnic minorities have to do with this?' His tone is belligerent rather than curious.
(Research Diary, 18 June 2008)

Trevor's reaction can be read as an expression of the so-called 'siege mentality' prevalent in loyalist areas. To this man, and to others like him, enquiries around minority ethnic engagement heighten anxieties about a tradition that they perceive as under threat already from gentrification and increasingly vocal public disapproval.

In other loyalist areas, however, participants were more open to exploring issues around diversity, inclusion and the bonfires. The following excerpt, from a discussion I facilitated with a group of teenaged boys in North Belfast, illustrates the informal dialogues that are taking shape in these communities:

Graymount is now home to a noticeable number of Polish residents, among others. The boys communicate a wariness toward the newcomers that is neither hostile nor welcoming. From the back

of the room, [a community worker] points out that if the foreigners don't engage with the local community, it's because they aren't treated terribly well. Later, she will tell me that the problem lies mostly with the attitude of the local adults. For now, though, she tells us that her next-door neighbours are Polish, and that 'they're dead on.' This elicits a storm of echoes from the boys, several of whom also know non-local neighbours who are also 'dead on.'

My favorite comment of the evening gestures toward potential ethnic minority inclusion in Graymount's bonfire. One lad observes that among the Polish residents are 'big, strong men. They should be helping us build it.' The others agree. (Research Diary, 2 July 2008)

This extract illuminates complex negotiations around tradition, culture and identity amongst the loyalist bonfire builders. For one participant, quickly echoed by the others, their 'big, strong' Polish neighbours have a role, perhaps even a responsibility, to contribute to the construction of the community's bonfire. Their provisional incorporation of Polish men, who are predominantly Catholic, illustrates the negotiations – perhaps once unimaginable – at work in the transforming bonfire tradition.

As I discussed in Chapter Three, loyalist areas are rife with tensions, frequently expressed negatively toward Belfast's increasingly visible minority ethnic residents. Although racist violence is widespread across the city, it is particularly prevalent in loyalist neighbourhoods, illustrating a 'synergy between Loyalism and racism' (McVeigh 2006). These tensions are expressed in extortion, politics of fear and, perhaps most chillingly, the paramilitary-directed messages of hate toward minority ethnic residents and their businesses (see Chan 2006). Against this backdrop, the transformation of 11th Night bonfires offers rich scope for exploring how ethnic minorities negotiate their senses of belonging in 'post-conflict' Belfast.

(In)visible Identities

In Northern Ireland, ethnic minorities have long negotiated their visual distinction – made all the more striking for the backdrop of a predominantly, although not homogenous, white society – with the dynamics of (in)visibility. The peace process has disrupted the political dynamics that held sway during the Troubles, ushering in a new era to which all parties must now adapt. For Belfast's ethnic minorities, and particularly for those who are long-term residents with

a basis for comparison, the past decade has wrought uncomfortable changes in the wake of peace. The following quotation, by a male interview participant at the Belfast Islamic Centre, illustrates his perception of these changes:

We had a good time. We had a good time. Before, they are fighting together, they don't see us. Now, they're no more fighting together. They can see, 'Oh, that's a Chinese. That's Indian. That's West African.' (Interview, 30 November 2007)

His nostalgic recollection – 'We had a good time' – harkens an era of welcome invisibility, when preoccupation with the Troubles limited the peripheral vision of the combatants and allowed minority ethnic residents to live quietly and unnoticed. He now traces a clear link between the ceasefires and the sudden exposure of ethnic minorities living locally. Likewise, another participant at the Islamic Centre expands on this link:

Look, we don't want to sound negative, but this is...the fact of life. When there is a struggle between two types of communities, they are too busy to even see what's surrounding them...Peace is good. But, we don't want to pay a negative price for this peace. Where [before] you used to fight with your Catholic neighbour, now you are in peace, or seeming peace, now you are going to look over and say... 'Who are these people living here? Oh, I never noticed them before. Now I notice them. Oh, he's taking my job. Oh, he's taking the housing.' (Interview, 30 November 2007)

In this empathetic account, the speaker attempts to understand the dynamics between the ceasefires and the 'negative price' that ethnic minorities have paid for peace. He inhabits the perspective of a loyalist who once fought with a 'Catholic neighbour,' turning his gaze on ethnic minorities, like himself, who become suddenly visible through the peacetime threats – to housing, to jobs – that they now imply. Through adopting, briefly, the identity of a generic loyalist, this interview participant attempts to understand the factors that now render ethnic minorities both visible and vulnerable in a society hostile to their presence.

Although prejudice and racism persist throughout the year, there is a sense amongst the interview participants that bonfire season exacerbates the potential for negative attention. In the

following excerpt, drawn from a discussion with members of the Bangladeshi community, Quazi clearly links rising levels of racial abuse to the 12th of July:

- Quazi And being coloured. You know, you get abuse...
- Lia Do you think it's worse on the 12th than at other times of year?
- Quazi Definitely. (Interview, 7 July 2008)

He bluntly identifies his physical difference, 'being coloured,' as the motivation for his abuse. Later in the same interview, Quazi's nephew Mihir observes that 'these bonfires make people more motivate(d) to do bad things.' Between them, Quazi and Mihir describe a cycle of racism, bonfires, visibility and abuse, in which one element amplifies the others in mid-July's increasingly fevered pitch.

For this reason, newcomers to Belfast are frequently warned, often by their compatriots, to avoid the bonfires. As one participant from ACSONI cautions: 'I wouldn't encourage being, uh, visible...at something like that. I would never go. I have no business being there' (Interview, 8 February 2008). Yet for others, the spectacle of the bonfires holds an allure. In an interview at the Indian Community Centre, one couple spoke of their cautious, occasional forays to their nearest bonfire:

- Priya But we stay very out, you know, out of the environment –
- Rav Behind, behind, behind it.
- Priya Because we are very easily noticed, you know, we are noticed far quicker than anybody else in the whole room. So we stay pretty well behind. And we go there and have a look and then come back. (Interview, 20 August 2007)

Priya and Rav are long-term residents of Belfasts. They attended their first bonfire in 1959, before the Troubles began. At that time, their visible difference intrigued the local loyalist community, who welcomed their presence at the bonfire. Several decades later, however, this couple has a far different relationship with the tradition, with the positive memories of that first bonfire now resting uneasily alongside the contemporary experience of danger and fear. Despite their misgivings, this couple continues to attend the bonfire, although they negotiate their visibility carefully by sticking to the periphery, 'behind' the action and the crowds.

For the participants at the Indian Community Centre, this discussion about visibility at loyalist bonfires opens into a broader discussion of prejudice in Belfast:

Priya The thing [is] Indians are very easily spotted, as well, that day.

Lia So you are very visible.

Rav Yeah. Especially now. Remarks, actually. It hurts how you take the remarks.

Priya No, but you can't take all remarks.

Rav Well, if you take it, you know, lightly, you know, if they call me a funny man, you know, I wouldn't mind.

Priya But if they call you a Paki, you don't take it lightly.

[This elicits a reaction from the entire group, with multiple people commenting on this common experience.]

Priya They can't tell the difference anyway. (Interview, 20 August 2007)

Their visibility heightens on the 12th – a day that celebrates a culture that is loyalist and, implicitly, white, and on which 'Indians are very easily spotted.' Rav's transition, from the concept of heightened visibility to hurtful 'remarks,' may be abrupt, but it also describes a correlation between the two. The exchange that follows describes varied ways for negotiating these 'remarks,' but Priya's reference to 'Paki' serves as a lightning rod of shared experience. In Northern Ireland, 'Paki' serves as a catch-all derogatory term for any individual of South Asian descent, and one which the taunters show little discernment in applying. As Priya bitterly observes, 'They can't tell the difference anyway.' In a curious twist, the 'remarks' themselves can render the participants *invisible*, even as their physical visibility garners the unwanted attention.

This theme surfaced, with even greater nuance, in a later interview with members of the Bangladeshi community. The following extract is a dialogue with two men: Quazi, a restaurant owner who has lived in Northern Ireland for nearly three decades, and his nephew, Mihir.

Lia Do you get a lot of people, um, assuming that...you're Indian?

Mihir We're terrorists. That's what they think.

- Quazi No, to them, you know, any coloured, you know, Asian, we are 'Pakis.'
- Mihir Yeah.
- Quazi That's what it is...It doesn't matter if you are from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh...(Interview, 7 July 2008)

In this extract, the participants describe two inaccurate and racially coded (or 'coloured') identities that have been ascribed to them: 'terrorist' and 'Paki.' The former is particularly ironic, considering that both republican and loyalist combatants engaged in terrorist activities during the Troubles. The latter, however, holds particular poignancy for these men, with regard to Bangladesh's own brutal 20th century war with Pakistan. Like Priya at the Indian Community Centre, Quazi observes that in Northern Ireland 'it doesn't matter if you are from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh.' The amorphous slur of 'Paki' elides national and cultural identities, subsuming their nuance and, in doing so, renders invisible the distinctions of these identities.

