

# **On Narrow Ground: Human Rights and The Architecture of Conflict in Belfast**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2021

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is less than 100,000 words

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## **Acknowledgements**

In particular I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Rory O'Connell and Dr Anne Smith, of the Transitional Justice Institute (TJI), Ulster University, for their contribution to this work. Their attention to detail was surpassed only by the speed with which they provided feedback on the numerous drafts. I would also like to thank Dr Catherine Turner of Durham Law School, who at various points in the course of the thesis provided invaluable advice. Thanks also to Lisa Thompson who sent me the email notification about the PhD Studentship that started all this and who kept the TJI ticking over in the early years of my study before she moved on to greater things. I would also like to thank Dr Jacqueline Reilly, Head of the Doctoral College, Ulster University, for her assistance along the way.

Special thanks go out to Professor Frank Gaffikin, Emeritus Professor, School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering, Queen's University Belfast, and Ken Sterrett, Senior Lecturer in Planning and Urban Design, School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering, Queen's University Belfast, both of whom helped steer the post-graduate interdisciplinary reading group that was a valuable source of information and guidance. The reading group also provided me with the opportunity to publish my first piece of work in this field and allowed me several opportunities to present and refine the ideas that are contained in this thesis. Thanks also to the other members of the post-graduate reading group especially Aisling Shannon Rusk who provided me with a first-class architectural tour of Belfast and which helped reassure me that I was indeed barking, but at least it was up the right tree.

Thanks also to Professor Richard Plunz, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, who helped clarify my thinking on a number of issues pertaining to this study and who provided me with the title for this thesis. The work we did together for the GSAPP studio on Belfast came at just the right time. Special thanks also go out to Professor Janet Smith of the Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement, UIC, who really does walk the walk and who was the first person outside of Belfast who drew my attention to the fact that sometimes living side by side goes along with living apart. I would also like to thank

Dr Brian Feeney of St Mary's University College Belfast who suggested to me that the Belfast Development Office (BDO) files from the 1980s might be worth looking at. He wasn't wrong.

I would also like to thank everyone who gave up their time to be interviewed. There were of course many others along the way who provided valuable insight, advice and assistance. Joanne Knox at the Ulster University library was especially helpful in the early days, as were the rest of the library staff at UU. Special thanks also to the wonderful staff of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) who are the custodians of an amazing and rich archive. I would also like to thank the staff of the Linenhall and Belfast Public Libraries, as well as the staff of the New York Public Library also played an important role. Special thanks also go to the staff of BBC Radio 3 who provided the background music for the journey. Most of all, thanks to Marny, Oisín and Cara for everything.

## ***Abstract***

This thesis examines what a more holistic approach to transitional justice that incorporates the social and economic dimensions of conflict means in theory and practice. The thesis applies a systems theory framework, showing how the economic, political, planning and architectural systems interacted to shape patterns of social disadvantage and political violence in Belfast. The thesis uncovers, identifies and exploits hitherto unknown documents confirming how the British Army used the planning and architecture of the built environment in Belfast as a conflict management strategy. This is an important finding given the range of commentators over several decades who argued that there was no evidence to suggest that there was security force involvement in the planning and design of Belfast during the conflict. The thesis also examines, through a case study analysis, how efforts to address structural and systemic conflict legacy issues continue to be impacted by the complex relationship that exists in Belfast between systemic inequalities, political identity, and territory. An important finding of the thesis is that efforts to address structural and systemic conflict legacy issues in Belfast are compromised by the different ways in which patterns of inequality and disadvantage are shaped across the two communities. The wider lesson from this study is that a more holistic understanding of transitional justice that engages structural and systemic conflict legacy issues requires a more 'reflexive' approach that is capable of 'cutting with the grain of understanding' of the processes that shaped social and economic disadvantage, as well as political violence, in the first place.

## Chapter One

### The Architecture of Conflict

#### Introduction

This thesis examines the relationship between systemic inequalities and political conflict. Chapter one outlines the range of factors that are relevant for examination of the socioeconomic aspects of conflict in a divided city and provides the key theoretical underpinnings of the thesis. Also included in this chapter is an outline of some of the key findings of the thesis, namely, the extent to which analysis of systemic inequalities in Belfast provides useful insight into the wider debate about what a 'thicker' understanding of transitional justice means both in theory and in practice.

#### Aims of Thesis

This research is located within a much broader debate about the need for a more holistic interpretation of transitional justice that engages the social and economic dimensions of conflict.<sup>1</sup> The thesis examines how systemic inequalities between the two main communities contributed to the outbreak of conflict in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s; how these inequalities were impacted by the subsequent conflict; and how systemic conflict legacy issues continue to impinge upon efforts to prevent a return to violence. An important theme of the thesis is that efforts to address structural and systemic inequalities must cut with the grain of understanding of the processes that shaped the inequalities in the first place.<sup>2</sup> The spatial legacy of conflict in Belfast also illustrates the 'painful compromises, not only between means and

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<sup>1</sup> A Boraine, 'Transitional justice: A Holistic Interpretation' (2006) 60 (1) *Journal of International Affairs* 17-18; R Duthie, 'Toward a Development-sensitive Approach to Transitional justice' (2008) 2 *International Journal of Transitional justice* 292-309 (*passim*); R Carranza, 'Plunder and Pain: Should Transitional justice Engage with Corruption and Economic Crimes?' (2008) 2 *International Journal of Transitional justice* 310-330 (*passim*); L Arbour, 'Economic and Social Justice for Societies in Transition' (2007) 40 (1) *Journal of International Law and Politics* 1-27 (*passim*); C Arnson, and I W Zartman, *Rethinking the Economics of War: The Intersection of Need, Creed, and Greed* (Johns Hopkins University Press 2005) (*passim*)

<sup>2</sup> Iris Marion Young defines structural injustice as 'a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting to pursue their particular goals and interests, for the most part within the limits of accepted rules and norms', I M Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (OUP 2013) 52

ends, but between ends themselves'<sup>3</sup> that arise where systemic inequalities are woven into the narrow ground of north Belfast, 'every inch of which has its own associations and meaning'.<sup>4</sup>

### **Research Questions**

***The primary research question that this thesis seeks to determine is: What lessons can be drawn about the need for a more holistic approach from transitional justice that embraces the social and economic dimensions of conflict as a result of examining structural and systemic conflict legacy issues in Northern Ireland?***

*In addition to the primary research question there are a number of other additional research questions, namely: To what extent did systemic inequalities between the two communities play a role in precipitating conflict in Northern Ireland in the 1960s? What role did the conflict in Belfast play in shaping systemic inequalities between the two communities during the conflict? To what extent does the spatial legacy of the conflict in Belfast have the capacity to precipitate a return to violence?*

### **Whither Transitional Justice?**

Those of a certain vintage and geographical origin may recall a popular TV game show, broadcast by the BBC from the 1960s through the 1980s, entitled 'Call My Bluff'. The show consisted of two teams of three competing to earn points by determining the correct definition of obscure words. Each team took turns to provide definitions, one of which was true and two of which were bluffs. If correct identification of the word was made the team earned one point. If not, the bluffing team earned one point. Both teams took turns bluffing and determining definitions. One might wonder what a revived form of the game show would make of distinguishing 'true' from 'bluff' definitions of the field (or is that 'the non-field'?) of transitional justice.<sup>5</sup> One difficulty with distinguishing

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<sup>3</sup> M Ignatieff, 'Human Rights as Idolatry' in M Ignatieff and A Gutman (eds), *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* (Princeton University Press 2003) 53

<sup>4</sup> A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (Blackstaff 1977) 182

<sup>5</sup> C Bell, 'Transitional Justice, Interdisciplinarity and the State of the 'Field' or 'Non-Field' (2009) (3) *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5-27 (*passim*)

‘true’ from ‘bluff’ in this context is the ‘fundamental and existential problem that transitional justice does not really know what it is...or what and whom it is for’.<sup>6</sup> While definitions of ‘transitional justice’ vary, they generally attempt to capture a legal, political, and moral dilemma about how to deal with historic human rights violations and political violence in societies undergoing some form of political transition.<sup>7</sup> Beyond this common theme however, there are fundamental disagreements relating to the ‘normative space’ that transitional justice ought to occupy.<sup>8</sup> Dixon for example questions whether transitional justice is a fundamentally palliative approach to post-conflict and post-authoritarian transition or a radical answer to structural violence and root causes of conflict?<sup>9</sup> The origins of transitional justice as a series of legal processes for dealing with past human rights violations explains some of the concerns that have arisen about transitional justice moving too far from its ‘home base’ of civil and political rights abuses.<sup>10</sup> From this perspective there are worries that if transitional justice starts to mean too much it will in effect come to mean nothing at all.<sup>11</sup>

Among those advocating for a more expansive understanding of transitional justice that includes socioeconomic dimensions there are differing strands of opinion as to how far the boundaries of this expansion ought to extend. Some argue for example that transitional justice should remain located within the realm of corrective justice but extend its remit to include ‘economic crimes’.<sup>12</sup> It is argued that along with transitional justice’s more traditional concern for

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<sup>6</sup> P Gready and S Robins, ‘Transitional Justice and Theories of Change: Towards evaluation as understanding’ (2020) (14) *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 280

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of how definitions of transitional justice evolved over time see R Nagy ‘Transitional Justice as a Global Project: Critical Reflections’ (2008) (29) *Third World Quarterly* 277-78

<sup>8</sup> P De Greiff, ‘The Future of the Past: Reflections on the Present State and Prospects of Transitional Justice’ (2020) (14) *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 257

<sup>9</sup> PJ Dixon, ‘Transitional Justice and Development’ in L Moffet, C Lawther and D Jacobs (eds), *Research Handbook on Transitional Justice* (Edward Elgar 2019) (*passim*)

<sup>10</sup> L Waldorf, ‘Anticipating the Past: Transitional justice and Socio-Economic Wrongs’, (2012) 21 (2) *Social and Legal Studies* 171

<sup>11</sup> P De Greiff, ‘Articulating the Links between Transitional Justice and Development: Justice and Social Integration’, in P De Greiff and R Duthie (eds), *Transitional Justice and Development: Making Connections* (International Center for Transitional Justice 2009) (*passim*)

<sup>12</sup> M Lenzen, ‘Roads Less Traveled?’ in P De Greiff and R Duthie (eds), *Transitional Justice and Development: Making Connections* (International Center for Transitional Justice 2009)



political violence it must also account for serious economic violations like corruption, looting of natural resources, financial theft and other violations of civilians' economic, social and cultural rights.<sup>13</sup> Mani on the other hand claims that transitional justice cannot divorce itself from the broader concerns of citizens of transitional justice societies or from the patterns of social injustice, violence, and exploitation, that will continue to oppress them if no attempt is made during the transition period to change such patterns.<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, Carranza states that 'addressing poverty and social inequality must be regarded as among the strategic goals of any transitional justice undertaking'.<sup>15</sup> This more expansive definition essentially views transitional justice as 'distributive justice' and can be distinguished from the 'corrective justice' that lies at the heart of more established transitional justice theory and practice.<sup>16</sup>

This debate about 'corrective' versus 'distributive' versions of transitional justice, and the direction that transitional justice ought to take in relation to systemic and structural inequalities mirrors similar discussions within the broader field of human rights.<sup>17</sup> Linkages between debate within transitional justice and the wider human rights world is perhaps unsurprising given that transitional justice has often served to reflect many of the biases and dispositions of its parent field, international human rights.<sup>18</sup> Waldorf suggests for example that the increased push to address socioeconomic injustice through transitional justice can be explained at a broad level by the international human rights movement's championing of economic and social

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<sup>13</sup> D Sharp (ed) *Justice and Economic Violence in Transition* (Springer 2014) (*passim*)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* 265

<sup>15</sup> R Carranza, 'Plunder and Pain: Should Transitional justice Engage with Corruption and Economic Crimes?' (2008) 2 *International Journal of Transitional justice* 329

<sup>16</sup> R Duthie, 'Transitional Justice, Development, and Economic Violence' in D Sharp (ed), *Justice and Economic Violence in Transition* (Springer 2014) 171

<sup>17</sup> There are direct analogies between the debate within transitional justice on 'corrective' versus 'distributive' justice with debates in human rights about 'individual' versus 'group' justice, 'formal' versus 'substantive' equality. For a useful discussion of the contradictions and compromises inherent within competing models of equality see C McCrudden, *Buying Social Justice: Equality, Government Procurement and Legal Change* (Oxford University Press 2007) 63-94

<sup>18</sup> D Sharp, 'Interrogating the Peripheries: The Preoccupations of Fourth Generation Transitional justice' (2013) 26 *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 150

rights and their justiciability.<sup>19</sup> It would be unfair however to characterize debate within transitional justice about how best to engage with the socioeconomic aspects of conflict as solely due to mimicry of the 'parent field'. Miller for example advocates the need for a more economic focus for transitional justice within the context of its 'definitional role'.<sup>20</sup> From this perspective, transitional justice as both literature and practice offer more than just a set of neutral instruments for the achievement of the goals of justice, truth and reconciliation; it also serves to narrate conflict and peace.<sup>21</sup> This is an important point and will be incorporated into this thesis through examination of the way in which urban planning and architecture served to perpetuate systemic inequalities and segregation between the two communities in Belfast. As this thesis will show, the acute intersection of socio-economic and identity-based deprivation that characterizes areas of Belfast can be traced directly to a deliberate conflict management strategy established in the early 1970s. This is an important finding as it demonstrates how spatial disadvantage was socially constructed to contain political violence and is therefore an important legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict. Prior to this research the dominant narrative was that patterns of segregation and disadvantage were attributed to the preferences of local communities and/or the incompetence of planners and architects.

As the territorial boundaries of transitional justice continue to be debated, efforts to address a more holistic approach to understanding the relationship between systemic inequalities and political violence has led to rethinking the focus on 'transition' as an interim process that links the past and the future, to 'transformation' that implies long-term, sustainable processes embedded in society.<sup>22</sup> The concept of transformative justice has emerged therefore in

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<sup>19</sup> R Duthie, 'Transitional Justice, Development, and Economic Violence' in D Sharp (ed), *Justice and Economic Violence in Transition* (Springer 2014) 174. Duthie also argues that the emphasis in post-conflict programming on holistic and complementary approaches, and the potential advantages to be gained with regard to donor funding are also relevant factors.

<sup>20</sup> Z Miller, 'Effects of Invisibility: In Search of the 'Economic' in Transitional justice' (2008) 2 *The International Journal of Transitional justice* 266-291

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>22</sup> W Lambourne, 'Transformative justice, reconciliation and peacebuilding' in S Buckley-Zistel (ed), *Transitional Justice Theories* (Taylor and Francis 2013) 20

recent years as a response to perceived shortcomings in the standard toolkit of transitional justice, particularly in relation to addressing structural violence and violations of socioeconomic rights.<sup>23</sup> Like transitional justice, transformative justice is concerned with addressing historical wrongs in post-conflict and post-authoritarian contexts.<sup>24</sup> Gready and Robins sum up transformative justice as ‘transformative change that emphasizes local agency and resources, the prioritization of process rather than preconceived outcomes and the challenging of unequal and intersecting power relationships and structures of exclusion at both the local and the global level’.<sup>25</sup>

Conflict transformation literature provides useful insight into the type of approaches that might be required in order to address the socioeconomic dimensions of conflict without necessarily resolving the territorial dispute as to where the boundaries between conflict transformation and transitional justice actually lie. Evans uses a Venn diagram to illustrate the relationship between transformative and transitional justice with an overlap region that illustrates the transformative aspects of transitional justice.<sup>26</sup> This diagram provides one way of appreciating, and indeed differentiating between traditional and established ‘core’ activities of transitional justice, for example, truth commissions, focused on civil and political rights issues, with the type of structural and systemic socioeconomic conflict legacy issues that are the subject of this thesis. His model is in fact analogous to the way in which systems theory and the work of Niklas Luhmann distinguishes between ‘core’ and ‘peripheral activities’ within closed systems without reference to hierarchy which is helpful in this context.<sup>27</sup> This thesis is located on the ‘overlap’ space between transitional and transformative justice and will offer some recommendations, based on the findings of empirical research carried out in Belfast, about what a more

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<sup>23</sup> M Evans, (ed), *Transitional and Transformative justice: critical and international perspectives* (Routledge 2019) (*passim*)

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* 37

<sup>25</sup> P Gready and S Robins, ‘From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice’ (2014) (8) *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 340

<sup>26</sup> M Evans, ‘Structural Violence, Socioeconomic Rights, and Transformative Justice’ (2016) 15 (1) *Journal of Human Rights* 8

<sup>27</sup> See p. 20 below where there is discussion of the core and periphery of the legal system and the way in which these impact upon the delivery of political objectives.

genuinely transformative approach to transitional justice ought to look like both in theory and in practice.<sup>28</sup>

### **Systemic Inequalities, Causation and Non-Recurrence**

Perhaps one of the most persuasive argument in favour of a broader approach to transitional justice that includes socioeconomic dimensions relates to prevention and non-recurrence of conflict. Among those advocating for more attention to be focused on the causal relationship between political violence and structural and systemic inequalities a number of important questions have arisen that are relevant for this study.<sup>29</sup> It is argued for example that the persistence of social and economic injustices can serve to undermine long-term political stability, especially if inequalities are linked to a lack of effective channels for redress.<sup>30</sup> Outside mainstream transitional justice scholarship debate about the existence of a causal relationship between socio-economic inequalities and politically motivated violence has included, among others, the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan:

The proximate cause of conflict may be an outbreak of public disorder or a protest over a particular incident, but the root cause may be, for example, socio-economic inequities and inequalities, systematic ethnic discrimination...or long-standing grievances over land and other resource allocation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly there is disagreement about whether transformative justice is a new way of looking at transitional justice, or a wholesale new approach to achieving justice, see for example L Balasco, 'Locating Transformative Justice: Prism or Schism in Transitional Justice?' (2018) 12 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 368

<sup>29</sup> L Laplante, 'On the Indivisibility of Rights: Truth Commissions, Reparations, and the Right to Development' (2007) 10 (4) *Yale Human Rights and Development Law Journal* 141-177 (*passim*); Z Miller, 'Effects of Invisibility: In Search of the 'Economic in Transitional justice' (2008) 2 *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 266-291 (*passim*); D Sharp 'Addressing Economic Violence in Times of Transition: Towards A Positive-Peace Paradigm for Transitional justice' (2012) 35 *Fordham International Law Journal* 780-814 (*passim*)

<sup>30</sup> M Darrow and A Thomas, 'Power, Capture and Conflict: A Call for Human Rights accountability in Development Cooperation' (2005) 27 (2) *Human Rights Quarterly* 474-477

<sup>31</sup> Prevention of Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General, UN Doc. A/55/985-S/2001/574 (7 June 2001) 7

Evidence of a direct causal relationship between systemic inequalities and political conflict ought however to be weighed against a substantial body of literature and empirical work which indicates that the relationship between these variables is somewhat more complex than might first appear to be case.<sup>32</sup> One of the difficulties is that scholars are not in agreement about the degree to which poverty, inequality and economic, social and cultural rights actually matter for armed conflict.<sup>33</sup> There is evidence for example that a high level of income ‘dramatically inhibits coups’, as does a high rate of economic growth.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, it is argued that political instability can lead to economic deterioration by causing private investors to flee unstable political conditions.<sup>35</sup> Recent empirical data indicates that the Asian countries deemed to be in the top ten risk of experiencing a military coup in 2019 have ‘a more recent history of coup attempt; a greater infant mortality rate; lower GDP per capita; a shorter history of democracy than other countries in the region; as well as a greater level of predicted drought, larger populations and longer regimes compared to all other Asian countries’.<sup>36</sup> This data points to the way in which the normalisation of ‘irregular transfers of power’, as measured by recent insurrection, can interact with other factors, such as economic hardship, climate change, and population increase to undermine political stability.<sup>37</sup>

Other data suggests that armed conflict results from a combination of factors that include inequality, poverty, exclusion and marginalization, as well as a broader absence or weakening of social cohesion in a society.<sup>38</sup> Gready and Robins argue that it is the *nature* rather than the *extent* of inequality that determines the likelihood of violent conflict, with horizontal inequalities – that

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<sup>32</sup> J Powell, ‘Determinants of the Attempting and Outcome of Coups d’etat’, (2012) 56 (6) *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 1027-1037

<sup>33</sup> L Waldorf, ‘Anticipating the Past: Transitional justice and Socio-Economic Wrongs’, (2012) 21 (2) *Social and Legal Studies* 171

<sup>34</sup> J Londregan and K Poole, ‘Poverty, The Coup Trap, and the Seizure of Executive Power’, (1990) 42 (2) *World Politics* 152

<sup>35</sup> E Asiedu, ‘Foreign Direct Investment in Africa: The Role of Natural Resources, Market Size, Government Policy, Institutions, and Political Stability’, (2006) 29 (1) *World Economy* 74

<sup>36</sup> C Besaw and others, *Annual Risk of Coup Report* (One Earth Future 2019) 17

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* 8

<sup>38</sup> See for example D Smith, *Trends and Causes of Armed Conflict* (Berhgov Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management, 2004); Oskar N.T. and J Ron ‘Do Human Rights Violations Cause Internal Conflict’, 2007, HRQ

is, those that align with cultural, ethnic or religious identities – more likely to lead to violence.<sup>39</sup> This is especially the case given that frequently forms of inequality, exclusion and marginalization interact and compound each other so that unequal access to land and natural resources might be linked to a lack of access to power and decision making. There is certainly strong evidence that grievances due to actual or perceived exclusion based on a collective identity can foster group mobilization and fuel violent conflict.<sup>40</sup>

Eichengreen, tracing the history of popular discontent and economic hardship from the Luddites through to the present day, argues that although populist revolts and insurrections rarely arise in good economic times, the question ultimately is why the populist alternative is marginalized on some occasions but not others.<sup>41</sup> The theme of why economic hardship and systemic inequalities can sometimes, but by no means always, lead to political violence has also been taken up by Ignatieff.<sup>42</sup> Based on research conducted in a number of urban centres across the globe he contends that even significant levels of poverty and inequality can be sustained to a certain degree so long as there is respect for the rule of law, impartial and strong institutions, and crucially, equality of opportunity, so that minorities, or their children can believe ‘there is a way up and a way out’.<sup>43</sup> Ignatieff’s study focuses on the way in which systemic inequalities play out within cities, a theme that this thesis also follows. This is especially relevant in a context in which

Place has become a dimension of the new grievances; after a long period during which geographic economic inequalities narrowed, recently they have been widening rapidly.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> P Gready and S Robins, ‘From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice’ (2014) (8) *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 339

<sup>40</sup> R Kanbur, *Poverty and Conflict: The Inequality Link* (International Peace Academy, 2007); D McCoy ‘Rectifying Horizontal Inequalities: Lessons from African Conflict,’ (2008) 8 (1) *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 105-134

<sup>41</sup> B Eichengreen, *The Populist Temptation: Economic Grievance and Political Reaction in the Modern Era* (Oxford University Press 2018)

<sup>42</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) (passim)

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid* 36

<sup>44</sup> P Collier, *The Future of Capitalism: Facing The New Anxieties* (Harper Collins 2018) 3

At present, transitional justice mechanisms do little to map or address horizontal inequalities as a cause of violence and this is a gap that this thesis will aim to at least partly address by examining the relationship between horizontal inequalities and political violence in Northern Ireland.<sup>45</sup> Drawing on the work of Ignatieff and others, including the substantial body of work by urban theorists, planners, and architects who provide valuable thinking on this issue, this thesis examines specifically the relationship between spatial inequalities and conflict in the city of Belfast.<sup>46</sup> In particular, this thesis will examine how horizontal inequalities, combined with socioeconomic disadvantage, and urban renewal, to help ignite the Northern Ireland conflict in the late 1960s. The thesis will also examine how a framework established to provide horizontal governance and ensure access to power for both communities, has served to prevent a return to violence in spite of the continued existence of serious levels of social and economic deprivation in Belfast.

### **Systemic Inequalities and Systemic Solutions**

Linked to the question of whether systemic inequalities have the capacity to precipitate political violence is the related question of how socio-economic legacy issues ought to be addressed. This aspect of the thesis fits within a broader debate within transitional justice that has, to date, included critiques of the effectiveness of traditional transitional justice frameworks in this area.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Gready P and S Robins, 'From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice' (2014) (8) *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 339

<sup>46</sup> S Bollens, *Urban Peace-Building in Divided Societies: Belfast and Johannesburg*, (Westview Press 1999) (*passim*); B Oomen, B Davis, M Grigolo (eds) *Global Urban Justice: The Rise of Human Rights Cities* (Cambridge University Press 2016) (*passim*); F Gaffikin and M Morrissey, *Imagining Place, Enfranchising People* (Pluto 1999) (*passim*); F Gaffikin, M Morrissey and K Sterrett, 'Remaking the City: the Role of Culture in Belfast' in W Neill and H Schwedler (eds) *Urban Planning and Cultural Inclusion: Lessons from Belfast and Berlin* (Palgrave Macmillan 2001) 35; I Shuttleworth, 'Are Northern Ireland's Communities Dividing? Evidence from geographically consistent census of population data, 1971-2001', (2009) 41 (1) *Environment and Planning A* 213 (*passim*); P Shirlow, 'Belfast: a segregated city' in C Coulter and M Murray (eds) *Northern Ireland After The Troubles: A society in transition*, (Manchester University Press) 2008) (*passim*); B Murtagh and P Carmichael, *Sharing Place: A Study of mixed housing in Ballynafeigh, South Belfast*. (Northern Ireland Housing Executive 2006) (*passim*)

<sup>47</sup> Kent for example argues that the UN transitional justice mechanisms in East Timor were 'ill equipped' to address the legacies of poverty, poor health, and limited education prevalent within that context. See L Kent 'Local Memory Practices in East Timor: Disrupting Transitional justice Narratives' (2012) 5 (3) *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 434

One potential solution that has been advanced within transitional justice scholarship is that truth commissions ought to become more focused on pursuing social justice through an emphasis on economic, social and cultural rights.<sup>48</sup> Significantly however, a number of important contributors to this debate have raised more fundamental concerns regarding the implications of a broader conception of transitional justice that includes a socio-economic dimension.<sup>49</sup> Evans for example questions whether the legal and quasi-legal tools typically favoured in transitional justice processes for addressing individual violations of civil and political rights (such as truth commissions, trials and amnesties) can be reconciled with collective political and socioeconomic processes underlying conflict?<sup>50</sup> This has given rise to the criticism that transitional justice is insufficiently attentive to context, formulaic, and technocratic.<sup>51</sup> De Greiff argues that the future of transitional justice depends upon the ability to occupy a much more explicitly normative space (where normativity is not reduced to legalism or preaching) but rather includes a focus on taking seriously non-recurrence and prevention of conflict.<sup>52</sup>

As with debate about the remit of transitional justice, doubts about the capacity of established transitional justice processes to address systemic and structural harms mirrors similar developments in wider area of human rights. For example, the first generation of equality law in the UK adopted a classic structural functionalist, or 'command and control' approach to combating racial discrimination.<sup>53</sup> The essence of this approach is the exercise of influence by

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<sup>48</sup> J Cavallaro and S Albuja, 'The Lost Agenda: Economic Crimes and Truth Commissions in Latin America and Beyond' in K McEvoy and L McGregor (eds), *Transitional justice From Below: Grassroots Activism and the Struggle for Change* (Hart 2008) (passim); L Arbour, 'Economic and Social Justice for Societies in Transition' (2007) 40 (1) *Journal of International Law and Politics* 1-27 (passim)

<sup>49</sup> L Waldorf, 'Anticipating the Past: Transitional justice and Socio-Economic Wrongs', (2012) 21 (2) *Social and Legal Studies* 171

<sup>50</sup> M Evans (ed), *Transitional and Transformative Justice: Critical and International perspectives* (Routledge 2019) 1

<sup>51</sup> P De Greiff, 'The Future of the Past: Reflections on the Present State and Prospects of Transitional Justice' (2020) 14 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 254

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>53</sup> Race Relations Act 1968



imposing standards backed by criminal sanctions with the force of law used to prohibit certain forms of conduct or to demand some positive action.<sup>54</sup>

At the heart of command-and-control regulation is a belief in the capacity of the state, and law, to formulate rules and impose sanctions directly in order to influence behavior and fit within the traditional structural functionalist model of law and society.<sup>55</sup> Travers contends that the enthusiasm with which governments and academic commentators viewed the state as a mechanism for transforming society between the 1940s and 1960s now seems naïve and misplaced but provides a way of understanding how the ideas of Niklas Luhmann, which offer a more complex and skeptical theory about the structure of society subsequently emerged from the 1970s onwards.<sup>56</sup> The essence of Luhmann's approach is that every system, whether it is a biological organism or a social institution, seeks to thrive and prosper within its environment, to sub-divide and become more complex over time (the meaning of the term autopoiesis in biology).<sup>57</sup>

From a systems theory approach, law therefore is viewed as merely one sub-system of society, existing alongside other function systems, such as politics, the economy, architecture, and planning.<sup>58</sup> Rather than a hierarchical relationship between different systems, this approach requires that one think in terms of heterarchical relationships, or 'functional cooperation', in which each system controls its own operations.<sup>59</sup> In other words, autopoiesis requires a shift from thinking of the relationship between politics and law as a

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<sup>54</sup> R Baldwin and M Cave, *Understanding Regulation: Theory, Strategy, and Practice* (OUP 1999) 35

<sup>55</sup> M Travers, *Understanding Law and Society* (Routledge 2010) 42-54; See also See e.g. W Evan, 'Law as an instrument of social change', in W Evan (ed), *The Sociology of Law: A Social-Structural Perspective* (The Free Press 1980) 554-562; R Summers (1971) 'The Technique Element in Law', *California Law Review*, Vol. 59, 733

<sup>56</sup> M Travers, *Understanding Law and Society* (Routledge 2010) 51

<sup>57</sup> N Luhmann, *Law as a Social System* (K Ziegert, F Kastner, R Nobles, S Schiff, and R Ziegert tr OUP 2004) (*passim*)

<sup>58</sup> N Luhmann, *Law as a Social System* (K Ziegert, F Kastner, R Nobles, S Schiff, and R Ziegert tr OUP 2004) 357-380; H Baxter, 'Autopoiesis and the Relative Autonomy of Law' [1998] 19 *Cardozo Law Review* 1987-2090 (*passim*); B Morgan, 'Regulating the Regulators: Meta-Regulation as a Strategy for Reinventing Government in Australia' [1999] 1 *Public Management* 49

<sup>59</sup> K Ziegert, 'The Thick Description of Law: An Introduction to Niklas Luhmann's Theory', in R Banakar and M Travers, *An Introduction to Law and Social Theory* (Hart 2002) 69

causal chain, with law implementing political objectives, to thinking in terms of 'a multitude of vertical chains of recursions' among each of the individual subsystems'.<sup>60</sup> Black summarizes the problem as one in which

the political system may attempt to use law, and law may in turn try to act on other social systems, but both attempts will fail to the extent that the norms that they try to impose are outside the paths and limits of the self-reproduction of those systems they try to act upon (i.e. to the extent that they go beyond the 'structural coupling' of those systems).<sup>61</sup>

Applying this theory to a practical context, Colin Scott points out that within the political system there may be legislation created which assigns criminal penalties to breaches of rules set down in a statute.<sup>62</sup> In this context the legislation is the instrument of communication between political and legal subsystem, but the legal system, operationalized through a court, receives the legislation on its own terms, processing it according to the wider normative principles of criminal law. The instrumental objectives of the political system in prohibiting the targeted conduct are therefore of no interest within the legal system, where the legal norms emphasize principles protective of defendants such as a requirement that intent is proven, that guilt is proved beyond reasonable doubt, and so on. The stringent application of these principles however can often cut across the instrumental objectives of the regulatory regime so that the political system can be 'irritated' by a perceived failure of law to enforce the will of the people.<sup>63</sup>

One example of this type of problem in the equality law context is evidenced by way in which the operations of the legal system served to frustrate early

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<sup>60</sup> Paterson J and G Teubner, 'Changing Maps: Empirical Legal Autopoiesis' (1998) 7 (4) *Social and Legal Studies* 457

<sup>61</sup> J Black, 'Proceduralizing Regulation' (2000) 20 (4) *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* (2000) 599

<sup>62</sup> C Scott, 'Regulation in the age of governance: the rise of the post-regulatory state' in *The Politics of Regulation: Institutions and Regulatory Reforms for the Age of Governance*, J Jordana and D Levi-Faur (Edward Elgar 2004) 151

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid* 152

efforts on the part of politicians in the UK to combat racial discrimination. The Race Relations Act 1968 relied heavily upon criminal penalties but these measures were frustrated by the operations of the legal system that were predicated upon the rules and procedures of criminal law and the difficulty of proving discrimination beyond reasonable doubt.<sup>64</sup> Similar problems arose with the use of formal investigations to combat racial discrimination in the 1970s when the courts, through the application of principles of administrative law, seriously compromised the ability of the Commission for Racial Equality to carry out investigations.<sup>65</sup> These operations of the legal system in turn frustrated the political objective of addressing systemic discrimination in the labour market and required theorists and practitioners to develop more purposive models for addressing structural inequalities. Early attempts in Northern Ireland to address systemic disadvantage in the labour market were frustrated for the same reasons.<sup>66</sup>

It is unsurprising therefore that criticisms have arisen about the capacity of established transitional justice frameworks, such as truth commissions and reparations to address the socioeconomic dimensions of conflict given the criticisms arose about similar frameworks for addressing structural and systemic inequalities, both in the domestic and international context, in the 1970s and 1980s. The difference is that in the context of UK, European and U.S. equality law, the response was to develop more elaborate mechanisms for addressing institutional discrimination – affirmative action measures, and mainstreaming, to name but two. Within transitional justice, the response in some quarters has been more surprising, namely, to conclude that a failure of the part of traditional *mechanisms* of transitional justice to engage adequately with socioeconomic dimensions of conflict means that transitional justice ought not engage with socioeconomic issues at all. This lends support to De Greiff's argument that transitional justice has, at least for some, come to mean the

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<sup>64</sup> C McCrudden, 'Law Enforcement by Regulatory Agency: The Case of Employment Discrimination in Northern Ireland' (1982) 45 *Modern Law Review* 6

<sup>65</sup> C McCrudden and others, *Racial Justice at Work: The enforcement of the Race Relations Act 1976 in Employment* (Policy Studies Institute 1991) (*passim*)

<sup>66</sup> C McCrudden, 'Law Enforcement by Regulatory Agency: The Case of Employment Discrimination in Northern Ireland' (1982) 45 *Modern Law Review* 6

institutions and mechanisms, rather than the normative values that these institutions might seek to uphold. De Greiff argues that autopoiesis and the work of Niklas Luhmann provides a useful framework for examining how transitional justice can occupy a more explicitly normative space that moves beyond focus on institutions and allows for more consideration of issues like social solidarity, and civic trust, as well as greater engagement with non-recurrence and prevention. The implications of what this might mean in practice in the context of the spatial legacy of conflict in Belfast will be considered in the next section.

### **The Autopoiesis of Architecture and The City Ecosystem**

The value of systems theory for this study is highlighted by the fact that the notion of closed systems, existing within their own vertical chains of recursive<sup>67</sup> meaning processes, characterised by complexity and fragmentation of power reflects a trend that has taken place across a several other disciplines relevant for this thesis, notably architecture and planning. Schumacher argues that architecture can be most adequately understood if it is analysed as an ‘autopoietic’ system of communications.<sup>68</sup> In one of the few examples of transitional justice scholarship considering the architectural legacies of conflict, Mihai has pointed to the ‘agency of architecture’, arguing that architecture is simultaneously dependent *upon* and potentially transformative *of* politics.<sup>69</sup> Mihai’s notion of the *agency* of architecture mirrors the autopoiesis of architecture identified by Schumacher. The autopoiesis of architecture is also reflected in Wilson’s conception that architecture

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<sup>67</sup> Within the context of urban regeneration, the recursive processes are characterized by an approach in which the public sector installs infrastructure, and clears a development site, which provides the opportunity for private development. The private development is typically characterised by an anchor tenant, which may include private residential accommodation, followed by a subsequent range of smaller private investors. This process is recursive in that it is a framework that has been applied in many contexts for the past several decades and forms the essence of the economic dimensions of urban regeneration. The political irritations caused by this recursive model of economic regeneration are discussed in chapters five and six. In the same way, the recursive operations of the legal system include for example the judicial interpretation of statutes, legal academic debates and doctrinal dissertations outlined above, as well as rules about rights of audience, affidavits, skeleton arguments, and the plethora of other operations that take place in order to ensure cases can be brought to court.

<sup>68</sup> P Schumacher, *The Autopoiesis of Architecture, Vol 1: A New Framework for Architecture*, (Wiley 2011) (*passim*)

<sup>69</sup> M Mihai, ‘Architectural Transitional Justice? Political Renewal within the Scars of a Violent Past’ (2018) 12 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 515

is of its nature assertive – it proposes a certain way of doing things, of bringing together or separating activities – and this will either create an order that affronts or one that enhances the quality of life.<sup>70</sup>

Ellis has used the medical condition of autism as a metaphor to highlight the way in which the planning system in Northern Ireland during the 1970s and 1980s was closed to outside interests and influences, reliant upon recursive operations shaped by a technocratic elite.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Kaika uses the condition of autism to describe how architecture can demonstrate ‘a pathological self-absorption and preoccupation with the self to the exclusion of the outside world’.<sup>72</sup> In both cases, a more accurate, and arguably less pejorative approach would be to describe planning and architecture as classic examples of *autopoietic*, rather than *autistic* processes.