The examples that I have presented in this section illustrate some of the ways in which Northern Ireland's society renders ethnic minorities visible or invisible. However, it is also crucial to consider the ways in which ethnic minorities, themselves, actively negotiate their own (in)visibility. Hainsworth (1998: 3) notes that during the Troubles, politicians praised individuals from ethnic minority communities for 'keeping their heads down' and 'not bothering anyone.' Such praise, he laments, suggests 'an unfortunate view of a would-be passive citizenry expectation for ethnic minority persons.' Hainsworth's indignation is understandable, but his reading of passivity fails to recognize how a low profile can also be read as an active strategy for survival. I encountered this in my own research, as I sought to arrange discussions about bonfires with various minority ethnic community groups across Belfast. As part of the process of approaching Belfast Jewish Community, I arranged a preliminary meeting with the organization's representative to the Minority Ethnic and Faith Network. She warned me that Jewish residents in Belfast choose to 'keep their heads down' and avoid engaging in politically-sensitive dialogue (Research Diary, 26 November 2007). As predicted, the official gatekeeper for Belfast Jewish Community responded to my request with a polite but terse email, wishing me luck with my project but effectively shutting down the possibility for further communication. I read their silence not as passive, but as an active, political negotiation of cultural identity in a delicate and volatile society.

My exploration of the political potential of visibility and invisibility speaks to the work of feminist geographer Hyams (2004), who argues that disproportionate attention given to ‘voices’ in group discussion (dis)misses meaningful silences and the ways they give shape to and are shaped by experience. She observes: ‘Silence is most often equated with absence and voice with presence – literally and figuratively’ (*ibid*: 109). A parallel logic could apply to the absence of invisibility and presence of visibility. In contrast to a straightforward assignment of value, a multidimensional and situational interpretation of (in)visibility reveals more nuanced understanding of how ethnic minorities can resist and rework simplistic and ignorant readings of their identities.

‘Flying the Flags of Fear’³

In Belfast, where territorial aspirations are emphatically marked through visual displays, the 11th Night bonfires represent a high-profile opportunity, literally and figuratively, for loyalists to assert their claims of identity. As a bonfire grows toward the sky, its builders will drape it with the flags of their culture: the Union Jack, the Ulster flag, the Northern Ireland flag and, on some sites, the flags of various paramilitary organizations. As midnight on 11th Night approaches, these flags are removed for safekeeping, and symbols of Irish republicanism are hoisted in their stead. In recent years, effigies of the Pope have given way to campaign posters of republican and nationalist politicians. Common to all, however, is the Irish Tricolour, which adorns the top of the bonfire and, significantly, is burned at midnight. In this way, the loyalist bonfires physically consume nationalist-republican aspirations; the version of Northern Ireland that is affirmed on 11th Night is one that is culturally and politically British in identity.

While the flags signify and affirm the patriotism of loyalist bonfire celebrants, they draw Belfast’s minority ethnic residents into a very different conversation about place and identity. For the minority ethnic participants whom I interviewed, the presence of flags on the bonfire, and the burning of the Irish Tricolour, in particular, elicited a visceral emotional response that draws forth their own expressions of national and cultural identity. In the following excerpt, drawn from an interview with the Bangladeshi community, two men articulate their condemnation of the loyalist tradition:

³ Hamber 2006

Mihir I mean, once you've seen a flag being burnt, that, to me, that's significant enough...To me, that's like hating another side...

Quazi Well, you won the war, so, you know – They won the war, uh, by – What's that called? Battle of Boyne, or something. [Laughs]

Lia In 1690. Three centuries ago.

Mihir There's a difference between celebrating your independence and celebrating hate. Conquering another community, or another race...It actually reminds people of that hate...I think the message to young people is: 'Look, we're better, we're superior...and we hate them.'
(Interview, 7 July 2008)

Mihir begins this exchange by voicing his disapproval of the flag-burning – a practice that he interprets as a loathsome symbol of hatred. His uncle, who moved to Northern Ireland nearly 30 years ago, responds by playing the devil's advocate: Quazi laughingly offers the Battle of the Boyne as justification of the practice. Mihir responds by pressing his point, articulating an important distinction 'between celebrating your independence and celebrating hate.' In doing so, he echoes the larger dialogue taking place in contemporary loyalism: How can loyalists define themselves positively, in terms of what they *are* (British, unionist, Protestant), rather than negatively, in terms of what they are *not* (Irish, nationalist, Catholic) (Graham 2004). Mihir links the conquerors' reenactment of victory to the perpetuation of hatred. Moreover, and as I discussed in the previous section, unspoken in this exchange between the two Bangladeshi men is the haunting spectre of their own national and cultural history, and the brutal civil war that created Bangladesh from East Pakistan. This parallel illuminates the ways in which Northern Ireland's ethnic minority residents bring their own cultural and historical perspectives to bear on what is to them a bizarre loyalist tradition.

In recent years, the controversy around flags and bonfires has widened in geographic scope. At some bonfire sites, Israeli flags now fly alongside the Union Jack and other traditional symbols of loyalist patriotism; on occasion, the Palestinian flag burns alongside the Irish Tricolour. Paradoxically, these symbols have become more significant in Northern Ireland's relatively peaceful post-ceasefire period. According to Hill and White (2008), the republican movement has supported Palestine since the late-1970s, as they sought to position themselves in

the vanguard of global anti-imperialist struggles. In West Belfast, the heartland of republicanism, symbols of support and sympathy for the Palestinian cause have increased since 2002.

Although the links between Palestine and Irish republicanism are well developed in the academic literature (Bell 2004; Coogan 1995; Hanley and Millar 2009), the connection between Israel and loyalism is more difficult to decipher. Hill and White (2008) trace the flying of Israeli flags in loyalist areas to April 2002, which they read as a direct response to the increased prevalence of Palestinian flags in republican areas. One way to read the connection between Israel and loyalism relates to the theory of the 'lost tribe of Israel.' Its proponents belong to a hardline Christian sect that believes Ulster Protestants to be the true lost tribe, and therefore Ulster the true last bastion of Christianity in Europe (Cusack and McDonald 2008: 378). The Israeli flag therefore emphasizes their self-image as a chosen people with a spiritually sanctioned claim to the land (Hill and White 2008: 38). Another reading relates to the refusal of some loyalist areas to fly flags that hold links with the right-wing British National Party and the anti-semitic hate organization Combat 18 (Figure 7.3). According to this theory, the flying of the Israeli flag may be read as symbolic opposition to anti-white supremacy.

Regardless of the loyalists' reasoning, the presence of Israeli flags sparks dialogue among Belfast's Muslim community, whose members would sympathize predominantly with the Palestinian cause. The director of the Belfast Islamic Centre believes that loyalists fly the Israeli flag because they interpret it as 'anti-Catholic.' His contempt for their ignorance is echoed in the discussion with a group of Muslim men at the Islamic Centre:

Hassan That's the culture of flags, you know, that's what, eh, Catholic area flying the, the Palestinian flag. Then –

Tariq Protestant, they burn the Palestinian flag. With the, with the Irish flag. Okay? And then, same as Catholic, you know, they burn the British flag along with the Israeli flag. They just taking each other's.

Lia Do you feel that the Protestants and Catholics understand the symbolism of these flags?

Hassan Symbolism of...fighting against the hatreds against one another. (Interview, 30 November 2007)

The controversy surrounding the flying of the Palestinian and Israeli flags draws Belfast's Muslim population into a larger dialogue with 11th Night bonfires, and with Northern Ireland

itself. For these men, many of whom expressed with great eloquence their unease and fear with the loyalist bonfire tradition, the visual battle being played out between Palestine and Israel complicates their own relationship with the Northern Ireland conflict. Below, I explore the complexities of these relationships.

Bonfires and Belonging

Residents who hail from neither of Northern Ireland's dominant ethnic blocs can find themselves sidelined by the 12th of July and the contentious debate prompted every year by the 11th Night bonfires. The virulent anti-nationalist rhetoric around the bonfires inevitably engages Catholics in dialogue, through which republicanism can reaffirm its own strong claims to land, culture and identity. Between the two extremes of the conflict, however, is the uncertain space in which ethnic minorities attempt to anchor their own sense of participation and belonging in Northern Ireland.

Among the other challenges discussed previously, loyalist bonfires also stage confrontations for ethnic minority individuals who hold powerful cultural beliefs about fire. The following extract is drawn from an interview with the Minority, Ethnic and Faith Network,⁴ in which Pritam describes the role of fire in his Hindu religious practice:

Earth, water, air, sky and earth. These are the five elements. And we are made with those five elements. And once we dissolve we just turn up into those five again. So in Indian religion, the fire is significance. We don't burn anything bad into it. (Interview, 8 April 2008)

As I discussed in Chapter Six, loyalist bonfires frequently comprise rubber tyres, electrical appliances and discarded furniture, alongside chemically-treated wooden pallets; the sites become, in essence, seasonal rubbish tips that go up in flame on 11th Night. According to the belief system that Pritam describes above, loyalist bonfires therefore represent pollution that is spiritual as well as physical. Along similar lines, the participants whom I interviewed at the Belfast Islamic Centre describe another way in which 11th Night bonfires transgress boundaries of faith and culture:

⁴ As I discussed in Chapter Four, the Minority, Ethnic and Faith Network is the umbrella for the emerging minority ethnic community sector in Northern Ireland.

Karim As a Muslim, as soon as you see fire, you show your fear from God...Fire is really well-hated in Islam.

Hassan You go to hell.

Karim Fire is well-hated in our religion. Really...I mean, in our holy book, from page one to the last page of it, it's all God is warning us from hellfire, hellfire, hellfire, hellfire.

Tariq ...In Islam, it says, 'If you are not believe in God, you will be thrown into the –

[Multiple voices] Hellfire (Interview, 30 November 2007)

Unlike the reverence that Pritam depicts, these participants describe an interpretation of fire that emerges from and inspires fear. On 11th Night, the loyalist cultural landscape evokes 'hellfire' in tangible, three-dimensional form. Although these two extracts differ markedly in their interpretation of fire, together they illustrate the tensions between cultural identity, belief and bonfires. The challenge for ethnic minorities from these communities, among others, is to reconcile aspects of their own cultural identities with the highly public performance of the loyalist bonfire tradition.

In his influential study on 'landscapes of fear,' Tuan (1979: 6) links these landscapes to 'psychological states and...tangible environments.' The phrase aptly describes the bonfires on 11th Night for ethnic minority residents, who adopt various strategies for negotiating this landscape. Not surprisingly, avoidance is a popular tactic. As one man from the Belfast Islamic Centre proclaims bluntly:

I wouldn't go to a bonfire in case I would be thrown into it. You know what I'm saying? You know, like the way they throw cats in it. (Interview, 30 November 2007)

Another interview participant, however, provides a more nuanced explanation. Harold, an African-American man who came to Northern Ireland in the early 1990s, observes that a bonfire is 'not really the best environment to find yourself in because, as they say here, nobody knows what foot you kick with' (Interview, 8 February 2008). He refers to a vernacular expression, popularized during the Troubles, which avers that Protestants and Catholics can be distinguished

by ‘what foot you kick with’ – whether left or right.⁵ With this comment, Harold provides a practical illustration of how Northern Ireland’s pervasive sectarianism ‘structures the way in which racism is...experienced’ (McVeigh 1998: 20). Moreover, his comment also illuminates how ethnic minorities negotiate anxieties about racism and xenophobia in a sectarian society.

Underlying such tactics of avoidance are the ways in which ethnic minorities frame their relationship to the bonfires and, more broadly, to Northern Ireland’s pervasive sectarian culture. The following quotation comes from Quazi, a Bangladeshi restaurant owner who moved here nearly 30 years ago:

But to us, uh, it’s nothing. It’s just a bonfire for us. But as for them, you know, it’s more like a political thing. They celebrate their, uh, achievement or something like that...I don’t understand all that, you know. Politics, Irish politics, or all that...I stay out of it. (Interview, 7 July 2008)

He stages a stark contrast between ‘us,’ for whom bonfires mean ‘nothing,’ and ‘them.’ His hesitation when trying to explain the history behind bonfires – ‘They celebrate their, uh, achievement or something like that’ – signals a vague understanding and, thus, positions him as neutrally as possible. Furthermore, he lumps the bonfire into the amorphous category of ‘Irish politics,’ which he purposefully avoids. Quazi’s arrival in Northern Ireland long pre-dates that of many minority ethnic residents, but the sentiments that underpin his survival strategies find echoes in the experiences of others. In the following extract, Matama, a young professional from Kenya, describes his own methods for maintaining distance from the bonfires:

Doesn’t really affect me. I mean, this is a tradition by people who live here. And I’m a visitor here...This is their business. And, uh, I respect that, and...it doesn’t bother me...I mean, you just keep away, do your bit. (Interview, 8 February 2008)

Despite his plans to remain in Belfast indefinitely, Matama identifies himself as a ‘visitor.’ In doing so, he positions himself as separate from the ‘people who live here’; the distinction allows

⁵ Another similar vernacular expression distinguishes Protestants from Catholics by the pronunciation of the letter ‘H.’

him to frame his attitude toward the bonfires as one of 'respect.' Like the gatekeepers from the Jewish community, Matama chooses to 'keep away.'

The 'political potential' (Hyams 2004: 105) of Matama's choice, however, is compromised by the very people he seeks to avoid. In keeping with common practice, the local loyalist leadership in Matama's neighbourhood approached him for a monetary donation.

One of the guys on my street...came around to the door one day, and was asking for donation...We made our little donation to put things [flags] on the street, on the roads...It's a small street and, you know, you don't see a lot of people on it. So there was no chance of any of the big, bad boys coming on the street as well, you know? And the marchers tended to behave themselves. I mean, the guys, they tend to behave themselves. So it was safe, and, uh, I don't think I made a big mistake, donating to, to, to that decorations, uh, effect, you know?

Collections such as that which Matama describes are frequently organized and implemented by individuals with paramilitary connections, thus turning the appeal for 'donations' into an exercise in intimidation and coercion. Matama's account illuminates the challenge of reconciling his desire to 'keep away' with the demands of his loyalist neighbours, who engage him – however unwillingly – with the bonfires. Matama reports making a 'small' donation for the decorations. He then attempts to justify this act through a variety of reasons: the size of his street precludes the arrival of 'big, bad boys'; 'the marchers tended to behave themselves'; 'it was safe.' Toward the end of the extract, however, he seems to seek reassurance: 'I don't think I made a big mistake.' Despite the justifications he has provided, the uncertainty in this statement suggests that he harbours doubts about his collusion, however small, with the local loyalist paramilitary presence.

In contrast to Matama's experience of unwilling complicity, Jacquie, a black woman from England, reveals during the same interview that she has never been approached for a donation. She explains that when she moved into a loyalist estate, her confidence and strength of character communicated to her neighbours 'what I stood for.' According to Jacquie, 'paramilitaries were told, 'Don't go to this house.'" She acknowledges, however, a more complex relationship between power, fear and exclusion that permeates the lead-up to mid-July:

So there's that whole intimidation thing there going on in the estate...before the bonfire, they are knocking on people's doors and they are trying to collect money. But...you couldn't feel a part of it because it's not – it's not something you ever – celebratory of black people. So...if there's a black person in a particular house...you'd be passed by. (Interview, 8 February 2008)

In this passage, Jacquie describes how the dynamics of intimidation enter into the practice of money collection, to fund activities that 'you couldn't feel a part of.' Not surprisingly, she is unable to see a celebration of her black identity reflected in the tradition. Her active voice, however, shifts suddenly at the end of this extract: 'if there's a black person in a particular house...you'd be passed by.' Running through and intermingled with her relief is, perhaps, an awareness of her exclusion.

The domination of sectarian politics and problems sidelines ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland throughout the year, but bonfires serve to intensify the sense of exclusion. As an interview participant from Nigeria, who has lived in Belfast for ten years, explains:

I think around that time of the year, that's when you actually feel you don't belong here...as a foreigner, when you know those things are coming, you actually book your holiday. You want to get out. (Interview, 8 February 2008).

His response to his sense of exclusion 'as a foreigner' is to embody it through his physical absence. The desire to leave also runs through this passage by a long-term resident from the Belfast Islamic Centre:

You don't feel you belong to it. If you feel the belonging sense, yes, you would stay...I been here more than twenty years...And I still don't feel I belong to this kind of, you know, um, culture, if you want to call it, you know. Which, you know, a bonfire, you know, you just don't – you don't – because you are not welcome to it. (Interview, 30 November 2007)

Although the two extracts differ, perhaps, in the degree of exclusion – the speaker in the first extract feels that he does not belong, whereas the speaker of the second believes that he is ‘not welcome to it’ – both acknowledge clearly the negative impact of 11th Night bonfires on cultivating a sense of belonging to Northern Ireland.

Hope, perhaps, might be drawn from the example of another bonfire tradition. In several interview discussions with minority ethnic groups, the 5th of November emerged as a successful contrast to the 11th of July. The frequency with which Guy Fawkes was mentioned speaks to the dynamics of diaspora, with many of Northern Ireland’s minority ethnic residents having migrated more recently from ‘mainland’ Britain. Although based in historic events as sectarian as those that inform 11th Night, Guy Fawkes evokes far more muted meanings for the interview participants. In the following extract, a man whom I interviewed through the Chinese Welfare Association enthusiastically compares England’s 5th of November to Northern Ireland’s 11th Night:

Guy Fawkes Night...it was a family outing. There’s no, no sectarianism in that...So that’s the difference. But if you look at the way that in England, Guy Fawkes night is really a day out for the family. It’s nothing else. (Interview, 21 August 2008)

Although this speaker emphatically declares that Guy Fawkes holds ‘no sectarianism,’ its historic ironies are not lost on other participants. The following extract is drawn from an interview with a member of the Bangladeshi community:

If you think about it, the Guy Fawkes Day, that’s not a good history anyway. And, uh, the history behind it, that’s not really something that you celebrate. [Laughs] But now they forget about it...they just enjoy themselves. (Interview, 7 July 2008)

Similar sentiments were expressed by a participant from the Belfast Islamic Centre:

Nobody thinks about *why* it’s taking place. It’s all about: ‘Oh, this is good fun, let’s go.’ But it’s not like that here yet. (Interview, 30 November 2007)

These speakers seem to suggest that a level of historical amnesia applies to the Guy Fawkes tradition, which renders its festivities less fraught with danger, and therefore inclusive for all. One participant from the Bangladeshi community offers his interpretation of its ethos succinctly: 'Yes, it has a different message...[I]t becomes a celebration for the British people.' (Interview, 7 July 2008)

Is similar potential within reach for Northern Ireland? In a discussion at the Belfast Islamic Centre, one participant articulated his vision for 11th Night bonfires:

I would like the bonfire to be a nice night out. Go and enjoy it, and sit with the extreme ones. Go to the carnival, the Shankill, you are a foreigner, you are a black. Sit there, enjoy the fire. And enjoy the 12th, enjoy St Patrick Day. What is it to do? You know what I mean? I only live here! Let me enjoy both.