As with developments in legal scholarship, developments in contemporary urban theory have led to a much more modest conception of the capacity of planners to achieve social objectives, which in turn gives rise to skepticism around traditional, top-down ‘command and control’ planning processes predicated upon grand visions formulated by technocratic elites. In particular, disillusionment with the command-and-control planning processes of the years following the end of the Second World War has led to a significant reappraisal

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<sup>70</sup> C Wilson, *Architectural Reflections: Studies in the Philosophy and Practice of Architecture* (Manchester University Press 2000). Examples of the way in which architecture can enhance the quality of life include the design of the road on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago. At the beginning of the dangerous curve, there is a sign warning of the lower speed limit and a series of white painted stripes on the road. The stripes are not bumps but they send a visual signal to drivers. When the stripes first appear, they are evenly spaced, but as drivers reach the most dangerous portion of the curve, the stripes get closer together giving the sensation that driving speed is increasing. ‘One’s natural instinct is to slow down, a classic case of ‘nudging!’’. R Thayer and C Sunstein, *Nudge* (Yale University Press 2008) 38. Thayer and Sunstein offer a range of examples in this work which illustrate how architecture and design can enhance life in areas such as road safety and healthy eating. See also C Montgomery, *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design* (Farrar 2014) (passim)

<sup>71</sup> G Ellis, “The City of the Black Stuff: Belfast and the Autism of Planning”, in McEldowney, M., Murrar, M., Murtagh, B. and Sterrett, K. (eds.) *Planning in Ireland and Beyond: multidisciplinary essays in honour of John V. Greer* (QUB 2005), pps. 261-271

<sup>72</sup> M Kaika, ‘Autistic Architecture: the fall of the icon and the rise of the serial object of architecture’ (2011) 29 (6) *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 977

of the role of planners, and indeed the state, to address urban problems, especially those associated with patterns of spatial disadvantage. Within urban planning, the 1970s onwards were characterized by significant rethinking of theory and practice as the modernist utopias of the 1960s came to be characterized by urban blight, crime and deprivation.<sup>73</sup> Gaffikin and Morrissey contend that thinking within planning theory has been partly by a wider crisis in theory itself, involving a re-think about how we think, how we know, how we see reality.

Even if we don't buy into all the analysis of post-modernism, we know that old-style economics and urban planning no longer offer the path to utopia. We don't live in a world subject to certitude and ready prediction. It is a much more messy and chaotic place than that. Thus, nobody has a ready-made blueprint for how to remake cities enduring industrial decline...In the field of urban regeneration, we strive hard these days to see planning in an integrated way, to connect the social with the economic, and both with the built environment'.<sup>74</sup>

The notion of functionally differentiated subsystems existing within their own recursive meaning processes is also analagous with Jane Jacobs' model of a city ecosystem, comprising physical-economic-ethical processes active at a given time within a city and its close dependencies.<sup>75</sup> Jacobs model of the city as an ecosystem, comprising physical-economic-ethical processes, operating as a living system, provides therefore an especially useful framework for allowing consideration of the separate, but related forces that shape urban space. This approach continues to influence urban scholarship which is characterized by analysis of the city from the perspective of the physical, i.e.

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<sup>73</sup> P Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain, 1945-1975, A Study of Corporate Power, and Professional Influence in the Welfare State* (Clarendon Press 1981)

<sup>74</sup> F Gaffikin, M Morrissey and K Sterrett, 'Remaking the City: the Role of Culture in Belfast' in W Neill and H Schwedler (eds) *Urban Planning and Cultural Inclusion: Lessons from Belfast and Berlin* (Palgrave Macmillan 2001) 156

<sup>75</sup> J Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (first published 1961, Modern Library 1993) xvi.

planning and design aspects of a city, as well as the economic and ethical processes that influence the ecology of the city.<sup>76</sup>

The value of a systems approach for understanding the processes that shape spatial inequalities in an urban context, and the relationship between the ethical and political dimensions of a city ecosystem is also evident in the work of Ignatieff, who contends that

As a matter of hard economic fact, cities simply cannot function without some key elements of a shared moral operating system...None of this can ever be taken for granted. Just keeping the show on the road is an unending struggle, requiring everyone to recommit daily to the task of...rewriting the code that keeps a common operating system in place.<sup>77</sup>

As outlined above, Jacobs also considered the ethical dimension to be a key element of the city ecosystem. Ignatieff elaborates further on the notion of a city operating system, linking the ethical dimension to politics he claims that

Political coalition building is crucial to the maintenance of a shared operating system...when cities are ethnically diverse...they cannot be governed from the top down in command-and-control style. Instead, they need horizontal governance, with power dispersed through networks of community and business leaders committed to the maintenance of its shared operating system. These networks must ensure that no single group secures exclusive control over contracts and patronage.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Pluntz contends that cities are not 'a redoubt against nature, but quite the opposite...cities are a component of our global ecosystem', R Pluntz, *City Riffs: Urbanism, Ecology, Place* (Columbia University GSAPP 2017) 15

<sup>77</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 70

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

The work of Jacobs, Luhmann, and Ignatieff provides a useful framework for analyzing the relationship between spatial inequalities and political violence within the Belfast city ecosystem. The terms 'ecosystem' and 'operating' system will be used interchangeably in this work, drawing in particular on Ignatieff's notion of a 'shared operating system' in order to understand how the Belfast ecosystem, characterized by political division between the two main communities, has evolved from single-community dominance, to a much more horizontal form of governance through the power-sharing arrangements currently in place. This in turn allows for a more holistic analysis of the factors that shape spatial inequalities and disadvantage.

Chapter three of this thesis will show for example that the 'horizontal governance' and political coalition building identified by Ignatieff was notably absent from the political system in Northern Ireland during the 1960s, when a top-down, command and control form of governance helped precipitate the violence that erupted onto the streets and led to the outbreak of the conflict. Similarly, horizontal governance and political coalition building was notably absent during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, when a high-level conflict management strategy consolidated the patterns of segregation and division that took shape in the 1960s. During this period, the planning system was predicated upon operations that sought to achieve the maximum degree of segregation of the two communities, embracing some of the most extreme forms of 'desert planning' (see chapters four, five and six). Chapters seven and eight will highlight how horizontal governance and political coalition building is much more evident in the efforts used to promote prevent a return to conflict in contemporary Belfast. Ignatieff's rejection of command-and-control forms of governance in favour of a horizontal governance approach characterised by coalition-building and cooperation fits with developments in socio-legal and urban scholarship regarding the need for a more deliberative and participatory form of governance which will be explored in the next section.

### **Law, Systems, and Social Objectives**

As outlined above, rather than thinking of the relationship between different subsystems as a causal chain with law implementing political goals, a systems



approach, embodied in the theory of autopoiesis, is predicated upon the notion of closed, individual subsystems (e.g. law, politics, economics, etc.) each of which exists within its own vertical chain of recursive meaning processes.<sup>79</sup> From this perspective therefore, the only way to avoid regulatory failure, and deliver social goals, is to adopt a new paradigm of procedural law that involves the replacement of direct state control with effective internal control; i.e. the creation of structural conditions for an 'organizational conscience'.<sup>80</sup> This new form of procedural law at the heart of the legal theory of autopoiesis involves a shift to more indirect and abstract guidance mechanisms which take account of the heterarchical rather than hierarchical relationship between law, politics and other social systems.<sup>81</sup> Teubner summarizes this new framework as one in which the legal subsystem relates to other subsystems not through highly specified or materialized regulatory law (i.e. externally imposed detailed standards), but rather through working with the grain of the understanding of ordering within other subsystems. In other words,

If an alternative is to *compete* with an established system it must be presented in terms which cannot be disregarded as totally foreign, permanently outside and of no concern to the system itself.<sup>82</sup>

One term for this new approach is 'reflexive regulation', which is achieved not by an absence of state intervention (i.e. deregulation) but which involves instead more sophisticated, abstract and indirect forms of regulation.<sup>83</sup> A key

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<sup>79</sup> J Paterson and G Teubner, 'Changing Maps: Empirical Legal Autopoiesis' (1998) 7 (4) *Social and Legal Studies* 457. Teubner contends that 'the economy for example, constructs its society through the language of prices. Law features in economic calculations not as a binding guide to conduct but as a cost factor (the severity of the sanction involved and the likelihood of it being applied. Politics constructs its 'public' through the language of power, law its 'legal reality' through the distinction between legal and illegal, and so on.' G Teubner *Law as an autopoietic system*, (A Bankowska and R Adler tr, Blackwell 1993) 102-103

<sup>80</sup> J Black, 'Proceduralizing Regulation' (2000) 20 (4) *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* (2000) 600

<sup>81</sup> J Black, 'Decentering Regulation: Understanding the Role of Regulation and Self-Regulation in a 'Post-Regulatory World' 54 (1) *Current Legal Problems* 105-112

<sup>82</sup> W Carson, *The Other Price of Britain's Oil: Safety and Control in the North Sea*, (Martin Robertson 1981) 301 in J Paterson, *Behind the Mask: Regulating Health and Safety in Britain's Offshore Oil and Gas Industry* (Ashgate 2000) 226 (emphasis in original)

<sup>83</sup> G Teubner, *Law as an autopoietic system*, (A. Bankowska and R. Adler tr, Blackwell 1993) 97

hypothesis of the move towards more purposive guidance processes is that the conditions for success must be affirmatively created, rather than taken for granted, in order to 'reshape the context in which the actors operate'.<sup>84</sup> The practical application of this new regulatory approach involves a more limited use of law for the creation of 'interlocking mechanisms' which aim to direct participation.<sup>85</sup> The first of these interlocking mechanisms is the need for internal scrutiny by the organization itself to ensure effective self-regulation, followed by the involvement of interest groups who must be informed, consulted and engaged in the process of change. The third element is involvement of an enforcement agency that should provide the back-up role of assistance, building capabilities and ultimately sanctions where voluntary methods fail.<sup>86</sup> These mechanisms therefore establish a triangular relationship among those regulated. The 'triangular relationship' in the urban context in Belfast includes the subject of the regulation (i.e. planners, architects, etc.), relevant stakeholders (i.e. community organizations, NGOs and residents' groups) with the courts acting as the guardian of the public interest.

This form of reflexive governance is evident in the context of urban development in Northern Ireland in several different ways. Arguably the most important is the way in which the consociational power-sharing arrangements at the heart of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 shape the context within which the political leadership of the two main communities deliberate.<sup>87</sup> One of the core elements that defines consociations as distinct constitutional arrangements

is parity through cross-community power-sharing – that is, arrangements that encourage or oblige communities to make

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<sup>84</sup> O De Schutter, and S Deakin (eds), 'Reflexive governance and the dilemmas of social regulation' in *Social Rights and Market Forces: Is the open coordination of employment and social policies the future of social Europe?* (Bruylant 2005) 3

<sup>85</sup> B Hepple, M. Coussey and T. Choudhury (eds) *Equality: A New Framework: Report of the Independent Review of the Enforcement of UK Anti-Discrimination Legislation* (Hart 2000) 56-85

<sup>86</sup> B Hepple, *Equality: The New Legal Framework* (Hart 2011) 126

<sup>87</sup> B O'Leary 'Comparative Political Science and the British-Irish Agreement', in J. McGarry (ed), *Northern Ireland and the Divided World: Post-Agreement Northern Ireland in Comparative Perspective* (OUP 2001)

public policy and law *jointly*, through executive, legislative, judicial, policing and bureaucratic institutions that ensure that the relevant groups are represented adequately in such institutions.<sup>88</sup>

From this perspective, law establishes a triangular relationship at the political level by requiring agreed decision making between political leadership of the two communities, with the courts forming the third element of the triangle, upholding the public interest. In addition to the requirement that decision making takes place on a cross-community basis the Northern Ireland Act also contains other elements that incorporate deliberative and reflexive arrangements, notably, Section 75 of the Act, which provides a series of procedural requirements which aim to address structural and systemic inequalities through involvement of stakeholders. Other examples of this triangular relationship are to be found in the legal rights to consultation specifically enshrined within The Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and the Housing Northern Ireland Order 2003 which grant the right to consultation and access to information for housing associations and tenants. The legal system has also developed more deliberative or reflexive governance arrangements through the application of common law principles around consultation which apply generally across policy making, including urban development.<sup>89</sup>

Urban theorists and political scientists have also developed a range of options that broadly fit within the type of deliberative and inclusive approach to post-conflict planning that aims to integrate participation of local communities with technocratic expertise while at the same time avoiding zero-sum sectarian politics.<sup>90</sup> Variations of this approach have been offered by a range of scholars, variously described as 'communicative' or 'collaborative planning'.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> C McCrudden and B O'Leary, *Courts and Consociations: Human Rights versus Power-Sharing* (OUP 2013) 6

<sup>89</sup> See e.g. *Moseley v London Borough of Haringey* [2014] UKHL 56

<sup>90</sup> B Murtagh, B Graham and P Shirlow, 'Authenticity and stakeholder planning in the segregated city' [2008] 69 *Progress in Planning* 41 (*passim*)

<sup>91</sup> R Brand and F Gaffikin, 'Collaborative Planning in an Uncollaborative World', *Planning Theory* (2007) 6 282-213 (*passim*)

In practice, these processes do not operate independently, but rather reflect a political reality that progress on major urban redevelopment schemes of the type considered in this thesis must be subject to a high degree of participation and involvement from local communities and other stakeholders (see chapter five).<sup>92</sup> Moreover, these processes also need to take account of the legal requirement for cross-community consensus contained in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, thereby consolidating the horizontal governance arrangements envisaged by Ignatieff.

Contemporary theory and practice within legal, political, and planning systems is therefore characterised by a shift towards more deliberative frameworks at the expense of traditional, command-and-control forms of governance characterised by a strong belief in the capacity of governments to formulate solutions, and crucially, directly implement them. This shift mirrors developments within transitional justice scholarship which argues for a way forward that emphasizes local agency, prioritizes process and challenges unequal and intersecting power relations and exclusion.<sup>93</sup> Through case study analysis, this thesis will outline some recommendations about what this more participative and 'reflexive' form of transitional justice might look like in theory and in practice.

### **Deliberating Fundamental Rights: Concerns and Compromises**

One characteristic of this shift towards more abstract and complex guidance mechanisms for addressing structural and systemic inequalities has been a more diminished role for the courts and more emphasis on participative and deliberative processes. This shift however has by no means taken place without controversy. McCrudden contends that viewing law merely as one

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<sup>92</sup> Research suggests that deliberative or collaborative planning work better in theory than practice. For example, Tewder-Jones and Allmendinger have pointed out that there is evidence 'some planners have very little regard for public consultation and participation as it potentially undermines their professional autonomy and threatens their independent professional judgment', M Tewdwr-Jones and P Allmendinger, 'Deconstructing communicative rationality: a critique of Habermasian Collaborative Planning', *Environment and Planning A* (1998) 30 1985

<sup>93</sup> P Gready and S Robins, 'From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice' (2014) (8) *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 356

'sub-system' may insufficiently identify and recognise the role of conflicting political and economic interests that shape abuses of power. By attributing regulatory failures simply to problems of 'communication' the danger is that de-politicizing the area of regulation concerned may offer those resistant to change an 'out' under the guise of a failure to understand, as opposed to a well-understood resistance to the aims that government wishes to see adopted.<sup>94</sup> The second criticism he identifies is that in viewing law and legislation as simply one social subsystem with its own values there is a danger of underestimating the extent to which law plays an important expressive role in articulating shared values that the society, through its representative institutions, regards to be fundamental and not merely negotiable. In particular, McCrudden cautions that enthusiasm for deliberation among stakeholders within a reflexive law context can create the danger that more debate on 'core values' than is actually desired takes place. From this perspective there is a set of ethical values at issue in the human rights context that are thought to be central to our conception of appropriate behaviour and therefore not open to fundamental challenge. The problem he considers is that within the context of a more abstract, participative processes, deliberation on *how* to implement can encourage deliberation on *how far* to implement, and ultimately on *whether* to implement, leading to the undermining of the values themselves.

The case study examined in this thesis shows that rather than downplaying the role of other factors in shaping abuses of power, viewing law merely as one sub-system allows for a more nuanced and arguably more comprehensive understanding of the way in which abuses of power can be shaped by political, economic, and other interests. Paterson and Teubner contend that at the most basic level, by being open to the possibility that more than one recursive chain will be in play across the entire range of the process, autopoiesis can direct existing analytical tools to the most appropriate places.<sup>95</sup> Thus, instead of

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<sup>94</sup> C McCrudden, 'Equality Legislation and Reflexive Regulation: A Response to the Discrimination Law Review's Consultation Paper' (2007) 36 (3) *Industrial Law Journal* 258-260

<sup>95</sup> J Paterson and G Teubner, 'Changing Maps: Empirical Legal Autopoiesis' (1998) 7 (4) *Social and Legal Studies* 457

economic analysis seeking to account for the entire field – as attempted, for example, by the Chicago School – autopoiesis can limit economic analysis to those recursive processes where the economic code and programmes are in evidence. Similarly, instead of political analytical tools coming to a study with ready-made concepts into which the entire field must be squeezed, autopoiesis asks that political analysis more modestly restrict itself to those systems where the power code of politics is in evidence.<sup>96</sup> In other words, a systems approach is useful for helping the researcher to understand, and identify, interests and influences that might otherwise go unnoticed.<sup>97</sup> This is especially valuable given the ‘invisibility’ of economics in transitional justice.<sup>98</sup> The value of considering the totality of influences on a field of study is especially important in this context given the subject matter of this thesis and the degree to which economic factors, and the architecture and planning of the built environment, as well as political violence, are central to explaining spatial disadvantage.<sup>99</sup>

The value of a systems analysis for considering the totality of influences in a field of study is also relevant in another important and wider context for transitional justice, namely, the need to disaggregate, and understand, the degree to which post-conflict patterns of inequality and disadvantage are a function of conflict, or other factors, such as inherent failings within economic or architectural subsystems. It has been argued that one of the reasons that the socioeconomic root causes of violence and repression are often ignored by transitional justice is the difficulty of identifying who or what is responsible for inequality and the challenge of conceiving of practical remedies to address

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> At the same time, there is no suggestion that systems theory is the only framework that can be used here, but rather, the aim is to highlight the potential value of a systems approach in this context.

<sup>98</sup> Z Miller, ‘Effects of Invisibility: In Search of the ‘Economic in Transitional justice’ (2008) 2 *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 266-291

<sup>99</sup> An example of the more traditional and one-dimensional approach characteristic of much transitional justice scholarship is evident in a recent report published by a group at Queen’s University Belfast which looked at the impact of the conflict on housing and land in Northern Ireland. The report largely ignored the role of redevelopment, planning and architectural practices focusing exclusively on political violence. See L Moffett and others, *No Longer Neighbours – The Impact of Violence on Land, Housing and Redress in the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Reparations, Responsibility & Victimhood in Transitional Societies 2020), <https://reparations.qub.ac.uk/assets/uploads/Land-Report-ENG-SP.pdf>

structural violence.<sup>100</sup> This point been taken up by Roht-Arriaza who has pointed out that forced displacement for example, does not only occur during armed conflict, but also through ‘dams, mines, wildlife reserves and parks, palm oil plantations and other ‘development’ projects’.<sup>101</sup> Dixon questions whether a country’s dispossession of land for resource privatization is an act of economic violence in need of transitional justice narrative, a consequence of globalization, or both?<sup>102</sup> As he rightly points out, this question challenges not only the terms according to which scholars define transitional justice, but also the assumptions they may hold about development.

In the context of this study, it is important to note that spatial inequalities and patterns of spatial segregation and deprivation, linked to group identity, are present in most urban environments. Moreover, as this thesis will show, contemporary Belfast has been shaped as much by global economic forces, notably deindustrialization, as the politics of Northern Ireland. The point here is that examination of the spatial legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict must address the way in which the different elements of the Belfast ecosystem have interacted to deliver the structural and systemic inequalities that exist in the contemporary city.<sup>103</sup> As outlined above, an important dimension to be considered in this thesis is the way in which the planning and design of the urban environment contributes to patterns of spatial inequality and segregation. This thesis shows how architecture and planning in the 1970s and 1980s proposed ‘a certain way of doing things’ that involved segregating and dividing entire communities within the city. The thesis also shows that the hypersensitivity to turf that characterises Belfast is reflected in an architectural ethos that is still predicated upon keeping communities apart rather than bringing them together. In a similar vein, Yiftachel contends that

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<sup>100</sup> Dancy G and E Wiebelhaus-Brahm, ‘Bridge to human development or vehicle of inequality? Transitional justice and economic structures’ (2014) 9 (1) *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 51-69

<sup>101</sup> N Roht-Arriaza, ‘Reparations and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’ in D Sharp (ed) *Justice and Economic Violence in Transition* (Springer 2014) 131

<sup>102</sup> PJ Dixon, ‘Transitional Justice and Development’ in L Moffet, C Lawther and D Jacobs (eds), *Research Handbook on Transitional Justice* (Edward Elgar 2019) 165

<sup>103</sup> For a discussion of complexity and urban planning see J Levy, *Contemporary Urban Planning* (Pearson Education 2009) 1-8

Planning, that is, the public regulation and ‘production of space’ is shown to serve as an instrument of social control. Like most other areas of public policy, it should thus be conceived as ‘double-edged’, being capable of both reform and control, emancipation and oppression.<sup>104</sup>

Chapter three of this thesis highlights how the planning system in Belfast served as an instrument of social control, and in particular, how a structural coupling between the planning and political systems during the conflict played a key role in shaping the spatial legacy that characterises the contemporary city. In other words, by identifying the specific operations of each sub-system, one is able to capture more fully the range of forces that help shape the structural and systemic inequalities that characterise the contemporary city.

### **Linear Progression and Systemic Inequalities**

There is another important theme that connects the work of Luhmann, Jacobs, and Ignatieff that is important for this thesis and it relates to the temporal aspects of their approaches and how they are especially valuable when considering the spatial legacy of conflict. Jacobs considered the city ecosystem to be in the same state of flux as the natural world so that observers of city life who thought they viewed static situations were actually seeing processes of beginning and processes of ending occurring simultaneously.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, systems theory is characterized by functionally differentiated sub-systems located within their own vertical chain of operations, repeated over time. This is especially useful given the objectives of this thesis namely, seeking to establish the ways in which structural and systemic inequalities have helped to shape, and in fact been shaped by conflict in Northern Ireland over a sustained period of time. From this perspective, spatial inequalities in contemporary Belfast ought not be viewed as a post-conflict snapshot, but

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<sup>104</sup> O Yiftachel, ‘Social control, urban planning and ethno-class relations: Mizrahi Jews in Israel’s ‘Development Towns’ (2003) 24 (2) *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 418

<sup>105</sup> J Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (first published 1961, Modern Library 1993) xvii



rather, from the perspective of wider processes of beginning and ending. Crucially, in the economic context, the need to consider structural and systemic inequalities from the perspective of a series of processes taking shape over time was also identified by Keynes who argued that

The great events of history are often due to secular changes in the growth of population and other fundamental economic causes, which, escaping by their gradual character the notice of contemporary observers, are attributed to the follies of statesmen or the fanaticism of atheists.<sup>106</sup>

As chapter three of this thesis will show, the factors that led to the outbreak of conflict in the city of Belfast in the late 1960s had their origins in weaknesses within the economic dimensions of the city ecosystem stretching back several decades. Moreover, the significant changes that were introduced into the city ecosystem in the 1950s, notably, the decanting of large sections of the population to outlying suburbs in order to support new industries, continues to shape spatial tensions and conflict in the city to the present day. In particular, this thesis will show that the population changes that have taken place over the past 50 years in Belfast must be taken into account in any discussions about a post-conflict planning agenda for the city in order to prevent a return to violence in the future.

The city ecosystem identified in this research is not static but rather is one that consists of processes of beginning and processes of ending occurring simultaneously, one of the most important of which is the decline in the Protestant share of the population of Belfast. This demographic shift has taken place within a context in which there has been a significant decline in traditional industries, notably shipbuilding, engineering, and textiles, and the rise of the knowledge economy. Other processes of change include the gradual decline of political violence and the move towards a more peaceful and in some

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<sup>106</sup> J M Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (first published 1920, Penguin 1971) 14

respects, equal city. The contemporary Belfast ecosystem is subject to continuing compromise and negotiation, especially regarding the occupation of territory as populations continue to shift and fits with Ignatieff's model of a subliminal operating system in that

It requires passably fair public institutions, decent policing above all and a subliminal operating system – basic trust, basic reciprocity- constantly tested, constantly renegotiated, but usually reaffirmed in the ebb and flow of daily life. It is so often reaffirmed as to become second nature.<sup>107</sup>

This vision of a 'subliminal operating system' is analogous to De Greiff's observation about the importance of 'civic trust' and the rule of law in promoting social integration and for strengthening norms, institutions and other basic pillars of a well-functioning society.<sup>108</sup> The violence that erupted in the city in the late 1960s, and lasted for almost three decades, took place within a context in which the subliminal operating system broke down through lack of civic trust in public institutions, especially the police. The city ecosystem of the 1970s and 1980s relied upon military power and emergency laws rather than basic trust and reciprocity in order to ensure the ebb and flow of daily life. The existence of a subliminal operating system in contemporary Belfast is evident, to an extent, in the significant decline in politically motivated violence in the city, especially bombings and shootings, as well as the withdrawal of the British Army, the end of 'no go zones' for the security forces, and a relative absence of confrontations between local communities and the police that descend into large-scale rioting and civil disorder. However, this thesis contends that insofar as the spatial legacy of the conflict in Belfast is concerned, there is no end point, no linear path towards peace, only a city ecosystem characterised by streets and neighbourhoods that ebb and flow with daily life and continue to be shaped by processes that in some cases go back centuries. There have

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<sup>107</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 45

<sup>108</sup> P De Greiff, 'Articulating the Links between Transitional Justice and Development: Justice and Social Integration', in P De Greiff and R Duthie (eds) *Transitional Justice and Development: Making Connections* (International Center for Transitional Justice 2009) 28-75

been some developments in transitional justice scholarship that fit the temporal vision of this thesis with Turner for example advocating a concept of justice which eschews certainty in favour of an open-ended approach in which justice is never fully present but remains locked in a continual process of negotiation and renegotiation.<sup>109</sup> In a similar vein, De Greiff argues that taking conflict prevention seriously involves

setting aside the sort of utopianism that we in the human rights community fall prey to so easily, utopianism that concentrates on describing (desirable) end-states and on pointing out how far away we are from attaining those end states, but that disengages from the task of providing answers to the question about how we get from here to there'.<sup>110</sup>

Through analysis of the post-conflict regeneration of Belfast, this thesis will outline what lessons can be learned about how we might get, 'from here to there', and importantly, the compromises that we all might need to settle for along the way. As chapters seven and eight will show, agreement around the way forward for the Girdwood site in north Belfast is rooted in the ebb and flow of demographic changes and by no means represents 'closure' but rather, illustrates the negotiation and compromise characteristic of a subliminal operating system that keeps peace on the streets – at least for now. This is crucially important in a city like Belfast where 'locality and history are welded together'.<sup>111</sup>

### **Contradictions, Compromises and Conflict**

Ultimately, as this thesis will show, the compromises that arose from the Girdwood redevelopment reflect the contradictions that lie at the heart of competing human rights claims predicated upon two different approaches to

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<sup>109</sup> C Turner, *Violence, Law, and the Impossibility of Transitional Justice*, (Routledge 2016) 163-164

<sup>110</sup> P De Greiff, 'The Future of the Past: Reflections on the Present State and Prospects of Transitional Justice' (2020) 14 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 258

<sup>111</sup> A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (Blackstaff 1977) 182

delivering group justice.<sup>112</sup> Useful insight into what these compromises and contradictions mean for the promotion and protection of human rights is provided again by Ignatieff who notes that in hyper-diverse cities a strong commitment to equality, diversity and tolerance – that is, living together – often goes hand in hand with the actual practice of living apart.<sup>113</sup> In fact, he concludes that it may be the case that the only realistic way for diverse populations to live together *is* to live side by side and that this paradox may be diversity's condition for success. Drawing on the work of Appiah, Ignatieff contends that diversity as a value and diversity as a fact do not closely correspond.<sup>114</sup>

The evidence from Belfast suggests a way forward that assists with non-recurrence of violence through separation *and* sharing, co-existing simultaneously in a wider shared ecosystem. From this perspective, separation and sharing are not binary opposites, with the choice, as some have suggested, between one or the other.<sup>115</sup> Ignatieff's own conclusions correspond with the findings of this research, where it appears that at least in some areas of the city the best way to keep the peace is to keep communities apart and continue to plan for segregation rather than integration – in spite of the consequences for continuing patterns of inequality. Based on fieldwork undertaken in a number of other divided cities Ignatieff suggests the need for a form of governance based on a 'shared operating system' that is grounded in compromise, especially for societies with complex transitions towards democracy. He argues in fact that the compromises inherent within these processes will at times require human rights activists and scholars to acknowledge that

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<sup>112</sup> For a useful discussion of the contradictions and compromises inherent within competing models of equality see C McCrudden, *Buying Social Justice: Equality, Government Procurement and Legal Change* (Oxford University Press 2007) 63-94

<sup>113</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 46

<sup>114</sup> A Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 230: 'Equality wasn't what morality demanded of us as individuals: it denotes a regulative ideal for political, not personal conduct. We go wrong when we conflate personal and political ideals.' In M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017), 231

<sup>115</sup> See e.g. K Boyle and T Hadden, *Northern Ireland: The Choice* (Penguin 1994) (*passim*) who posit the notion that separation and sharing are binary opposites. The shared operating system posited in this thesis combines elements of both.

If human rights activism wills the end of a successful transition, it must also will the means, that is, the less than perfect political processes that make a democratic transition possible....It is also a fact that outsiders do not have the power, if we ever did, to determine how fast or slow any local transition proceeds anywhere. We have no ultimate standing on the question of questions: Whose place is this? Who rules?<sup>116</sup>

This perspective fits with the material gathered during this case study where 'the less than perfect political processes' that have prevented a return to violence have indeed delivered solutions that fall outside conventional boundaries of established economic development and planning theory. And yet Ignatieff goes on to argue that 'outsiders...' need to recognize '...the dangers that lurk in our own certainties and convictions and avoid them as best we can'....<sup>117</sup>

As outlined above, an important theme of modern planning theory is the need for greater humility and a rejection of the hubris that infected the profession in the decades immediately following the Second World War. As outlined in chapter three, the descent of the utopian, modernist cities of the 1960s and 1970s into urban nightmares for the people that had to actually live in them, helped ensure that modern planning theory is characterized by need for participative, deliberative solutions. Just as transitional justice activists and scholars need to accept the pace and outcomes that deliberative processes provide, so too, planning theorists need also to recognize the limitations of their power and accept outcomes that defy conventional wisdom in the profession.

The key finding from this thesis is that a genuinely thicker understanding of transitional justice that incorporates socioeconomic dimensions ought to be a more deliberative and *reflexive* form of transitional justice. Such an approach

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<sup>116</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 136

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid* 137

would recognize both the autopoietic nature of modern governance and provide a framework for analyzing the complex relationship that exists between social and economic inequalities and political conflict. A more reflexive approach to transitional justice would also provide space for economists, architects, planners, and local communities, all of whom have an important role in helping to understand, and address, systemic and structural conflict legacy issues.

This more reflexive form of transitional justice is one that is located on the interface between transitional and transformative justice, it is deliberative, with means and ends determined at the level of the 'local'. Such an approach fits with other developments characterized as transitional justice 'from below'.<sup>118</sup> Reflexive transitional justice also fits with the demand from conflict transformation scholarship that prescriptive and mimetic approaches to transition ought to be jettisoned in favour of those that are context specific, participatory and bottom-up – what Paul Lederach has called 'elicitive'.<sup>119</sup> Gready and Robins argue that the processes likely to emerge from such an emancipatory approach to transition will necessarily be hybrid in nature, dependent upon informal as well as formal governance, grounded in the cultures and the context from which they emerge, and more or less hybridized with global discourses and mechanisms.<sup>120</sup> As this thesis will show, it is in this 'hybridized space', that a genuinely more holistic understanding of transitional justice can hope to succeed on the streets of Belfast.

## Conclusions

The focus of this thesis is the relationship between systemic inequalities and political conflict. In particular, this research is concerned with understanding the complex range of economic, political, planning and architectural processes

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<sup>118</sup> K McEvoy, 'Beyond Legalism: Towards a Thicker Understanding of Transitional Justice' (2007) 34 (4) *Journal of Law and Society*. See also P De Greiff, 'The Future of the Past: Reflections on the Present State and Prospects of Transitional Justice' (2020) 14 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 257

<sup>119</sup> P Lederach, 'Building Mediative Capacity in Deep-Rooted Conflict', (2002) 26 (1) *Fletcher Forum on World Affairs* 91-101

<sup>120</sup> P Gready and S Robins, 'From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice' (2014) (8) *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 351

and that need to be considered when examining the spatial legacy of conflict in a divided city. The evidence from this study is that a more holistic approach to transitional justice that addresses social and economic conflict legacy issues must engage with the range of processes that have helped shape social and economic disadvantage over time. This requires a reconsideration not just of the means by which transitional justice can be achieved, but also the outcomes that transitional justice can reasonably be expected to deliver.

Chapter two outlines the methodological approaches taken to complete this thesis, while chapter three examines the role that urban planning and the wider process of deindustrialization, and lack of political representation for the Catholic community played in conflict in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s. Chapter four examines the role that the conflict management strategy established in the early 1970s played in shaping patterns of spatial disadvantage that persist to the present day. Chapters five and six provide an examination of the Girdwood case study in north Belfast, highlighting the ways in which political, economic, and architectural systems were impacted by the legacy of the conflict, ultimately leading to a failure to secure agreement on the Girdwood Masterplan. Chapter seven explores how efforts to address competing patterns of spatial inequality, and in particular, concerns from within the Unionist community, led to the development of alternative proposals for the redevelopment of the Girdwood site. Chapter seven also shows how these alternative proposals, negotiated by the political leadership of the two main communities retain many of the architectural and design practices of the conflict, namely, they are predicated upon the continued separation and segregation of the two main communities in the area. Chapter eight will explore what lessons can be drawn with regard to the redevelopment of the Girdwood site for the wider theory and practice of transitional justice. This will include consideration of what the north Belfast case study says with regard to the outcomes that can reasonably be expected from efforts to address structural and systemic conflict legacy issues.

## Chapter Two

### Methodology and Reflections

#### **Introduction**

This chapter sets out the processes deployed to achieve the research objectives of this thesis; it provides an outline of the main ethical issues associated with the research, the identified limitations of the study and the foreseen and the unforeseen challenges that arose during the course of the research. This chapter also considers the ways in which the data gathered for the research has been processed and used in drafting the research findings. The combination of methods employed for this study 'flow logically from the project's research question'.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Challenges of Inter-disciplinary Research**

This research is situated within a socio-legal framework however several other disciplines, notably urban theory, economics, political science and transitional justice have also been drawn upon. Specifically, this thesis encapsulates an approach that considers the limitations and boundaries of the legal system.<sup>2</sup> Drawing upon systems theory and the legal theory of autopoiesis this thesis seeks to understand how structural and systemic inequalities can impact upon conflict through examination of the way in which economic, political, and architectural processes shape urban space.

As with any inter-disciplinary research, a key challenge for the researcher is the extent to which one can go beyond the boundaries of one particular discipline, while retaining the rigour inherent within the thinking and methodologies associated with each individual discipline. Banaker and

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<sup>1</sup> F Coomans, F Grunfeld and M Kamminga, 'Methods of Human Rights Research: A Primer' (2010) 32 (1) Human Rights Quarterly 185

<sup>2</sup> D Nelken, 'Getting at Law's Boundaries', (2006) 15 Social and Legal Studies 598; J Mingers, *Self-Producing Systems: Implications and Applications of Autopoiesis* (Plenum Press 1995) (passim)



Travers have noted that ‘lawyers, and not social scientists, are the main actors in the field of social-legal research in the UK’.<sup>3</sup> As such these researchers face particular challenges with respect to seeking to adopt a sociological approach to law, coming as they do from a legal, rather than sociological perspective. These methodological obstacles<sup>4</sup>, which are not specific to the sociology of law, and which also exist in other sub-branches of sociology, concern the tension between the ‘experience-near’ concepts and perspectives of insiders (such as lawyers, doctors, clients etc.) on their field of activity, and the ‘experience-distant’ theoretical concepts of the outsiders (in this case the sociologist studying law, medicine etc.) on the insiders’ perceptions, beliefs, intentions, and actions.

For larger scale research projects, one obvious solution to the problem identified by Banakar and Travers is for a range of project staff to be recruited to carry out the research, with expertise from a range of disciplines. This is an approach that has been adopted in recent years by a number of practitioners in this area of study. For example, an assessment of the success of affirmative action measures in advancing equality in employment in Northern Ireland undertaken by a group from the University of Oxford, contained one lawyer and three sociologists with an advisory panel that included this author.<sup>5</sup> The option of working with a team of individuals from a range of disciplines is not open to a researcher

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<sup>3</sup> R Banakar and M Travers, ‘Introduction’ in R Banakar and M Travers (eds), *Theory and Method in Socio-Legal Research* (Hart Publishing 2005) xi

<sup>4</sup> R Banakar, ‘Reflections on the Methodological Issues of the Sociology of Law’ (2000) 27 (2) *Journal of Law and Society* 2

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. C. McCrudden, R Muttarak, H Hamill and A Heath, ‘Affirmative Action without Quotas in Northern Ireland’, Legal Research Paper Series, Paper No. 43/2010, (University of Oxford 2010). The advisory panel included, among others, myself (then Equality Programme Officer, Committee on the Administration of Justice), Evelyn Collins (Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland), Patricia McKeown (Regional Secretary UNISON), and Ian Shuttleworth (geographer, Queen’s University Belfast). When the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland published an edited collection examining the impact of fair employment legislation in Northern Ireland “a generation on”, contributors came from the disciplines of law, sociology, social policy, geography, and economics, B Osborne and I Shuttleworth, *Fair Employment in Northern Ireland: A Generation On* (Blackstaff 2004) Similarly, when the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights commissioned research into employment equality in the late 1990s, experts from a range of academic disciplines contributed to the study, e.g. E McLaughlin and P Quirk (eds) *Policy Aspects of Employment Equality in Northern Ireland* (SACHR 1996)

conducting a PhD thesis, although there is undoubtedly an argument that the subject matter of this thesis should be the subject of a wider cross-disciplinary study at a later date. Future research potential notwithstanding, the immediate problem of how one might feasibly examine issues relating to the relationship between law and the urban environment, which requires engagement with a range of other disciplines, remains. The theoretical framework of this research, namely, autopoiesis and systems theory is inherently 'inter-disciplinary'. It is predicated upon the notion of functionally differentiated sub-systems each of which exists within its own recursive meaning processes.<sup>6</sup> As outlined in the previous chapter this 'heterarchical' rather than 'hierarchical' framework, that is predicated upon an understanding of the internal processes or 'operations' of each closed system, necessitates a degree of engagement and inquiry outside the traditional boundaries of the legal system that helps militate against a socio-legal study becoming by default, a legal study.<sup>7</sup>

### **Documentary Sources**

A broad range of documentary resources were used to inform the wider theoretical and practical basis of the research namely law, economics, politics, urban planning, transitional justice and architecture. Search strategies were used to identify relevant academic literature and data related to the case study. These included academic publications; reports by NGOs; published government reports, including planning documents; archival primary sources including minutes of meetings, letters, and formerly classified internal government reports; domestic legislation; domestic jurisprudence; and quantitative data such as census figures and data on patterns of deprivation and segregation. Considerable time was spent identifying archives where historical and contemporary information from local sources on the case study could be found. They included the Linen Hall Library in Belfast, the special collections library at Queen's

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<sup>6</sup> G Teubner, *Law as an autopoietic system*, (A Bankowska and R Adler tr, Blackwell 1993) (passim)

<sup>7</sup> J Paterson, J. and G Teubner, 'Changing Maps: Empirical Legal Autopoiesis' (1998) 7 (4) *Social and Legal Studies* 451

University Belfast, and the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) in Belfast.

### **Empirical Research**

Paterson and Teubner argue that the identification of the specific autopoietic systems at play in any given context is not a question that can be answered theoretically but only through empirical observation.<sup>8</sup> They also contend that autopoiesis theory does not impose a set of pre-existing systems but rather compels us to observe the concrete interactions and technological processes in our implementation field in order to discover the systemicity of our research object. They go on to argue that it is 'probably' the case that only through consideration of individual concrete examples can researchers decide upon a methodology which is appropriate to each case.<sup>9</sup> The technique used by this researcher involved an adaptation and combination of several of these approaches outlined above, namely a descriptive narrative augmented by photography, walking, and conventional (as opposed to cognitive) mapping. Documentary and interview analyses were deployed to identify the key subsystems relevant for the study i.e. politics, economics, architecture, and planning. The descriptive technique was particularly useful for capturing the essence of the recursive processes within the political and economic systems while the use of maps, photography, and walking was especially valuable in identifying the operations of the planning and architecture systems.

This research provided an opportunity for a deeper engagement in an ethnographic type approach. A range of opportunities for observation and data gathering outside of actual interviews and walking/photography were taken. For example several policy/practitioner events were attended which all lent data and learning to the case study.<sup>10</sup> This researcher also

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<sup>8</sup> J Paterson, J. and G Teubner, 'Changing Maps: Empirical Legal Autopoiesis' (1998) 7 (4) *Social and Legal Studies* 451

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 461

<sup>10</sup> These included for example a round-table discussion in January 2013 organised by the Community Relations Council for Northern Ireland on the subject of 'Shared Housing' as well as a seminar at the Northern Ireland Assembly, organised in conjunction with the

continued to be involved in the practice and policy arena relating to the substance of the thesis. Opportunities to gather data and to view the field from the perspective of a critical researcher rather than simply take part as a participant and subject of the field were taken. This researcher also sat on a panel at the All-Ireland Public Interest Litigation Conference, in Belfast in June 2012, on the subject of strategic litigation and spatial inequality. In the spring of 2017 this researcher worked with and advised a group of faculty and post-graduate students from the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University who were working on a report for Belfast City Council directly related to the thesis, entitled 'Reconnecting Belfast'.<sup>11</sup>

### **Qualitative Interviews**

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted for the purposes of addressing the research questions and identification of recursive processes within closed systems. For identifying interview subjects, 'purposive' and snowball sampling were used to identify interview subjects.<sup>12</sup> The primary targets for interview were the authors and officials responsible for drawing up and implementing the original Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Masterplan as well as members of the Masterplan Advisory Panel. The Advisory Panel had been established in order to bring a range of stakeholder expertise, across a wide section of the community, and representing a range of interests into the development of the Masterplan and therefore provided an ideal target for interview. The primary author of the Masterplan agreed to participate in the study, as did the senior public servant with responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Masterplan. Most members of the Advisory Panel agreed also to be interviewed although in some cases organisations or political parties nominated an alternative representative due to changes in personnel. For example, the senior DUP representative on the Advisory

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University of Ulster and the Queen's University Belfast, also in January 2013, on residential segregation and population change in Northern Ireland.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.lulu.com/shop/gsapp/reconnecting-belfast/ebook/product-23261743.html>

<sup>12</sup> M Patton *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (Sage 1990) 169

Panel Diane Dodds, by the time the interviews were carried out, had moved to Strasbourg to serve as an MEP. The DUP proposed that an alternative act as a substitute.

A basic interview guide, with UU ethical approval, was developed to facilitate the interview and sent to interviewees in advance of the meeting. In total 27 interviews were conducted.<sup>13</sup> This interview-based research was undertaken in NI during three phases, the first of which was November – December 2011; the second of which was in January 2015; and the third and final set of interviews took place in July 2018. An important contention of this thesis is that the city ecosystem is not a ‘snapshot’ but rather, represents a series of processes of beginnings and endings occurring simultaneously. It was vitally important therefore that initial interviews were followed up in order to assess the extent to which the evolution and development of the city ecosystem fit with the findings of the research. In this context it is important to note that when the first phase of interviews were completed there was political gridlock around the way forward for the Girdwood site, which was at that time, still a cleared derelict site. Subsequent interviews took place as this vacant site was transformed by the community hub, through the political discussions about the ‘Conceptual Framework’ alternative to the original Masterplan. The point here is that city ecosystems, and the patterns of inequality that are contained within them are not static, and therefore it was imperative as the research evolved that additional information was garnered to trace the development of the site.

Interviews focused on gleaning the respondents’ views on the extent to which interventions could influence and address patterns of spatial inequality and segregation. In particular interviews focused on the complexity of the problems that arose with regard to the nature of spatial inequalities i.e. identifying what constitutes inequality in an urban context and how patterns of inequality are constructed. Interviews also focused

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<sup>13</sup> Ethical approval for the interview guide was secured September 2011

on the different systems that shaped the built environment (i.e. political, economic, planning and architecture) in order to tease out how one might arrive at a more inclusive planning framework.

There are a range of views and recommendations on the issue of ‘saturation’— i.e. the necessary number of interviews for a qualitative research project. Guest et al have explored the diverse views on this matter in academia and found that authors’ recommendations range from between 15 and 60 interviews, with little rationale for these recommendations.<sup>14</sup> Their own view is that if overarching themes are used then saturation is reached early when there is enough data to support the themes and the discussion of them.<sup>15</sup> This form of saturation was achieved during this study as similar opinions began emerging from the middle to the end of the interviewing period.

It is also important to note that the interviews themselves were not the sole form of primary data, nor was this solely an ethnographic study. The aim of the interviews was to provide an additional source of data with which to triangulate the information that had already been identified from documentation search, and other ethnographic/observation processes discussed below as well as the researcher’s own contextual understanding of the issues relating to this study that had been achieved over the course of more than ten years spent working on these issues.

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<sup>14</sup> G Guest, A Bunce, and L Johnson, ‘How Many Interviews Are Enough? An experiment with Data Saturation and Variability’ [2006] 18 *Field Methods* 60 (78)

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

### Photography and Walking Ethnography

Photography and walking ethnography were an important element of the research methodology of this thesis and were used to help capture the 'layers of subtlety' that are essential to understanding the 'context forensics' of field urbanism.<sup>16</sup> There are certainly limitations with respect to how well one can capture the essence of a city ecosystem without 'visualization' of the context in order 'to trace the agents and forces that have produced the image of the city'.<sup>17</sup> The decision to use photography and walking ethnography however was not part of the original research plan but during the course of my fieldwork it became apparent that these approaches would be necessary in order to provide a full representation of the findings of the research. For example, the first conference at which I presented a paper from this thesis ('Urban Conflicts' conference in Belfast, May 2011), I spoke to a powerpoint presentation that contained written text. The conference was an interdisciplinary event, and I observed at the time that the planners and architects all used photographs and maps for their presentations – less so political scientists, sociologists, lawyers. I also observed at subsequent seminars, and conferences, that within the fields of architecture and urban planning the use of photographs and maps was something of a sine qua non for explaining research findings. The importance of the visual in the urban context is evidenced further by the fact that virtually all of the architectural and planning sources, both primary and secondary, reviewed for this thesis used photographs and illustrations, especially maps.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> R Plunz, *City Riffs: Urbanism, Ecology, Place* (Columbia University GSAPP 2017) 14

<sup>17</sup> P Alkhoven, 'The Reconstruction of the Past: the Application of New Techniques for Visualization and Research in Architectural History', (1991) CAAD Digital Futures Proceedings, 549

<sup>18</sup> See e.g. R Plunz, *City Riffs: Urbanism, Ecology, Place* (Columbia University GSAPP 2017); W Johnston, *The Belfast Urban Motorway: Engineering, Ambition and Social Conflict* (Colourprint Books 2014); Dawson G, 'Defensive planning in Belfast', (1984) (17) *Irish Geography* 27-41; Government of Northern Ireland, *Future Policy on Areas of Contention, Second and Final Report of the Joint Working Party on Processions, (secret)* (Government of Northern Ireland April 1971 CAB/1634/1); M Mihai, 'Architectural Transitional Justice? Political Renewal within the Scars of a Violent Past' (2018) 12 *International Journal of Transitional Justice*

In addition to the importance of 'visualization' as a research methodology it also became apparent during the fieldwork that physically visiting the sites in question, as opposed to simply relying on google images for example, would be required. During the course of my interviews, several subjects stressed to me the importance of visiting the site of my research in person, and the need to have a physical presence 'on site' in order to adequately understand urban regeneration. One subject, who was at that time director of the Maze/Long Kesh (MLK) regeneration project, stated that he had insisted that his office be located 'on site' so that he could get an adequate feel for the issues by being physically present

the first thing, when this team was set up, I said we've got to be based out here, you know we couldn't have done this job from Castle Buildings, and it's that willingness to actually get your hands dirty and engage I think is the key.<sup>19</sup>

One of the problems identified with the Girdwood Masterplan, and discussed in some detail in chapter five, was that it was drawn up by people who were not sufficiently familiar with the 'layers of subtlety' that exist between territory and identity in the local area. The need to physically visit the sites of my study was further highlighted during the course of my interviews, where subjects alluded to different streets and areas of Belfast, describing in some detail examples of poor connectivity and defensive planning that had been put in place over the past several decades.

It became obvious therefore during the initial stage of the fieldwork that it would be necessary to physically visit these areas in question in order to adequately appreciate the issues that lie at the core of this research – namely, the social impact of urban planning and architecture. Moreover, it also became clear that it would be necessary to capture visual images and include them in the thesis in order that the reader might better

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<sup>19</sup> Interview: Planner/Public Official, (2011)



understand my arguments and findings. Gready and Robins argue that empirical research in transitional justice needs to go beyond narrowly framed surveys of what kinds of interventions local populations and victims want, or equally narrow impact assessments of institutional mechanisms, to provide a more open-ended assessment of priorities among wider populations and extending to societal and social responses.<sup>20</sup> This is an example of a more 'open-ended', or reflexive approach that allows the research methodology, and identification of societal and social responses to the subject matter of the study, to flow from the evidence as it evolves during the course of the fieldwork.

In total, 304 photographs were taken in two separate phases of site visits. The first phase of photographs took place over a two-week period in July 2015. There were a number of practical difficulties inherent with this kind of methodological approach that had to be addressed. For example, common sense would indicate that when photographing and wandering around busy road networks it is prudent to do so when the traffic will be least hazardous. For this reason, the site visits and the images of the Westlink, Grosvenor Road, York Street, and other main arterial routes were taken early on Sunday mornings. Given that the purpose of the site visits was to illustrate the impact of the road network on connectivity between local communities there is an issue that the low volume of traffic captured in the photographs understates the extent of road severance. The images of the Divis Street junction at the Westlink for example show how wide and open spaces dominate the site, but at the same time, the lack of road traffic fails to capture just how difficult this junction is to navigate for pedestrians coming from the Lower Falls into the city centre. There is no easy solution to this problem that doesn't involve potential injury, other than to recognise that the images captured reflect a snapshot of the city ecosystem at a particular time when traffic is at its most minimal.

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<sup>20</sup> P Gready P and S Robins, 'Transitional Justice and Theories of Change: Towards evaluation as understanding', (2020) (14) *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 282. For a critique of dominant methodologies see S Robins, 'Whose Voices? Understanding victims' views in Transition,' (2009) 1 (2) *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 320-333

Another challenge was ensuring that the weather, always unpredictable in Belfast regardless of the time of year, allowed for suitable lighting and this was achieved by having an 'open-ended' approach to the exact day on which the visits would take place. I had several slots set aside in the month of July 2015 for the first phase of this aspect of the fieldwork and observed the weather forecast in order to pick the optimal conditions for photographing and walking. The photographs were taken using a Nikon D60 camera and the images were uploaded onto a computer immediately after I returned home. Like Schwartz, I made my activities visible so that residents and others would be aware of my presence.<sup>21</sup> Unlike Schwartz no one bothered to ask who I was or what I was doing. This no doubt reflects the fact that communities in Belfast are more used to having photographers wandering around with cameras than farmers in rural Iowa. The table on the next page provides the exact location and number of photographs taken at each phase.

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<sup>21</sup> D Schwartz, 'Visual Ethnography: Using photography in qualitative research' (1989) 12 (2) *Qualitative Sociology* 125

<b>Location in Belfast</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Number of Photographs</b>
York Street	July 2015	12
Corporation Street	July 2015	11
Sailortown	July 2015	20
Girdwood (Manor Street)	July 2015	6
Henry Street	July 2015	9
Westlink	July 2015	35
Divis Street Junction	July 2015	12
Grosvenor Road	July 2015	8
Albert Street	July 2015	6
New Lodge	July 2015	41
Duncairn Gardens	July 2015	17
North Queens Street	July 2015	17
Great George's Street	July 2015	3
York Street/Westlink	July 2015	7
Lanark Way	July 2015	12
Springfield Road	July 2015	13
Frederick Street	July 2015	7
Girdwood Hub	July 2018	18
Girdwood (Manor Street)	July 2018	9
Titanic Quarter	July 2018	9
Dunbar Link	July 2018	8
Carrick Hill/Peter's Hill	July 2018	10
Frederick Street	July 2018	2
Millfield/Castlecourt	July 2018	11
Exchange Street	July 2018	1

The areas chosen to be photographed were the Girdwood site and its surrounding streets that had featured in the interviews, as well as those areas which had been identified in the literature and primary documentary sources. For example, an important issue that arose during the course of the interviews and documentary analysis was the way in which the community in the New Lodge area, adjacent to the Girdwood site, had been 'boxed in' by several decades of defensive planning and architectural practices. In order to test the validity of some of the claims made by interviewees I drove into the middle of the New Lodge, and attempted to exit the area, first by car, and subsequently on foot. I parked my car on the New Lodge Road and wandered for approximately one hour around the area. The street closures, disruption to connectivity, and housing density that had been described to me by some of the interviewees were indeed shown to be valid and the visit provided a useful visual record of the way in which the aims of the Joint Working Party Report from the early 1970s, had been put into practice. Photographs were taken along the northern end of the New Lodge which fronts onto Duncairn Gardens, as well as the eastern side of the New Lodge which fronts onto York Street, and the southern end of the New Lodge at the Westlink. Photographs were also taken at Henry Street in the New Lodge as this area had featured in a leaked report in the 1980s about the impact of security force involvement in the planning of housing developments, as well as North Queen Street and Great George's Street which bisect the New Lodge area at its eastern flank.

Perhaps the most significant documentary evidence uncovered during the course of this research was the Joint Working Party Report from the early 1970s, and one of the recommendations of this report was that the Belfast Urban Motorway (subsequently the 'Westlink') ought to be used as a 'cordon sanitaire' around areas of conflict. The Westlink therefore is an important subject of this thesis and photographs were taken at several different points of the road, notably, the Clifton Street Junction (22 photographs), York Street Junction (6 photographs), Divis Street Junction

(12 photographs), Grosvenor Road Junction (8 photographs), and Peter's Hill (6 photographs) and Millfield junctions (3 photographs). I drove to each junction, parked my car, and wandered in an east/west direction, photographing the Westlink from above. The objective here was to experience the degree of connectivity, or rather the lack thereof, that exists between the west of the city and the centre of the city. At the Divis Street junction, even on a Sunday morning, when traffic is minimal, there are still difficulties navigating the area safely and several photographs were taken to illustrate the impact of the junction. The detailed findings about the impact of severance and photographs appear in chapter four of the thesis. In addition to the Westlink, several commentators over the years have identified the impact of the M2 motorway on the city ecosystem around Corporation Street, especially regarding the destruction that this road brought to the 'Sailortown' community. Again, for safety reasons, photographs were taken on a Sunday morning of the M2 flyover from York Street (12 photographs) and Corporation Street (11 photographs) and underneath the M3 flyover (20 photographs).

The fieldwork combined photography with 'walking ethnography'. As Yi'En has pointed out, rather than imagining walking ethnography as a unidirectional practice that brings us from Point A to Point B it is instead a process of orientations/reorientations and attractions/distractions which can only be achieved through an open-ended approach that involves an element of 'wandering', and that brings our bodies 'into conversation' with the environments we move through.<sup>22</sup> The importance of walking for understanding and appreciating urban space is highlighted by the fact that to this day, on the first weekend in May, urbanists and citizens across the globe celebrate the work of Jane Jacobs through organising and participating in 'Jane's walks'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> C Yi'En, 'Telling Stories of the City: Walking Ethnography, Affective Materialities, and Encounters' (2013) 17 (3) Space and Culture 3

<sup>23</sup> For details of the 'Jane's walks' see <https://janeswalk.org> In May 2019 I took part in a 'Jane's walk' around the Harlem neighbourhood in New York City which specifically looked at the impact of gentrification on the African-American community in that area of the city. On that weekend there were over 200 'Jane's walks' in New York City alone. See also N Storrington, 'In Order to Appreciate Jane Jacobs You've Got To Get Out And Walk',

One example of how the layers of subtlety inherent within the urban context can be appreciated through 'walking ethnography' was provided during the course of my visit to Duncairn Gardens. I wandered up and down Duncairn Gardens for about 20-30 minutes, on a weekday morning, observing, and photographing the Duncairn Business Park. There is widespread agreement that this site serves as a barrier between the New Lodge and Tiger's Bay areas. During the course of my visit, while standing on Duncairn Gardens opposite the Business Park, I observed several taxicabs pulling up outside what looked ostensibly like a fence. Each of the passengers alighting from the taxis subsequently pressed a buzzer and were allowed entry to the Business Park through a concealed gate that was designed to resemble the fence. It was clear that these were people going to work and that the defensive design was so effective that even standing across the street, the concealed entrance, which was also surrounded by shrubs, was to all intents and purposes, invisible. Over previous years I had visited the Business Park for various purposes, and in fact, I had occasionally walked this route home from work as I lived in north Belfast at that time. It was striking therefore that even with my relative familiarity with the area, I had passed this hidden entrance on several occasions and failed to notice it. This illustrates how one can identify and uncover layers of urban subtlety through walking ethnography that are missed when simply engaging in walking as a unidirectional practice, that takes one from Point A (work) to Point B (home). The photographs taken at this site are shown and discussed in chapter four of the thesis.

Most of the photographs taken during this first phase focused on the impact of the defensive design and planning practices that had been in place since the early 1970s. These images therefore feature mainly in chapters three and four of the thesis. During the first phase of this aspect

of the fieldwork, there was very little to photograph of the Girdwood redevelopment, which was still at that time a construction site closed to the public for health and safety reasons. I did take however take several photographs around the site and wander around the perimeter, taking particular interest in the Manor Street entrance given that this was the interface with the Protestant community to the north which had been the subject of much controversy.

The second phase of the walking ethnography and photography was carried out in July 2018, and the main objective here was to capture the impact of the actual redevelopment of the Girdwood site as well as to visit some examples of conflict legacy planning that had come to my attention in additional literature. By this time, I had moved to the United States and my return to Belfast in July 2018 allowed me to visit the Girdwood site in order to experience the redevelopment first-hand. As with the first phase, site visits took place over several days, although the photographs were all taken on a single visit on a Sunday morning. An important aspect to this fieldwork was impact of the redevelopment at the Girdwood site on connectivity between the communities of the New Lodge and the Lower Oldpark. The visit, and photographs, illustrate the findings from the interviews and documentary evidence about the way in which the redevelopment was used to allay fears about Catholic expansion along the Clifton Park Avenue/Manor Street interface. On my first visit to the site, the playing fields to the east of the Community Hub were quite busy with young families and youths who were clearly from the nearby New Lodge area – Glasgow Celtic soccer shirts were highly prominent. I then wandered from this area of the site to the western or ‘Protestant’ end, navigating the long distances, surrounding fencing, and road barriers. I stood for some time at the Manor Street, or ‘Protestant’ end of the site, and observed that I was the only person who had crossed from one area to the other, and that the design of the site clearly discouraged connectivity between the two communities through fencing, barriers, and defensible space characterised by wide open spaces. I then wandered up to the Lower Oldpark area, which I managed to find, with no small amount of

effort. The Lower Oldpark area, as outlined in the report cited in chapter seven, was certainly disorienting and difficult to navigate – the details of why this is so are discussed in some detail in that chapter. In order to ensure that the wide, open spaces, and lack of movement between the two ends of the Gridwood site were not due to the fact that I was traversing the area on a Sunday morning, I made another visit during the week and observed the same patterns.

There is an important point here about the findings of this thesis and the fieldwork, namely, that no serious commentator, politician, or indeed anyone else that I am aware of suggests that there is good connectivity between west Belfast and the city centre. Nor does anyone suggest that the Gridwood Community Hub connects the New Lodge to the Lower Oldpark. As outlined in chapter seven, the argument from all concerned is that the severance created by the Community Hub is necessary in order to reassure the Protestant community that Catholic expansion into their territory will be halted. In relation to the legacy of the conflict, no one actually disputes that the Westlink motorway seriously destroyed connectivity between the west of the city and the city centre. As outlined in chapter four, there is nothing 'original' in stating that the Divis Street junction is extremely difficult for pedestrians to navigate – in fact, architects, planners, community activists and politicians have been saying this for years. Where there are disputes, or contested narratives, they relate to the degree to which the disruption to connectivity was a deliberate tactic on the part of the security forces, or the result of incompetent planners, or a legacy of an urban renewal approach that neglected the needs of poorer communities and prioritised the interests of motor vehicle owners. The images contained in this thesis illustrate therefore a phenomenon that is largely uncontested – namely, that the planning and design of Belfast serves to segregate and isolate certain communities. At the same time, the photographs and walking ethnography are valuable for triangulation of the documentary and interview sources and illustrate the extent to which the city has been scarred by defensive architecture and design practices over several decades.



Analysis of the photographs involved comparing the visual images with descriptions about the impact of defensive planning and architecture from interview subjects, the documentary sources uncovered from PRONI, and other secondary literature. The aim was to uncover and identify the 'layers of subtlety' that shape defensive planning and architecture in the Belfast ecosystem and ensure the validity of interviews and other sources. As discussed in chapter four, Gehl contends that there are five different means with which architects and planners can promote isolation and prevent contact, namely, walls; long distances; high speeds; multiple levels; and orientation away from others.<sup>24</sup> The photographs that were selected to be included in the final thesis are those which best capture how these techniques are visible on the streets of Belfast.

An important factor in selecting photographs for inclusion in the thesis was the need to ensure geographical balance across the city in order to illustrate how the ecosystem as a whole was impacted – and not just one area, or one community. Other factors that played a role in selection of photographs included 'technical' choices around the quality of image, lighting, etc. As with interviews, saturation was reached when sufficient images and walking journeys had been reached to support the themes of the thesis and discussion of them.

### **Reflections Challenges**

A central contention of this thesis, is that in a divided city, where conflict is played out on 'a narrower ground than even the most impatient observer might imagine, a ground every inch of which has its own associations and special meanings', there is no such thing as neutral planning.<sup>25</sup> In the same context, there is no such thing as 'neutral research' or 'neutral researchers', but rather, as Robinson et al argue,

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<sup>24</sup> J Gehl, *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*, (Island Press 2011) 72

<sup>25</sup> A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (Blackstaff 1977) 182

at best, a researcher must identify his/her position and then proceed to conduct a study as objectively as possible.<sup>26</sup>

There is an increasing recognition of the relevance of the context of the researcher as part of narrative interpretation with researchers increasingly inclined to make known their own group membership identity.<sup>27</sup> Reinharz comments on 'Researcher Self-Disclosure'<sup>28</sup> and argues that utilizing this approach facilitates a 'dialogue' to take place rather than a standard interview. As far as the case study was concerned, researcher non-disclosure was simply not an option. Given that this researcher had spent over ten years working on issues relating to human rights and equality he was well known to many of the interview subjects.<sup>29</sup> In fact, most interview subjects had met with the researcher in the course of his previous employment about matters directly relevant to the subject of this thesis. One interview subject had previously served as the researcher's employer while another interview subject, was a neighbour of the researcher. In this context, the researcher was caught up in the morass of personal ties and intimate experiences to which Daniels has referred.<sup>30</sup>

When the Department for Social Development published the initial draft Masterplan for the regeneration of the Crumlin Road/Girdwood site, this researcher drafted the response from his own organisation, and met with a range of government officials and politicians to discuss the concerns that had been raised in that submission – namely the extent to which the proposals in the draft Masterplan might have failed to address legal

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<sup>26</sup> G. Robinson, A Schnabel and M Smyth, 'Researching Violent Societies: Methodological and Ethical Challenges', Work in Progress, United Nations University 15 (3) (Tokyo Summer 1999) 24

<sup>27</sup> S Corbin and J Buckle, "The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research", (2009) 8 (1) International Journal of Qualitative Methods 55

<sup>28</sup> S Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (OUP 1992) 33

<sup>29</sup> J Hockey, 'Research Methods: Researching Peers and Familiar Settings', Research Papers in Education (1993) 8 (2) 202 citing J. B. Stevenson and L. S. Greer, 'Ethnographers in their Own Cultures: Two Appalachian Cases' (1981) 40 *Human Organisation*

<sup>30</sup> A Daniels, "Self-Deception and Self-Discovery in Fieldwork", (1983) 6 *Qualitative Sociology* 60

obligations regarding the promotion of equality of opportunity. This researcher also spoke at a conference in May 2008, organised by another local human rights NGO, which also focused on the issue of spatial inequality in north Belfast.<sup>31</sup> Officials from the Department for Social Development were present at that conference, including the most senior government official with responsibility for this project at that time whom was subsequently an interview subject for this thesis. In addition to the specific work around the north Belfast site, this researcher had also spoken at two further conferences in Derry on the subject of inequality and urban regeneration, both of which were organised by the Derry-based urban regeneration corporation Ilex. Again, a range of government officials from a number of statutory agencies, some of whom were subsequently interviewed for this thesis, were present at these conferences. The point here is that, following the conclusions of Robinson et al, the best that can be done is to acknowledge my own position, and seek to be as objective as possible.

In addition to the context of the researcher, another issue to be considered in this, as with any study of this nature, is the question of whether or not interview subjects ought to be accorded anonymity. Most of the interview subjects were individuals who were well known in their respective spheres, most of whom had spoken publicly about the subject matter of the research. Several in fact were elected representatives, while the remainder were all senior figures in their respective fields of expertise. Many had published papers and given speeches on issues pertaining to this research. All interview subjects were happy to go 'on the record' and a list of interviewee names is provided in an appendix.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> 'Addressing Inequality and Deprivation: a human rights-based approach', Participation and the Practice of Rights Conference, Belfast, May 2008

<sup>32</sup> The thesis that was originally submitted for examination had omitted the names of the interview subjects, even though the subjects themselves had not requested anonymity. In fact, all along, during the various drafts of the thesis that were submitted to my supervisors, the names of the interview subjects were included in the text. When reading the submitted version of the thesis, prior to my viva, it became clear to me very quickly that removing the names of the interview subjects had been a serious error on my part as it diminished the impact of the work. The external examiner agreed with me on this point during the viva. He also alluded to the controversy surrounding the work of the

Perhaps the most potentially significant problem relating to the context of the researcher lay with respect to the issue of housing inequality between the two communities in north Belfast. In 2006, this researcher was the main author of a report entitled 'The Rhetoric and the Reality' which examined the current legal framework and patterns of disadvantage between the two communities across a range of policy areas, including employment, education and housing.<sup>33</sup> The report presented quite a critical analysis of the extent to which public authorities in Northern Ireland were engaging with their duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to promote equality of opportunity and good relations on grounds of religious belief and political opinion. A number of the public authorities concerned disagreed with the findings of the report and a series of meetings were held in order to clarify particular issues relating to the interpretation of the legal duties provided for in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. The public authority that took most exception to the findings contained in the research report was the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). This researcher was phoned directly by the then Deputy Chief Executive of the NIHE and subject to quite serious criticism about the wisdom of publishing the findings contained in the report, and the NIHE subsequently issued a statement taking issue with the report. In addition, when the findings of the report were made public, the Deputy Chief Executive of the NIHE personally attended the event launch and again took issue with the findings that were published. A subsequent meeting took place between this researcher, his then senior managers, and senior officials from the NIHE, including the Deputy Chief Executive.

It is fair to describe these exchanges, certainly in their initial phase, as quite acrimonious, bordering on bad-tempered, although following a

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later Peter Hart who had used anonymous sources in his book about IRA killings in Cork during the War of Independence. I therefore decided that for the final submitted version of the thesis that names would be included via an addendum.

<sup>33</sup> Committee on the Administration of Justice, *Equality in Northern Ireland: The Rhetoric and the Reality*, (Committee on the Administration of Justice 2006)

lengthy period of engagement a position was reached in which both organisations and their respective staff, “agreed to disagree”. The main issue of dispute was the decision in the research report to publish information that had been gathered from a series of Parliamentary Questions (PQs), highlighting the disproportionate amount of time that Catholics in Belfast were spending on housing waiting lists. The NIHE was particularly concerned that publication of this data would increase tensions and lead to negotiations around ensuring adequate housing provision for both communities more difficult. There was no disputing the actual data itself relating to waiting list times etc., given that the information contained in response to the PQs had come from the NIHE in the first place. The problem so far as the NIHE was concerned lay with the decision to put the information from the PQs back into the public domain. The NIHE also took exception at the time to the fact that in their view, the report implied that they were guilty of discriminating against Catholics in the way in which they allocated housing. This researcher, and indeed his senior managers, did not agree that this was a fair reflection of the findings contained in the report.

At the time of this exchange, this researcher spoke with a senior academic from Queen’s University Belfast (who was also a subject for interview) who confirmed that he had had a similar experience following some research that he had published relating to patterns of housing need across the two communities in Belfast. This senior academic stated that it was widely known that the NIHE were particularly sensitive to criticism in terms of the patterns of housing provision between the two communities. It was therefore with some trepidation that in the course of the fieldwork for this thesis that this researcher approached the NIHE for an interview and outlined the nature of the thesis study. The approach was made however in writing, in the same way that other interview subjects had been approached, to one of the staff members who had been subject to the discussions around the previous research in 2006. There was no question therefore that the organisation was unaware of the identity of this researcher, or the previous history regarding the earlier controversy.

The initial response was that the request would need to be directed to the Chief Executive, given the 'sensitive' nature of the subject matter.<sup>34</sup> Significantly however, the request for an interview for this thesis was fully facilitated by the Chief Executive, even though he himself did not take part. In fact, during the course of the interview for this thesis it became apparent that some of the information requested by this researcher was not immediately available. The senior manager with whom this researcher did meet then suggested an additional meeting with this researcher at which another member of staff from the NIHE would be present who could speak more authoritatively on the topic. This second meeting subsequently took place, with the senior manager also present, and this researcher was provided with all the data that he requested. In fact, it is fair to say that the NIHE could not have been more helpful or co-operative in terms of accommodating the requests that were made by this researcher. Subsequent to these meetings, this researcher then met with the senior academic (who was also interviewed for this thesis), and discussed these experiences. The senior academic confirmed that both he and other researchers had become aware of a change in mood within the NIHE, reflecting a much greater willingness to engage with, and discuss matters that had previously been considered "too sensitive" to be aired publicly. There was some discussion apparently within the academic community who work closest on these issues about why this change should have taken place, and one possible explanation that was put forward was the fact that there was quite a degree of speculation that the NIHE was to be dismantled, or at least significantly reduced, as part of the reforms of local government that were taking place under the Review of Public Administration. During the course of this research, in November 2012, the Minister for Social Development announced that the NIHE was to be abolished with new housing structures to be put in place for Northern Ireland.

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<sup>34</sup> Email reply from NIHE Equality Unit, copy with author

It would seem reasonable to conclude therefore that the imminent abolition of the NIHE, may well have contributed to something of a 'relaxation' on the part of those at senior levels within the organisation with respect to speaking about controversial issues. In this case therefore, the context of the research, from the perspective of the interview subject changed. The change however was not because the changing context of the researcher – moving from an advocacy to an academic setting, but rather because of changes to the context of the interview subject. Clearly, this is an issue that this researcher only became aware of as a result of having carried out similar research, prior to commencing the PhD. This shows therefore the benefits of working within a particular field for a longer period, which allows for more longitudinal observations to be made. It is also important to note that while there was a much greater willingness on the part of the NIHE to discuss the matter of inequality between the two communities with respect to differentials in the housing waiting lists, the point was still made during the interview about the 'sensitive' nature of this issue. This point was not just made by the NIHE however, over half of all the interview respondents in Northern Ireland at one point or another in the course of the interview used the word 'sensitive' in the context of discussions about this issue. However, the decision by the ECNI to compile and publish data on housing inequalities indicates an increased willingness to discuss publicly matters that had been absent from public scrutiny for several decades.<sup>35</sup>

Given that Northern Ireland has been historically divided by nationality, ethnicity, and religion, it must be registered that this researcher is from a Catholic community background, is known to be from a Catholic community background, and had worked previously for an organisation which had published a range of reports which highlighted inequalities which predominantly affected the Catholic community. Any answers that were provided during the course of the interviews, would perhaps have been affected by this fact, particularly given the sensitive nature of the

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<sup>35</sup> Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, *Statement on Key Inequalities* (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland April 2017)

issues being discussed. In short, one might question the validity of the information provided to this researcher, with the danger that interview subjects simply gave the answers that they perceived the researcher wanted to hear. The interview material contained in this thesis and discussed below shows that there was no reticence among interview subjects to expressing their views in an equally forthright manner, regardless of community background. This may well have been due to the elite nature of the interview subjects, all of whom would have had professional experience of working with representatives across the two main communities in Northern Ireland, and indeed, with each other.