In this extract, the participant reworks an imaginary bonfire for an inclusive society. In doing so, he nonetheless affirms its place in loyalist culture by acknowledging the presence of the 'extreme ones' (perhaps a paramilitary reference) and the location of this imaginary bonfire in the loyalist heartland of the Shankill. Crucially, however, this speaker imagines himself in a society that can tolerate – and perhaps even welcome – his presence at both the loyalist 12th of July and the republican St Patrick's Day celebrations. In recent years, festivities for St Patrick's Day, while still largely perceived as culturally republican, have begun to encompass other forms of ethnic diversity, for example in the composition of the annual parade through Belfast City Centre. Although loyalists lag behind their republican counterparts, there are signs that a similar shift may be possible. In Chapter Six, I discussed the successful launch of the beacon at Woodvale Park in July 2008 and my colleague's observation: 'In a couple years, you could picture a Catholic family coming here during the day' (Research Diary, 11 July 2008). As loyalists come to terms with the transformations at work in their tradition, perhaps one day, too, for Northern Ireland's ethnic minorities the bonfire will be nothing more threatening than 'a nice night out.'

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the transformations at work in the Northern Ireland peace process through the perspectives of minority ethnic residents. Surprisingly, academics and practitioners have tended to overlook their presence in both analyses of and practical engagement with peacebuilding. Although my case studies of Divis Mountain and 11th Night bonfires yielded fascinating insights into republican and loyalist cultural identities, the inclusion of minority ethnic voices (and silences) renders a fuller, more dynamic understanding of the multiple dimensions to conflict transformation.

My findings suggest that Belfast's contested landscapes provoke ethnic minorities to negotiate complex dynamics of alienation, belonging and identity. For example, the participants who accompanied me on guided walking tours of Divis described the challenges of moving through a city that is infamous for its territoriality. For new migrants, in particular, these intricacies can exacerbate the bewildering process of learning the local landscapes. Also bewildering are the 11th Night bonfires that position and implicate ethnic minorities in unpredictable ways. For instance, the recent practice in some loyalist neighbourhoods of burning the Palestinian flag draws some members of the Belfast Islamic Centre into a dialogue, however one-sided, in which they did not want to participate. The discussions that I facilitated with minority ethnic community groups yielded diverse experiences. For example, the interview with the Afro-Caribbean Society featured both Matama, who felt compelled to 'donate' to the neighbourhood's monetary collection for patriotic decorations, and Jacquie, who credits the force of her personality for keeping would-be collectors at bay. These are just some of the practices that ethnic minorities employ to navigate the complex politics of racism and sectarianism in Northern Ireland.

By re-framing the contested landscapes that I examined in the two preceding chapters, I emphasize the role of ethnic minorities in re-making Northern Ireland's 'post-conflict' cultural landscapes. I argue that their diverse memories and narratives contribute to the transformations at work through the peace process. Tolia-Kelly (2004: 278, original emphasis) illuminates these dynamics in her study of British Asian women: 'For the women in the study, marginalized from the national landscape of Britain, *other* landscapes and ecologies become sites of affirming individual and collective identities, and these shift British identity.' In similar ways, Northern Ireland's ethnic minorities bring a vast range of other landscapes to bear on the divided, sectarian landscape of their current location. Tolia-Kelly's insights into the continual process of re-making Englishness illuminate similar possibilities

for Northern Ireland. The re-making of Northern Ireland involves, in part, its re-scaling in wider geographies of engagement and belonging. To this end, Northern Ireland's ethnic minorities play an invaluable role.

Throughout this thesis, I have sought to uncover ways in which transformations of contested cultural landscapes might yield new forms of identity that can sustain – and be sustained by – a peacetime society. In her study of young British Muslim women, Dwyer (2002) argues that it is possible to see, through negotiations of 'new ethnicities' and 'hybrid identities,' how new forms of national belonging within a postcolonial Britain might be imagined. Her argument resonates powerfully for Northern Ireland, where new forms of belonging are desperately needed for a divided and increasingly diverse 'post-conflict' society. Even as they recall experiences of hardship, racism and exclusion, the minority ethnic participants whom I interviewed embody possibilities for a non-sectarian future.

I end this chapter with the words of an older man from the Belfast Islamic Centre:

We are here now. We are here with the children, and the children [are] born here, they grow here, they love the soil of this place. They want to make a living here, they want to stay here for rest of their time...That's why we are hoping to get good peace in the future, you see. (Interview, 30 November 2007)

This eloquent statement disproves any assumptions that in Northern Ireland, passion for the land is the remit of republicans and loyalists alone. 'Good peace' belongs to all, regardless of political affiliation. I argue that scholarship on Northern Ireland must expand beyond its traditional, binary model of sectarian conflict to acknowledge how diverse relationships and communities are equally vital to a society emerging from violent conflict.



Figure 7.1. Members of the Afro-Caribbean Society on Divis Mountain. Photo by the author.



Figure 7.2. View of Belfast from Divis. The Springmartin peace line is visible behind the cow on the left. Photo courtesy of Belfast Hills Partnership.

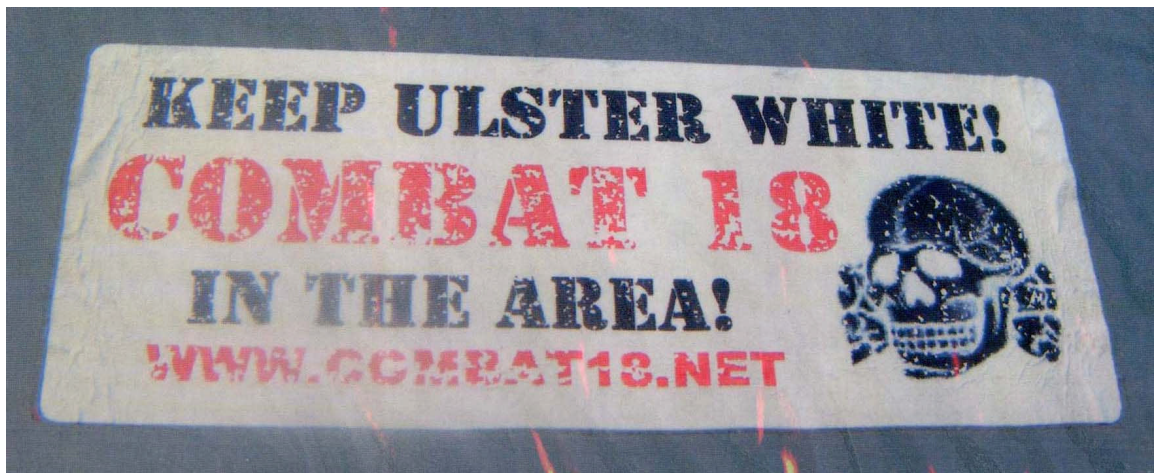


Figure 7.3. Racist sign posted on the Shankill Road, West Belfast. Photo by Henri Mohammed.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: New Narratives of Identity and Place

Introduction

In its broadest sense, this thesis explores cultural geographies of peacebuilding. By positioning my project at the crossroads of cultural geography and conflict transformation theory, I have developed a theoretical approach that emphasizes how relationships between identity and place underpin conflict over contested territory. Through my empirical research in Northern Ireland, I have demonstrated that these relationships – and hence their transformations – are crucial for building peace in conflicts based on competing territorial claims.

From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, the literature on conflict and peace is plentiful. My own project contributes to this body of scholarship, while pushing further into new theoretical terrain where cultural geography and conflict transformation theory intersect. Although I bring to my work a healthy respect for the harder, high-profile politics of peace – for discourses of governance and democracy, legislation and policy – my fascination lies with ordinary people and the extraordinary lives they lead in the fraught transition out of conflict. For conflicts based on competing territorial claims, in particular, cultural geography can frame vital questions about the meanings that people invest in, and the identities they draw from, the contested places over which they struggle. For my doctoral project, I conceptualized these queries through the framework of contested cultural landscapes. These landscapes became a space within which I interrogated complex connections to culture, identity, history and heritage – dimensions to conflict that remain integral to the peace process long after the spotlight of the international media has shifted elsewhere.

In Chapter Two, I outlined my interlinking research aims and the questions they provoked. I reiterate them below:

Aim 1. To examine how transformations of contested landscapes provoke new perceptions of place and geographic scale.