As a former, and indeed current practitioner within the equality and human rights world a key challenge for a study of this kind relates to the extent to which objectivity can be retained in a context in which one has worked, and indeed, continues to do so, in an advocacy role in that particular field. Dadds has written about the need for researchers in this context to combine previous insider knowledge with newer research knowledge in order to view the context of the research through 'a different lens'.<sup>36</sup>

It is impossible to exclude the possibility that information was either provided selectively on occasion to this researcher, or indeed, that this researcher selectively interpret the information that was provided. It would seem that the best that one can aim for with a study of this nature is that through awareness and evaluation of one's own positioning with respect to the research, that objectivity can be achieved to a degree that is satisfactory for the purposes of answering the research question of the thesis. The exchanges during the interviews were however very frank, with this researcher being surprised at some of the information that interview subjects were willing to divulge. One interview subject for example informed the researcher that he personally, under political pressure from members of the Ulster Unionist Party, had removed

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<sup>36</sup> M Dadds, 'Empathetic validity in practitioner research', (2008) 16 (2) Educational Action Research 280



intended social housing from one particular development, because of concerns that if the housing were to be provided, it would go to tenants who were predominantly Catholic, and that this could have negative consequences for the Unionist vote in the area.<sup>37</sup> While not unlawful at the time that it occurred (the mid-1990s), this action was certainly politically controversial, however the interview subject pointed out that the controversy had been avoided due because the action was carried out without representatives from any of the other main political parties being aware of what was going on at the time.<sup>38</sup> Given the background and career history of the interview subject, there is little reason for believing that this story was untrue, and indeed, the story fits with what was to transpire much later with respect to the Crumlin Road/Girdwood site. Moreover, the information was provided while the interview was being recorded, although the interview subject did not request that the recorder be turned off at any point during the interview. This statement was subsequently confirmed, in unsolicited information provided by another interview subject, also on tape.

This was perhaps the clearest example of this kind of information being provided during the course of the interviews, however there were a number of other instances where information was forthcoming, which, if it were to enter the public domain, would, at the very least, be potentially embarrassing for the interview subject, and indeed, assorted third parties. The fact that such information was provided does illustrate that even when the subject matter of the research is controversial, or “sensitive”, and the context of the researcher is very clear, interview subjects can still be remarkably forthcoming about the information that they divulge. It is also important to note that in the example outlined above, the controversial

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Senior Planner (2011)

<sup>38</sup> The action was not unlawful because discrimination laws in Northern Ireland which aim to address inequalities between the two communities are focused almost exclusively on the labour market. Efforts to address discrimination in housing relies upon a points-based system which aims to ensure that individual houses are allocated to most needy tenants. There was at that time no specific legal mechanism for addressing actions which served to perpetuate housing inequalities indirectly, such as the example here, where houses were not included in a development plan because the likelihood is that they would have been occupied by Catholics.

information that was divulged came from an interview subject who was in a very senior position and was well aware of the controversial nature of the information. In other words, there was no question of the interview subject being “taken advantage of” or “misled” regarding the nature of the interview. Clearly however, what subsequently happens to such information is an ethical issue with which the researcher has to engage and this will be discussed further below.

Certainly, the complexities and ‘pay-offs’ between being too far from or too close to a research subject continue to be debated.<sup>39</sup> In this type of research there is often the question as to the extent to which having ‘insider status’ can reduce the difficulties in obtaining access and rapport with participants.<sup>40</sup> The corollary is that outsiders may achieve a more critical and detached approach. In their assessment of insider/outsider research tensions, Corbin and Buckle conclude that rather than focusing on a dichotomy between the two conditions or status, more creative ways to engage with and work with this tension and the debate that surrounds it are needed.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, as noted by these authors, there may be a need for a “space between” which acknowledges that researchers may move not only between differing research contexts and respondent identities, but also between differing identities based on the characteristics of the researcher themselves and their background.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, it is clear that with respect to the subject matter of this thesis, namely, spatial equality, the need to constantly be aware of locating where one is positioned, and being conscious of the context of that position, has a geographical, as well as a metaphorical, significance.

One final challenge presented for the work was the unexpected ‘lockdown’ following the arrival of the Covid-19 virus. This presented a difficulty with

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<sup>39</sup> V Kanuha, ‘Being Native Versus Going Native: Conducting Social Work Research as an Insider’, (2000) 45 (2) *Social Work (passim)*

<sup>40</sup> J Pugh and M Brooks, ‘Insider/Outsider Partnerships in an Ethnographic Study of Shared Governance’, (2000) 14 (27) *Nursing Standard* 43

<sup>41</sup> S Corbin and J Buckle, ‘The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research (2009) 8 (1) *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 54

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*

regard to carving out time to write in between supervising remote learning for the kids. The situation was further complicated given that my wife was also working remotely from home – and still is! The other main difficulty with regard to lockdown was that it removed the New York Public Library as a resource – this venue had been especially useful for finalising references from books that were unavailable elsewhere. The net outcome is that some references remain unpaginated, although fortunately Amazon.com, as well as Abe and Alibris, proved useful resources for quite a range of materials.

### **Identifying the Subject of the Research**

It is the nature of ethical problems that they are not generally clear-cut, readily or finally resolvable especially given the nature of the topics for consideration – namely, sectarian inequality and segregation<sup>43</sup>. The key point to make about the nature of this research however is that the aim was not to carry out an ethnographic study of individual communities, in order to determine views on ‘the other’. Such studies tend to involve interviews with individual members of particular communities, in order to examine how access to services and issues about personal safety impact upon life experiences. This study on the other hand is about the way in which the legal, planning, political and design processes have impacted upon the frameworks that shape patterns of spatial equality and segregation, and as such, is focused on gathering views from those who were themselves directly involved in the decision-making processes. This means that the voices, or views of individual residents do not inform this study, although the study does include elected representatives from local communities, and those working within the community sector in a gate keeping capacity. Crow et al have cautioned about the dangers of vulnerable and marginalised groups being excluded from the research process, which is a potential problem with research of this kind.<sup>44</sup> However

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<sup>43</sup> A Daniels, “Self-Deception and Self-Discovery in Fieldwork”, [1983] 6 *Qualitative Sociology* 60

<sup>44</sup> G Crow et al, ‘Research Ethics and Data Quality: The Implications of Informed Consent’ (2006) 9 (2) *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 83

this is a study about the legal regulation of urban space, rather than a study of the impact of spatial deprivation or segregation on local communities per se - and as such, the choice of interview subject that has been adopted here is the one that is best suited for this study.

### **Practicalities of Ethics**

There are a number of practical aspects to ensuring that a research methodology and process is ethically robust as it is being executed. In particular, undertaking interviews with subjects requires certain safeguards for both the researched as well as the researcher, the experience of which is discussed here. Approaching potential respondents to request an interview prompts a number of considerations. Crow et al have pointed out for example that interviewing people 'who don't want to be interviewed is not a happy experience'.<sup>45</sup> This problem was limited through enabling those approached to have an opportunity to accept or decline to take part in the interview.<sup>46</sup>

In addition, each participant was provided with a 'Subject-Information Sheet' as part of the interview request process that outlined the position of the PhD researcher and provided details of the study. Since the subjects had an opportunity to read the 'Subject-Information Sheet' they were able to make an informed decision on whether they wished to participate. Securing consent from participants has become a key element of the process of data gathering and ensuring that it is ethically responsive. The potential for this process to improve or negatively impact the data gathering process and the quality of the data is debated in the literature. A consent form was used which was signed at the beginning of each interview – with one copy for the researcher and one for the respondent.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid 86

<sup>46</sup> The high acceptance rate, measured by individual willingness to participate, no doubt reflects the fact that I knew quite a number of participants, either directly, or I was known to their organization. In the several cases, individuals within political parties who were contacted recommended an alternate candidate within their own party whom they considered to be better placed to speak on the issues. There was no distinction or variance between community background/political affiliation and willingness to be interviewed.

Permission to digitally record the interview was given by the overwhelming majority of participants. In one case the respondent did not wish to be recorded so notes were taken that were typed up immediately afterwards. In another case, the respondent is now living in Dublin, and due to a busy work schedule did not wish to arrange a meeting however was willing to be interviewed over the phone. Again, the interview was written up immediately afterwards.

In all, over 1,000 minutes (i.e. almost 17 hours) of digital recordings were transcribed, which was extremely time-consuming but worthwhile. Occasionally, during the course of an interview, respondents chose to state that what they were saying was 'off the record' however they were content that the tape keep running, and they received an assurance that the information that they provided would not be included in the final thesis. In terms of consent however there was an issue which did arise in the course of two interviews in Belfast, where it seemed very clear that the interview subjects did not in fact want to be interviewed. In both cases, the interview subjects had been recommended for interview by their organisational line managers who had themselves taken part in the interview process. In other words, the higher-ranking officials in both organisations had participated freely and willingly, and in fact had been very open in their views. On the other hand, both senior officials recommended that their junior staff also take part in the interview process separately however the junior staff were much more guarded and circumspect about what they were willing to say. One must also question therefore the extent to which the decisions taken by the two junior staff members to participate in the study were 'freely taken' or whether they felt that they had been ordered to do so by someone at a higher level within their organisation. Both experiences suggest two particular difficulties. Firstly, there is clearly an inherent difficulty with using a snowballing approach to identify interview subjects when dynamics such as organisational hierarchies and management structures can interfere with 'free consent'. Secondly, these interviews were obvious examples of another trend identified in the course of this study, namely that the more

senior the interview subject, the more willing that they were to discuss 'sensitive' issues. In both of the involuntary cases the material gathered in the interviews was discarded and not used in any part of the thesis.

### **Research Challenges, Strengths and Limitations**

As would be expected for a study of this nature, a range of challenges arose, including for example some minor difficulties in accessing all the intended interview subjects. The first major challenge which arose however was the lack of literature surrounding the link between the urban environment and the theory and practice of human rights in Northern Ireland. This gap with regard to academic outputs in this area elicited a noticeable degree of scepticism with regard to the value of the research. During the course of two regular PhD assessments at Ulster this researcher was asked whether the subject for the study was relevant to human rights given that patterns of settlement in Belfast were very much a function of individual choice and not the outcome of state coercion.<sup>47</sup> The difficulties presented here highlight the problems that arise when researchers restrict themselves to one type of research methodology. In this case, literature searches were useful to a point, but somewhat limiting given the lack of academic outputs on the relationship between human rights and the urban environment in Northern Ireland. This issue was linked to perhaps the most controversial aspect of the research namely the extent to which the security forces in Northern Ireland had been directly involved in the planning process in Belfast. A small number of interview subjects felt that they had, and there was a very small body of secondary literature which confirmed that this appeared to be the case. On the other hand, the vast body of literature published over the course of several decades, particularly that body of work published by the most prominent and respected scholars, dismissed such views as 'conspiracy theories' and highlighted the lack of evidence to support this assertion. This was also the view of a number of interviewees.

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<sup>47</sup> One alternative explanation of course is that the questions were put to the researcher in order to test whether sufficient thought had been given to the subject matter.

This question was crucially important for the thesis given that the question of whether or not patterns of segregation and spatial deprivation have been socially engineered, as opposed to arising as a function of individual choice, goes some way to determining the extent to which these problems might be viewed as being relevant to human rights. This researcher, on the advice of several interview subjects, undertook an extensive examination of historic files contained within the Public Record Office for Northern Ireland (PRONI) and ultimately discovered several documents which provided clear evidence of the extent to which the security forces in Northern Ireland had indeed engaged in large-scale manipulation of the planning system as part of counter-insurgency strategy. The process of uncovering these documents took a considerable degree of time and relied very much on 'trial and error'. Part of the difficulty was that much of the documentation from the period remains classified and there was an obvious difficulty in that the files which may well have provided the most evidence were the ones that were closed. This researcher submitted several written requests to PRONI under the Freedom of Information Act in order to seek access to some of the closed files. In some cases, the response was an outright refusal to disclose the information and in other instance a request to access closed files resulted in the researcher gaining access to 'open versions' of the files concerned where sections of the file remained closed.<sup>48</sup>

Obviously there is no way of determining what additional information might be gleaned from accessing 'closed files' or 'closed sections' of open files. It is however notable that among the files that remain closed are those concerned with redevelopment in Ardoyne in north Belfast and Ballymurphy in west Belfast. Both of these are areas in which IRA activity was especially prominent and are among the districts most impacted by

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<sup>48</sup> See e.g. with regard to files HSS/13/36/69, NIA/1/2/133 and NIA/1/2/134 the researcher was allowed access to open versions HSS/13/36/69A, NIA/1/2/133A, NIA/1/2/134A, letter from Margaret O'Donnell to Tim Cunningham, 7 January 2014. See e.g. with regard to files ENV/21/1/11, ENV/21/1/11, and ENV/21/1/26, letter from Margaret O'Donnell to Tim Cunningham, 22 May 2013

the conflict. In some cases however, files were open which pertained to other areas of the city during the period of the conflict and this allowed for a better understanding of the processes that were in play with regard to shaping the built environment. It is important to point out that this thesis is focused on examining the Belfast ecosystem, and the way in which it has been impacted by economic, political and design processes over time. This explains why at times there is reference to events in south Belfast for example, as this provides an appreciation of how events in north Belfast and around Gridwood fit within the wider events shaping the ecosystem. For example, some documents discovered, and indeed interview material, highlighted the way in which developments in the south of the city were impacted by concerns about the growth of the Catholic community in that area. This material was useful therefore in terms of helping to understand the processes that shaped debate around the Gridwood site. The crucial point about looking at the city from the perspective of an ecosystem is that there are not discrete areas that can be debated, and analysed in isolation, but rather, that the study uses one area in order to appreciate the wider ecosystem at work. The fact that a city ecosystem, and the relationship between systemic inequalities and conflict are shaped over time, also explains why there is such a focus on historical material in the thesis. This material is not 'background', but rather, is presented as an explanation of the way in which demographic and other changes over time can shape inequality and political conflict.

Notwithstanding difficulties with respect to accessing materials, the document search at PRONI did ultimately succeed in delivering some very valuable material that would not otherwise have been identified. Had this researcher relied for example upon a conventional systematic literature search the outcome would undoubtedly have been to conclude that, in line with the vast body of academic work, the security forces were not responsible for directing planning in the city. The experience of this researcher highlights the value of deploying a range of methodologies and the need to retain a degree of scepticism about academic consensus where there is always a danger that the peer review process or following



'acknowledged authorities' can lead to 'groupthink'. There is also clearly a difficulty with regard to the way in which findings from 'evidence based' research can become skewed when the evidence is hidden within a 'closed file'.

Another challenge that arose at the beginning of the research lay with the fact that discussions about the way forward for the case study were gridlocked at the time that the research commenced. Although the Girdwood Draft Masterplan was published in July 2007,<sup>49</sup> by 2010 it was very clear that there would be no progress with the original plan given the disagreement about housing and the subsequent economic downturn. Although there was valuable information from interviews about why the Masterplan had failed, there was inevitably a degree of speculation about what would happen next on the site. One positive outcome of this conundrum was that the extended time required to complete the PhD coincided with the extended time that was required to reach agreement on a way forward for the Girdwood site and the Gaol. As a result, when this researcher visited the site for the last time in July 2018, and carried out some final interviews, the redevelopment had been completed. The final thesis reflects therefore the actual development on the site, as opposed to speculative 'guesstimates' about what might occur. As it happens, much of what actually took place in the end was in line with my hypothesis about what would happen derived from first interviews in November 2010. Several aspects of the redevelopment however are somewhat different and therefore it is useful that the degree of uncertainty about the future of the site has been removed and the thesis is based on what actually happened rather than what might happen. This aspect of the research illustrates the difficulties associated with conducting research according to a specific time frame when the subject of the research is moving contingent on the outcome of sensitive negotiations. A central argument of this thesis, namely, that a city ecosystem is not static, and ought not be viewed as a

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<sup>49</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007)

snapshot but rather, is one that consists of processes of beginnings and endings occurring simultaneously. It also highlights the fact that

Architectural historians who study real architecture work with imperfect, heterogeneous and often incomplete material when studying the transformation of a city. By studying very precisely the subtle transformation over time it is possible to trace the agents and forces that have produced the image of a city.<sup>50</sup>

The extended time taken to complete the thesis presented several challenges with respect to the need to update literature, as well as financial and personal investment in a project over a period of time. In this respect, the thesis, like the city itself, evolved over time, and also benefited greatly from additional time to rethink arguments, especially when some of these arguments were published in academic journals.

### **Analysis of Findings**

Given the volume of interviews, and documentary sources collected for the purposes of this research a text-searching approach using Microsoft Word was used for the data analysis. Word software was utilized to store and disaggregate data from interview transcripts and secondary sources so that it became 'segregated, grouped, regrouped, and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation.<sup>51</sup> The process of analysis allowed for primary categories to be identified which reflected the main closed systems relevant to the study. Further subcategories were identified in order to establish the recursive operations of each sub-system. The subcategories were reflective of the themes that were identified through the literature and through the process of data analysis itself reflecting the

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<sup>50</sup> P Alkhoven, 'The Reconstruction of the Past: the Application of New Techniques for Visualization and Research in Architectural History', CAAD Digital Futures Proceedings, 1991, 550

<sup>51</sup> C Grbich Qualitative Data Analysis: An Introduction (Thousand Oaks 2007) in J Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Sage 2009) 8

'codes-to-theory' model for qualitative inquiry identified by Saldana.<sup>52</sup> Given that coding 'is not a precise science; it's primarily an interpretive act' the use of software or indeed any other form of technology cannot overcome the potential bias or selective approach that researchers can take with regard to data analysis – any more than subjectivity can be eliminated from the data gathering process.<sup>53</sup> Overall this author is satisfied that the process of analysis successfully allowed for an identification of the recursive chains within the closed systems relevant to the study which in turn allowed for the primary research question to be addressed.

The 'lack of superiority of a single research method points to the need for triangulation of research methods'.<sup>54</sup> Triangulation is an important aspect of this research process, with primary sources and additional secondary material used throughout the thesis to support the findings from the empirical work and to lend additional rigour to the analysis and conclusions. In addition, findings from this study have been presented at a number of academic and practitioner conferences that have affirmed and underscored the relevance and validity of the research findings. In addition, the researcher has to date published three academic peer reviewed articles which have also provided validation for the research.<sup>55</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter described the methodological approach I used for this thesis and included an analysis of the challenges of inter-disciplinary research as well as the range of sources used. It also focused on the methodological

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<sup>52</sup> J Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Sage 2009) 12

<sup>53</sup> J Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Sage 2009) 4

<sup>54</sup> A Hageman, A Review of the Strengths and Weaknesses of Archival, Behavioural, Qualitative Research Methods: Recognizing the Potential Benefits of Triangulation' *Advances in Accounting Behavioural Research* (2008) (11) 28

<sup>55</sup> Cunningham T, (2014) 'Changing Direction: Defensive Planning in a Post-Conflict City', *City* (18) (4) 455-462; Cunningham T, 'Monitoring Equality – Reflexive Regulation, Planning Systems, and the Role of Discrimination Law: Lessons from Northern Ireland', [2015] 14 *The Equal Rights Review* 119; Cunningham T, 'Cutting with the Grain: Human Rights, Conflict Transformation and the Urban Planning System – Lessons from Northern Ireland', (2016) 17 (3) *Human Rights Review* 329

challenges and ethical dilemmas that arose during the course of the research and the various techniques that were deployed in order to circumvent, or at least militate the problems identified. The subject and scope of this study aims to contribute to an evolving debate about the relationship between systemic inequalities and conflict in Belfast. By drawing findings and conclusions from this case study, the research lifts the focus on the relationship between the complex range of forces that shape spatial disadvantage. Chapter three will focus on the relationship between patterns of spatial inequality, conflict, and the design and planning of the urban environment and will include examination of the way in which the post-war planning practices helped precipitate the conflict that erupted in the late 1960s. Chapter four will examine how conflict management techniques established in the early 1970s helped shape the urban environment while at the same time concentrating patterns of spatial inequality and segregation in Belfast that exist to the present day.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Spatial Inequalities, Conflict, and Planning**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the complex relationship that exists between territory, conflict and political identity in the city of Belfast and highlights several important lessons for a more holistic conception of transitional justice that takes account of the social and economic dimensions of conflict. The first of these relates to the role of structural and systemic inequalities in causing conflict in the first place. As this chapter will show it was the combination of political, economic, and planning processes, some of which had been in place for several decades, that ultimately helped shape the violence that erupted on the streets of Belfast in the late 1960s. In particular, this chapter will show the important role that the planning system in Northern Ireland during the 1960s played in helping to precipitate political violence. Included in the analysis is examination of the ways in which the planning orthodoxy of the 1960s, which was characterised by large-scale urban redevelopment programs and displacement of inner-city communities, failed to take account of the spatial politics of Belfast and served to accentuate pre-existing tensions within a political system that was already under pressure from a growing and discontented Catholic population.

This chapter shows also the value of a systems theory approach for transitional justice scholarship in helping to identify the range of processes that can lead to political conflict, especially when these processes take place over a sustained period and are therefore more easily overlooked. The relationship between urban planning and political violence, which has been largely absent from transitional justice scholarship to date, has received quite a degree of attention from political scientists, urban theorists, and geographers. This chapter will show that if transitional justice wishes to engage fully with the socioeconomic dimensions of

conflict then the role of urban planning and architecture in shaping the spatial aspects of political violence cannot be ignored.

### **Spatial Inequalities and the Legacy of Conflict**

Shortly after resigning from the British delegation at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, JM Keynes, who went on to become one of the most celebrated economists of the twentieth century, observed that

The great events of history are often due to secular changes in the growth of population and other fundamental economic causes, which, escaping by their gradual character the notice of contemporary observers, are attributed to the follies of statesmen or the fanaticism of atheists.<sup>1</sup>

Keynes' maxim about the need to consider the impact of systemic changes over time fits with Jacobs' temporal vision of a city ecosystem. She noted that observers of city life who thought they viewed static situations were actually seeing 'processes of beginning and processes of ending occurring simultaneously'.<sup>2</sup> In several respects, urban planning in Belfast over the last 50 years has been characterized by attempts to manage processes of beginning, and processes of ending. In some instances, most notably during the 1960s, failure to adequately deal with these wider processes of change, and their impact on the demographics of the city helped precipitate political violence.

The most important economic 'process of ending' in Belfast during the twentieth century has been deindustrialization. In 1920 Belfast was the industrial heartland of Ireland with an economic base centred on shipbuilding, engineering, linen, and

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<sup>1</sup> J M Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (first published 1920, Penguin 1971) 14

<sup>2</sup> J Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (first published 1961, Modern Library 1993) xvii

a rope works that was the largest in the world.<sup>3</sup> The Victorian grandeur of the city was reflected in a population growth level unsurpassed by any other urban centre in the British Isles during that period – the population of Belfast rose from under 20,000 at the beginning of the nineteenth century to almost 350,000 in 1901.<sup>4</sup> The significant growth levels in the population and the economic fortunes of the city during the nineteenth century were mirrored however by significant differences in the political, social, and economic status of the two main communities. Most notably, prosperity and wealth generated during the nineteenth century was largely concentrated within the hands of the Protestant community - the owners and management of most industrial and commercial concerns were Protestants as were the bulk of the workforce and the skilled trades.<sup>5</sup> Data from the period shows for example that in 1901, while Protestants comprised 76 per cent of the population, they constituted 93 per cent of Belfast's skilled working class; Catholics, constituting 24 per cent of the city's population as a whole, provided the remaining 7 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

Another important characteristic of Belfast during the nineteenth century was the presence of significant levels of sectarian violence which in many instances was focused around attempts by the growing Catholic population to assert their right of access to the city's housing stock and collective attempts by Protestants to contain them.<sup>7</sup> The work of Hepburn, Boyd and others has highlighted for example the way in which street violence as a result of Catholic attempts to move into what was deemed to be Protestant territory was a major factor in precipitating the riots of

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<sup>3</sup> B Collins, 'The Edwardian City' in J Beckett et al (eds) *Belfast: The Making of the City* (Appletree Press 1988)

<sup>4</sup> B Walker and H Dixon, *No Mean City: Belfast 1880-1914* (Friars Bush Press 1983) vii

<sup>5</sup> P Buckland, (1981) *A History of Northern Ireland* (Gill and Macmillan 1981) 6

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Hepburn A C, *A Past Apart: Studies in the History of Catholic Belfast 1850-1950* (Ulster Historical Foundation 1996) 121. Growth in the Catholic percentage of the population during this period was not linear. Hepburn observes that between 1861 and 1911 the Catholic share of the city fell from 34.1 to 24.1 per cent, a decline of three tenths. He argues that it is 'highly likely' that the relative decline of Catholic migration to Belfast, and a differential out-migration of young adult Catholics, especially males, arose from a Catholic perception of reduced employment opportunities available to them in the city. A C Hepburn, *Contested Cities in the Modern West* (Palgrave 2004)169, table 6.1

1872.<sup>8</sup> These riots culminated in the Catholic victory at the Battle of Leeson Street which secured the expansion of the main Catholic district in the city, the Falls, into the south-west of the city.<sup>9</sup> As this, and indeed subsequent chapters of this thesis will show, efforts by the Protestant community to halt the growth of an expanding Catholic population continue to characterise the Belfast to the present day and remains an important source of political conflict.

The growth levels in the population of the city during the nineteenth century continued through the first half of the twentieth century so that by the late 1940s the population of Belfast had reached its high point.<sup>10</sup> The 1951 census figure put the population of the city at 443,671, 32% of the entire population of Northern Ireland. Ten years later, the total population of the city had fallen to 415,856, and by 1971 it was down to 362,082, little more than it had been at the start of the century. Population decline during this period came about because there had been a steady move of people from the core of the city to more suburban areas in the period 1951-1971, with the greater urban area reaching around 600,000 in 1971.<sup>11</sup> This pattern continued through the 1970s and 1980s which saw a continued decline in population and the number of households in the inner core of Belfast city so that from 1971 to 1991 there was a 55% loss of population. At the same time the outer regional area of the city grew by 39%.<sup>12</sup>

The figures above illustrate a general pattern of decline in the population of the city as a whole since the Second World War, following the massive growth of the nineteenth century. The secular nature of these changes is illustrated by the fact that this pattern is common in industrial cities across the UK and indeed the USA,

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<sup>8</sup> A C Hepburn, *A Past Apart: Studies in the History of Catholic Belfast 1850-1950* (Ulster Historical Foundation 1996); A Boyd, *Holy War in Belfast* (Anvil 1969)

<sup>9</sup> F Wright 'Communal deterrence and the threat of violence in the North of Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century' in J Darby, N Dodge and A C Hepburn (eds) *Political Violence: Ireland in Comparative Perspective* (Ottawa 1990)

<sup>10</sup> W Maguire, *Belfast: A History* (Carnegie Publishing 2009) 170

<sup>11</sup> D Bryan in S. J. Connolly, (ed) *Belfast 400: Planning, Space, and Conflict* (Liverpool University Press 2012) 326

<sup>12</sup> F Boal, *Shaping a City* (QUB 1995) 22



where the hollowing out of the industrial base, and the decline of traditional industries, allied to the phenomenon of suburbanisation, saw similar falls in population.<sup>13</sup> What is especially notable about the phenomenon in Belfast however is the way in which these population trends differ across the two communities. Most of those who left Belfast in the 1970s and 1980s were Protestants, with the result that Belfast is now a more 'Catholic' city than at any time in its history.<sup>14</sup> The extent to which these demographic changes have impacted upon political representation in the city is evidenced by the fact that only representatives of the Unionist community held the position of Lord Mayor of the city from 1842 until 1996. In the 24 years since, the role of Belfast Lord Mayor has alternated on a yearly basis between Unionist, Nationalist, and Alliance party representatives.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of the spatial distribution of the current population it is important to note that increases in the Catholic percentage of the population in the city have been accompanied by high levels of residential segregation.<sup>16</sup> Segregation levels between the two communities can be seen starkly in the division of the city between the two sides of its main river, the Lagan (see Figure 2 overleaf).<sup>17</sup> Whereas the core city to the west of the Lagan is 55% Catholic, to the east it is only 12%. In terms of overall levels of segregation within the city of Belfast, Murtagh and Carmichael have pointed to the fact that 68% of electoral wards in Northern Ireland have a population in which more than 70% of the residents belong

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<sup>13</sup> F Gaffikin, M Morrissey and K Sterrett, 'Remaking the City: the Role of Culture in Belfast' in W Neill and H Schwedler (eds) *Urban Planning and Cultural Inclusion: Lessons from Belfast and Berlin* (Palgrave Macmillan 2001) 148

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Unlike many cities, Belfast Mayors are not elected directly but rather, are elected by fellow councilors and serve for one year. This process has evolved into an informal arrangement by which Unionists and Nationalists rotate the position of Mayor and Deputy Mayor. In effect this represents an informal realpolitik which recognizes the demographic balance of the city. See <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk>

<sup>16</sup> Shuttleworth I, 'Are Northern Ireland's Communities Dividing? Evidence from geographically consistent census of population data, 1971-2001' (2009) 41 (1) *Environment and Planning A* 213

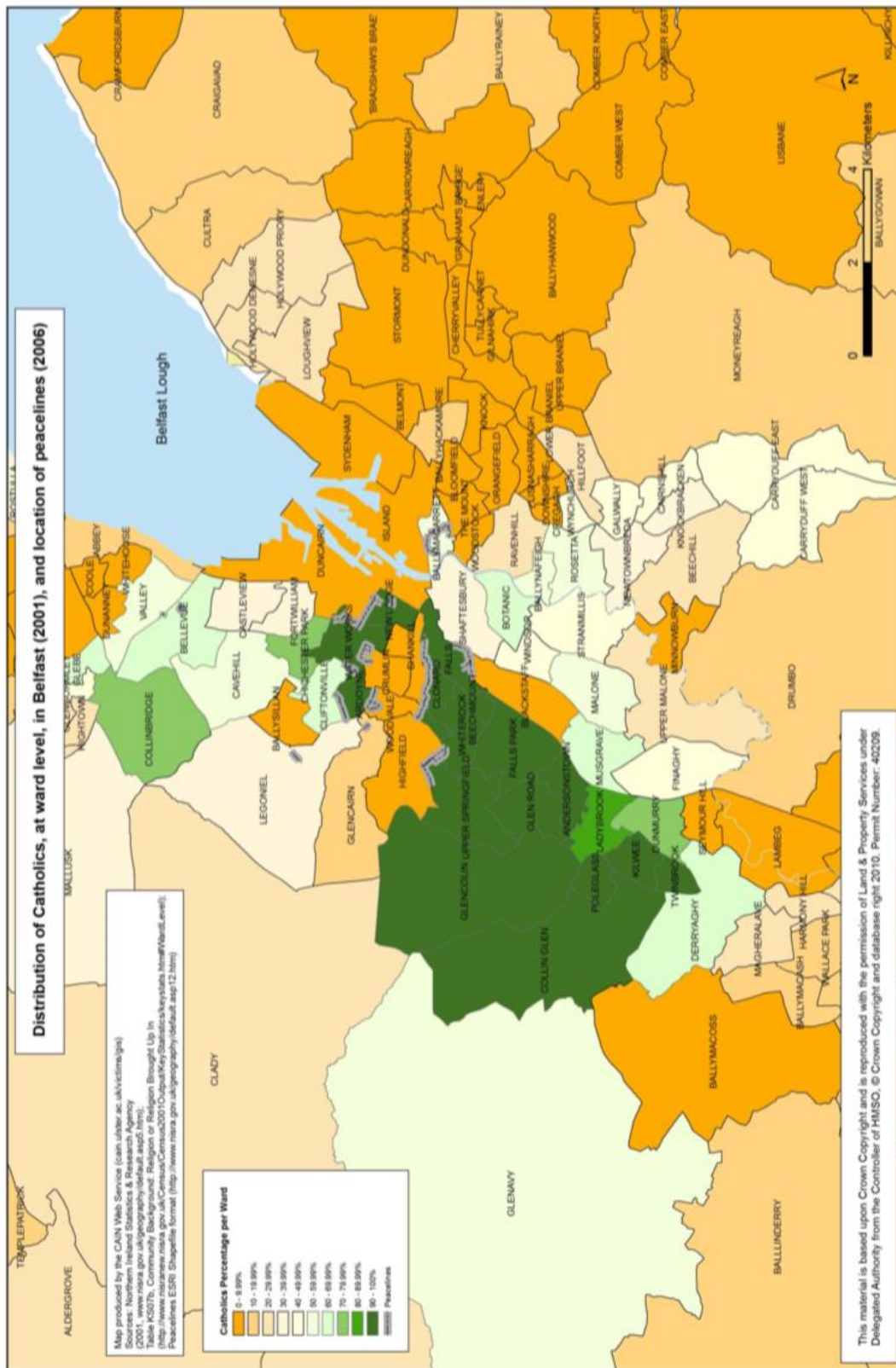
<sup>17</sup> F Gaffikin, M Morrissey and K Sterrett, 'Remaking the City: the Role of Culture in Belfast' in W Neill and H Schwedler (eds) *Urban Planning and Cultural Inclusion: Lessons from Belfast and Berlin* (Palgrave Macmillan 2001) 148

to one community or the other.<sup>18</sup> In the late 1960s, six in ten of public-sector households in the urban area lived in streets that were segregated, but a decade later, it was nine in ten households.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> B Murtagh and P Carmichael, *Sharing Place: A Study of mixed housing in Ballynafeigh, South Belfast* (Northern Ireland Housing Executive 2006)

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*



In the north and west of the city in particular, segregation by community background is heightened by the presence of concrete or steel barriers euphemistically referred to as 'peace lines' – see below.<sup>20</sup>



The 'Peace Wall' at Lanark Way, West Belfast. The Catholic Falls Road is to the left, behind the barrier, and the photo is taken from the Protestant Shankill side of the barrier. Photograph by Tim Cunningham.

The demographic characteristics of Protestants and Catholics living at these peace lines, or interface areas as they are commonly known, differ significantly with Catholic communities characterized by higher family sizes, higher fertility rates and a more youthful demographic structure. On the other side of these barriers the Protestant populations are older, with smaller household sizes and lower than average fertility rates. When these demographics are played out in highly

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<sup>20</sup> Gray P, U McAnulty and M Keenan, 'Moving Towards Integrated Communities in Northern Ireland: New Approaches to Mixed Housing', 9 No. 3 (2009) *European Journal of Housing Policy* 337 – 353

segregated space, very different housing need profiles are reflected in terms of the number, size, type and location of accommodation required.<sup>21</sup> This in turn has serious and important consequences for the post-conflict regeneration of these areas which experience chronic levels of social deprivation. In fact, another striking feature about contemporary Belfast is that segregation by community background is augmented by socio-spatial segregation creating an acute intersection of socio-economic and identity-based inequality.<sup>22</sup> Current data illustrates the extent to which different areas of the city are dominated by different sections of the community and the uneven distribution of spatial deprivation with the north and west Belfast parliamentary constituencies accounting for 9 out of the top 10 most deprived areas within the entire region of Northern Ireland.<sup>23</sup>

In summary, those of Catholic community background are more likely to live within the most deprived areas, deprived spaces are more likely to be segregated than non-deprived spaces, and there is a significant association between deprivation and political violence in Belfast. If the electoral ward death rates per 1000 of the population are correlated with the Belfast deprivation scores that were generated in 1991 (Robson et al, 1994), the coefficient is 0.7 – in short, the level of deprivation in a local area predicts about half its experience of political violence.<sup>24</sup> The map overleaf (Figure 4) illustrates the spatial nature of violence and deprivation in the city. These data hint at the nature of socio-economic change in Northern Ireland – continuing Catholic disadvantage feeding an impression of no improvement in the quality of life but deterioration in the position of Protestants engendering a sense of loss. At the same time, these changes occurred in the context of an ambitious framework of equality and anti-poverty measures spanning several

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<sup>21</sup> P Shirlow, 'Belfast: a segregated city' in C Coulter and M Murray (eds) *Northern Ireland After The Troubles: A society in transition*, (Manchester University Press 2008).

<sup>22</sup> F Gaffikin and M Morrissey, *Planning in Divided Cities: Collaborative Shaping of Contested Space* (Wiley-Blackwell 2011) 197-229

<sup>23</sup> Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, *Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures* (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2010) 3

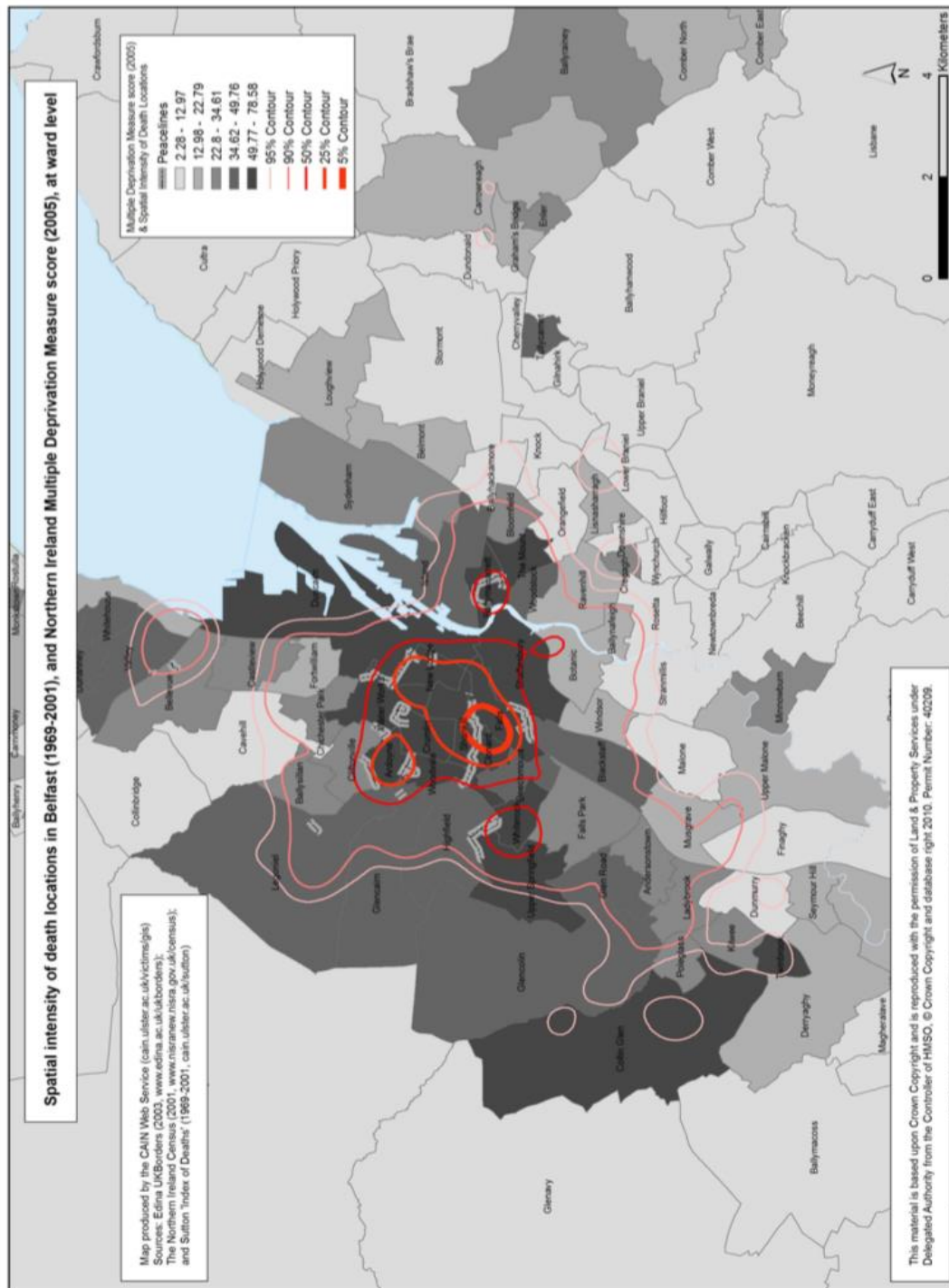
<sup>24</sup> F Gaffikin and M Morrissey, *Planning in Divided Cities: Collaborative Shaping of Contested Space* (Wiley-Blackwell 2011) 218

decades.<sup>25</sup> As this thesis will show, many of these demographic characteristics are the direct outcome of the actions, and in many cases the failings, of the economic, political and planning systems stretching back over the past 50 years.

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<sup>25</sup> Among the measures include the Belfast Areas of Need (BAN) Programme, Making Belfast Work (MBW), Targeting Social Need (TSN), New Targeting Social Need (New TSN), and Renewing Communities. For a discussion of the impact and shortcomings of these programmes see J Muir *Regeneration and Poverty in Northern Ireland: Evidence and Policy Review* (Sheffield Hallam University: Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research 2014)





### **The City Ecosystem and the Economics of Decline**

In order to understand how the fragile Belfast ecosystem came to be fractured in the late 1960s it is necessary to return and consider the systemic weaknesses that lay at the heart of the wider Northern Ireland economy going back over a century. In fact, the beginning of the end for many Protestant communities in Belfast can be traced to the turn of the twentieth century when the decline in the linen and shipbuilding industries got underway. The difficulty for Belfast, as with many other industrial cities entering the twentieth century, was that the city ecosystem was heavily weighted towards sectors with poor long-term prospects. It was not until after the second world war however that the scale of decline in traditional industries became apparent, highlighting again the extent to which secular changes, can escape, by their gradual nature, the notice of contemporary observers.<sup>26</sup>

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Northern Ireland experienced a dramatic alteration in its manufacturing mainstays unequalled by many regional economies in the rest of the United Kingdom. The most concentrated job losses were in shipbuilding where competition from a range of new competitors, and changing demand in shipping, which favoured the new purpose-built yards in Europe and the Far East, meant that between 1960 and 1964 no fewer than 11,500 jobs, some 40 per cent, were lost in shipbuilding, repairing and marine engineering.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the linen industry, another mainstay of the Belfast ecosystem, fell victim to a range of secular changes notably the trend in consumer taste away from linen fabrics during the twentieth century, competition from synthetic as well as natural fibres, and the challenge of new foreign producers. The net result was that almost one-third of linen plants in the region closed down and 27,000 employees, over 45 per cent of the labour force, lost their jobs during the period 1958-64. Furthermore, employment in agriculture, another important sector of the Northern Ireland economy continued to contract as the consequence of modernisation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> L Kennedy, *The Modern Industrialisation of Ireland 1940-1988* (Dundalgan 1989); M Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, (Pluto Press 1976) 227-256

<sup>27</sup> P Buckland, (1981) *A History of Northern Ireland* (Gill and Macmillan 1981) 94

<sup>28</sup> Ibid



The impact of these systemic weaknesses within the economy of the region led the government of Northern Ireland in the early 1960s to commission several reports exploring ways in which to best achieve economic modernisation.<sup>29</sup> At this time, there emerged, under the premiership of the new Northern Ireland Prime Minister, Terence O'Neill, a 'new technocratic unionism' which sought the twin objectives of a more accommodating relationship with the Catholic minority community while at the same time embarking on a programme of economic modernisation.<sup>30</sup> The basis of this 'new technocratic unionism'<sup>31</sup> were two reports commissioned before O'Neill became premier – the Hall report and Professor Sir Robert Matthew's Belfast Regional Survey and Plan (the Matthew Plan) – as well as an economic plan drawn up by Professor Thomas Wilson at O'Neill's request.<sup>32</sup>

These reports represented an attempt to reconfigure the economic system of Northern Ireland towards newer, growth industries, such as artificial fibres, and away from traditional industries, notably, shipbuilding and linen. The difficulty was that the heartland of these traditional industries was the city of Belfast, which provided not just the linen mills in and around north and west Belfast, but also the Harland and Wolfe shipyard. Crucially, the city of Belfast also provided the numerous associated ancillary industries, such as rope makers and engineering works, that supported these key industries. These ancillary industries represented what Collier refers to as the 'economies of agglomeration' necessary in order to maximise production and reduce costs, that characterise any urban centre.<sup>33</sup> The problem for Belfast was that the production and transportation processes associated with the new growth industries, notably artificial fibres, required large brownfield sites on the city periphery which militated against the location of new factories in the urban centre where space and land was at a premium. Efforts to

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<sup>29</sup> Department for Economic Development, *Report of the Joint Working Party on the Economy of Northern Ireland* (Cmnd 446, 1962) (*passim*)

<sup>30</sup> F Boal, 'Territoriality on the Shankill-Falls Divide in Belfast' [1969] 4 *Irish Geography* 41

<sup>31</sup> M Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, (Pluto Press 1976) 230

<sup>32</sup> R. H. Matthew, *Belfast: Regional Survey and Plan* (Belfast: HMSO 1964)

<sup>33</sup> P Collier, *The Future of Capitalism: Facing The New Anxieties* (Harper Collins 2018) 126

successfully reconfigure the economic system suggested a strategy be put in place that would facilitate the relocation of large sections of the urban population of Belfast out of the city in order to provide a workforce for these new industries in outlying suburban brownfield sites. This objective was in line with conventional theory and practice within the planning system of the time which was focused on large-scale demolition and redevelopment of urban centres, decanting of urban populations to surrounding new towns, and a massive expansion of urban road building.

The 'Matthew Plan', which examined a number of these issues, including the need for new housing, an expanding population, and the problem of the unrestrained growth of the population of Belfast was submitted to the Northern Ireland government in October 1962 and is of key significance for understanding the current patterns of settlement within the city and indeed the relationship between planning and political conflict.<sup>34</sup> Matthew proposed a radical solution to fence the city of Belfast with a 'stop line', beyond which the growth of Belfast would be halted while the people living in sub-standard housing within the city would be housed in seven existing towns, or 'growth centres', that would be greatly expanded, and one entirely new city, 'Craigavon', to be positioned in the countryside between Portadown and Lurgan.<sup>35</sup> Many of these people who relocated to the new growth centres were going to have to commute into Belfast and, in line with conventional wisdom at the time, this would be achieved by car with a series of motorways proposed connecting these towns to Belfast. Such was the influence of Matthew's proposals that Belfast remains a commuter city to this day, and with a few exceptions, such as Poleglass in the west of the city, and Cairnshill, in the south-east, the Belfast 'stop line' remains more or less intact.<sup>36</sup> The Matthew Plan, and this attempt at economic modernisation, was to have profound and unforeseen

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<sup>34</sup> B Morrison, 'Planning the City; Planning the Region' in F Boal and S Royle (eds) *Enduring City: Belfast in the Twentieth Century* (Blackstaff 2006) 141-154

<sup>35</sup> P Buckland, (1981) *A History of Northern Ireland* (Gill and Macmillan 1981) 113

<sup>36</sup> R Osborne and D Singleton, (1982) 'Political processes and behaviour' in F W Boal and N J Douglas (eds) *Integration and Division: Geographical Perspectives on the Northern Ireland Problem* (Academic Press 1982) 177

consequences with regard to the sectarian politics of the city and the ever-present tensions around land and identity. The practices applied by Matthew did fit with mainstream international planning orthodoxy of the period and had originated far beyond the streets of Belfast.

### **International precedent, Closed Planning Systems, and Conflict**

The new spatial vision for Northern Ireland that emerged in the 1960s reflected what became known as an Anglo-modernist planning paradigm. Before coming to Belfast, Matthew had been involved in the redevelopment of several other cities across the UK and imported the recursive planning practices that were at the heart of planning orthodoxy at that time.<sup>37</sup> These practices included large-scale demolition of substandard housing, known as ‘slum clearance’, and the decanting of inner city populations to new tower blocks on the periphery of city centres, or other growth centres (i.e. ‘new towns’) with the cleared land in city centres to be used for new highways and commercial development.<sup>38</sup> This Anglo-modernist planning paradigm was presented as a result of the cold calculus of technocrats within the planning system and sought to create a modernist utopia characterised by tower blocks and new roads which would replace the Victorian slums that formed the urban landscape of the UK at that time. The problem was that the sectarian politics of the region that characterises claims to territory in Northern Ireland dictated that these planning decisions, not surprisingly, took on an ethnic salience.<sup>39</sup>

One of the most problematic aspects of the new, Anglo-modernist vision for Belfast concerned housing provision. A key element of the Matthew Plan was the need to

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<sup>37</sup> R Matthew, *Belfast: Regional Survey and Plan* (HMSO 1964) (*passim*)

<sup>38</sup> The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) and Rent Restriction Law (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) (1956) gave the government of Northern Ireland the right to define certain properties as ‘unfit’ and mark them for redevelopment. Almost 100,000 houses were allocated under this Act, the majority of which were in the west of the city centre (the Crumlin Road Shankill Road and Divis Street areas and to the south (Sandy Row, Donegall Road and The Markets). W Johnston, *The Belfast Urban Motorway: Engineering, Ambition and Social Conflict* (Colourprint Books 2014) 32-33

<sup>39</sup> A C Hepburn, *A Past Apart: Studies in the History of Catholic Belfast 1850-1950* (Ulster Historical Foundation 1996) 246

launch an urgent and concerted attack on dereliction to enhance Belfast's image which culminated in the 1969 Belfast Urban Plan. Again, there was nothing inherently problematic about developing a city plan in order to address the significant levels of housing need. The cumulative consequence of a much-delayed housing programme therefore was comprehensive redevelopment for many traditional Belfast working-class communities.<sup>40</sup> Apart from new build housing, land in the inner city was to be designated for the new Belfast Urban Motorway (BUM) and new commercial/industrial development. The outcome of the Matthew Plan was to place the embryonic motorway system at the heart of the development of the Belfast region, to promote little enthusiasm for public transport, and to accept that Belfast would become a city of commuters – a pattern still reflected in the current transport network of the city. Sections of the inner urban population were therefore to be encouraged to 'decant' to the suburbs and new towns, the locations for anticipated multinational investment.

Again, reflecting the command-and-control nature of the planning system at that period, there was scant evidence that the consultants were enthusiastic about Skeffington concepts of the need for public participation in planning.<sup>41</sup> One difficulty with this approach was that not only did many people in the working-class areas of Belfast wish to remain where they were, but that the plans themselves increased housing need through the spreading of 'blight'. Once an area was listed for redevelopment, property values in the area slumped and existing landlords lost any incentive to modernise properties or carry out repairs.<sup>42</sup> Feelings ran particularly high in the Shankill where blight had been given 14 years to spread in the period between the time when the plans were first mooted and in January 1974, when the area was finally vested.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Planning Advisory Board, *Housing in Northern Ireland: Interim Report of the Planning Advisory Board* (Cmnd 479, 1965)

<sup>41</sup> Skeffington Report, *People and Planning: Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning* (London: HMSO, 1969) (*passim*)

<sup>42</sup> J Darby and G Morris, 'Intimidation in Housing', (1973) 111 (2) *Community Forum* 7

<sup>43</sup> J Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Blackstaff Press 2001) 295

Furthermore, a perennial problem for any process of urban renewal is what to do with existing residents when the houses in the area designed for redevelopment are demolished.<sup>44</sup> If suitable dwellings are not available to re-house those rendered homeless as a result of demolition, then the redevelopment process itself exacerbates housing need. Moreover, the immediate effect of the Matthew 'stop line' had been to halt most of the building already taking place in suburban areas and to slow down the Corporation's not very impressive redevelopment programme.<sup>45</sup> Maguire has pointed out how Belfast Corporation, faced with the problem of finding houses for large numbers of people from inner-city areas which were in need of redevelopment, accepted the stop line with much reluctance, by no means convinced that the municipal impulse towards bigness was such a bad thing as the planners thought.<sup>46</sup> The overall effect of the Matthew Plan and the Belfast Urban Motorway project therefore was that demolition of existing housing took place at a significantly faster pace than replacement dwellings were constructed further exacerbating a pre-existing housing crisis.<sup>47</sup> Housing need was compounded by the hubristic, top-down, command-and-control approach that embodied urban planning during this period notably the belief that inner-city communities should be broken up and relocated regardless of whether they actually wanted to go.

The planning system of the 1960s was oblivious to these difficulties, not least given the enthusiasm with which many politicians across the water, and beyond, had embraced the modernist vision that had been presented to them by planners and architects.<sup>48</sup> In Great Britain, by the autumn of 1960, the pace of change in the urban built environment – whether actual change or planned change for the future – was becoming 'as rapid as any time since the Industrial Revolution'.<sup>49</sup> In fact,

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<sup>44</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

<sup>45</sup> F W Boal, 'Contemporary Belfast', in J C Beckett and R E Glasscock (eds) *Belfast: The Origin and Growth of an Industrial City* (BBC 1967)

<sup>46</sup> W Maguire, *Belfast: A History* (Carnegie Publishing 2009) 170

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>48</sup> J Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern Architects and Urban Transformation 1954-72*, (Routledge 2007) (*passim*)

<sup>49</sup> D Kynaston, (2014) *Modernity Britain: A Shake of the Dice* (Bloomsbury 2014) 70

'revolution' was the term adopted by a junior housing minister, Sir Keith Joseph, who told the Town Planning Institute's annual dinner March 1961

We are on the edge of a great job of urban renewal and a vast revolution in our industrial areas is taking place...heavy responsibility falls on the members of the planning profession. They are confronted with the challenge of not only filling in the void but of creating something out of existing disorder and creating ordered beauty out of empty space.<sup>50</sup>

Although there was a desperate need for old and sub-standard housing to be replaced in many British industrial cities, not everyone was enamoured with what was being proposed as a replacement. In Glasgow for example, one Councillor declared that what disturbed him most about that city's radical Development Plan was that they were treating people like cattle in the sense that 'the proposals were being imposed from the planners' point of view without regard to other considerations'.<sup>51</sup> In Britain such concerns tended to be limited to a small number of local, usually independent, elected officials and church leaders in addition to one or two dissenting voices within the planning and architecture professions, most notably Nairn:

Does any planner in Birmingham, Liverpool or Manchester know how the Corporation dustmen live, what they enjoy in the city centre and what they abhor? The problem is at least as important as plot ratios, daylight angles and sight lines. To take one concrete example, most Cockney families like to live in the kitchen. The architect's job is not to ask why, nor to persuade Cockney's to live like young married architects, but to build big

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid 285

<sup>51</sup> Ibid 75

kitchens in the specific proportion that they are needed, as far as can be assessed. But do they? Not on your life...<sup>52</sup>

Undoubtedly a key factor behind the pace of change that took place during that period was the fact that the radical redevelopment programs there were supported across the political spectrum.<sup>53</sup> Most of the inner-city redevelopment in fact took place with the active and vocal support of local Labour party officials and elected councilors in cities such as Glasgow, Sheffield, Liverpool, Newcastle and Hull although the urban renewal program itself had originated with the Conservative government under Harold Macmillan. Kynaston concludes that the push for radical urban renewal during this period became part of the prevailing 'zeitgeist, to a certain something in the air'.<sup>54</sup> Undoubtedly, within the political system, the momentum was firmly behind redevelopment, reconstruction and to use the terminology of the period 'slum clearance' in order to deliver a modernist utopia that was predicated on the needs of cars not people

with much greater vigour, we must rebuild our whole environment of working and living in terms of the motor car.<sup>55</sup>

Within the economic system, the construction industry and those who made a living, both directly and indirectly from that industry also had a vested interest in pursuing 'revolutionary' changes in the built environment. The importance of economic stimulus has also been highlighted by Pluntz who argues that the motor industry played an important role in shaping post-war urban development in US cities in favour of the car and away from public transport.<sup>56</sup> In autopoietic terms therefore, it can be said that during this period in the US and the UK, a structural

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid 78

<sup>53</sup> There were however other important influences in Britain notably the construction industry, see P Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain 1945-1975*, Oxford University Press 1981 (*passim*)

<sup>54</sup> D Kynaston, *Modernity Britain: A Shake of the Dice* (Bloomsbury 2014) 73

<sup>55</sup> D Kynaston, *Modernity Britain: A Shake of the Dice* (Bloomsbury 2014) 72

<sup>56</sup> R Pluntz, *City Riffs: Urbanism, Ecology, Place* (Columbia University GSAPP 2017) 29-32

coupling took place in which modernist planning and architecture became aligned with political and economic interests in order to deliver a modernist utopia that required large scale destruction of major urban centres with scant regard for the needs of the local communities. Significantly, for the purposes of this thesis, the Anglo-modernist planning model that shaped British and US cities in the 1950s and 1960s was directly replicated in Belfast through the Matthew Plan and other projects notably the Urban Motorway. In some respects this was hardly a surprise given that these projects were designed by the same technocratic elites who brought not just their expertise, but also the flaws and controversies that their projects had caused in British cities. Unlike the situation in Britain however, a lack of political legitimacy for the 'revolutionary' changes taking place were compounded by the sectarian territorial claims within the region, which will be explored in the next section.

### **The Political System and Planning for Conflict**

The main problem with the redevelopment taking place in Belfast during the 1960s was that the political system in Northern Ireland, which excluded representatives of the Catholic and Nationalist community from both central and local government in Belfast ensured that important decisions that required large scale demolition of housing, the breaking up of communities and forced relocation, lacked legitimacy. This lack of legitimacy was further compounded by the way in which sectarian politics impacted upon systemic inequalities. For example, the Unionist controlled Belfast Corporation had little interest in rehousing Catholics who were displaced within its own boundaries. Moreover, outside Belfast, Unionist controlled councils used their planning powers to limit the development of much needed housing for Catholics.<sup>57</sup> This is evidenced by the fact that the dominance of Unionist political representation across Northern Ireland between the late 1940s and late 1960s had brought an increase in the housing supply in 'Unionist towns' such as Craigavon,

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<sup>57</sup> Disturbances in Northern Ireland: Report of the Cameron Commission Appointed by the Government of Northern Ireland (Cmd 532, 1969) 140



Antrim, Bangor, Newtownards, and Carrickfergus and suburban developments on the outskirts of Belfast such as Monkstown, Glengormley and Whiteabbey.<sup>58</sup>

Additionally, a number of green-field 'mixed estates' (occupied by both Catholic and Protestant residents) were also developed beyond the urban fringe of the city, giving rise to social-housing settlements such as Rathcoole, New Barnsley, Springmartin, Lenadoon and Twinbrook. The lack of specific house building programmes directly targeted at the Catholic population in order to address their chronic levels of need was not brought under public scrutiny until the advent of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association in 1968. In fact, the reluctance on the part of Unionist councils to house Catholics was identified in the inquiry into the first wave of disturbances that took place concluded that

among the immediate and precipitating causes of the disorders which broke out, was a rising sense of continuing injustice and grievance among large sections of the Catholic population in Northern Ireland...in respect of inadequacy of housing provision by certain local authorities.<sup>59</sup>

The reality for those living within severe housing need in Belfast therefore was that the demolitions which took place in order to clear land for the Belfast Urban Motorway and the decanting of populations outside the city significantly increased rather than decreased housing need for the Catholic community by exacerbating the imbalances that had built up during the 1940s and 1950s. What this period shows clearly is the relationship between urban planning and civil unrest, and the capacity of the former to precipitate the latter. The former Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams has described how his involvement as a Republican activist began with opposition to the plans for redevelopment of the Pound Loney area of the

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<sup>58</sup> D Coyles 'Hidden City' in D Coyles and D Wylie (eds) *Housing Plans for the Future* (Steidl 2018) (book is unpaginated)

<sup>59</sup> Disturbances in Northern Ireland: Report of the Cameron Commission Appointed by the Government of Northern Ireland (Cmd 532, 1969) 229

Lower Falls in west Belfast which was the site of the Divis Tower blocks that opened in May 1968. In many ways, the objections of Adams and the protestors on the Lower Falls mirrored those in cities across the Irish Sea

While we were all for the replacement of old, substandard housing, we were opposed to the plans which saw system-building in multi-story units as the answer to the demands of the housing crisis, and which structured grants to local authorities to favour the new methods. The old housing was desperately poor, but the Loney was a good area with its own sense of community, in the which the same families had lived in the same streets for generations. We were convinced that high-rise flats weren't the answer. How could you live up there? How would you get the pram down? Where would the children play? In a balcony fifty feet up in the air?.... there had been no consultation at all with local people.<sup>60</sup>

The Divis tower block complex which replaced the Pound Loney housing and opened in May 1968, like many similar developments of that period in Britain, was mostly demolished less than twenty years later and came to epitomize the worst example of the system-built developments of that era.<sup>61</sup> Adams describes in his memoirs how the public protests that he was involved in around opposition to this redevelopment led to confrontations with the police and disintegrated into rioting, a pattern that was in fact to be repeated on a much larger scale in 1968-69 as other civil rights protesters, campaigning on similar issues such as housing, employment and electoral reform met the full force of the Unionist government.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> G Adams, (1996) *Before the Dawn* (Heinemann 1996) 89

<sup>61</sup> Other developments that also had to be demolished in the 1980s included the notorious 'Weetabix' flats on the Shankill Road - so called because they resembled cereal packets, as well as the Turf Lodge Flats in Belfast, both of which had to be demolished 'within a few years of their erection'. See C Brett, *Housing a Divided Community* (Queen's University Belfast 1986) Plate 30, 32

<sup>62</sup> G Adams, (1996) *Before the Dawn* (Heinemann 1996) 93

The comments by Adams regarding confrontations between protestors and the police highlights another difficulty with the Anglo-modernist planning framework imported from Britain, namely, that opposition within the Catholic community, coupled with lack of political involvement, led protestors against redevelopment onto the streets of Belfast who in turn were brought into direct confrontation with an almost exclusively Protestant police force. The RUC and the Ulster Special Constabulary ('B Specials' or 'specials') on occasion showed themselves to be more than willing to flex their muscle when faced with protestors who were viewed by many within the force as 'fifth columnists' intent on undermining the Union.<sup>63</sup> The partiality of the RUC and the Specials and protests about that partiality 'are widely regarded as having been a significant factor in the events precipitating the conflict'.<sup>64</sup> Those marching in opposition to the demolition of housing in Belfast, or the construction of the urban motorway, were protesting about the way in which political choices were made regarding the implementation of what were fundamentally planning decisions.

### **Planning Systems, Populations and Political Violence**

Morison and Livingstone contend that it was exactly at the point at which the Northern Ireland government began to act like a modern welfare state that issues of legitimacy of the state began to be posed.<sup>65</sup> In effect this is a variation of De Tocqueville's thesis that the most perilous moment for a bad government is one when it seeks to mend its ways.<sup>66</sup> Close examination of the impact of the urban renewal programmes that took place in working-class communities in Belfast during this period, and indeed, the way in which the economic modernisation

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<sup>63</sup> G Ellison and J Smyth, *The Crowned Harp: Policing Northern Ireland* (Pluto 2000) (*passim*)

<sup>64</sup> J McGarry and B O'Leary *Policing Northern Ireland: Proposals for a New Start* (Blackstaff 1989) 31

<sup>65</sup> J Morison and S Livingstone (1995), *Reshaping Public Power: Northern Ireland and the British Constitutional Crisis* (Sweet and Maxwell 1995) 126

<sup>66</sup> A De Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, (tr A Gilbert, first published 1856, Anchor Books 1955). Tocqueville's thesis is distinguishable from the J curve: the idea that revolts and revolutions occur after long periods of rising expectations. Arguably the J curve was also relevant in this context with rising expectations from the Catholic community following the reformist promises of the O'Neill government in the early 1960s.

programme of the 1960s exacerbated sectarian disadvantages, would indicate that the situation in Northern Ireland was somewhat more complex than has hitherto been recognised.<sup>67</sup>

In order to understand fully this period in the history of Northern Ireland it is necessary to identify how exactly the recursive processes within the planning system precipitated a crisis within the political system. There is little doubt that the technocrats within the planning profession, adopting an Anglo-modernist vision, could objectively justify a number of the controversial decisions made during the 1960s. The decline of traditional industries required new inward investment, which in turn required new infrastructure. Moreover, there were at the time sound technical reasons for believing that old slum dwellings ought to be replaced by new tower blocks, creating cities in the sky. What the planners and architects at the time failed to realise however, is that planning is fundamentally predicated upon the control and manipulation of space and in a divided society, where territory and identity are inextricably linked, there is no such thing as a neutral design'.<sup>68</sup>

In one respect, the Unionist government of Northern Ireland from the early 1960s onwards was content to adopt reports and recommendations that coincided with its own narrow sectarian interests. Examples include the redevelopment of 'Protestant' towns, while at the same time, continuing to pursue sectarian policies that failed to provide adequate housing for those displaced by the large-scale urban renewal programs and the construction of the new Belfast Urban Motorway. To conclude that the events of the 1960s were simply further evidence of Unionist attempts to marginalize the Catholic community however fails to recognise the complex relationships that were at play during this period. Evidence from the period illustrates the subtle ways in which the Matthew Plan and the Belfast Urban

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<sup>67</sup> This is not to suggest a total absence of analysis of the wider structural factors that led to the outbreak of conflict in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, see e.g. L O'Donnell, B Rolston, and M Tomlinson, *Northern Ireland: Between Civil Rights and Civil War* (CSE Books 1980)

<sup>68</sup> R Thayer and C Sunstein, *Nudge* (Yale University Press 2008) 3; See also O Yiftachel, 'Social control, urban planning and ethno-class relations: Mizrahi Jews in Israel's 'Development Towns' (2003) 24 (2) *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 418

Motorway project played a significant and important role in destabilizing Unionist communities at that time. For Belfast's Protestant community, the outcome of the modernization programme that began in the late 1950s and early 1960s was an exodus of the more educated, skilled and upwardly mobile members of that community from traditional 'Protestant' heartlands. This in turn would have disastrous consequences both in terms of social capital and crucially, electoral support for political Unionism that has lasted until the present day. A study of labour mobility in Northern Ireland has shown that those who moved to new towns were young married couples whose parents were better educated; had better aspirations and who had higher incomes than those who did not move.<sup>69</sup> A further study of newcomers to one of the Craigavon estates found that the intake population tended to consist of young married couples with children of school age, of whom 65% were semi-skilled and where 49% owned a car.<sup>70</sup> In fact, concerns about the adverse consequences for social capital and political representation within Protestant communities was brought to the attention of the Unionist government at the time by local leaders. In January 1965, the Unionist Association of St Anne's Ward in West Belfast expressed concern at the fact that the plan for the Belfast Urban Motorway involved the loss of a significant number of homes in the area, all of which were 'good residential properties', occupied by the 'backbone of the community'

It is appalling to consider the cold blooded inhumanity that regards human beings as no better than cattle to be moved around at official edict...there is no possible building ground inside the City boundary where these extra 5000 replacement houses could be constructed...presumably these 5000 families just vanish...The more responsible, sensible people who are the backbone of any community, are going...property and business

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<sup>69</sup> W Birrell, *Labour Mobility in Northern Ireland* (New University of Ulster)

<sup>70</sup> Craigavon: New City: Household Survey for Brownlow, Summer 1969.

values have dropped to slum clearance levels....and there is the potential loss of a Unionist seat....<sup>71</sup>

This letter also illustrates a further problem that the Matthew Plan and Urban Motorway created for Protestant communities, namely, political representation. This fact is especially relevant in a context in which populations 'are voters as well as occupiers of land'.<sup>72</sup> Part of the difficulty for the Unionist community was that the sectarian nature of the political system in Northern Ireland dictated that Unionist hegemony was contingent upon maintaining Unionist electoral majorities. This meant that not only were Unionist controlled councils outside of Belfast reluctant to provide housing for new Catholics leaving the city, but also that Unionist councillors within Belfast Corporation were also fearful of measures which would disturb or threaten their political control within the city.<sup>73</sup> The latter concern is highlighted above by the reference to the 'potential loss of a Unionist seat'.<sup>74</sup> This concern was in fact raised as far back as 1958 when a delegation of Unionist councillors from west Belfast raised concerns with the then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland that house demolition for the Belfast Urban Motorway would commence a 'drift away' from the constituency and that the Unionist hold on the U.K. parliamentary seat would be 'seriously imperilled'.<sup>75</sup>

This judgment proved somewhat prescient given that just over a decade later West Belfast ceased to have a Unionist representative in the UK parliament and illustrates again the extent to which urban redevelopment, including road construction, are inextricably linked to political representation in Northern Ireland. In fact, records show between 1958-1965 successive delegations of Unionist

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<sup>71</sup> Letter from St Anne's Unionist Association, 1965, PRONI, ref D2669/9

<sup>72</sup> O McEldowney, J Anderson, and I Shuttleworth, 'Sectarian demography: Dubious discourses of ethno-national conflict', in K Hayward and C O'Donnell (eds) *Political Discourse and Conflict Resolution: Debating Peace in Northern Ireland* (Routledge 2011) 160

<sup>73</sup> M McCleery, 'The Creation of the 'New City' of Craigavon: A Case Study of Politics, Planning and Modernisation in Northern Ireland in the Early 1960s', 27 (1) *Irish Political Studies* 97

<sup>74</sup> Letter from St Anne's Unionist Association, 1965, PRONI, ref D2669/9

<sup>75</sup> Minutes of a meeting between the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland and Lord Glentoran with a deputation from the West Belfast Unionist Association, December 4<sup>th</sup> 1958, PRONI D2669/9, para. 2

councillors got short shrift from the Unionist government with regard to taking on board their concerns about the adverse consequences of the redevelopment of the city for Unionism. For the Stormont government, concerns about the loss of Unionist votes in West Belfast were the price to be paid for the economic modernisation programme that promised to deliver wider prosperity and which was to be delivered through the promises of the Matthew Plan. The sacrifice of Unionist votes in Belfast indicates further the degree to which the political system in Northern Ireland at that time was steered by Anglo-modernist planning practices and promises of economic modernisation. Moreover, the reference to Unionist communities in Belfast being 'treated like cattle' in the letter from the St Anne's Unionist Association mirrors the terminology used by the councilor in Glasgow referring to the development plan in that city (see above). These similarities illustrate further the extent to which the draconian measures deployed within Belfast to relocate inner-city communities, demolish housing and redevelop areas were not specific to Northern Ireland but rather mirrored similar approaches deployed in Britain. What was different however between Northern Ireland and Britain during this period was the way in which political representation impacted upon planning practices.

### **Planning Systems and the Politics of Urban Redevelopment**

As outlined above, part of the difficulty in Northern Ireland in the 1960s was that, in so far as the Catholic community was concerned, no effective mechanism existed within the political system for airing grievances with regard to the way in which Anglo-modernist planning was impacting on the ground. At that time, the political system of Northern Ireland ensured that authority over urban regeneration programmes in Belfast was held exclusively by the Unionist Party so that concerns about the impact of the wholesale destruction of working-class communities, and the forced relocation of families therefore had no adequate political outlet. Tensions around the impact of large-scale urban redevelopment in Belfast were compounded by wider grievances within the Catholic community about lack of political representation and discrimination in relation to the allocation of jobs and

housing more generally. This wider problem had in fact been an aspect of life in Northern Ireland since its establishment.<sup>76</sup> These tensions came to the fore in Northern Ireland in the early 1960s, in towns such as Dungannon, Derry, and Newry, when a younger and educated Catholic middle class emerged, giving rise to a burgeoning civil rights movement that challenged existing Protestant and Unionist hegemony and campaigned for reform.<sup>77</sup> Many of the early civil rights marches were concerned with the way in which housing was allocated by Unionist-controlled councils in order to protect Unionist electoral majorities. Other concerns of the civil rights movement included the gerrymandered political boundaries that ensured many towns such as Derry, which had a Catholic majority, remained in Unionist political control.

Significantly however, the Anglo-modernist planning of the 1960s, which aimed to facilitate a program of economic modernization, had the effect of further alienating the wider Catholic community. For example, the major new growth centre in Northern Ireland, the new city of Craigavon, was named after the first Prime Minister of the region, James Craig, who famously claimed that he wanted a 'Protestant parliament for a Protestant people'. Furthermore, the Lockwood Report in 1965 controversially recommended that the region's new university be located near the predominantly Protestant town of Coleraine rather than the second city of Derry, which had a large Catholic majority. The modernisation of the road network also precipitated discontent within the Catholic community with the new motorways linking Belfast the major unionist towns of Ballymena, Portadown and Enniskillen, leaving most of the Derry-Belfast link single-carriageway. Other controversial decisions included the Benson Report on railways in 1963, leading to the removal of the west's only railway line, cutting off Derry from Strabane, Omagh and Dungannon and, in 1966, the closure of Derry's naval base.

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<sup>76</sup> R Cormack and R Osborne, *Discrimination and Public Policy in Northern Ireland* (Clarendon 1991) 10

<sup>77</sup> N O'Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles* (Cork University Press 1997) xv



As with the redevelopment taking place in Belfast, many of these decisions taken during this period – new economic developments concentrated in towns close to the capital; contraction of the railway network; siting of new universities in small, attractive tourist centres rather than larger industrial towns – paralleled contemporary developments in Britain.<sup>78</sup> In fact, each of these decisions could be justified individually from a purely ‘technocratic’ planning perspective.<sup>79</sup> For example, the naval base closures were part of a general cut-back in British naval expenditure, from which Northern Ireland could not expect to be immune.<sup>80</sup> Railways in Northern Ireland were losing money, and, as in Britain and indeed the Republic of Ireland, Governments at that time were closing lines in order to limit losses – the Benson Report had in fact recommended the closure of both lines to Derry. The Lockwood Committee produced reasoned arguments for concluding that the Coleraine area best fulfilled the requirements of a site for a new university, among them the availability of an area large enough to allow for expansion; a criterion that the existing university college in Derry could not meet.<sup>81</sup> In fact, at that time in Britain, the prevailing planning orthodoxy was that new university campuses ought to be located in smaller towns, away from large urban centres.<sup>82</sup> The Unionist government could also point to sound practical reasons why entrepreneurs preferred to settle in the eastern areas of Northern Ireland since that was where skilled labour, docks and communications were most heavily concentrated.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, the planners and architects who formulated many of these proposals were not from Northern Ireland and not members of the Unionist establishment. Sir John Lockwood for example was Master of Birkbeck College in

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<sup>78</sup> A C Hepburn, *A Past Apart: Studies in the History of Catholic Belfast 1850-1950* (Ulster Historical Foundation 1996) 246

<sup>79</sup> T Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland* (Gill and Macmillan 1997)

<sup>80</sup> J Whyte, ‘How much discrimination was there under the unionist regime, 1921-1968?’, in T Gallagher and J O’Connell (eds), (Manchester University Press 1983)

<sup>81</sup> J Draper, (2014) ‘A University gerrymander? Coleraine and the Lockwood Report’, *History Ireland*, Issue 5, Vol. 22.