Research Questions:

- How do these transformations alter long-held meanings of places associated with violent conflict?
- How do they shape the ways in which people relate contested landscapes to broader regional, national and international scales?

Aim 2. To examine how transformations of contested landscapes shape the expression, creation and negotiation of identity.

Research Questions:

- How do these transformations help to create new dimensions of identity?
- How do people negotiate their shifting identities in a place of recovering conflict?
- How do interactions between shifting identities and transformations of contested landscapes address the legacy of violence and complicate and contribute to the process of building peace?

Whereas other studies of the transformation of violent conflict tend to ask *why*, I chose to emphasize *how*. Much of the published academic literature on conflict transformation probes the reasons that underlie change: Why did the actors decide to pursue or not to pursue peace? Why did changes occur when they occurred? In contrast, my emphasis on *how* can be read, at some level, as my attempt to discern a blueprint for peacebuilding. I wanted to investigate the multi-layered processes by which societies emerging from conflict come to new understandings about the places over which they struggle, and their relationships to those places. I chose to examine a window of time – the end of the first ‘post-conflict’ decade – that is sufficiently distant from the drama of the peace accords to invite reflection, but not so distant that they have faded into mythic memory. In other words, I sought a timeframe that is both reflective and raw.

With its divisive territorial struggles, imprinted visibly in ‘peace lines’ and political murals, and its spatially sectarian society, Northern Ireland is a geographer’s dream. As Smyth and Darby (2001: 36) wryly comment, ‘It is difficult to imagine an ethnic conflict anywhere in the world that has been more thoroughly researched.’ In a site as saturated as Northern Ireland, what did I hope to illuminate? My obvious starting point was the small band of cultural geographers – namely Catherine Nash, Brian Graham, Sara McDowell and Bryonie Reid – whose queries around identity, place and heritage resonate with my own. I build on their work by pushing cultural geography further into dialogue with theories of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Where I diverge, as well, is in the diversity of my research participants. In addition to studying the republican and loyalist populations for which Northern Ireland is known, I actively sought the perspectives of minority ethnic residents. I wanted to produce a piece of scholarship on Northern Ireland that not only reflects the region’s growing ethnic diversity, but that also acknowledges the ways in which people marginalized by the general discourse of Northern Ireland have experienced the long civil war and its uncertain aftermath. By

eliciting their perspectives, I developed a richer, more complex understanding of the Northern Ireland peace process.

In this final chapter, I bring together some concluding thoughts on my thesis as a whole. The first section reiterates the key findings from my empirical research. In the second section, I reflect further on the major themes that recur throughout this dissertation, including transformation, cultural landscapes, scales of identity, and the role and process of research. I emphasize the contributions of my study to academic scholarship and to Northern Ireland. Finally, I end by gesturing toward broader impacts, particularly in relation to peacebuilding and reconciliation politics in Northern Ireland, and I suggest directions for future work.

1. Summary of Key Findings

For this project, my conceptual launching point was the two-part hypothesis framed in my research aims. First, transformations of contested landscapes provoke people to think in new ways about places implicated in violent conflict, altering the ways in which they relate these places to wider scales of engagement and belonging. Second, in doing so, these transformations create new expressions, dimensions and negotiations of identity that complicate and contribute to the process of peacebuilding. I based my research around three entry points: Divis Mountain, 11th Night bonfires, and Northern Ireland's growing ethnic diversity. In taking this approach, I wanted to explore the dynamics of identity and place within distinct cultural populations, while simultaneously drawing connections and comparisons between them. As I discussed in Chapter One, the contested landscapes of Divis Mountain and the 11th Night bonfires resonate powerfully within republican and loyalist cultures, respectively. Moreover, they address current environmental and political debates that are taking shape through the peace process. These landscapes offer intriguing case studies for exploring how their transformations provoke shifting conceptualizations of place, identity, and scale in a society emerging from conflict. Cross-cutting and connecting these landscapes is my third entry point – Northern Ireland's growing ethnic diversity. By exploring minority ethnic perspectives through their engagement with transformations of Divis Mountain and 11th Night bonfires, I wanted to deepen and diversify my understanding of how conflict shapes senses of belonging. In Chapter Three, I discussed Reid's (2008: 531) call for 'complex, nuanced, provisional readings of...politically burdened places' and her suggestion that they offer grounds for hope for multiple and shared senses of place and belonging. My

research attempts to answer her call, while bearing in mind the ways that such readings can complicate as well as contribute to peacebuilding.

In Chapter Five, I focused on the demilitarization of Divis Mountain and its implications for republican cultural identities. The mountain's militarization allowed me to tap the rich vein of imperial history that has shaped contemporary ideas around resistance, victimhood and memory in republican communities, while its *demilitarization* helped me to understand how history can be mobilized to serve a particular cultural narrative. My research on the transformations of this contested landscape exposes a range of possibilities for peacebuilding, as well as complex undercurrents. For the residents whom I interviewed, Divis has long held an iconic place in their conceptualizations not only of West Belfast but of a larger, romanticized narrative of republican resistance to British authority. The mountain's return to the public domain now requires people to re-engage with the landscape in a variety of ways. In Chapter Five, I explore some strikingly different engagements. For example, the wistful meditations of the taxi driver Seamus, recalling his first glimpse of the mountain after a decade of imprisonment, articulate an idea of Divis that is suffused with emotional memories of homecoming. The mountain resonates in complex ways for Seamus, who only returned to visit it several years after his release from prison. In contrast, the Irish Ramblers Association, founded by former members of the Irish Republican Army in 1998, coordinates regular walks on Divis that can be read as continued resistance to British authority as well as reclamation of the mountain. The *Herald of Jericho* sculpture illuminates yet another avenue for engagement, reworking materially the army fort that had for two decades obliterated the mountain from view. These diverse engagements illuminate various routes by which memories and identities of republican resistance are being reworked in a time of peace.

The transformations of Divis speak powerfully to debates around the process of defining heritage for a shared society. In Chapter Two, I discussed the complexities that surround heritage, its role in the creation of collective identities, and its potential for contestation in societies recovering from violent conflict. As Ashworth et al (2007: 5) argue: 'The creation of any heritage actively or potentially disinherits or excludes those who do not subscribe to, or are embraced within, the terms of meaning attending that heritage.' My research on Divis gestures toward this potential. For several interview participants, the mountain's demilitarization represents republican victory and an opportunity to reinscribe republican belonging in the landscape. In sectarian Belfast, the zeal with which republicans embrace Divis as a cultural resource holds potential to exclude others. This dichotomy captures what Ashworth et al (*ibid*) describe as the 'zero-sum' characteristics of heritage that can destabilize a peace process and undermine the search for shared forms of heritage.

Yet my findings on Divis also indicate that transformations of contested landscapes can provoke wider possibilities for ‘post-conflict’ cultural identities. The example of the ideologically-driven former combatant named Padraig, whose opinions of the National Trust suggest a softened stance toward a symbol of British imperialism, suggests that peacetime transformations may reposition a fiercely held identity resource like Divis within new scales of engagement. The artist Christoff Gillen illuminates such possibilities through installations that rework the historic landscape of the linen industry for a contemporary, city-wide audience, and in doing so provokes the public to engage in new ways with the mountain. More broadly, my research responds to Nash’s (1999: 460) call ‘for a more differentiated sense of the post-colonial.’ The findings described above point to the potential for peacebuilding to complicate existing narratives of conflict, rendering simplistic anti-colonial justifications in more nuanced variations that offer scope for new forms of shared heritage.

In Chapter Six, I focused on loyalist identities through an analysis of the transformations of 11th Night bonfires. In many ways, these transformations – spurred by municipal concerns about environmental pollution and symbols of sectarian aggression – can be read as a microcosm of the larger changes wrought by the peace process. Unlike the demilitarization of Divis, which was warmly received by republicans in West Belfast, the changes at work in the 11th Night bonfire tradition present more ambiguous opportunities for their loyalist adherents. Through the bonfires, I query the roles of tradition in a ‘post-conflict’ society, and how they attempt to bind culture, community and identity to place, both physical and ideological. Within the rubric of 11th Night bonfires, I chose to study three case studies: Belfast’s Bonfire Management Programme; its counterpart in Antrim; and the beacon of Woodvale. Each of these case studies refracts different dimensions of change, although the emergence of common themes around environmental stewardship and cultural education speaks to the broader possibilities of reconceptualizing this divisive tradition.

Particularly striking, in all three case studies, are the ways in which external transformations of the bonfire tradition provoke people in loyalist communities to re-scale their tradition, and hence themselves, as participants in larger dialogues. For example, the Bonfire Management Programme’s Participants Forum became a space in which initially reluctant loyalist communities came together to share and to strategize around their bonfires, evoking the system of communication that historic bonfires once served. In Antrim, new practices of, and municipal support for, bonfire engagement is changing in pace with the paramilitary culture that until recently defined the tradition. As rigid systems of territorial control begin to relax, new practices around 11th Night bonfires

are provoking paramilitary combatants to link their effects to larger scales of geopolitics and environmental justice.

Earlier in this thesis, I argued that the process of peacebuilding must address how divisive, contested versions of heritage can be reimagined for a shared future. My findings from Chapter Six illuminate how the co-constitutive dynamics between landscape and identity can effect such change. For example, the Bonfire Management Programme's 'Programme of Reflection and Capacity-Building' is provoking new expressions of a positively defined loyalist identity, which in turn help to soften the sectarian edges of the bonfire landscape. In doing so, these new expressions of identity point toward ways in which transformations of the contested 11th Night bonfires can facilitate the reworking of a sectarian tradition for a shared society. However, other findings from my empirical research suggest that this trajectory is far from straightforward. My research on the gendering of bonfires, for example, reveals complex negotiations of identity and expectation, particularly with respect to the division of labour. Even Woodvale's strong female bonfire committee, in their pursuit of the beacon, relied on the support of the local, masculine paramilitary presence. Ultimately, I argue that transformations of the contested bonfire landscape can be read as both a product and an agent of the peace process, both complicating and contributing to practices of peacebuilding.

In Chapter Seven, I broadened the scope of the Northern Ireland conflict by focusing on Belfast's frequently-overlooked minority ethnic residents and their perspectives of the transformations at work with Divis Mountain and 11th Night bonfires. By re-framing the same cultural icons that I explored in relation to republican and loyalist identities, I sought to highlight the role of ethnic minorities in re-making Northern Ireland's contested cultural landscapes. Through a series of semi-structured interviews, I examined how transformations of these contested landscapes provoke ethnic minorities to negotiate complex dynamics of alienation, belonging and identity in 'post-conflict' Belfast.

With regard to Divis Mountain, my findings reveal the extent to which sectarian conflict shapes not only perceptions but embodied experiences of Belfast. My interviews suggest that ethnic minorities navigate the city based on their knowledge of sectarian geography. For example, the participant named Arthur describes a continuous mapping process by which he gathers geographical, territorial knowledge that informs his sense of where he can and cannot go. In this way, Arthur and his fellow ethnic minorities are like any resident of sectarian Belfast, regardless of national affinity. Ethnic minorities, however, and particularly those new to Northern Ireland, face the additional challenge of

building their spatial knowledge of sectarianism without the benefit of the received wisdom (however inaccurate) that circulates in republican and loyalist communities.

From the summit of Divis, the participants experienced new perspectives of scale that (re)engaged their experience of the city with other scales and landscapes of diasporic identity. The city's territorial intricacies elided into larger views, repositioning Belfast in relation to the rest of Northern Ireland, to the Irish Republic, and to Britain. Moreover, engagement with Divis evoked other landscapes of home, such as one participant's reflections on Mount Kilimanjaro. My findings suggest that Divis Mountain provokes new insights into the shifting scales of diasporic identity and, by extension, multiple identities that must be negotiated in a highly territorial city. These negotiations of identity encompass not only the racialized dynamics of living in a predominantly white society, but its sectarian fractures as well.

Through the landscape of the 11th Night bonfires, I dealt more explicitly with the politics of minority ethnic belonging in a sectarian society. My research reveals ambivalent perceptions about the peace process amongst the ethnic minorities I interviewed, most notably in the ways it renders them visible in negative ways. However, my findings also suggest that ethnic minorities actively negotiate their own (in)visibility, and exercise political choices around when, and how, to voice or silence themselves. I also uncovered ways in which these participants position themselves as neutral, for example by relegating bonfires as an amorphous extension of 'Irish politics' that is best to be avoided.

Nonetheless, my research suggests that Northern Ireland's sectarian struggle implicates Belfast's minority ethnic residents in unwelcome ways, for example, through pressure to contribute financially to a neighbourhood's decorations for July festivities. Another unwelcome engagement emerges through the practice of draping bonfires with national flags, drawing ethnic minorities into difficult reflections about place, nationalism and identity. For example, the flying of Palestinian and Israeli flags in loyalist areas elicited visceral emotional responses from members of the Belfast Islamic Centre, and complicates their own positions with regard to the conflict and their senses of belonging within Northern Ireland itself.

Yet my research also reveals how ethnic minorities, with their multiply positioned, diasporic identities and experiences, can contribute to larger dialogues about transformation and tradition in Northern Ireland. Many of my interview participants had lived previously in England, where their exposure to the more welcoming Guy Fawkes tradition allowed them to trace parallels and contrasts to the 11th Night bonfires. Furthermore, the ways in which ethnic minorities embody their multiple identities offers

an example for ways in which ‘new ethnicities’ and ‘hybrid identities’ might emerge from and contribute to the process of building peace.

Having outlined the key findings of the three empirical chapters, I now want to reflect more broadly on the wider themes of this thesis and my contributions to academic debates.

2. *Contributions to Academic Scholarship*

For this project, I have drawn from wide-ranging sources across a number of different academic fields. In doing so, I positioned my thesis to contribute to diverse dialogues. The most obvious contribution is the argument I set forth in Chapter Two for greater engagement between cultural geography and conflict transformation theory. Although others have emphasized the importance of place identities to processes of peacebuilding (for example, Graham 2004; Reid 2004, 2005), I believe that this thesis articulates the first clear theoretical argument for linking the two fields. In doing so, I bring to the amorphous, interdisciplinary field of peace studies a disciplinary approach that frames processes of social transformation through theorization of place, landscape, culture and identity.

Within cultural geography, this thesis contributes to a number of established and emerging debates. Just as my work in geography frames new theorizations within peace and conflict studies, so do insights from peace studies help me to chart new terrain in cultural geography. My analyses of contested cultural landscapes contribute to what Wylie (2007: 191) describes as ‘a recent suite of writings on landscape and the politics of memory,’ with specific contributions to discussions about politics of heritage in divided societies. As I discussed in Chapter Two, cultural geographers have published surprisingly little scholarship on the concept of ‘public landscape.’ I suggest that this concept may hold important scope for studies that conceptualize landscape as a continuum from contested to public. My research holds potential to develop ideas of ‘public landscape’ in relation to peacebuilding, as contested resources of heritage and identity move into a broader, shared public domain. I suggest that ‘public landscape’ may offer a useful theoretical framework for exploring the ambiguous transformation of contested cultural landscapes in their new ‘post-conflict’ manifestations.

Furthermore, my research on conflict transformation and processes of peacebuilding contributes to an emerging debate about geographic dimensions of transition. For example, geographers have explored transition in contexts including the legacies of post-socialist transitions (Bradshaw and Stenning 2004); young people’s

transitions to adulthood (Valentine 2003); and gender identity transitions among trans people (Lim and Browne 2009). This debate recognizes that transitions take many forms, and challenges their normative assumptions. In September 2010, I will participate in a two-part session on 'diverse geographies of transition' at the annual conference of the Royal Geographical Society. My presentation will explore 'transition' through the more ambiguous transformations of the Northern Ireland peace process.

Indeed, my research develops scholarship not only on transition, but on the concept of transformation itself. I introduced the concept in Chapter Two as the theoretical approach of 'conflict transformation,' which aims to transform the relationships, interests and discourses that support the continuation of violent conflict. I then invoked 'transformation' in multiple variations as it relates to landscape, identity, culture, tradition and peacebuilding. To rephrase the hypothesis framed in my research aims: A peace process provokes tangible transformations of contested landscapes, which in turn provoke *intangible* changes in how people engage with these landscapes. Lurking behind this hypothesis is an expectation of transformation as an agent of positive change. Projected outcomes, for example, might include new forms of inclusive, positively-defined cultural identities, or shifts from local to global worldviews that can facilitate and sustain a non-violent society. These desires, however, mask the more ambiguous dimensions of transformation. They also perpetuate problematic assumptions, for example, the equation of 'local' as parochial and 'global' as progressive. By resisting the temptation to read the narrative of peace as an optimistic, one-way trajectory, I conceptualize transformation as a multi-dimensional framework that more accurately engages with reality. To draw an example from my own research, the connections between paramilitarism and racism in post-ceasefire Northern Ireland suggest that the transformation of conflict is partial and complex.

This thesis also contributes to vibrant, interdisciplinary debates about multiple identities. In Chapter Two, I discussed how Valentine (2007) emphasizes the fluidity and instability of intersections between categories, thus developing 'geographical thinking' about the relationship between multiple categories of belonging. I also discussed how the reworking of identity is central to Hall's (1992) theorization of 'new ethnicities.' To these debates I offer the novel approach of contextualizing their expression, creation and negotiation in 'post-conflict' situations. The insights gleaned from my research suggest rich scope for theorizing multiple identities in relation to conflict transformation and peacebuilding. I argue that conceptualizations of identity and ethnicity as fluid and constructed offer hope for societies emerging from conflict, as they engage with the task of opening previously rigid narratives of cultural heritage to new, flexible ways of locating ethnic identity. In a related vein, my findings in Northern Ireland may also

contribute to debates around ‘political belonging in a world of multiple identities’ (Hall 2002). These debates relate to migration (see Yuval-Davis et al 2005, Kastoryano 2004), heritage (see Czaplicka 2004) and multiculturalism (see van den Abbeele 2004, Hansen 2004) – all of which are pertinent issues in contemporary Northern Ireland.