<sup>82</sup> Whyte, J. “How much discrimination was there under the unionist regime, 1921-1968?”, in Tom Gallagher and James O’Connell (eds) *Contemporary Irish Studies* (Manchester University Press 1983)

<sup>83</sup> Hennessey T, *A History of Northern Ireland* (Gill and Macmillan 1997)

London and his committee included three other academics from England.<sup>84</sup> Sir Robert Matthew, as noted above, before coming to Belfast had played a key role in reshaping several British cities notably Glasgow, Birmingham, and Newcastle.<sup>85</sup> The plans that Robert Matthew, John Lockwood and others formulated for Northern Ireland fit with the planning orthodoxy that had been applied across the water and the zeitgeist of the time. Moreover, these initiatives were all designed to make the Northern Ireland economic system more competitive by improving transportation networks and providing a ready source of labour outside Belfast to service the new artificial fiber industries that were being attracted to the region.<sup>86</sup> To a large degree, pressure from the economic system for modernization of the Northern Ireland infrastructure and relocation of large populations to outside the city was based upon a recognition that traditional industries such as textiles and shipbuilding were in decline. In other words, an attempt to address structural failings and weaknesses within the economic system in Northern Ireland at that time, which was predicated upon industries that were in long-term decline, led to increased pressure to adopt Anglo-modernist planning approaches.

The outcome however was that these attempts helped precipitate a crisis within the political system, as a direct result of the sectarian politics of the region. Significantly, the political system in Northern Ireland, which excluded representatives of the Catholic and Nationalist community from both central government and political power within Belfast Corporation, ensured that important decisions that required large scale demolition of housing, breaking up communities and forced relocation, lacked political legitimacy. Moreover, a political system that was also predicated upon maintaining Unionist control of electoral districts, and retaining a sectarian majority, mitigated against adequate new build housing for Catholics who were displaced as a result of the large-scale redevelopment taking place in Belfast. In the context of Northern Ireland, opposition to these planning

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<sup>84</sup> J Draper, 'A University gerrymander? Coleraine and the Lockwood Report', *History Ireland*, (2014) 22 (5) 44-47

<sup>85</sup> D Kynaston, (2014) *Modernity Britain: A Shake of the Dice* (Bloomsbury 2014) 28, 270, 276-277

<sup>86</sup> J Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Blackstaff Press 2001)

policies was taken up by the burgeoning civil rights movement, becoming a focus for public protest which in turn led to violent confrontation between protesters and the overwhelmingly Protestant police force. Another important source of grievance for the Catholic community at that time was the draconian powers that allowed the overwhelmingly Protestant police force to maintain control over the Catholic community.<sup>87</sup> This problem became especially apparent as the largely peaceful civil rights movement was met with a violent backlash from the Northern Ireland police force as well as counter-protests organized by a number of radical and emerging figures within the Protestant community which in turn precipitated serious public disorder.<sup>88</sup> The violent reaction from the RUC and the B Specials toward the peaceful civil rights protestors precipitated a violent response from within the Catholic community. The disturbances that erupted in smaller town centres such as Dungannon, and Newry was regrettable. In Derry, these events would lead to the Battle of the Bogside and the arrival of the British Army in Northern Ireland. In Belfast, with its pre-existing sectarian divisions and strict demarcation of territory in tightly packed urban spaces, the 1960s vision of a modernist utopia disappeared in the flames that spread across city in 1969.

Ultimately, the redevelopment and modernisation programme envisaged by Sir Robert Matthew and the new technocratic unionism would go no small way to precipitating the violent street confrontations that would overshadow the entire economic modernisation programme. This would in turn bring Northern Ireland into a conflict lasting several decades claiming over 3000 lives. Writing about the redevelopment schemes of the early 1960s, the former chairman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and leading figure in the Northern Ireland Labour Party explains that

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<sup>87</sup> N O'Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles* (Cork University Press 1997) (*passim*)

<sup>88</sup> M Farrell *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, (Pluto Press 1976) 257-284

The authors of these schemes failed to learn from the bitter experiences of redevelopment in Britain; and it is arguable that the widespread demolition which preceded these sweeping and ill-thought-out schemes contributed largely to the violence of the sectarian strife which marked the Troubles.<sup>89</sup>

In other words, the sectarian structure of the political system in Northern Ireland ensured that similar measures that proved highly controversial in cities like Glasgow, Birmingham, Newcastle, and London, proved disastrous in Belfast. In Britain, the 'revolutionary' changes that took place across the urban landscape from the late 1950s onwards did not immediately precipitate civil unrest – that was to come later as high-rise tower blocks became synonymous with violence, crime, and a lack of social capital.<sup>90</sup> Paul Collier traces the origins of the backlash which has characterised much white working class discontent in recent years to the planning orthodoxy of the 1950s and 1960s

The growing number of cars needed flyovers and the growing number of people needed housing. In response, entire streets and neighbourhoods were bulldozed, to be replaced by modernist flyovers and high-rise towers. Yet to the bewilderment of the Utilitarian vanguard, what followed was a backlash. Bulldozing communities made sense if all that mattered was to raise the material housing standards of poor individuals. But it jeopardized the communities that actually gave meaning to people's lives.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> C Brett, *Housing a Divided Community* (Queen's University Belfast 1986) 33

<sup>90</sup> Rodgers argues that the decline of the 'public realm' in modern cities is a prime culprit in the transition from 'open-minded' to 'single-minded' urban areas – from multifunctional to monofunctional spaces and structures – which are seriously detrimental to urban community and identity. See R Rogers *Cities for a Small Planet* (Faber 1998) 9-10

<sup>91</sup> Paul Collier, *The Future of Capitalism: Facing The New Anxieties* (Harper Collins 2018) 11

As outlined above, the configuration of the political system in Northern Ireland meant that the backlash in Belfast was much more immediate than that in Britain. Many of the Anglo-modernist planning practices of the period originated in the United States, where similar controversies arose, especially with regard to the way in which large scale demolition in inner cities, overseen by unelected planning officials, impacted adversely on African-American communities in particular.<sup>92</sup> Several of the technical experts responsible for designing the Belfast Urban Motorway had visited a number of US cities in order to gain expertise in road design although they had singularly failed to learn lessons about the impact that these projects had on precipitating confrontation and the adverse consequences that motorway construction had for displacing communities.<sup>93</sup> During the early 1960s, urbanists such as Jane Jacobs had directed much of their ire at the way in which the substantial redevelopment that was taking place in the US at that time was eviscerating entire cities and causing social discontent - Jacobs argued for example that urban motorways in the US were leaving entire communities like 'amputated areas typically developing galloping gangrene'.<sup>94</sup>

### **Operating Systems and Divided Cities**

In contrasting the experiences of Northern Ireland with those of Britain and the United States during the 1960s it is worth considering again Ignatieff's argument, outlined in chapter one, about the need for passably fair public institutions, decent policing, and a 'subliminal operating system' characterized by 'horizontal governance' when cities are ethnically diverse.<sup>95</sup> As the evidence from the period considered above clearly shows, Belfast during the 1960s was characterized by a

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<sup>92</sup> R Rothstein, *The Colour of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (Liveright 2017) 17-38

<sup>93</sup> Johnston argues that the visit to the US should have sounded 'alarm bells' both with respect to the impact of congestion and opposition from the local communities. See W Johnston, *The Belfast Urban Motorway: Engineering, Ambition and Social Conflict* (Colourprint Books 2014) 46-50

<sup>94</sup> J Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (first published 1961, Modern Library 1993) 6. See also W Lawson 'The Woman How Saved New York City from Superhighway Hell', *Vanity Fair*, (April 14 2017) <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2017/04/jane-jacobs-citizen-jane-documentary>

<sup>95</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 45.

total lack of political coalition building, or 'horizontal governance'. In fact, the redevelopment of the city was characterized by a top-down, command-and-control model, with one single party, namely, the Ulster Unionist Party, maintaining control over contracts and patronage. Moreover, the fact that public institutions, especially policing, remained within the control of the Protestant community, ensured that the basic requirements necessary for allowing ethnically diverse communities to live side by side, were absent. The situation in Belfast in the 1960s can therefore be contrasted with that in other cities in Britain during the same period where the 'revolutionary' changes that shaped cities there were supported across the political spectrum.<sup>96</sup>

In Britain, opposition to the new Anglo-modernist planning processes which involved the forced relocation of entire communities that treated people like cattle was restricted to a few independent local councilors and church leaders. In the United States, where much larger urban redevelopment programs took place without the 'buy-in' of the African American community, the Anglo-modernist utopias envisioned by post-war planners disappeared in flames amidst the race riots of the late 1960s. In many respects, the findings of the Kerner Commission, established to investigate the causes of disturbances in US cities parallels some of the findings the Cameron Commission.<sup>97</sup> Specifically, the Kerner Report found that population movements and discriminatory practices combined to concentrate poverty in racial ghettos.<sup>98</sup> In Northern Ireland a major concern among Unionist elected representatives was to preserve electoral majorities and control of territory by limiting the spatial expansion of the Catholic community. Similar experiences took place in the US in order to prevent the growth and expansion of African

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<sup>96</sup> For a discussion of the 'revolutionary' impact of post-war urban redevelopment in the US see J Teaford, *The Metropolitan Revolution: The Rise of Post-Urban America* (Columbia University Press 2006); See also R Rothstein, *The Colour of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (Liveright 2017) (17-38)

<sup>97</sup> Both reports found for example that discrimination in housing and employment were important factors in contributing to the outbreak of violence. Disturbances in Northern Ireland: Report of the Cameron Commission Appointed by the Government of Northern Ireland (Cmd 532, 1969) 140; *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Bantam Books 1968) 9-11

<sup>98</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Bantam Books 1968) 12-13

American communities beyond specified and discrete territorial boundaries through the use for example of restrictive covenants which prohibited houses from being sold to non-whites, and 'redlining' which prohibited non-whites from securing loans in certain districts.<sup>99</sup>

It would be a mistake to view the attempts at reconfiguring the planning and economic systems in the 1960s as solely the result of a Unionist conspiracy against the Catholic community, not least given that much early opposition to these measures came from within the Unionist community itself.<sup>100</sup> In fact, what the experience of Northern Ireland in the 1960s shows is the complex relationship between systemic inequalities, planning and conflict and the capacity of closed systems to produce adverse and unintended consequences. There were huge errors with regard to the way in which the Belfast Urban Motorway and the Matthew Plan impacted on the spatial politics of the city. The Unionist politicians governing Northern Ireland can be seen, with the benefit of hindsight, to be naive with regard to their application of Anglo-modernist planning and in particular, with regard to their failure to recognize the adverse social consequences of their actions. On the other hand, they were no more guilty of this charge than their counterparts further afield who pursued these 'revolutionary changes' with equal zeal in cities across Britain, and indeed, the United States.

The evidence here would indicate that several factors, including lack of political representation, a sectarian police force, and large-scale demolition of housing, which had the effect of exacerbating existing levels of housing need, and the forced relocation of entire communities, all contributed to igniting violence in Northern

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<sup>99</sup> D Massey D and N Denton *American Apartheid: segregation and the making of the underclass* (Harvard University Press 1993) (*passim*). Discriminatory attitudes and behaviours within white communities in the US also played a significant role in perpetuating segregation during this period, see e.g. T Schelling *Micromotives and Macrobehaviour* (Norton 1978)

<sup>100</sup> See above regarding the letters and representations to the Northern Ireland Government from the St Anne's Unionist Association. At the same time, there was strategizing within the Ulster Unionist Party regarding the impact of urban redevelopment on electoral districts. See e.g. M Mulholland "Why Did Unionists Discriminate?" in *From the United Irishmen to Twentieth-Century Unionism: Essays in honour of A.T.Q. Stewart*, S Wichert (ed) (Four Courts Press 2004)

Ireland in the late 1960s. That huge numbers of houses were demolished, and communities broken up and forcibly relocated illustrates the way in which the uneasy balance that had held the city ecosystem together for several decades came to be shattered. Moreover, the adoption of the Matthew stop line, which ended the already limited housing construction that had been taking place under the auspices of Belfast Corporation, and which was opposed by its leadership, further illustrates the ways in which planning policy at the time inadvertently served to turn serious levels of housing need into a housing crisis. The experience of Northern Ireland during this period and the conclusions reached here resonates with the research considered in chapter one which found that poverty and inequalities per se do not lead to political conflict per se but rather that violent conflict arises when systemic inequalities are combined with other factors, notably, a lack of 'horizontal governance', impartial institutions, and fair policing.<sup>101</sup>

An important lesson from this chapter therefore is that one of the key factors in contributing to the outbreak of conflict in the 1960s was the failure to take account of the political impact of planning decisions which had been formulated by technocratic elites. The role of planning and urban development in precipitating violence in Northern Ireland illustrates the need for adequate consideration of how planning choices will impact in a politically divided city where space and identity are inextricably linked and where conflict is fought out

on a narrower ground than even the most impatient observer might imagine, a ground every inch of which has its own associations and special meanings.<sup>102</sup>

This theme will be explored more fully in chapters seven and eight where evidence will be provided to show how politicians in Northern Ireland are currently much

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<sup>101</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 36

<sup>102</sup> A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (Blackstaff 1977) 182



more aware of the need to take account of the political impact of economic and planning orthodoxy. Part of the reason for greater awareness about the political impact of planning policy in contemporary Belfast, as chapters seven and eight will show, is that the operating system of the city is now much more characterised by a form of horizontal governance where political decision-making, contracts and patronage are no longer held by one community. The evidence considered in this chapter from the 1960s illustrates the consequences of a failure to take account of the political impact of the 'territorial imperative' on economic development and urban planning. The role of planning and urban development in precipitating conflict in the 1960s therefore lends support for the more nuanced approach that is currently being taken with regard to redevelopment in north Belfast, and which is the focus of chapter eight.

### **Conclusions**

An important theme of this chapter is the complex relationship that exists between territory, conflict and political identity in the city of Belfast. In order to trace the nature and origins of this relationship, this chapter showed how current patterns of spatial deprivation and segregation in Belfast have been socially constructed and is largely a function of weaknesses within the political, economic, and planning systems stretch over several decades. In particular, this chapter highlighted the important role that the planning system in Northern Ireland during the 1960s played in helping to precipitate political violence through the application of a planning orthodoxy characterised by large-scale urban redevelopment programs and displacement of inner-city communities. Crucially however, this orthodoxy failed to take account of the spatial politics of the city, so that weaknesses within this planning orthodoxy served to accentuate pre-existing tensions within a political system that was already under pressure from a growing and discontented Catholic population. In particular, this chapter showed how failure on the part of planners and politicians to recognise and appreciate the tensions that exist between territory and identity helped precipitate conflict in the early 1960s. This will allow for a more

detailed examination in subsequent chapters of how efforts to ensure that the mistakes of the 1960s are not repeated.

The key finding of this chapter with regard to the overall focus of the thesis is to highlight the challenges associated with expanding the remit of transitional justice to take account of the social and economic dimensions of conflict, and the capacity of the former to precipitate the latter. It was the combination of a number of political, economic, and planning processes, some of which had been in place for several decades, that ultimately helped shape the violence that erupted in the late 1960s. The way in which different systems combined to precipitate conflict highlights therefore the need for transitional justice to develop frameworks of analysis that are capable of identifying the range of factors that can lead to political conflict, especially when these processes take place over a sustained period and are therefore more easily overlooked. The relationship between urban planning and political conflict, which has been largely absent from transitional justice scholarship to date but which has received quite a degree of attention from political scientists, urban theorists, and geographers is one such relationship that requires further analysis. The point here is that if transitional justice scholarship wishes to genuinely expand its remit, then it is necessary that it moves out of its own recursive knowledge processes and develop of methodologies and frameworks that are capable of engaging with structural and systemic injustices.

## Chapter 4

### The Planning System and the Spatial Legacy of the Conflict

#### Introduction

This chapter explores the role that the Northern Ireland conflict played in shaping the urban fabric of Belfast. By examining hitherto undiscovered documents from the public archive this chapter shows how the planning system in Belfast was reconfigured by the security forces in the early 1970s as part of a conflict management strategy. As the documentary evidence illustrates, the aim of this strategy was to use the planning and design of the city in order to create the maximum degree of separation between the two communities. Drawing especially on the history of the Belfast Urban Motorway by Johnston, and the material uncovered in the public record office, this chapter will examine how road networks, housing developments, and financial resources were targeted at techniques that prioritized segregation and separation of the two communities. This chapter also considers the important legacy of this strategy, especially with regard to accentuating the patterns of segregation and division that were already in place by the early 1970s. One important legacy of the defensive planning strategy established in the 1970s was the dismembering of some communities from the wider city ecosystem which in turn accentuated patterns of spatial inequality that exist to the present day. As with the previous chapter, important lessons will be drawn about the important role that planning and architecture can play not just in shaping the fabric of a city, but also with shaping systemic and structural patterns of disadvantage. This chapter concludes by considering the challenges that the spatial legacy of the conflict presents for the future redevelopment of the city.

In terms of the overall argument of the thesis, this chapter highlights the important role that the planning and the design of the urban environment can play in shaping the social and economic legacy of conflict. This in turn emphasizes why a more holistic model of transitional justice that encapsulates

social and economic dimensions of conflict needs to move beyond its established knowledge base to one that is capable of identifying structural and systemic inequalities that have been woven, literally and figuratively, into the urban fabric of a city. In order to do this, a genuinely ‘thicker’<sup>1</sup> understanding of transitional justice must embrace the theory and practice of disciplines such as urban planning and architecture which provide valuable insight into the way in which structural and systemic conflict legacy issues have been designed and arranged.

### **The Planning System and The Politics of Containment**

Evidence of the extent to which the planning system in Belfast was reconfigured by the security forces in the early 1970s as part of a conflict management strategy is provided by a series of documents uncovered from the Public Records Office for Northern Ireland (PRONI) during the course of this research. These documents show that in October 1970 the Northern Ireland government established a Joint Working Party under the Chairmanship of the then Minister of State for Home Affairs, John Taylor MP<sup>2</sup>, to examine ‘areas of confrontation and public disorder’ and provide recommendations on these issues towards future government policy.<sup>3</sup> The findings of the Joint Working Party (hereafter the ‘JWP Report’) were marked ‘secret’ and

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<sup>1</sup> K McEvoy, ‘Beyond Legalism: Towards a Thicker Understanding of Transitional Justice’ (2007) 34 (4) *Journal of Law and Society* 411-440

<sup>2</sup> John Taylor was at the time an Ulster Unionist MP in the Northern Ireland Parliament representing the South Tyrone constituency and was Minister of Home Affairs. He went on to become an Ulster Unionist MP at Westminster, an Ulster Unionist representative in the European Parliament, and a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, serving at all levels of government in Northern Ireland. He was also deputy leader of the Ulster Unionist Party 1995-2001 and became a life peer in the House of Lords in 2001, taking the title, Baron Kilclooney. He survived an assassination attempt by the Official IRA in February 1972 after being shot five times in the neck and head

<sup>3</sup> Government of Northern Ireland, *Future Policy on Areas of Contention, Second and Final Report of the Joint Working Party on Processions, (secret)* (Government of Northern Ireland April 1971 CAB/1634/1) para 39. Membership of this Joint Working Party included, among others, some of the most senior figures with responsibility for security matters in Northern Ireland at that time, including Major-General Acton of the British Army (Northern Ireland Headquarters), Assistant Chief Constable Baillie (representing the police force for Northern Ireland, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)) as well as senior officials, including Ken Bloomfield, from the NI Cabinet Secretariat. The other members of the group were J G Hill, Ministry of Home Affairs, W Slinger, Ministry of Community Relations, D Perham, Ministry of Development, and A Hewins, Office of the United Kingdom Representative in Northern Ireland. The secretary to the group was R A H Miller, Ministry of Home Affairs

submitted to the then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Brian Faulkner, in April 1971 with a series of recommendations regarding the future planning and design of the city. This Report in effect provided a blueprint for the reconfiguration of the planning system that was to have significant consequences for the urban fabric of the city of Belfast for subsequent decades. Specifically, the JWP Report recommended that the substantial re-development of Belfast, which had begun several years previously under the auspices of the Belfast Urban Plan, should provide for the 'maximum natural separation' between opposing areas.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the JWP Report recommended that the Belfast Urban Motorway, construction of which had also begun several years previously, be used as a physical 'cordon sanitaire' by creating a 'cleared belt' up to 100 yards wide to the west side of the City Centre.<sup>5</sup> Beyond the Urban Motorway the Report concluded that across Northern Ireland generally 'opportunities to create natural divisions between difficult areas by means of road re-alignment should not be overlooked.'<sup>6</sup> The JWP Report also stated that the Ministry of Home Affairs, as the department responsible for security and law and order, ought to be given an opportunity to consider

any plans for substantial development or re-development (both for housing and for industry and commerce) at an early stage, consulting the security forces and other departments where necessary.<sup>7</sup>

In effect, these recommendations outline how the planning and design of the city was to serve as an instrument of counter insurgency by dividing and segregating specific areas of the city and the communities living within them. As indicated in the JWP Report, an important aspect in achieving this

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<sup>4</sup> Government of Northern Ireland, *Future Policy on Areas of Contention, Second and Final Report of the Joint Working Party on Processions, (secret)* (Government of Northern Ireland April 1971 CAB/1634/1) para 39

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* para 40

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* para 41

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

segregation and division was the design of the road network and in particular the Belfast Urban Motorway. The next section outlines how this came to be achieved and highlights the important legacy of this approach with respect to the design and planning of the city.

### **Defensive Design Systems: A Road To Nowhere**

One way in which the legacy of the JWP Report can be traced is by examining the planning and design of large sections of the road network in and around Belfast, especially the 'Westlink' motorway which separates north and west Belfast from the rest of the city.<sup>8</sup> Specific examples of the way in which the recommendation that the Belfast motorway be used as a 'cordon sanitaire' include the barrier effect created at the canyon section of the road from Grosvenor Road to York Street (see overleaf) where the road was depressed, in some places up to 30 metres.

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<sup>8</sup> For discussion of the wider impact of the security forces on planning and architecture in Belfast during the conflict see S Brown 'Central Belfast's Security Segment: an urban phenomenon' (1985) 17 (1) *Area* 1-8 (*passim*); R Cowan, 'Belfast's Hidden Planners' (1982) 6 (56) *Town and Country Planning* 163-167 (*passim*); M Pawley *Terminal Architecture* (Reakteon Books 1998), 93-111 (*passim*); R Brand 'Written and Unwritten Building Conventions in a Contested City: The Case of Belfast' (2009) 46 (12) *Urban Studies* 2669-2689 (*passim*)



The 'canyon effect' at the junction of Clifton Street and the Westlink. The 'seven towers' of the New Lodge area are in the background. The towers that are visible furthest away retain evidence of the British Army observation posts that were located on the roof. The tower nearest is undergoing refurbishment with new roofing added in place of the former army posts. Photograph by Tim Cunningham, July 2015

Further examples of this 'cordon sanitaire' effect are also provided at the Divis Street and Grosvenor Road junctions of the Westlink where both routes were completely severed by vast areas of tarmac devoted almost wholly to motor vehicles - in both cases the 'cordon sanitaire' is heightened by the lack of frontal development to mitigate the impression of 'negative space'.<sup>9</sup> This in turn creates a significant psychological barrier in addition to the more obvious physical barrier presented by the road. Severance at the Grosvenor Road was augmented by the addition of the heavily fortified police station.

Gehl contends that there are five different means with which architects and planners can promote isolation and prevent contact, namely, walls; long

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<sup>9</sup> W Johnston, *The Belfast Urban Motorway: Engineering, Ambition and Social Conflict* (Colourprint Books 2014) 148

distances; high speeds; multiple levels; and orientation away from others.<sup>10</sup> As illustrated in the photographs above, and below, all these elements were present in the approach to planning and architecture that characterized these sections of the road network in the city.



Grosvenor Road police station, leading up towards the Falls Road. The Westlink motorway runs perpendicular to the Grosvenor Road, beyond the police station. The bridge over the Westlink is visible in the distance. Photograph by Tim Cunningham, July 2015

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<sup>10</sup> J Gehl, *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*, (Island Press 2011) 72





Severance caused by the canyon effect of the Westlink at Divis Street. Belfast Metropolitan College is on the right-hand side of the photograph. Photograph by Tim Cunningham

Similarly, at the southern end of the Westlink, the cordon sanitaire effect at Roden Street was almost total, with the motorway marking the barrier between the Nationalist northern end, and the Loyalist southern end. In effect the Broadway roundabout became a border zone and effectively split the Donegall Road in half creating a permanent boundary between the loyalist 'Village' and Catholic Falls Road areas. Again, several of the elements outlined by Gehl feature in this section of the road, which is characterised by long distances; high speeds; and orientation away from others. In terms of the social and economic legacy of these planning and architectural practices, Johnston has pointed out that the Westlink was subsequently to have

a profound and permanent effect on the areas through which it passed, restricting access to the central area of the city to just five streets (Grosvenor Road, Divis Street, Peter's Hill, Clifton

Street and North Queen Street) and one footbridge (serving Divis Flats).<sup>11</sup>

The Westlink in fact significantly reduced connectivity between north and west Belfast by cutting off the natural linkages between homes, shops, leisure facilities and workplaces that had previously characterised this area of the city.<sup>12</sup> The Forum for Alternative Belfast has highlighted the ‘fracture and disconnection’ caused by the Westlink and indeed has established several projects, notably ‘Connect West’ to address the legacy of the design practices of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>13</sup> Faligot argues that a key objective of both the Westlink and the M2 motorways was to ensure the ‘fragmentation and isolation’ of communities as well as provide the security forces with the means by which to respond rapidly when needed in these areas.<sup>14</sup> For the purposes of this thesis it is important to note that the lack of connectivity and high degree of severance caused by the Westlink did not take place by accident, nor was it an unfortunate consequence of poor planning. Rather, as Hillyard has argued, the aim was to contain ‘dissident populations’ as part of a wider conflict containment strategy.<sup>15</sup> This objective is further confirmed in another document uncovered from the PRONI, in this case written by Colonel K. J. Carter, Deputy Commander, 39 Airborne Brigade, at British Army HQ in Lisburn.<sup>16</sup> This document affirmed that the objective of the conflict management strategy was to restrict movement from the north and west of the city to the city centre through the manipulation of the built environment.

The reduction of latitudinal roads across the city will assist the security forces in checking movement. From the security aspect

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<sup>11</sup> W Johnston, *The Belfast Urban Motorway: Engineering, Ambition and Social Conflict* (Colourprint Books 2014) 146

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.forumbelfast.org/projects/Connect-East-Connect-West-2012.php>

<sup>14</sup> Faligot R (1983) *Britain's Military Strategy in Ireland: The Kitson Experiment* (Dingle 1983) 123

<sup>15</sup> Hillyard P, ‘Law and Order’ in J Darby (ed) *Northern Ireland: The Background to the Conflict* (Appletree Press 1983) 47

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Colonel Carter, Deputy Commander, 39 Airborne Brigade, (8 June 1971 LA/7/3E/14/46) 1

alone it would be desirable for the motorway to be constructed with a continuous central wall or panel to prevent any form of lateral movement underneath in the areas between through routes....It would be appreciated if the current plans could be made available so that they can be studied from the long-term security viewpoint for the construction of the motorway would seem to be an important, integral part of the overall plan for the development of the city.<sup>17</sup>

This letter is important in two respects. First it confirms that the aim of the strategy at the time was to prevent and restrict movement – the very antithesis of a conventional planning approach which aims to achieve connectivity through facilitating the flow of people throughout the city. The second point to note is that this letter indicates the degree to which plans were to be studied from the long-term view.

In addition to the design of the Westlink there are other examples that further illustrate how the framework laid down in the JWP Report shaped the city ecosystem. For example, the original Belfast Transportation Plan that preceded the outbreak of the conflict, and which was published in 1969, had proposed a ground level ring road encircling the city centre within the circle of an urban motorway.<sup>18</sup> The idea was that vehicles arriving into the central area on the motorway would leave at the nearest exit and then join the inner ring road to guide them more precisely to their final destination.<sup>19</sup> Significantly, the 1978 Transportation Plan recommended completion of the ring road structure in an amended form that was constructed as a north western section (brought about through the widening of Carrick Hill and Millfield); an eastern flank (from Oxford Street and Victoria Street); and a northern flank (brought about through the widening of Frederick Street and the construction of the Dunbar Link).

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid 4

<sup>18</sup> Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, 'Belfast Urban Area Plan: Review of Transportation Strategy' (Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland 1978)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

While these sections of the ring road functioned well from a traffic perspective, they were disastrous for local communities. Thompson concludes that ‘as part of the city centre fabric the Dunbar Link was appalling with no serious attempt made to reconstruct the truncated streetscape around it, almost no frontal development’, with pedestrian facilities ‘sparse’ rendering the area ‘an urban wasteland devoid of life for the next 30 years’.<sup>20</sup>



The Dunbar link, one of the stretches of the original Central Distributor Box that became the inner ring road around certain areas of the city. Photograph by Tim Cunningham, July 2015

In terms of the city ecosystem, the inner ring road, as with the Westlink, assisted the flow of traffic around the city but became a significant barrier to the free movement of people between the city centre and the surrounding residential areas. Severance at the Divis Street junction was especially acute given that pedestrians there were required to negotiate both the Westlink motorway and the ring road, which served to provide an additional barrier

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<sup>20</sup> W Johnston, *The Belfast Urban Motorway: Engineering, Ambition and Social Conflict* (Colourprint Books 2014) 110

between the west of the city and its natural hinterland. The Divis Street junction was also provided with a British Army observation post located on the roof of Divis Tower flats to augment the defensive design of the road network. Given that the Divis Street junction was the entrance to the Lower Falls, and indeed, a key route between Greater West Belfast and the rest of the city, the extent to which the urban environment was used to achieve security objectives becomes clear. The Forum for Alternative Belfast has described the Divis Street junction as an ‘empty and inhibiting’ place to walk and cycle and established the ‘Divis Link’ project to attempt to mitigate some of the worst aspects of the design of this area of the city.<sup>21</sup>



Divis street junction with the Westlink Motorway. From the late 1960s until the late 1990s the British Army had an observation post located at the top of the tower. Photograph by Tim Cunningham, July 2015

The redesigning of the road network to achieve security objectives was especially extreme, but not solely restricted to north and west Belfast. As the JWP Report had specifically recommended, ‘opportunities to create natural

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.forumbelfast.org/projects/divis-pathfinder.php>

divisions between difficult areas by means of road re-alignment should not be overlooked.<sup>22</sup> This recommendation was to have consequences for the way in which the road network impacted upon 'difficult areas' in east Belfast. For example, the Bridge End Flyover had the effect of converting the streetscape of Ballymacarrett into 'an expansive urban wasteland that persists to the present day, acting as a significant psychological barrier between the Newtownards Road/Short Strand area and the city centre'.<sup>23</sup> Dawson's detailed study of the area illustrates how security considerations shaped the road layout of the Catholic Short Strand in East Belfast.<sup>24</sup> In this instance the portion of the Lower Albertbridge Road that was widened to dual carriageway standard was the same portion of the road that acted as a sectarian interface thereby ensuring that the road-widening created an additional security barrier between the two communities. In a similar vein, Bryan has pointed out that the eight lanes of the M2 motorway, which run northwards out of the city 'cut right through the traditional docks or Sailortown district' rendering the York Street area 'almost unrecognisable and effectively destroyed it as a residential district'.<sup>25</sup> This is illustrated in the photograph over leaf which shows the impact that the M2 motorway had on the sailortown area – the memorials underneath the motorway flyover commemorate a community that was obliterated by redevelopment.

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<sup>22</sup> Government of Northern Ireland, *Future Policy on Areas of Contention, Second and Final Report of the Joint Working Party on Processions, (secret)* (Government of Northern Ireland April 1971 CAB/1634/1) para 19

<sup>23</sup> W Johnston, *The Belfast Urban Motorway: Engineering, Ambition and Social Conflict* (Colourprint Books 2014) 138

<sup>24</sup> Dawson G, 'Defensive planning in Belfast', (1984) (17) *Irish Geography* 27-41

<sup>25</sup> D Bryan in S. J. Connolly, (ed) *Belfast 400: Planning, Space, and Conflict* (Liverpool University Press 2012) 326





The former sailortown district of inner north Belfast – the sailortown memorials can be seen mounted in the foreground under the road flyover. The area is now a classic 'shatter zone', bereft of life. Photograph by Tim Cunningham, July 2015



One of the sailortown memorials under the M3 flyover. Photograph by Tim Cunningham, July 2015

Evidence of the impact of the conflict management strategy applied during the conflict is further illustrated by the fact that the working-class Protestant areas of York Road and Shore Road and the working-class Catholic areas of the New Lodge and lower Antrim Road had major road junctions placed between them and the city centre thereby ensuring severance between the two communities in these areas and between these communities and the wider city ecosystem (see photograph below). These photographs of the Westlink, the Dunbar Link, the Divis Street Junction (see above), and the M2 and York Street (see above and below) provide a visual representation of the spatial legacy of the conflict, illustrating how architecture and planning can deliver subtle forms of coercion over a period of several decades.<sup>26</sup>



The M2 motorway heading north out of the city at York Street that obliterated the sailortown community. Photograph by Tim Cunningham, July 2015

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<sup>26</sup> Herscher A, *Spatial Violence* (Routledge 2019) 3



### **The Design Legacy: Shatter Zones and Desert Planning**

The Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (BMAP 2015) has acknowledged the social impact of many of the planning and architectural practices of the 1970s and 1980s. In particular the BMAP 2015 highlighted the way in which the Inner Ring Road created both a physical and psychological barrier for surrounding communities:

The Inner Ring Road which currently surrounds much of the city centre has left a scar on the urban fabric with large expanses of roadway inappropriate to the scale of the city, a fractured townscape and a physical and psychological barrier separating city centre from surrounding residential communities.<sup>27</sup>

In a similar vein, Grahame Fraser, former Director of Network Services at Road Service Northern Ireland, reflecting back on the impact of the road design policies of the 1970s onwards on inner city north Belfast has stated that ‘the York Street area was basically decimated, and it lay that way for years’.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Department of the Environment, *Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015* (Department of the Environment 2004) Part 4, Vol 2, 23

<sup>28</sup> Cited in W Johnston, *The Belfast Urban Motorway: Engineering, Ambition and Social Conflict* (Colourprint Books 2014) 138



The inner ring road at York Street, to the north of the city centre. The M2 flyover is to the right foreground, the Yorkgate shipping complex is on the left. Photograph by Tim Cunningham July 2015



Henry Street in the New Lodge area. The Yorkgate shopping complex is on the left, with long lines and orientation away from the community that characterize the design style identified by Gehl. The road barrier in the distance shows how direct access from Henry Street to the York Road was blocked. Photograph by Tim Cunningham, July 2015



Henry Street from the pavement at York Street, showing how vehicular access out of the New Lodge at the eastern end of the area was blocked. Photograph by Tim Cunningham, July 2015





The Southern end of the New Lodge area with housing around Henry Street on the right and the 'cordon sanitaire' provided by the Westlink on the left. Photograph by Tim Cunningham, July 2015

Jane Jacobs directed much of her ire at the capacity of the road network to eviscerate cities, likening the communities around them to 'amputated areas typically developing galloping gangrene'.<sup>29</sup> As outlined in the previous chapter, the approach to urban planning favoured in the post-war urban renewal programs in the US was imported into the UK and Northern Ireland in the 1960s. In Belfast, the adverse social consequences of these kind of design practices were heightened by the impact of the JWP Report which sought to use the road network in particular to separate and segregate 'areas of conflict'. What is especially notable about Jacobs' work is when it took place – her magnum opus, 'The Death and Life of Great American Cities' was first published in 1961. In the intervening decades a substantial body of literature has emerged illustrating the social impact exerted by the design of the urban

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<sup>29</sup> J Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (first published 1961, Modern Library 1993) 6

environment.<sup>30</sup> In some cases, these lessons have been applied, to a greater or lesser degree, in the intervening decades, in order to mitigate the worst social consequences of some of the design practices of the early 1960s. In some instances this even happened in areas of Belfast – as evidenced by the decision to abandon plans for an urban motorway encircling the entire city in the 1970s.<sup>31</sup> This decision had the effect of preserving much of the urban and social fabric south and east Belfast notably, in the Queen’s University area, where the southern section of the urban motorway would have required the demolition of large sections of Victorian residences and the communities living in and around them.

Crucially however, the security imperative behind the JWP Report ensured that the lessons that had been learned about the adverse social consequences of road design were not applied to ‘difficult areas’, especially those in the north and west of the city. In fact, for ‘areas of confrontation’, the opposite was the case in that the original design for the western section of the urban motorway was altered in order to *increase* segregation and divisions. This is evidenced for example by the fact that the original plans for the Belfast Urban Motorway in the 1960s specifically ruled out canyoning of the road on grounds of cost, and because of the impact on connectivity for local communities. Following the eruption of conflict in the city, and the JWP Report, the canyoning of the road, and the ground level junctions at Divis Street and the Grosvenor Road were reintroduced showing how the desire to create a ‘cordon sanitaire’ replaced the earlier aim to minimize disruption to connectivity. As outlined above, the net effect of this revised approach was to increase social, economic, and psychological isolation of communities in certain areas of the city, while ensuring that other areas remained connected to the wider city ecosystem.