Although I will reflect in greater depth on my research process toward the end of this chapter, I describe here the contributions of this thesis to scholarship on methodology. As I discussed in Chapter Four, I designed for this project a complementary, integrated field programme that drew on a set of mixed qualitative methodologies. In addition to the more commonly used methods of participant observation, semi-structured interviews and maintenance of a research diary, I developed some novel methodological approaches. For example, the guided walks that I led on Divis Mountain for minority ethnic groups echo earlier techniques used by Burgess (1996), Brennan (2005) and even Wylie (2002). My own practice, however, differs in its response to the sensitive political environment of my research site. These walks may have introduced participants to Divis, but I argue that the act of travelling *to* the mountain is equally important. By bringing the participants through territory initially perceived as unknown and potentially dangerous, my walking technique facilitated their embodied experience of sectarian Belfast. Other novel research approaches, which I developed in response to the challenge of working in a volatile, sectarian society, include my collaboration with Groundwork and the semi-structured bonfire discussions with minority ethnic groups that I conducted with the aid of the Bonfire Management Programme’s travelling exhibit. In short, I believe that this thesis contributes to scholarship on the methodological challenges of conducting research in sensitive, ‘post-conflict’ environments.

Finally, my research offers a number of contributions to scholarship on my research site, Belfast, Northern Ireland. As I discussed previously, this thesis amplifies the scholarship of the handful of cultural geographers who also write about the Northern Ireland conflict, thus bolstering the profile of geography in a field dominated by political scientists and legal scholars. Cultural geography offers unique theoretical resources for framing and conceptualizing questions of place, scale, community and identity. These are crucial issues for the process of peacebuilding. Through conducting this research, I also affirm the importance of Northern Ireland as a site worthy of cultural geographic inquiry. My work on transformations of contested landscapes and identities in republican and loyalist cultures responds to Edwards and Bloomer’s (2009) call for research on communities sympathetic to paramilitarism and their emergence from armed struggle. However, I feel that my emphasis on ethnic minorities represents my most important and meaningful contribution to academic literature on Northern Ireland. Elsewhere in this

thesis, I have argued that scholarship on Northern Ireland must expand beyond the established binary model of sectarian conflict to acknowledge how diverse relationships and communities also contribute to the process of peacebuilding. My research contributes to growing scholarly interest in Northern Ireland's ethnic minorities but, crucially, it does so by drawing them into Northern Ireland's larger, complex dialogues about the legacy of the Troubles and the transformation of violent conflict.

3. *Contributions to Policy and Practice*

In addition to its contributions to academic scholarship, this project contributes in a number of ways to the practical work of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. I have taken seriously my argument for reconceptualizing the participants of the peace process by responding to my own call for meaningful minority ethnic engagement. As I intended, my research process made tangible contributions, in real time, to participants from minority ethnic backgrounds. The guided walks of Divis introduced them to a little-known public resource, and the bonfire discussions gave newcomers, in particular, a chance to learn more about a bewildering local practice.

As I discussed in Chapter Four, my collaborations with Groundwork and the National Trust gave each organization a presence in the emerging minority ethnic sector. Moreover, my involvement has served to increase awareness within these organizations about the importance and the benefits of diversifying their work. Groundwork, for example, increasingly draws on the connections I have forged with minority ethnic community groups to develop new projects around regenerating shared space. At the time of writing, I continue to lead guided walks of Divis Mountain for groups that express interest. These walks now contribute to a larger dialogue within the National Trust, emanating from its headquarters in England, around diversity, accessibility and the organization's relevance for a multicultural public (Mayo 2009; Hawthorne 2007). In December 2009, I spoke on behalf of the organization at a conference on recreational diversity, organized by the Countryside Access & Activities Network. This summer, the National Trust intends to incorporate my work on Divis in one of its regular reports to its membership base.

My research also contributes to debates around practices of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. In Chapter Three, I discussed the controversy over 'single identity work,' which refers to efforts that focus on exploring identity solely within one community in order to create a strong and confident foundation from which to reach across the sectarian divide (Nash 2005b; Kilpatrick and Leitch 2004). Critics, however,

argue that this strategy bolsters notions of cultural separation and competition for scant resources (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006). To some extent, my own activities in Belfast can be interpreted as ‘single identity work,’ particularly in relation to my roles and responsibilities with the Bonfire Management Programme. Although my professional participation was circumscribed by the formal structure of the programme, I adopted a similar approach for my empirical research. By focusing on republican perspectives in relation to Divis Mountain, and on loyalist perspectives in relation to 11th Night bonfires, I transferred the concept of ‘single identity work’ to my research practices with the republican and loyalist populations for which Northern Ireland is known. The concept of ‘single identity’ breaks down, however, with regard to my emphasis on minority ethnic perspectives. The groups that participated in walks on Divis and in bonfire discussions (for example, the Minority Ethnic and Faith Network, the Afro-Caribbean Society and Latina America Unida) comprise a diverse range of ethnicities and nationalities. This diversity – between the various minority ethnic groups that participated in my research, as well as internally within each group itself – reworks notions of community and belonging. Moreover, the diverse membership of these groups draws on wider scales of identity, thus pointing toward ways in which community practitioners in Northern Ireland might reconceptualize ideas of what constitutes ‘single identity.’

As I discussed in Chapter Three, the challenge of putting peace into practice is bound up in Northern Ireland’s intricate and contested ‘policy landscape’ (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006: 143). To this end, this thesis also holds implications for public policy and related debates around community relations. To reiterate my discussion in Chapter Three, I invoke the example of Belfast City Council’s influential ‘good relations’ strategy, which advocates the promotion of community relations, the celebration of cultural diversity, and the promotion of equality through service delivery and a representative workforce (Belfast City Council 2003). The strands of my research feed into these debates in various ways. For example, my research on republican and loyalist cultural identities contributes to knowledge about the processes by which communities long entrenched in the conflict are approaching, perceiving and negotiating the peace process. In doing so, my research also contextualizes and points to practical possibilities for peacebuilding in these communities. Simultaneously, my research on minority ethnic perspectives contributes to emerging dialogues about cultural diversity, particularly in relation to 11th Night bonfires. Through my involvement with the Bonfire Management Programme, I worked closely with a range of statutory stakeholders. Although our interactions revolved primarily around my professional responsibilities in various loyalist communities, I discovered that my research on minority ethnic perspectives and experiences frequently piqued interest among civic officials. As my doctoral project draws to a close, I will seek new avenues

(for example, through lectures, meetings and professional reports) for disseminating the results of my work to the public sector.

4. *Reflections on the Roles of the Researcher*

Perhaps the most innovative contributions emerging from this thesis relate to my methodological approach. From the outset, I conceptualized this project as qualitative in design, and myself as open to an array of theoretical frameworks. In Chapter Four, I discussed the importance of feminist and participatory geographies in shaping my work. With regard to feminist geography, I was drawn to the ways in which its methodological approaches could acknowledge the delicate dynamics involved with conducting research in sensitive political environments. As Moss (2002: 3) observes: 'Thinking about feminist research tends to sharpen an approach to a project in that understanding power and knowledge brings into focus the varied contexts in which the research takes place.' Along similar lines, participatory geographers inspired me with their emphasis on collaboration, people's experience and knowledge, and knowledge for the purpose of political action (Gatenby and Humphries 2000: 90). Yet although these methodological literatures influenced me greatly, I struggled to understand how my work could contribute to scholarship in participatory geography, and to a lesser extent in feminist geography. If gender formed only one aspect of my analysis, could I call myself a feminist geographer? If my research participants did not actively co-design my project, could I honestly wear the mantle of participatory geographer? Steered by instinct, over the course of my research I navigated an invisible course between the two.

The experience was liberating. Although I could not categorize it, I honoured my conviction that the process of research is as important as its products. I wanted this project to be relevant in real time, and to real people. To this end, the collaborations that I pursued were ideological as well as logistical. Even as I sought support for entering paramilitary-controlled territory, I also craved opportunities to contribute tangibly to the peace process. And in the end, I did, although in ways I could not have anticipated. Through my collaboration with Groundwork, which in the second year became a formal staff position, I worked intimately with loyalist neighbourhoods to advance the aims of the Bonfire Management Programme. On Divis Mountain, as I helped the warden repair barbed wire fencing through which neighbouring cattle had rampaged, I contributed in my own small way to cultivating this newly-acquired resource for a peacetime public.

My engagement with ethnic minorities, however, may represent my most influential contribution to scholarship and practice in Northern Ireland. On a strategic

level, I bridged the work of my collaborating organizations with the emerging minority ethnic sector, which in many ways was in its infancy when I began fieldwork in February 2007. In this capacity, I expanded the routes by which minority ethnic communities engage with Northern Ireland, through walks on Divis Mountain and discussions about loyalist bonfires that, more than once, offered newcomers a chance to question and to learn about this bewildering local tradition. In devoting my energy and collaborative resources to my research in the minority ethnic community sector, I advanced my own political agenda, that of bringing their voices into the larger dialogue of the peace process.