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<sup>30</sup> C Montgomery, *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design* (Farrar 2014) (*passim*); N Ellin, *Architecture of Fear* (Princeton Architectural Press 1997); A Herscher, *Spatial Violence*, (Routledge 2019) (*passim*)

<sup>31</sup> Blackman T, ‘Planning Inquiries: A Socio-Legal Study’ (1991) 25 (2) *Sociology* 311-327

Bryan has outlined how the north and west of the city, and the working-class residential areas in the east, (i.e. the predominantly Catholic Short Strand and Protestant Ballymacarrett), already separated from the city centre by the river, are now further dislocated by large road junctions so that the pedestrian walking to the city centre from most working-class residential areas is confronted by a desolate and intimidating combination of road junctions and empty wasteland. He contrasts this appearance with the commercially vibrant corridor linking predominantly middle-class residential areas of South Belfast directly to the city centre.<sup>32</sup> Significantly, these 'working-class residential areas' are the areas of confrontation identified in the original Joint Working Party Report of the early 1970s, illustrating further the social consequences of the 'cordon sanitaire' approach adopted. It is clear from the evidence examined here that the planning and design of the city of Belfast from the 1970s represents the apotheosis of desert architecture, 'amputating' entire areas of the city from the wider ecosystem through the use of physical and psychological barriers that have been enshrined in concrete.

### **Straight-Jacketed Communities, Identity, and Territory**

There is another important legacy of the way in which the design of the urban environment can have adverse consequences for the city ecosystem and it is this. During her research into the impact of the large-scale redevelopments that characterized US cities in the years following the Second World War, Jacobs identified how planners could themselves heighten racial tensions and the sense of ownership of 'turf' through the very kind of urban design practices that characterized the security led approach to planning in Belfast from the 1970s onwards. In other words, by using the design of the urban environment to restrict movement and demarcate territory, identity-based tensions and competition around the ownership of urban space were increased. An example of how this can happen is what Kadar Asmal has described as the 'forced cleavages' created by the apartheid regime in South Africa

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid

a country with forced cleavages...brought about by a system based exclusively on separating people from one another on the basis of the colour of their skin...resulting in rabbit-warrens of housing separated on a racial basis.<sup>33</sup>

In many respects, the security-led approach to planning that characterized Belfast from the early 1970s onwards did the same thing. Prime examples of this include the 'forced cleavages' achieved by the design of the Westlink motorway, the inner ring road, and the M2. These changes to the road network did not create divisions within Northern Ireland but certainly did 'freeze them in concrete', highlighting Jacobs' point about the capacity of urban design to heighten ownership and access to 'turf'.<sup>34</sup> This in fact was an issue that the Churches Central Committee for Community Work (comprising the Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, Methodist and Catholic churches) and the Northern Ireland Council of Social Services picked up on in the early 1970s pointing out the ways in which planners were in fact increasing sectarian polarisation and territoriality

putting into fixed moulds, and in physical moulds, and in physical form, segregated areas of the city...for the next one hundred years at least.<sup>35</sup>

The point here is that the practices that characterized the planning and design of the urban environment during the years of the conflict served to exacerbate pre-existing tensions around ownership of territory, not alleviate them. In fact, as the documentary evidence uncovered during the course of this research shows, these consequences were known to public officials at the time. In

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<sup>33</sup> K Asmal, 'Dealing with differences: the South African experience' in *Ethnicity and Housing: Accommodating differences*, F Boal (ed.) (Ashgate 2000) 27-33. See also S Schindler, *Architectural Exclusion: Discrimination and Segregation Through Physical Design of the Built Environment*, 124 *Yale Law Journal* 1934. Schindler discusses the racial impact of post-war urban renewal through the phenomenon of 'White Roads through Black Bedrooms'

<sup>34</sup> W Johnston, *The Belfast Urban Motorway: Engineering, Ambition and Social Conflict* (Colourprint Books 2014) 217

<sup>35</sup> RM Rutherford, 'Belfast Urban Area Plan Public Inquiry', September 1973, HMSO

addition to the main JWP Report a dissenting note or 'minority report' written by Anthony Hewins from the Office of the United Kingdom Representative in Northern Ireland expressed concern that the proposals contained in the main Report would mean accepting divisions in the community as a feature of life 'for a hundred years or more'.<sup>36</sup> Hewins considered the approach taken by the Joint Working Party for the future management of areas of confrontation to be 'a counsel of despair....expressed in terms of bricks and mortar'. Specifically, Hewins questioned whether the Protestant or Catholic populations would themselves be content to remain in 'straight-jacketed communities' which he feared might well 'become sources of major discontent'.<sup>37</sup> He concluded his minority report with the observation that 'the word ghetto has been lightly and loosely used in the past but that 'these proposals would give the name substance and would attract criticism from all over the world'.<sup>38</sup> Hewins, and indeed the Church leaders of the 1970s correctly identified the way in which the framework outlined in the JWP Report would have long-term consequences for the ecosystem of the city. This point is especially evident with regard to the way in which the securitization of the urban environment impacted upon housing development, which is examined in the next section.

### **The Planning System and Dividing Communities**

In addition to the impact on the road network, another important aspect of the reconfiguration of the planning system by the security agenda established in the early 1970s relates to the planning and design of housing developments. With respect to housing, the original JWP Report had specifically concluded that 'plans for housing adjacent to the main lines of confrontation between the two communities, where not already approved, should be revised to provide more open space, particularly on either side of the new natural barrier' and that the number of 'open routes' between the Falls and the Shankill areas should

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<sup>36</sup> Government of Northern Ireland, *Future Policy on Areas of Contention, Second and Final Report of the Joint Working Party on Processions, (secret)* (Government of Northern Ireland April 1971 CAB/1634/1) para 27

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid* para 28



be substantially reduced.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the Report considered it 'to be of great importance that there should be a further reduction in the overall percentage of residents going back into the area after re-development'<sup>40</sup> concluding that 'there may be no alternative to increasing rather than discouraging segregation of the two communities through the creation of natural barriers'.<sup>41</sup> The JWP Report also recommended that as part of the overall redevelopment programme for the city various factories and warehouses would have to be situated and that 'consideration should be given to the possibility of locating such accommodation along the line of confrontation, with high walls forming natural barriers and special provision made against fire risks etc' with 'a special subsidy' made available to make this possible.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the Report concluded that it was necessary in the future 'for careful planning of the layout of new housing areas to avoid physical features leading to the creation of areas of confrontation.'<sup>43</sup>

The subsequent implementation of these recommendations can be traced by examination of the minutes of another hitherto secret entity called the "*Standing Committee on Security implications of Housing Problems in Belfast*" (SCH). The SCH comprised a number of government agencies including the Belfast Development Office (BDO), which was at the time the main agency within government responsible for urban development, and the Department of the Environment, the government department responsible for planning, housing and urban affairs. As with the original Joint Working Party, the SCH also contained representatives from the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), the government department responsible for law, order, and security as well as representatives from the security forces i.e. the RUC and the British Army.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid para 42

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid para 49

<sup>42</sup> Ibid para 42

<sup>43</sup> Ibid para 51

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Eddie Simpson, Assistant Secretary, Housing and Urban Affairs, Department of the Environment (DOE) on 6 May 1981. It is not possible to identify all the members of the SCH from the evidence available, although the names and job titles of some of the more senior figures are listed in the minutes. As with the original JWP, the Security Force representatives on the SCH were among the most senior figures within the police and military establishment in Northern Ireland at that time - with the RUC represented by Deputy Chief Constable

The minutes of a series of meetings that took place in the early 1980s and subsequent correspondence between the security agencies and the planning service indicates the degree to which the security forces were involved in the planning of housing in the city at that time.<sup>45</sup> There are two main themes to emerge from examination of these documentary sources. The first theme is the degree to which efforts were made to ensure that the North and West areas of Belfast were separated from the main body of the city. The second theme is that the provision of additional and much-needed housing for the Catholic community ought to either be delayed or halted altogether in order to contain the risk of violence.<sup>46</sup>

These themes are especially apparent with regard to the way in which commercial development was planned and designed in order to act as a buffer between contested areas. During the 1990s urban regeneration policy in Northern Ireland led to the construction of a number of new business development or 'enterprise' parks, subsidised by government, which offered incentives such as low rent for new investors with the aim of revitalising stagnant communities. Part of an overall programme aimed at helping regenerate economically deprived areas by redeveloping vacant brownfield sites into commercially viable land. One such example was the North City Business Park in Duncairn Gardens in the north of the city which transformed a vacant brownfield site into a business development park. The original JWP Report had recommended that as part of the redevelopment of the city factories and warehouses ought to be located 'along the line of confrontation' - in the case of the North City Business Park this was between the 'Catholic'

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McAtamney and Assistant Chief Constable Chesney and the British Army represented by Brigadier Crowfoot (39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade)

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. Minutes of a meeting of the SCH Thursday 19 February 1981; Letter from ACC Chesney to Eddie Simpson, Assistant Secretary, Housing and Urban Affairs (DOE) on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1981. See also Minutes of a meeting of the Standing Committee on Security Implications of Housing on Thursday 1 April 1981; Minutes of a meeting of the Standing Committee on Security implications of Housing Problems in Belfast, 30 June 1980; Minutes of a meeting of the Standing Committee on Security implications of Housing Problems in Belfast, Thursday 19 February 1981

<sup>46</sup> Letter from ACC Chesney to Eddie Simpson, Assistant Secretary, Housing and Urban Affairs (DOE) on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1981

New Lodge and 'Protestant' Duncairn Gardens areas (see below).<sup>47</sup> This approach is confirmed by Richard Needham, the Minister with responsibility for planning and economic development in Belfast during this period

We did not advertise it but wherever we could we tried to find neutral uses for the no-go land. Factories, offices, warehouses, old people's bungalows, schools, leisure centres – all were used to make the divisions less obvious....<sup>48</sup>

The difficulty with this approach was that in a divided city, where territory and identity are inextricably linked, there is no such thing as 'neutral' uses for no-go land.<sup>49</sup> The construction of the Duncairn Business Park is of particular significance in this regard given that this development in effect ensured that no additional housing could be provided on the site, something that residents from the overcrowded Catholic New Lodge area were demanding.<sup>50</sup> The net effect of the Duncairn Business Park was therefore to halt the growth and expansion of the Catholic community of the New Lodge northwards towards traditionally 'Protestant' territory. This is illustrated clearly in the photograph below which shows how the design of the Duncairn Business Park serves to act as a barrier between the two communities.

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<sup>47</sup> Government of Northern Ireland, *Future Policy on Areas of Contention, Second and Final Report of the Joint Working Party on Processions, (secret)* (Government of Northern Ireland April 1971 CAB/1634/1) para 42

<sup>48</sup> R Needham, *Battling for Peace* (Blackstaff Press 1998) 168

<sup>49</sup> O Yiftachel, 'Social control, urban planning and ethno-class relations: Mizrahi Jews in Israel's 'Development Towns' (2003) 24 (2) *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 418

<sup>50</sup> Interview: Former Nationalist Politician, (2011)



North City Business Park, from the 'Catholic' end at Duncairn Gardens. The Business Park is on the right, providing a 'buffer' separating the Catholic area of Duncairn Gardens from 'Protestant' Tigers Bay. The Tigers Bay housing can be seen in the distance. The heavily fortified walls around the business park illustrate how defensive design practices shaped, and indeed continue to shape, the architecture of the city. Photograph by Tim Cunningham, July 2015



The current entrance to the North City Business Park, which is accessible by a buzzer/intercom system for pedestrians on Duncairn Gardens. The gate swings closed when staff have passed through (see photograph below), hiding the access point. Again, the defensive design architecture which dominated this area of the city is evident with fortified walls and shrubs and railings used to disguise the entrance. Both photographs by Tim Cunningham, July 2015





Further examples of the way in which the security based approach to urban planning impacted upon the spatial politics of the city is evidenced by the way which another government programme ostensibly aimed at benefiting deprived areas in the 1980s was also used to contain the expansion of the Catholic community in the north of the city.<sup>51</sup> In this case funding from the Belfast Areas of Need (BAN) programme was used to construct a series of security barriers, euphemistically named 'environmental improvement' walls.<sup>52</sup> One interviewee encountered this phenomenon in the Catholic New Lodge area of North Belfast where he was an elected representative at the time

At one stage I discovered in the early 1980s that what was supposed to an environmental improvement grant for these kind of areas...they were known then as the Belfast Areas of Need (BAN)... and I discovered that in many of these areas, particularly the New Lodge, the environmental improvement grant was actually being used to build walls around the place, and they were calling these environmental barriers, and trying to create them in such a way that they didn't look like fences, they would be nice walls...and it would be £45K here, and £88K there and so on...I can remember at the time issuing statements about it and trying to complain and so on, and getting absolutely nowhere.<sup>53</sup>

As illustrated below, many of these 'environmental improvement' walls or barriers still exist to this day, illustrating the way in which defensive design tactics have become 'mainstreamed' into the fabric of the built environment of Belfast. Looking at the photographs below the 'straight-jacketing' of the Catholic community in the New Lodge is evident by the walls that block off access to and from the area from the nearby Duncairn Gardens. This is shows

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<sup>51</sup> G Dawson, 'Defensive planning in Belfast', (1984) *Irish Geography* (17) 36

<sup>52</sup> G Dawson, 'Planning in the Shadow of Urban Civil Conflict: a case study from Belfast, Working Paper 24, May 1984 (University of Liverpool 1984) 36

<sup>53</sup> Interview: Former Nationalist Politician (2011)

the extent to which Hewins' warning that 'the word ghetto has been lightly and loosely used in the past but that 'these proposals would give the name substance and would attract criticism from all over the world' becomes apparent.<sup>54</sup>



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<sup>54</sup> Government of Northern Ireland, *Future Policy on Areas of Contention, Second and Final Report of the Joint Working Party on Processions, (secret)* (Government of Northern Ireland April 1971 CAB/1634/1) para 5



Two of the 'environmental improvement' barriers blocking vehicular, and pedestrian access from the northern side of the New Lodge on to Duncairn Gardens. The pedestrian gates are typically closed at night. The trees and the wall, visible in the background through the open gate are part of the barrier surrounding the North City Business Park. Photographs by Tim Cunningham, July 2015

In some cases, these walls, such as those illustrated above, served to block off road and pedestrian access, in other instances, these walls were specifically targeted at pedestrians, as illustrated by the example on the next page showing 'anti-climb' paint complemented the metal fencing.

These photographs illustrate how the strategy outlined in the JWP Report, namely, 'to provide for the maximum natural separation between opposing areas,'<sup>55</sup> and to ensure that 'opportunities to create natural divisions between difficult areas by means of road re-alignment should not be overlooked'<sup>56</sup> played out in practice. Taking the New Lodge area as an example, as

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<sup>55</sup> Government of Northern Ireland, *Future Policy on Areas of Contention, Second and Final Report of the Joint Working Party on Processions, (secret)* (Government of Northern Ireland April 1971 CAB/1634/1) para 39.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid* para 41



illustrated by the photographs, the use of environmental improvement grants to build walls and close off streets, along with the construction of the North City Business Park, served to halt the expansion of the Catholic population of the area northward and create a buffer between the New Lodge and Protestant Tigers Bay. Vehicular access northwards was also eliminated by the closure of the streets fronting onto Duncairn Gardens (see above), which allowed limited and controlled pedestrian access to and from the area. Access to, and expansion of the New Lodge area was circumscribed by the Westlink motorway which served as a 'cordon sanitaire' to the south. In a similar vein the road barriers at the junction of Henry Street and York Street (see previous) restricted movement out of the New Lodge to the east, while the western section of the New Lodge fronted onto the Antrim Road and was directly opposite the Girdwood Army Barracks.<sup>57</sup> The cumulative impact of these defensive planning and design practices therefore was to ensure that the entire Catholic community in the New Lodge area was encircled, or set into the type of 'fixed moulds' identified by Hewins. Moreover, almost all of the vehicular access and exit points to the New Lodge were on the Antrim Road, opposite one of the main British Army bases in the city, thereby allowing quick deployment of the security forces to prevent and restrict movement in and out of the area but destroying connectivity between the New Lodge and the city center, which lay immediately to the south and west.

The strategy outlined in the JWP Report originated at the highest levels of government and was aimed primarily at containing violence. The benefits of this approach from a security point of view are obvious in that the easiest way to prevent the IRA moving weapons or explosives out of areas like the New Lodge was to close off roads and restrict movement, especially of vehicles. Certainly, members of the IRA were, at the time, aware of what was going on, not least given that they were directly impacted.

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<sup>57</sup> See map of the area <https://goo.gl/maps/bxk5untvDTJ7iqoZ7>

The first socially engineered district was Twinbrook [in West Belfast] with one way in, and one way out, and that was done deliberately, and the open green areas ...were there because they became a fire sight – in other words, if they trapped an IRA unit in that area, or rioters or whatever, they would have to cross a wide open space to get out...so they could contain them, in that area...<sup>58</sup>

The difficulty however was that this approach had the effect of fencing in or straight jacketing a community that was growing in population and which was in dire need of housing. In this respect, the objectives of the JWP in several instances, coincided with those of Unionist politicians who wished to protect Protestant territory from attack by the IRA, but who also wished to halt the advance of the Catholic community across the city in order to protect their electoral majorities.



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<sup>58</sup> Interview: Republican Politician (2011)

Fencing blocking pedestrian access from the New Lodge area to Duncairn Gardens with 'anti-climb paint' augmenting the metal barrier. Photograph by Tim Cunningham, July 2015

The extent to which security objectives overlapped with the interests of Unionist politicians is evidenced by the comments made by one Unionist Councillor on Belfast City Council to one interviewee, who was at the time an SDLP representative for this area of the city

I can remember one Unionist Councillor coming to me, in all seriousness, I just couldn't believe it, in all honesty and openness and he said to me, look you know, we've finished now, this new gate that's going in at Hillman Street, opposite Tigers Bay, does that mean the whole New Lodge is sealed off now? And I said, well actually yeah, it does. But he was sort of asking me for clarification – you know, he didn't go to the next point which is, is there anywhere else we should be blocking off?<sup>59</sup>

The comments above illustrate an important point about the security driven approach to planning the city, namely that it cut with the grain of the spatial politics of the city which is predicated upon protecting Protestant territory from Catholic encroachment, which will be explored more fully in the next section. At the same time, the planning framework established in the JWP Report was not exclusively targeted at the Catholic community. The cumulative impact of the redesigning of the road network and housing developments is illustrated by a government report published in 2016 which examined the legacy of conflict planning in the Lower Oldpark area of north Belfast.<sup>60</sup>

The Lower Oldpark Action Plan document is highly significant with regard to the public debate on this issue as it is this report publicly identifies and acknowledges this important legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict, namely,

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<sup>59</sup> Interview: Former Nationalist Politician (2011)

<sup>60</sup> Department for Social Development (2016) Building Successful Communities: Lower Oldpark and Hillview Action Plan, Belfast: HMSO. The legacy of conflict planning on the Lower Oldpark is discussed in some detail in chapter seven of this thesis

the impact that changes to the built environment have had on isolating and segregating communities within the city. The low-quality living environment, and the fact that the area creates the impression of being closed to outsiders represents not just a significant problem for those living in the area but acknowledges the ways in which the design of the built environment can impact upon the social and economic life of a city. These conclusions fit with the study by Appleyard and Lintell in San Francisco which showed that even a relatively limited deterioration of the quality of the outdoor environment can have a disproportionately severe negative effect on the extent of outdoor activities including pedestrian use.<sup>61</sup>

Jacobs coined the term shatter zones to reflect the consequences of the type of developments outlined above in which the social fabric of an area was shattered, reduced to an austere, barren wasteland devoid of life. In a similar vein Cullen adopted the term 'desert planning' to describe urban areas characterized by wide streets and roads, and empty spaces where 'life has literally been built out' of areas.<sup>62</sup> Several notable urbanists have identified how these terms apply to many areas of Belfast, notably for the former sailortown district, and the areas around the Westlink.<sup>63</sup> The photographs of the Dunbar Link, the Westlink and North Queen Street, show how the security led approach to redevelopment of the city literally built life out of many sections of central Belfast. Gehl contends that

To be able to move about easily and confidently, to be able to linger in cities and residential areas, to be able to take pleasure in spaces, buildings, and city life, and to be able to meet and get together with other people -informally or in more organized fashion

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<sup>61</sup> D Appleyard, D and M Lintell, 'The Environmental Quality of City Streets', (1972) 38 (2) *Journal of American Institute of Planners* 84

<sup>62</sup> G Cullen, *Townscape*, (The Architectural Press 1961)

<sup>63</sup> F Gaffikin, M McEldowney, K Sterrett, 'Creating Shared Public Space in the Contested City: The Role of Urban Design', (2012) 15 (4) *Journal of Urban Design* 493

– these are fundamental to good cities and good building projects<sup>64</sup>

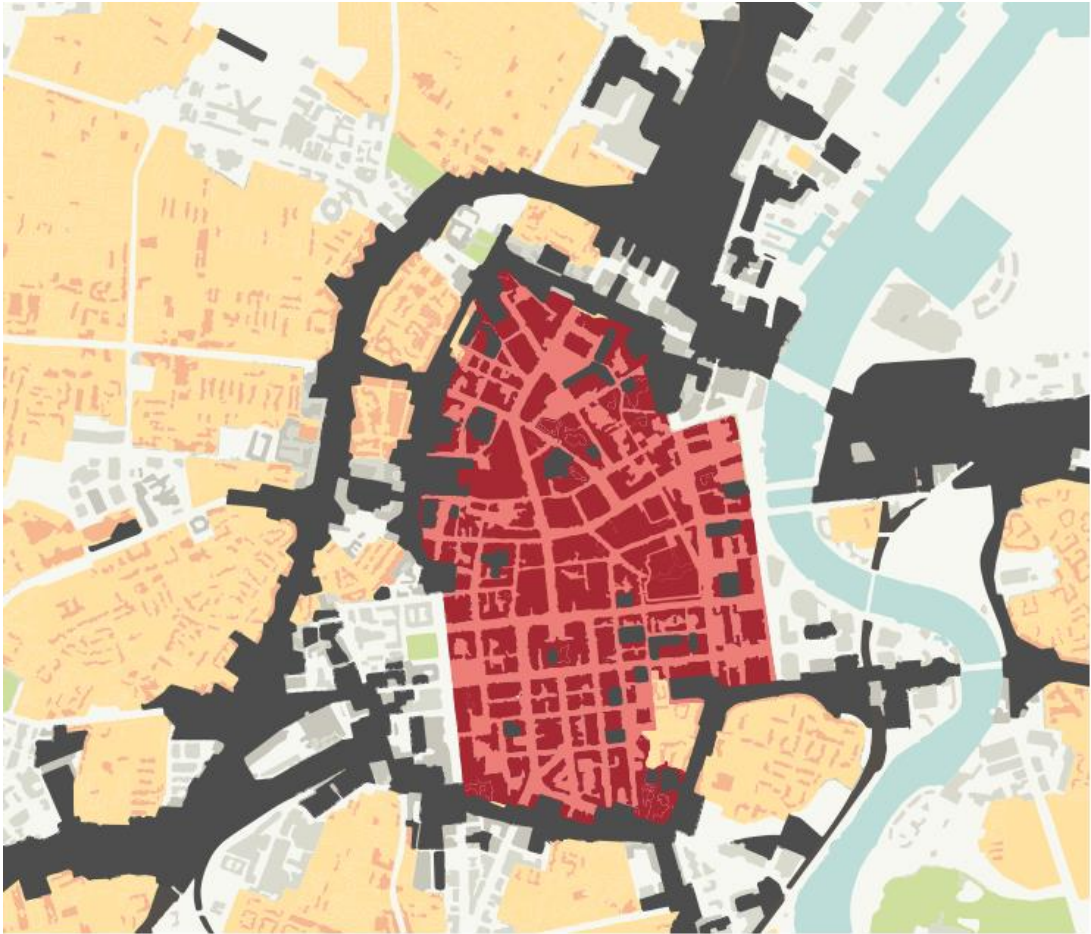
As the evidence outlined above illustrates, the principles identified by Gehl which are fundamental to a good city were the polar opposite of what the planning framework for Belfast sought to achieve from the early 1970s. Mainstream planning and architecture literature has long since identified the oppressive nature on communities of the kind of functionalist architecture and planning evident in Belfast during the 1980s and 1990s, including reducing well-being and enhancing feelings of isolation as well as serving to concentrate social and economic inequality.<sup>65</sup> Collier has pointed out that recent research in neuroscience-enhanced social psychology has found that the modernist designs beloved of the planners reduced well-being by breaching common aesthetic values.<sup>66</sup> Physical exclusion and marginalization is mirrored by the high levels of social and economic deprivation that characterize many of these areas, such as the Lower Oldpark, and the New Lodge. The phenomenon of severance, and the creation of 'Shatter Zones' would in time be recognised as one of the most significant problems associated with urban road and other development schemes and there are numerous examples surrounding the centre of the contemporary city (see below).

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<sup>64</sup> J Gehl, *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*, (Island Press 2011) 51

<sup>65</sup> O Yiftachel, 'Theoretical Notes on 'Gray Cities': the Coming of Urban Apartheid?' (2009) 8 *Planning Theory* 88 (passim); P Aelbrecht and Q Stevens (eds), *Public Space Design and Social Cohesion* (Routledge 2019) (passim)

<sup>66</sup> P Collier, *The Future of Capitalism: Facing The New Anxieties* (Harper Collins 2018) 12



Belfast City Centre is isolated from the rest of the city by highways and the shatter zones created by them.<sup>67</sup> This map highlights the legacy of the security led approach to planning that created a cordon sanitaire around the north and west of the city in addition to other areas of confrontation. Main commercial areas devoid of housing are coloured red, residential areas yellow, and highway shatter zones are grey

The Forum for Alternative Belfast refer to the swathes of vacant and derelict land surrounding the core area of the city identified above as ‘the grey doughnut’ and contend that these lands are ‘largely leftover space from the 1970s roads program.’<sup>68</sup> The evidence uncovered in the JWP report shows however that from the early 1970s the redevelopment of Belfast was to be

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<sup>67</sup> Reproduced with permission from Masters of Science in Urban Planning and Master of Architecture Columbia University GSAPP, ‘Reconnecting Belfast’ (Columbia University 2017)

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid

used to ensure the 'maximum natural separation between opposing areas'<sup>69</sup> and that 'opportunities to create natural divisions between difficult areas by means of road re-alignment should not be overlooked.'<sup>70</sup> It is clear therefore that this 'leftover space' was deliberately 'left over' in order to serve as a security barrier. From this perspective, the 'Grey Doughnut' ought to be viewed not simply as a legacy of the 1970s road program, but rather an important aspect of the spatial legacy of the conflict. Crucially however, in addition to destroying connectivity, efforts to straight-jacket communities were to have important consequences for distorting patterns of housing need, not least given the demographic imbalances that existed in the city in the early 1970s. This aspect of the legacy of the design practices of the conflict will be explored in the next section.

### **Population, Territory, and The Political System**

A central contention of this thesis is that planning is fundamentally predicated upon the control and manipulation of space and in a divided society, where territory and identity are inextricably linked, there is no such thing as neutral planning. This 'brute fact' is all the more pertinent in a city like Belfast where the late historian A.T.Q. Stewart observed that the 'territorial imperative is extremely insistent'.<sup>71</sup> In order to appreciate the full impact of the spatial legacy of the framework laid down in the original JWP Report, and in particular the way in which this approach exacerbated tensions around 'turf', it is necessary to consider again Jacobs' notion of the city ecosystem and the processes that have shaped Belfast over time. In this respect one can conclude that one of the main consequences with the securitization of the urban environment from the 1970s was that it exacerbated problems that arose with the mismanaged urban renewal programmes that began in Belfast in the early 1960s highlighted in the previous chapter. In particular, the agenda put forward by the Joint

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<sup>69</sup> Government of Northern Ireland, *Future Policy on Areas of Contention, Second and Final Report of the Joint Working Party on Processions, (secret)* (Government of Northern Ireland April 1971 CAB/1634/1) para 39

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid* 41

<sup>71</sup> A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (Blackstaff 1977) 182

Working Party served to further distort population imbalances between the two communities, especially with regard to housing need.

For Belfast's Protestant community, the outcome of the modernization programme that began in the early 1960s was an exodus of the more educated, skilled and upwardly mobile members of that community from traditional 'Protestant' heartlands.<sup>72</sup> Protestant exodus during this period would have adverse consequences both in terms of social capital and crucially, electoral support for political Unionism with Belfast now a more 'Catholic city' than any time in its history.<sup>73</sup> The particular difficulty for Protestant communities in Belfast is that the official government policy of 'decanting' residents to the growth centres was followed, from the early 1970s, by another unofficial, but nonetheless important policy predicated upon the same principle, albeit with a security rather than economic imperative. This is evidenced by the fact that the original report of the Joint Working Party on areas of confrontation stated that it was 'of great importance that there should be a further reduction in the overall percentage of residents going back into the area after re-development.'<sup>74</sup> The 'great importance' attached to the percentage of residents returning to areas after redevelopment is highly significant because over the years within the Protestant community there has been a strong suspicion that there was a deliberate policy of using redevelopment to drive a Protestant exodus from the city.<sup>75</sup> The report of the Joint Working Party not only confirms these suspicions but illustrates the way in which urban renewal programmes of the 1970s coincided with the desire of the security forces to reduce local population densities to achieve security objectives. This phenomenon was especially problematic in Protestant areas

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<sup>72</sup> L O'Dowd and Komorova K, 'Regeneration in a Contested City: A Belfast Case Study', *Divided Cities/Contested States Working Paper No. 10*, (Queen's University Belfast 2009) 9

<sup>73</sup> Gaffikin F, M Morrissey and K Sterrett, 'Remaking the City: the Role of Culture in Belfast' in W Neill and H Schwedler (eds) *Urban Planning and Cultural Inclusion: Lessons from Belfast and Berlin* (Palgrave Macmillan 2001) 148

<sup>74</sup> Government of Northern Ireland, *Future Policy on Areas of Contention, Second and Final Report of the Joint Working Party on Processions, (secret)* (Government of Northern Ireland April 1971 CAB/1634/1) para 14

<sup>75</sup> O McEldowney, K Sterrett, K. and F Gaffikin, (2001) 'Architectural Ambivalence: the Built Environment and Cultural Identity in Belfast', in W Neill and H Schwedler, (eds) *Urban Planning and Cultural Inclusion: Lessons from Belfast and Berlin* (Palgrave Macmillan 2001) 105



given that these were the very areas where people had begun to move away from in the early 1960s as part of the earlier Matthew Plan and were also the same areas that were subject to substantial redevelopment in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>76</sup> Protestant population decline during this period was much more widespread than that experienced by the Catholic community.<sup>77</sup> The net effect of this was that the process of redevelopment during this period 'simplified the social geography and made [the inner core of the city] more Catholic'.<sup>78</sup> As with road construction, the security forces were adapting urban planning practices of the time that had already produced a destabilizing effect on working class communities and accentuating the problem still further. Large scale urban redevelopment, allied with genuine concerns about safety, therefore served to depopulate and destabilize Protestant communities from the 1970s onwards. As one study concluded:

The decline in the population of the inner city was greatly accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s by the flight of Protestants in particular to safer areas outside the boundary...The simultaneous redevelopment of densely-crowded areas of working-class housing contributed to these changes; many of the scenes of urban desolation which formed the backdrop to television reports of the violence in the 1970s were caused by slum clearance rather than Semtex, while the availability of plenty of accommodation in new Housing Executive estates outside the

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<sup>76</sup> The impact of redevelopment on Protestant depopulation is illustrated by the fact that between 1971 and 1978, the total population of the Shankill area declined from 46,363 to 33,297, a fall of 13,066 people or 28.1%. This compares to an overall Belfast average of a decline of 19%. These declines are explained mainly by the clearance of the old densely populated areas and their replacement with new housing at lower densities. In 1978, of those families who left the district, the most popular destinations were Newtownabbey, Bangor, and Antrim. Northern Ireland Housing Executive, *Draft Introduction to the Seven Districts Housing Statements* (Northern Ireland Housing Executive 1980) para 2.6 ENV/21/1/39/A

<sup>77</sup> I Shuttleworth and J Anderson, 'Demographic Change Through Conflict: Belfast from the 1960s to 2001', Conference Paper, (2011), 3

<sup>78</sup> P Doherty and M Poole, 'Ethnic Residential Segregation in Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1971-1991', 87 (4) *Geographical Review* 528

boundary and well away from the violence encouraged some households to move voluntarily.<sup>79</sup>

While dispersal and depopulation became the de facto policy towards inner city and working-class Protestant communities in Belfast for several decades the situation with respect to the city's Catholic community was quite different, not least, because, as outlined in the previous chapter, there were fewer areas outside of north and west Belfast that Catholics could move to safely.<sup>80</sup> As outlined in the previous chapter, from the late 1950s many members of the Catholic community, like their Protestant counterparts, had sought to escape the chronic housing problems in Belfast by decanting to new developments such as Rathcoole that were constructed on the outskirts of the city as part of the dispersal policy that was central to the Matthew Plan.<sup>81</sup> Following the eruption of violence in the late 1960s, those who had left quickly returned to safe haven in the traditional Catholic heartlands of the north and west of the city.<sup>82</sup> While dispersal and depopulation were the twin objectives for dealing with areas that were predominantly Protestant, exactly the opposite was the case with respect to the Catholic community. Within Catholic areas of the city, further reduction in the overall percentage of residents going back into the area after re-development was much more difficult simply because Catholics had significantly fewer options in terms of where they could go.<sup>83</sup> As the minutes of the SCH, highlighted above, show very clearly, the default policy for containing the security threat in the 1970s and the 1980s was to contain the Catholic community within discrete boundaries, and this resulted in either housing developments being delayed, not undertaken at all, or with land that could be used for housing being developed for industrial or commercial

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<sup>79</sup> R L Harrison, 'Population change and housing provision in Belfast', in P A Compton (ed), *The Contemporary Population of Northern Ireland and Population-related Issues*, (QUB 1981); D A Singleton, 'Belfast; housing policy and trends' in Buchanan and Walker (eds.) *Province, City and People* (Greystone 1987)

<sup>80</sup> Hayes M, *Minority Verdict: Experiences of a Catholic Public Servant* (Blackstaff Press 1995) 142

<sup>81</sup> Maguire W, *Belfast: A History* (Carnegie Publishing 2009)

<sup>82</sup> M Elliott, *Hearthlands: A Memoir of the White City Housing Estate in Belfast* (Blackstaff 2017) 164-184

<sup>83</sup> Brett C, *Housing a Divided Community* (Queen's University Belfast 1986) 48

purposes. This was a policy with which Unionist politicians were more than willing to agree since that fitted with their historic aim of limiting the spread of Catholics throughout the city, partly, but not wholly, in order to protect their electoral interests

Apart from the 1940s and 1950s, no decade in the past 150 years has gone by without at least one summer of serious rioting...In most cases the background was an attempt, individual or collective, by Catholics to assert their right of access to the city's housing stock and collective attempts by Protestants to contain them.<sup>84</sup>

The material examined in the course of this research illustrates the 'brute fact' about the spatial politics of Belfast during the conflict, namely, that many of the problematic practices regarding the sectarian nature of planning decisions that existed prior to the conflict remained in place. Both the Cameron Report and the Macrory Report had specifically identified the sectarian nature of planning policies and the impact on the Catholic community as a source of concern for the civil rights movement in the 1960s.<sup>85</sup> Specifically, the Cameron Report had found that there were many cases in which councils in Northern Ireland during the 1960s had withheld planning permission, or caused needless delays, where they believed a housing project would be to their electoral disadvantage i.e. where the housing would be occupied by Catholics.<sup>86</sup> The report concluded that in certain Unionist-controlled areas it was fairly frequent for housing policy to be operated not on the basis of actual housing need but maintenance of the current political preponderance in the local government area.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the Macrory Report on the reform of local government in the region had the effect of removing responsibility for housing and planning from

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<sup>84</sup> A C Hepburn, 'Long division and ethnic conflict: the experience of Belfast', in S Dunn (ed) *Managing Divided Cities* (Keele University Press 1994) 121

<sup>85</sup> Government of Northern Ireland, *Disturbances in Northern Ireland: Report of the Cameron Commission* (Cmd 532, 1969) para 37, para 229

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid* para 139

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid* Para. 140

the hands of locally elected officials and instead centralising these powers into the hands of government departments or new statutory agencies.<sup>88</sup> The most notable of these agencies was the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, established under the Housing Executive Act (Northern Ireland) 1971 which provided that all public authority house building and its allocation on the basis of an objective points system should become the responsibility of a central, and it was assumed, more professional housing authority.<sup>89</sup> This measure was designed to meet allegations that some local authorities had discriminated in the location and allocation of housing in order to protect electoral majorities. The establishment of a central housing agency, and the adoption of a points system, that sought to ensure housing allocation was based on an objectively defined waiting list, became synonymous with the overall reform package introduced in the early 1970s.