In a marriage of theory and praxis, my doctoral research evolved alongside and through my practical work. In Chapter Four, I bemoaned the absence of Northern Ireland's ethnic minorities in scholarship on the peace process. Over the course of my fieldwork period, I came to understand the practical dynamics that underpin the silence. Although ethnic minorities are garnering greater attention in both practical and academic circles, I have been dismayed by their disconnection from existing discourses of the peace process, and by a widespread tendency to treat racism and exclusion as problems unrelated to larger dialogues of 'post-conflict' community relations. Underpinning these patterns are well-meaning workers in the community/voluntary sector who assume that minority ethnic issues represent a softer, easier option than the difficult task of grappling with the legacy of the Troubles in loyalist and republican communities. As I deepened my responsibilities to and engagement with the minority ethnic community sector, I came to recognize the importance of my research to enlarging and diversifying the public discourse of the peace process. At one level, my actions were purely incidental – an unintended effect of my Japanese-Chinese-American presence in, say, the white, working-class loyalist neighbourhoods participating in the Bonfire Management Programme. But in other ways, my research offers a deliberate course of action. By presenting Northern Ireland's ethnic minorities as complex, multiply positioned individuals, with the capacity to negotiate their multiple identities, my research holds potential to shape the ways in which they are conceptualized by the wider society as well.

In some ways, my research experience can be read as a process by which I staged the encounters I wanted to study. In doing so, I left a physical, cultural and ideological imprint on my field site and, more importantly, I facilitated the social changes I wanted to see. My advisor once asked me why I reject the terms 'activist' and 'participatory.' Until then, I had not considered 'activist' in relation to my research, and 'participatory' only to dismiss it. In exploring the basis for my resistance, however, I realize that the definitions I adopted initially were narrow and rigid. In my research approach, I placed great value on listening, observing and absorbing. These are seemingly passive processes that

contrast sharply with the images I held of a (brash, outgoing, politically impassioned) participatory activist. Yet as I reflect on these differences, I recognize that I have done a great disservice to terms like ‘activist’ and ‘participatory’ by limiting their scope. I am coming to understand that my research collaborations were indeed participatory in nature, and that seemingly passive aspects of my own approach were, in fact, quietly active in their own right.

I return, at last, to the theme of ‘public geographies,’ which I introduced in Chapter One as an overarching dialogue for this dissertation. To reiterate, ‘public geographies’ can be considered, at least provisionally, as the production of accessible academic work for broader ‘non-academic’ audiences; the co-construction of knowledge with non-academics; and the legitimation of non-academic or public geographical knowledges (Birmingham Public Geographies Working Group 2010). My meditations on activism, which developed over the course of this project, resonate with lively debates emerging within public geography. Mitchell (2004), for example, calls for academics to contribute to social change through what we are employed to do – that is, to produce solid, important work within the academy. Dempsey and Rowe (2004: 32), however, challenge his argument, advocating instead a concept of ‘theory-as-toolkit’ that facilitates ‘activist knowledge production.’ Meanwhile, Maxey (2004: 159) argues that ‘a broad, inclusive understanding of activism can offer a number of ways for us to develop critical geography conceptually and practically.’ He observes overlaps between reflexive processes and inclusive understandings of activism. The value that he invests in ‘reflexive activism’ (*ibid*) mirrors my own.

Running through these debates is the challenge of balancing academic research with activism – a challenge with which I have grappled over the course of this project. Maxey (2004: 159) points to the boundaries ‘between theory/practice, academia/activism and the very notion of engagement ‘within/beyond’ the academy.’ These are distinctions that ‘public geographies,’ with their emphasis on accessible, relevant scholarship for multiple publics, attempt to dismantle. My own research, and the approaches I adopted, also probe the distinction between these categories, pushing further into terrain where they dissolve. As Cloke (2004: 96) wisely observes: ‘The academic and the personal perform such complex interactive manoeuvres that it is well nigh impossible to disentangle them.’

Coda

As this project draws to a close, my own ‘narrative of identity and place’ is now poised to take flight. Running alongside my thesis is its *antithesis* – a vastly different account of my years in Belfast. Or so I assumed at the outset.

In February 2007, I moved to Belfast with the intention of writing an explicitly *non-academic* book from my doctoral research. Weary of scholarly tomes that barely disguised their postgraduate origins, I adopted the opposite approach: a dissertation fashioned from the ‘real’ book at its heart. I pressed my research diary into service as a double agent, and launched what I assumed would be a double life.

For several years, I had skirted around the idea of a career in community relations. In Belfast, one of my research collaborations turned the idea into distinct possibility. With Groundwork’s support, I pursued training in a suite of professional skills that had long intrigued me: mediation, principled negotiation, facilitative leadership, community capacity-building. I gained valuable on-the-ground experience, facilitating discussions at first about 11th Night bonfires, and eventually about the grittier topics of racism, homophobia and hate crime prevention. This is no easy task for an introvert, but fascination pushed me onward, and I have slowly come to understand the strengths and challenges that I bring to my work in post-conflict community development.

Initially, I intended to keep separate my postgraduate and professional trajectories, my thesis and its antithesis. I envisioned one as the respite from the other, and in the beginning this was so. Inevitably, the distinctions collapsed – initially to my alarm, but ultimately to my delight. Three years later, I find it difficult to decipher where one process begins and the other ends. My research interviews, for instance, inhabit the same learning curve as my community discussions. I developed vital facilitation skills through both and, I argue, at a quicker pace than otherwise possible on their own.

I may have wished to compartmentalize the double strands of my work, but geography has willed it otherwise. September will find me at the Royal Geographical Society, not only delivering an academic paper on ambiguous transitions of peacebuilding, but taking part in a panel titled ‘geographers helping.’ While the other panelists discuss how their work in the ‘helping professions’ led them to geographical critique, I will trace an alternate course. In my case, it was geography that led.

The so-called antithesis lies in wait, roughly assembled between the covers of my research diary. Like its academic counterpart, this book will take shape as earth and fire, and water as well. In East Belfast, transformations of derelict shipyards, which in grander days gave rise to the Titanic, now ripple into regenerating the communities along the

waterways. Over eighteen months of fieldwork, and nearly eighteen more of dissertation-writing, I have nurtured this book as my gift to the everyday reader – a departure from academic, theoretical debate. Yet at the moment of departure, geography’s gravitational pull draws me back into its orbit. Here, I find myself face to face with ‘public geographies’ and their commitment to creating popular, accessible work that is as relevant for people outside academia as it is for those within. In the end – or perhaps, more accurately, in the beginning – I discover that my thesis and its alternative are two parts of the same process.

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	<i>Sample Question</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
1.	Introductions: Name, where you came from, and how long you have lived in Belfast.	Establish ethnic identity, other identities
2.	Before today, what did you know about the Belfast hills?	Previous knowledge of and relationship with landscape
	Did you know that you are allowed to go there?	
	What were your impressions of the hills?	
3.	How would you describe your experience of today's hike?	Current thoughts on the hills
	How has the hike changed your previous ideas about the hills?	
4.	What did you think of the view of the city?	Thoughts on view of the city
	Has it changed your sense of Belfast? Of Northern Ireland? How?	Perceptions of scale
	Has the hike helped you feel more of a connection to Belfast?	
5.	More generally, how would you describe your experience of living in Belfast?	Thoughts on belonging
	How would you describe your experience of living here during the peace process?	
	What are ways in which you feel as though you belong? What are ways in which you feel as though you <i>don't</i> belong?	
	In general, does Belfast/Northern Ireland enter into your sense of identity? How?	Articulation of identity and place
6.	Going back to our hike today, do you think that you would go to the hills on your own?	Continuing engagement with Belfast hills
	Would you feel safe there?	
	What would be your ideal walk, either in the city or outside of it? How long? What would you want to see or experience?	

	<i>Sample Question</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
1.	Where in Belfast do you live? For how long have you lived here?	Establish ethnic identity, other identities
	What kinds of identities do you draw from this place? How is [this place – i.e., neighbourhood, Belfast, Northern Ireland] important to your sense of identity?	Articulation of identity and place
	What other aspects of identity do you consider important?	
2.	How would you describe your experience of the bonfire tradition?	Establish relationship to bonfire tradition and core community
	In your opinion, why do you think this tradition is celebrated?	
	What aspects of the bonfire tradition do you find frustrating?	
	What aspects of the tradition do you find positive or enjoyable?	
	How do the bonfires affect your sense of belonging to/identity in [this place]?	Articulation of how bonfires affect sense of identity and place
3.	Recently, some loyalist communities have been trying to open their bonfire tradition to people from other cultural backgrounds. How would you describe your reaction to their efforts?	Establish extent of interest in participating in the transformation of bonfires.
	How would you feel about being included in the bonfire tradition?	
	What would need to happen for you to feel included and valued in [this place]?	
	What kind of place might you see for yourself in this evolving tradition?	Articulation of identity and belonging in changing Northern Ireland.
	What kind of place do you see for yourself in your neighbourhood / in Belfast, more generally?	

4.	What is different today?	Thoughts on relationship between environment and peace process
	How is [this place – i.e., neighbourhood, Belfast, Northern Ireland] different today? How has it changed?	
	Have the bonfires changed the way you think about [this place]? Has it changed your relationship to [this place]? If so, how and in what ways?	
	How does [this activity] tie into other aspects of your identity?	
	What are your hopes for [this place]? Does [this activity] tie into these hopes? If so, how?	