The difficulty however is that the secret planning agenda pursued by the security forces from the early 1970s onwards, coupled with the sectarian geography of the city and the political composition of Belfast City Council meant that the planning system reverted to the 'default' historical option, namely, containment of the growth of the Catholic community in Belfast. According to one interviewee, an elected representative of the SDLP in north Belfast during this period

The fact and the truth of the matter is that the housing policy in North Belfast that the Housing Executive and the Housing Branch in the Northern Ireland Office pursued in the 1980s, was essentially the same policy as the UDA, i.e. they tried to curtail and circumscribe the expanding Catholic population in North Belfast...Essentially the authorities were following the policy of the UDA so that if you were to build Catholic houses then they would be burnt down, or they would be attacked, so don't try it.

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<sup>88</sup> Macrory, P. A., Review Body on Local Government in Northern Ireland 1970: Report', June 1970

<sup>89</sup> Housing Executive Act, 1971 as amended by Article 22 of the Housing (NI) Order 1981

This is our territory, and we demand a wall to delineate it, and the Housing Executive and the NIO gave in to that and for the last 30 years they've been building those walls, they've been holding in the nationalist population that has been growing all the time.<sup>90</sup>

Evidence gathered during the course of this research shows that from the early 1970s, notwithstanding the measures that were introduced to address the sectarian planning and housing policies that existed under the Stormont government, various other techniques were deployed by Unionist politicians to limit the natural growth of the Catholic population in the city. One of the main challenges to conducting this research is the fact that most of the files from the period remain closed. However, in the course of reviewing documents and conducting interviews, several examples have been found which illustrate the way in which the city ecosystem from the 1970s onwards was impacted by sectarian and security concerns. For example, one interviewee describes how a desire to curtail Catholic housing in the south of the city impacted upon the development of the Gasworks site in the early 1990s. The site in question lay between Lower Ormeau, Donegall Pass, and the Markets, and if there had been residential development on the site housing demand in the area was such that the occupants of the housing would have been predominantly Catholic. According to the interviewee,

That was going to be a big sticking point, and the decision was made not to have a residential development on the site, that was done because at that stage the site was owned by the Council and the Council was dominated by Unionists so in a sense they made the decision, we'll develop the Gasworks without any residential development...<sup>91</sup>

This area also featured in the deliberations of the Standing Committee on Security Implications of Housing with the submission from the Security Forces

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<sup>90</sup> Interview: Former Nationalist Politician (2011)

<sup>91</sup> Interview: Planner/Public Official (2011)

expressing concern about the changing demographics of the Lower Ormeau Road (specifically the concern was that the Catholic population in the area had increased) and the security implications that might arise as a result of any additional housing development within the area as it was felt this might lead to increased opposition among Catholic residents to traditional Protestant marches in the area.<sup>92</sup> The letter concluded that

while the problem has become less acute over the past year, the re-development of the area with perhaps an increase in the number of residents from the Markets area of Cromac Street, could escalate the problem..[and that]... discussion with the Security Forces will be essential before the advanced stage for this area is reached.<sup>93</sup>

This document confirms that the security objective at the time was predicated on Catholic containment in order to ensure that confrontations did not arise with respect to traditional Protestant marches for example, which coincided with the desire of Unionist politicians to ensure that Catholic expansion outside of traditional boundaries was curtailed. Other documents, highlighted above, also illustrate how the 'default' position of the security forces was to restrict the construction of much needed housing for the Catholic community.

The difficulty therefore from the early 1970s onwards was that while the political reforms which ensured that the housing executive was legally obliged through the introduction of a 'points system' to ensure that the allocation of housing on an individual case by case basis was fair and equitable, there was no mechanism for ensuring that wider policies and practices within the planning system regarding where housing could be built were subject to the same oversight.<sup>94</sup> Crucially, important planning powers remained within the

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<sup>92</sup> Letter from ACC Chesney to Eddie Simpson, Assistant Secretary, Housing and Urban Affairs (DOE) on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1981

<sup>93</sup> Ibid

<sup>94</sup> Documents also show that sometimes the aims of the security forces and Catholic residents were aligned. For example, on one occasion Unionists members of Lisburn Borough Council

purview of local councillors, open to manipulation according to sectarian biases, and in a context in which Belfast City council and indeed all the council areas in the immediate vicinity of the city were controlled by Unionists, the default position was to block Catholic housing. Moreover, in a context in which the two communities were isolated within distinct geographic areas, the issue of where development took place was therefore crucial in determining wider patterns of housing inequalities. This was coupled with the widespread violence and intimidation that continued in Belfast through the 1980s and the 1990s with Catholic housing targeted in periods of serious inter-communal conflict.<sup>95</sup> For example, following the Anglo-Irish Agreement a row of houses in Manor Street, adjacent to the Lower Oldpark that had been occupied by Catholic residents was burned to the ground.<sup>96</sup>

Significantly, in the 1980s, the statutory body with responsibility for oversight of equality and human rights in Northern Ireland, the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR), asked the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) to undertake a programme of research in order to establish whether equality of opportunity existed between the two communities in the areas of employment, economic wellbeing and housing.<sup>97</sup> Part 4 of the PSI's report that dealt specifically with housing was published in June 1989 and highlighted significant inequalities between the two communities.<sup>98</sup> For example, in terms of access to housing the report found that within the Belfast urban area 'Catholic applicants had a considerably lower chance of being re-housed than Protestant applicants' with an almost 2:1 disparity between the two

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sought to 'oppose and obstruct the Poleglass development, both by spreading rumours that tenants owed large rent arrears and by stalling over the granting of pub licences. DCC McAtamney stressed that the police attached high importance to the provision of pubs in the area; the demand was otherwise likely to be met by clubs with paramilitary associations.' Note of the fifth meeting of the Standing Committee on Security implications of Housing Problems in Belfast, Thursday 19 February 1981

<sup>95</sup> P Shirlow, 'Belfast: a segregated city' in C Coulter and M Murray (eds) *Northern Ireland After The Troubles: A society in transition* (Manchester University Press 2008)

<sup>96</sup> J Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Blackstaff 2001)

<sup>97</sup> Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, *Religious and Political Discrimination and Equality of Opportunity in Northern Ireland: Report on Fair Employment*, Cm 237 (SACHR 1987), para 1.8

<sup>98</sup> D Smith and G Chambers, *Equality and Inequality in Northern Ireland Part 4: Public Housing Policy Studies Institute Occasional Paper 47* (Policy Studies Institute 1989) 5

communities.<sup>99</sup> The issue of housing inequalities between the two communities was subsequently examined in a report published by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights in 1990.<sup>100</sup> This report set out a series of recommendations which aimed to identify the reasons behind the disparities in housing allocations between the two communities.<sup>101</sup> During the 1990s, another substantial body of independent research, also carried out by the Standing Advisory Commission for Human Rights, in addition to a Report by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, had sought to examine continued social and economic inequalities between the two communities.<sup>102</sup> In particular, the research carried out during the 1990s focused on the extent to which disproportionate levels of social need and spatial disadvantage were concentrated within the Catholic community, especially in the west of the city.<sup>103</sup> At no point however was this substantial body of research spanning over a decade able to consider the matters discussed in this chapter – namely the role of the security forces in shaping the built environment, and the role of Unionist politicians in blocking housing developments. Again, this highlights how public policy making, and democratic oversight became subsumed within a security-led agenda that distorted patterns of spatial disadvantage within the city and allowed planning powers to be exercised power without accountability. Moreover, the secret nature of the practices involved allowed the myth of neutrality to be maintained with regard to the political impact of the reform

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, *Religious and Political Discrimination and Equality of Opportunity in Northern Ireland* (Cm 110, 1990) (*passim*)

<sup>101</sup> Ibid para. 9.13

<sup>102</sup> D Smith and G Chambers *Equality and Inequality in Northern Ireland Part 4: Public Housing Policy Studies Institute London Occasional Paper 47* (PSI 1989) (*passim*); Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, *Religious and Political Discrimination and Equality of Opportunity in Northern Ireland* (Cm 110, 1990) (*passim*); Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, *Employment Equality: Building for the Future* (Cm 3684, 1997) (*passim*); Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, Session 1998-99 House of Commons Fourth Report, Vol.1 95-1; E McLaughlin and P Quirk (eds.) *Policy Aspects of Employment Equality in Northern Ireland* (SACHR 1996) (*passim*)

<sup>103</sup> I Shuttleworth, P Shirlow and D McKinstry, 'Vacancies, Access to Employment and the Unemployed: Two Case Studies of Belfast and Londonderry', in E McLaughlin and P Quirk (eds) *Policy Aspects of Employment Equality in Northern Ireland* (Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights 1996) 27-49; M Sheehan and M Tomlinson, 'Long-term Unemployment in West Belfast', in E McLaughlin and P Quirk (eds) *Policy Aspects of Employment Equality in Northern Ireland* (Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights 1996) 51-88



measures of the early 1970s, as evidenced by the SACHR report of 1987 which stated explicitly that

Since 1972, the Government of Northern Ireland has been under the direct authority of British Ministers and civil servants who have not been directly associated with either of the two sections of the community in Northern Ireland and who might be expected to have been free from any religious or political partiality of the kind alleged against previous Unionist administrations. A number of programmes have been instituted to ensure impartiality and equality in the allocation of governmental resources. In Belfast under the Belfast Areas of Need programme an objective assessment was made of levels of poverty and need in different parts of the city as the basis for the allocation of resources for housing renewal and other forms of urban redevelopment.<sup>104</sup>

It is clear from the sources examined in this chapter the 'impartiality' and 'neutrality' alluded to in the SACHR report was seriously compromised by the range of powers that Councils retained with regard to planning and the activities of the security forces. These factors contributed therefore to the distortion of patterns of settlement in the city that led to increased pressure on waiting lists and patterns of housing inequality in Catholic areas. In particular, incremental attempts by the Catholic community to expand beyond traditional territorial boundaries were frustrated by the vetoing of housing development by the security forces and Unionist politicians. The outcome of the security-led approach to the redevelopment of Belfast in the 1970s and 1980s vindicates the prediction of Hewins regarding the 'straight-jacketing' of communities. For the Catholic community in particular, which was growing in population with limited choices about where to live, this 'straight-jacketing' was

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<sup>104</sup> Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, *Religious and Political Discrimination and Equality of Opportunity in Northern Ireland: Report on Fair Employment*, Cm 237 (SACHR 1987), para. 3.3

especially problematic, especially with regard to increasing housing need. This problem was further heightened by a political system in which decisions were made without input from the representatives of the Catholic community. The original JWP Report was compiled for the Unionist government at Stormont, and presented to the then Prime Minister, Brian Faulkner. As the documents from the 1980s show, political responsibility for the subsequent implementation of these findings was primarily in the hands of the security forces, accountable to the UK government. In addition, some responsibility for planning remained in the hands of the Unionist-controlled Belfast City Council which allowed for decisions to be made with regard to where housing developments could be located. The common factor therefore was the lack of representation and input from representatives of the minority Catholic community. As outlined in chapter one, Ignatieff contends that segregation and hyper-sensitivity to turf is a phenomenon that afflicts many urban centres across the globe, and is not of itself necessarily problematic, so long as it is consensual, and involves an element of 'horizontal governance' that is based upon a degree of tolerance and mutual respect.<sup>105</sup>

As the material highlighted in this chapter shows clearly, the planning and design practices that characterized Belfast during the years of the conflict was not part of a 'shared operating system'. In fact, as the documentary evidence explicitly indicates, the planning and design of the city from the 1970s onwards was in fact characterized by a top down, command-and-control style of governance driven by the security forces, especially the military. Neither was there 'horizontal governance' of the type identified by Ignatieff, but rather, one community, namely the Unionist community, were able to exert influence through their control of Belfast City Council. The frustrations felt by one interviewee, as an elected representative of the Catholic community, and the example provided by the interviewee with regard to the redevelopment of the Gasworks, as well as the documentary evidence, are indicative of the way in which the historic power structures that had dominated Belfast retained

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<sup>105</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 45

influence. This was especially apparent with regard to the desire on the part of the security forces to contain violence, which cut with the grain of thinking among elected leaders of Unionism who wished to contain the Catholic community within discrete boundaries. Moreover, the secret nature of the decision-making process meant that oversight by statutory agencies like the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights was nullified.

The fact that secret planning powers were exercised without accountability is all the more significant given that the 1980s was a period when the city of Belfast underwent an unprecedented level of housing redevelopment. As Bardon has pointed out the bulk of the Westminster subvention to Northern Ireland during this period was spent neither on direct aid to industry nor on the security forces - the overwhelming share was assigned to the public services and the most visible sign of this expenditure was the transformation of the region's public housing.<sup>106</sup> In 1981 the British government identified housing as its number one priority – with the result that in the following decade the Northern Ireland Housing Executive built 10,000 new homes in the city, 'virtually all two-storey terraced or semidetached dwellings'.<sup>107</sup> It is estimated that between 1982 and 1991 the NIHE had spent £2.4 billion on new dwellings, maintenance, grants and renovation.<sup>108</sup> Part of the reason for the upsurge on public spending in areas like housing was the fact that some of the more Keynesian-minded members of the UK government, typically referred to as 'wets', were serving as ministers in Northern Ireland during this period.<sup>109</sup> Undoubtedly, another reason was the security-led planning agenda which

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<sup>106</sup> J Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Blackstaff 2001) 303

<sup>107</sup> B Morrison 'Planning the City: Planning the Region' in F Boal and S Royle (eds) *Enduring City, Belfast in the Twentieth Century* (Blackstaff Press 2006) 151

<sup>108</sup> C Shannon, 1991, *Building a Better Belfast*, (1991) 58-59. J'TOWN Pamphlets 363.50941671 SHA 65

<sup>109</sup> Chris Patten, who served as an environment minister during this period has stated that Northern Ireland 'seemed to have become a place to which those whose Thatcherite sympathies could not be wholly trusted were exiled...It was suggested that since I was keen on public spending, I should be given lots of money to distribute in Northern Ireland before being weaned off it with some future return to a domestic, mainland (sic) department'. See C Patten *First Confession: A Sort of Memoir*, (Allen Lane 2017) 158. Other notable 'wets' who served in Ministerial office in Northern Ireland in the 1980s included Jim Prior and Richard Needham

recognised the need to redesign urban space as part of a counter-insurgency strategy. Among the areas redeveloped during this period were some of the most notorious prefabricated high-rises built during the 1960s, including the 'brutal concrete architecture of the Divis Flats, whose balconies and walls gave cover to the IRA gunmen'.<sup>110</sup> At the same time however, this redevelopment took place in a way that entrenched and exacerbated isolation and segregation of the two communities in the centre of the city with the security objectives trumping all others.

### **The Spatial Legacy of the Conflict and a Contested Past**

As with other conflict legacy issues in Northern Ireland there is a contested view around the extent to which the city of Belfast was shaped by the conflict. Looking at the evidence considered above, the relationship between the planning and political systems in Belfast during the years of the conflict was a complex one. This complexity is heightened by the fact that in a context in which serious levels of violence were perpetrated against the civilian population, communities themselves wanted to ensure that their built environment afforded them as much protection as possible. American and UK theories of urban design were already 'pointing in this direction' by embracing the notion of defensible space in order to enhance community safety, which included not only a reduction in crime but also increased road safety through manipulation of the built environment.<sup>111</sup> The concept of defensible space, developed by Oscar Newman in the United States in the early 1970s, is a surrogate term for the range of mechanisms that combine to bring an environment under the control of its residents.<sup>112</sup> According to Newman, defensible space aims to decrease functional and physical distance between neighbours in order to enhance feelings of security and communal cohesion

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid 170. Documents from the period also show that Brigadier Crowfoot was of the view that the replacement of the Turf Lodge flats with two-storey dwellings would 'broadly assist the army'. Note of the fifth meeting of the Standing Committee on Security implications of Housing Problems in Belfast, Thursday 19 February 1981

<sup>111</sup> F Gaffikin, M McEldowney, K Sterrett, 'Creating Shared Public Space in the Contested City: The Role of Urban Design', (2012) 15 (4) *Journal of Urban Design* 505

<sup>112</sup> O Newman, *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention Through Urban Design*, (Macmillan 1972)

while at the same time discouraging potentially dangerous outsiders from entering the 'semi-private domain'. On the micro-level this means for example that windows and lights are positioned on houses to enable residents to observe the more public areas of their environment, which Newman argues has a pronounced effect on securing the environment for peaceful purposes, and has also a demonstrable effect in reducing irrational fears and anxieties among inhabitants. Another desirable feature of a residential environment embracing the notion of defensible space is the minimisation of through-flow which at the most basic level can be achieved by extensive use of culs-de-sac, although other devices employed include the introduction of physical barriers to traffic movements (e.g. ramps) or symbolic barriers to movement such as 'shared surfacing' which attempts to reduce a semi-public space to the level of semi-private. These design approaches are among the techniques that were being deployed in Northern Ireland during the 1970s and 1980s, something which Brett conceded

...the courtyard-type layouts, now almost universally employed by the [Northern Ireland Housing] Executive, owe something to the concept of 'defensible space' developed in the United States in recent years.<sup>113</sup>

The fact that the aims of the security forces and local communities on occasion overlapped is no doubt one reason why quite a number of commentators have argued that there is no evidence of security force involvement in the planning and design of the urban environment and that regeneration initiatives, including housing, were influenced solely by community household surveys and community consultation programmes.<sup>114</sup> This counter argument is

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<sup>113</sup> C Brett, *Housing a Divided Community* (Queen's University Belfast 1986) 102. Sir Charles (Charlie) Brett was a significant figure in Northern Irish public, professional, and cultural affairs for several decades. He was for a time Chairman of the Northern Ireland Labour Party and served on numerous public bodies including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, of which he was Chairman. He was probably best remembered for his dedication to the conservation, restoration and re-use of the built heritage; and as an architectural historian, an expert on that heritage. He was one of the founders of the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society

<sup>114</sup> B Morrison, (2001) 'The Culturally Inclusive City: the Belfast Potential', in Neill, W., and Schwedler, H. (eds) *Urban Planning and Cultural Inclusion: Lessons from Belfast and Berlin*

predicated on the notion that following reform of local government in Northern Ireland during the early 1970s, in response to allegations of discrimination under the previous Stormont regime a technocratic ethos was established within the planning system that prioritised impartiality and neutrality.<sup>115</sup> From this perspective, the Westlink motorway 'fortuitously made an effective barrier to possible sectarian confrontation'.<sup>116</sup> Notwithstanding the publication of several leaked documents during the 1980s which appeared in the press, the official line from government that was always to deny that the security forces had any specific role in the planning process in Northern Ireland and to stress the 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' of planning decisions in order to distance themselves from any hint that they were pursuing a security agenda.<sup>117</sup>

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(Palgrave Macmillan 2001) 202; B Anson, 'Response to Architecture in No-man's Land' (1984) 37 (180) *Architects Journal* 47; B Murtagh, *The Politics of Territory: policy and segregation in Northern Ireland*, (Palgrave 2002) (passim)

<sup>115</sup> B Murtagh, *Planning for Anywhere: Housing Policy in Northern Ireland*, *Housing Studies* (1998) 13 (6) 833; S Bollens, *Urban Peace-Building in Divided Societies: Belfast and Johannesburg* (Westview Press 1999); G Ellis, 'The City of the Black Stuff: Belfast and the Autism of Planning' in M McEldowney, M Murrury, B Murtagh, and K Sterrett (eds) *Planning in Ireland and Beyond: multidisciplinary essays in honour of John V. Greer*, (QUB 2005)

<sup>116</sup>C Brett, *Housing a Divided Community* (Queen's University Belfast 1986) 77

<sup>117</sup> Letters from the DOE concerning alleged security force involvement in planning were leaked to 'The Guardian' (13.3.82), and to the Irish News (15.3.82). Subsequent articles in the press concerning this matter are found in 'The Belfast Telegraph' (15.3.82); 'Built Environment' (17.3.82), 'The Belfast Newsletter' (15.3.82); 'The Irish News' (23.3.82); and 'The Guardian' (6.4.82, 13.4.82); Scope (1982) Who designs the City? Belfast: Scope



Cartoon that appeared in following the publication of leaked memo, Town and Country Planning, June 1982, p. 164

In a context in which public consultation and security considerations were, on occasion, pointing in the same direction, a significant number of contributors to this debate concluded that the outcomes were ones that the residents themselves requested. In terms of the complexity of this process, one interviewee argues that

it's not this huge conspiracy, it is a series of smaller tactics if you like...take the example of design, where a trend develops, and somebody who's a professional architect, knows that if they put in a particular type of plan, that it's going to be knocked back... so they start adapting their work to suit the prevailing trend, not because they know they're getting knocked back because of a British Army agenda, or an NIO agenda, but they know they're getting knocked back with a particular type of plan, so they start adapting to the criteria if you like that is set down, or the

parameters that are quite subtly set down over a period of time, because remember this was a long conflict. So, there wasn't a big plan that they implemented in two years, or three years, or even five years, this was something that they did over a long period of time.<sup>118</sup>

Colin Scott summarizes the relationship between competing sub-systems as one in which each subsystem relates to other subsystems not through highly specified, or materialized external rules, but rather through working 'with the grain of the understanding of ordering within other subsystems'.<sup>119</sup> In the context of the built environment, the desire of residents to have some protection against attack, the development of courtyard type urban design models to limit traffic, and the need for substandard system-built tower blocks to be demolished, cut with the grain of a security agenda designed to manage conflict. The fact that on occasion, interests coincided, with solutions formulated by architects and planners, allowed security officials and politicians plausible deniability regarding their role in shaping the built environment. The detail of the defensive design and planning practices that evolved through the 1980s originated within the planning system, not among politicians or security officials, thus allowing the planning system to 'own' the outcomes that shaped the urban environment during this period. This process therefore blinded many observers to the way in which the planning system had been reconfigured and minimized the extent to which the planning and design of the Belfast ecosystem is an important legacy of conflict.

As the material uncovered during the course of this research shows, the Westlink did not, as Brett argued, 'fortuitously' separate communities. The fact that on occasion, residents wished for the urban environment to afford them

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<sup>118</sup> Interview: Republican Politician (2011) This description is similar to what Lindblom describes as 'incrementalist decision-making', C Lindblom, *The Market System: What it is, How it Works, What to Make of it* (Yale University Press 2002)

<sup>119</sup> C Scott, 'Regulation in the Age of governance: the rise of the post-regulatory state', in J Jordana and D Levi-Faur (eds) *The Politics of Regulation: Institutions and Regulatory Reforms for the Age of Governance* (Edward Elgar 2004)153



some degree of safety, does not mean that the significant role that the security agenda which shaped the city over several decades ought to be minimized or discounted. Furthermore, as identified in the first sections, the reforms of the early 1970s did not mean that sectarian biases were removed from the planning system, but rather that they were reconfigured and operated in slightly different and more subtle ways.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter examined the role that the Northern Ireland conflict played in shaping the urban fabric of Belfast during the period of the conflict. By examining hitherto undiscovered documents from the public archive this chapter showed how the planning system in Belfast was reconfigured by the security forces in the early 1970s as part of a conflict management strategy. As the documentary evidence also showed, the aim of this strategy was to use the planning and design of the city in order to create the maximum degree of separation between the two communities. Of particular significance was the way in which road networks, housing developments, and financial resources were targeted at techniques that prioritized segregation and separation of the two communities. An important legacy of this strategy however was to deliver adverse social consequences for patterns of settlement in the city, accentuating the patterns of segregation and division that were in place by the early 1970s. In particular, as this chapter highlighted, an important legacy of this strategy was to amputate some communities from the wider city ecosystem which in turn has accentuated the patterns of spatial inequality that exist to the present day. As with the previous chapter, important lessons can be drawn here with regard to the important role that planning can play not just in shaping the fabric of a city, but also with regard to shaping systemic and structural patterns of disadvantage. This chapter concluded by examining the challenges that the spatial legacy of the conflict presents for the future redevelopment of the city.

An important question therefore is whether a political system predicated upon preventing a return to conflict, an economic system predicated upon attracting

inward investment, and a planning system predicated upon maintaining territorial boundaries, can succeed in addressing the spatial inequalities identified in chapter three. The purpose of the case study analysis in the next chapters is to establish whether and to what extent the framework currently in place can address the spatial legacy of the conflict by examining the redevelopment plans for the Girdwood site in north Belfast. This will include an examination of the development proposals and how they have been shaped by the planning, political and economic systems. In particular the case study will examine the extent to which efforts to address the spatial legacy of the conflict are circumscribed by the desire to prevent a return to conflict. The case study chapters will also illustrate further the extent to which efforts to develop a more holistic approach to transitional justice require engagement with disciplines such as urban planning and architecture that provide a better understanding of the exact nature of structural and systemic injustices.

## Chapter 5

### The Girdwood Masterplan and the Architecture of Conflict

#### Introduction

This chapter examines the relationship between urban planning, conflict, and systemic inequality through the redevelopment of the former Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Army Base in north Belfast. By looking at a range of primary sources, and through interviews with a number of key figures who were involved in discussions around the Girdwood Masterplan this chapter illustrates the degree to which urban planning in Belfast continues to be highly politicised. This chapter shows for example how efforts to address spatial inequalities in an area experiencing some of the highest levels of deprivation in Northern Ireland were impacted by concerns within the Protestant community about Catholic territorial expansion in north Belfast. This is especially evident with regard to the way in which efforts to promote economic regeneration, predicated upon the sale of high-end residential accommodation on the Girdwood site, gave rise to concerns within the political system with regard to threatening Protestant territory. This chapter focuses particular attention on the important relationship between urban design, inequality and spatial legacy of the conflict, highlighting the various ways in which the design of the urban environment, especially with regard to the retention of territorial boundaries between the two communities, has the capacity to impact upon efforts to address socio-economic and identity-based inequalities.

The overall theme of this chapter, in line with the objectives of this thesis, is the extent to which efforts to address the spatial legacy of the conflict are subject to the operations of the political, economic, and urban design systems, each of which is characterized by its own chain of recursive processes. The case study illustrates the way in which the operations of these closed systems (political, economic, and urban design) can create 'irritations' that have the potential to undermine the wider objective of preventing a recurrence of conflict. These findings have important implications for the wider objectives of

the thesis, illustrating the need for the theory and practice of transitional justice to embrace more systemic frameworks for analysis in order to develop a more holistic understanding of the social and economic dimensions of political conflict. This chapter also highlights the difficulties associated with misplaced and misdirected efforts to address structural and systemic conflict legacy issues. This chapter illustrates why efforts to develop a more holistic approach to transitional justice that embraces social and economic legacy issues needs to cut with the grain of understanding of those forces which shape social and economic inequality, especially economic, planning and design processes.

### **The Girdwood Redevelopment Project: Background**

Following serious disturbances in north Belfast in 2001 that centered around the high-profile 'Holy Cross' protest<sup>1</sup> the British Government commissioned an independent review of community relations in the area chaired by the former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, Rev Dr. John Dunlop.<sup>2</sup> The Review team conducted a 6-month research and consultation project in North Belfast, publishing a final report (the 'Dunlop Report') in May 2002.<sup>3</sup> A key theme of the Dunlop Report was the division of North Belfast into a large number of distinct communities most of which – particularly those in the more deprived areas – are regarded as either exclusively Protestant/Unionist or Catholic/Nationalist territory. The Dunlop Report concluded that

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Holy Cross' incident was one of the most controversial in the recent history in Northern Ireland when a group of Protestants staged a long-running protest outside a Catholic girl's primary school. The protest was covered by both national and international media and resulted in several legal challenges relating to the way in which the protests were policed. The European Court of Human Rights ultimately rejected a claim that the police had failed to protect the children <http://www.bailii.org/eu/cases/ECHR/2010/2015.html> although several of the families did receive damages in a civil case relating to the failure of the state to protect the rights of the children <http://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2016/09/01/news/belfast-holy-cross-schoolgirls-paid-compensation-over-2001-loyalist-dispute-677391/>

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Dunlop was assisted in his task by Mr. Roy Adams, Property Developer and Planner (BDP) and Monsignor Tom Toner, a local Catholic priest

<sup>3</sup> J Dunlop, R Adams and T Toner, *North Belfast Community Action Project: Report of the Project Team*, (Department for Social Development 2002) para. 51

the boundaries or interfaces between these oppositional communities were fractured zones where hostility and antipathy are maintained and renewed through violence and disorder.<sup>4</sup>

For the purposes of this thesis it is important to locate the findings of the Dunlop Report within the context of the wider city ecosystem i.e. the processes that have shaped planning in the city over the past several decades as well as the demographic trends that will shape future development. From this perspective the Dunlop Report illustrates the legacy of the defensible space approach that steered the planning system in Belfast during the past four decades. This approach, as outlined in the previous chapters, was introduced in the early 1970s, and involved reconfiguring the planning system in the city in order to create the maximum degree of separation between the two communities. In practice, this entailed using the road network, as well as commercial and residential development, to provide barriers between the two communities through the creation of defensible space. As indicated in chapter four, the net effect of this planning strategy was to contain the growth of the Catholic community within specified territorial boundaries while at the same time promoting the depopulation of Protestant areas, which in turn increased the demographic imbalance between the two communities in the city.

The Dunlop Report outlined the way in which the planning system that characterized the conflict had impacted upon relationships between the two communities in north Belfast. The report found that an important factor in increasing tensions at territorial boundaries was the differing demographic profiles between the two communities with a younger and expanding Catholic community sitting alongside an ageing and declining Protestant community that gave rise to differing demands for housing and living space

The sectarian geography of the place is like a patchwork quilt of communities living side by side with interfaces and walls and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid para. 47

fences, and various other boundaries separating them...and these two communities... exhibit very different needs in respect of housing. On the Catholic side, it's generally speaking a young growing population, with lots of kids around, very big waiting list for housing... people living with relatives, this type of thing, in overcrowded conditions. On the Protestant side, the opposite would be the case in respect of that type of need...Older people, living in older houses.<sup>5</sup>

The Dunlop Report concluded that the demographic imbalances and in particular, the patterns of housing inequality that characterize interface areas had fueled fears within the Protestant community that the shift in territorial identity in North Belfast was one-directional i.e. that Protestant areas were being 'taken over' by the Catholic community who sought ultimately to drive the Protestant working class out of the city.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, within the Catholic community the Dunlop Report found that there was a feeling that housing inequalities were ignored leaving Catholics trapped behind barriers, euphemistically referred to as 'peace lines', which closed off vacant brownfield sites that could otherwise be developed to provide much needed accommodation

North Belfast is notorious for having I think about 18 miles of peace walls that delineate and designate territory, and so every community in this constituency claims its land. You see it for example dramatically at the Cupar Street interface, where there are acres and acres and acres of available land on the Shankill Road side, and crowded housing on the other side, but of course the wall will not, and cannot be moved, even to meet housing need, because to move it or to take it down would inevitably

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<sup>5</sup> Interview: Public Official Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

<sup>6</sup> J Dunlop, R Adams and T Toner, *North Belfast Community Action Project: Report of the Project Team*, (Department for Social Development 2002) para. 51

mean the expansion of green territory, and the lessening of orange territory.<sup>7</sup>

This illustrates again an important aspect of the spatial legacy of the conflict, namely, the way in which a desire within the Protestant community to retain defensible space and protect territory has adverse consequences in terms of increasing housing inequality for the Catholic community. The capacity of territorial boundaries to impact adversely upon housing inequalities was also highlighted in the North Belfast Housing Strategy (NBHS) published by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) some months prior to the Dunlop Report.<sup>8</sup> The NBHS identified significant differentials between the two communities with regard to patterns of housing need in North Belfast. For example, although Catholic households made up about half of the population of North Belfast overall, they comprised approximately three-quarters of the waiting list for houses; as of March 2000, the composition of the waiting list was such that 60% of Catholic applicants (727) were classified as 'urgent need' compared with 36% of Protestant applicants (153). The NBHS document also found that although the housing waiting lists had fallen for both communities, the reduction had been much greater for Protestants (-39%) than for Catholics (-12%). The NBHS also found that the waiting time variations reflected lower stock turnover in Catholic areas and pointed towards the need for increased new build supply with the main pressure for land to support new housing provision in Catholic neighbourhoods.<sup>9</sup>

The NBHS in effect highlighted the way in which territorial boundaries limited the supply of available land for the Catholic community, thereby increasing housing inequality for that community. An important focus of this thesis is the

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<sup>7</sup> Interview: Protestant Clergyman (2011)

<sup>8</sup> Northern Ireland Housing Executive, *The North Belfast Housing Strategy: Tackling Housing Need* (NIHE 2000)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. These figures confirm the long-standing differential level of housing need facing the Catholic community outlined in chapter three. The continuation of these patterns is evidenced in a recent article, see Rory Winters, 'Close to 100% of social housing need in north Belfast is concentrated in predominantly Catholic neighbourhoods', *The Detail* (Belfast, 29 February 2020)

extent to which the spatial legacy of the conflict is characterized by concerns within the Unionist community to limit the growth and expansion of the Catholic community in north Belfast, which in turn, impacts adversely on efforts to address housing need. The demographic imbalance in north Belfast, alluded to above, illustrates the extent to which population movements shape patterns of inequality, especially within a context in which the planning system is predicated upon the retention of territorial boundaries between communities. There is therefore little surprise that these boundaries are characterized by tension and fear given the demographic imbalance that exists between the two communities in these areas. The situation in north Belfast, as outlined in the Dunlop Report and NBHS endorses Keynes' argument about the way in which population growth has the capacity to impact upon political developments.<sup>10</sup> In fact, as this case study will show, population movements and demographic imbalances illustrate the complex range of factors that shape the spatial legacy of the conflict in north Belfast and highlight the challenges associated with efforts to address structural and systemic conflict legacy issues more generally.

### **Housing Inequality, Demographics and the Politics of Territory**

Although there is some dispute, particularly within the Unionist community, about the detail of the findings within the NIHE strategy document<sup>11</sup> there is general acceptance that disproportionate housing need exists for the Catholic community

The demand for social housing is very much a green demand in North Belfast at the minute.<sup>12</sup>

Significant disagreements arise however with regard to how public agencies ought to address Catholic housing inequalities, not least with respect to land

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<sup>10</sup> J M Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (first published 1920, Penguin 1971) 14

<sup>11</sup> Northern Ireland Housing Executive, *The North Belfast Housing Strategy: Tackling Housing Need* (NIHE 2000)

<sup>12</sup> Interview, DUP Politician/Political Advisor (1) (2011)



availability for additional residential provision. The NIHE at that time had completed a review of its land holdings as well as a comprehensive assessment of possible 'opportunity sites' that could conceivably be used for new housing and had concluded that given the pressing housing needs in north Belfast, at least part of the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood site, which had just become available, needed to be used to provide additional housing, both social and private.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, the NIHE had also concluded that notwithstanding the shortage of available land, the situation in North Belfast was not at the stage where the NIHE would propose that existing community boundaries ought to be breached to enable housing to be provided for the Catholic community.

The sectarian geography creates a very inefficient housing market...if that land was available to everyone and there weren't the fears and the worries about security, and people are willing to live together, and all of that, then it would be a much more efficient housing market, and there would be more land readily available that could be developed quickly, and it would be less impact on the public purse, going out acquiring new land, but we have always taken the line, and we still insist upon this, this isn't within our gift...This is not something that the housing executive or indeed any individual agency can change, this requires political and community, agreement...<sup>14</sup>

This quote illustrates further the nature of the spatial legacy of the conflict. In particular this highlights the important link between housing inequalities and land availability, especially the way in which patterns of inequality are shaped by territorial boundaries between the two communities and urban planning approaches which confine and restrict the spread of the Catholic community in the city. The retention of territorial boundaries, and their consequent impact

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<sup>13</sup> Northern Ireland Housing Executive, *The North Belfast Housing Strategy: Tackling Housing Need* (NIHE 2000) 21

<sup>14</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

upon spatial inequalities and community relations was an issue that the Dunlop Report picked up on, concluding that there could not be integration of the two communities unless relationships between them improved.<sup>15</sup> The Dunlop Report also concluded that to demand change of the territorial boundaries between the two communities without working to improve relationships and trust would be experienced as a threat and considered the improvement of relationships to be an essential element in creating a peaceful north Belfast that could accommodate diversity.<sup>16</sup>

In effect, the Dunlop Report outlined the tensions that exist in this area of the city with regard to the way in which efforts to address structural and systemic conflict legacy issues have the capacity to impact adversely on relationships between the two communities. This point is of particular significance in a context in which the imperative within the political system is to ensure that relationships between the two communities do not deteriorate to the extent that they precipitate a return to violent conflict. The question that arises in this context therefore, and which was in fact a key issue of debate around the Girdwood Masterplan, is the extent to which the desire to prevent a return to violence ought to take priority over the objective of addressing the chronic level of housing inequality in the Catholic community.

Taken together, the Dunlop Report and the North Belfast Housing Strategy highlight the spatial legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict in this area of the city. This legacy is one in which an acute intersection of socio-economic and identity-based inequality exists within the context of a growing Catholic population in need of housing and a declining Protestant population fearful that they were being expelled from their traditional areas. Moreover, these reports illustrate the extent to which territorial boundaries serve to keep these two communities apart forming a 'patchwork quilt' of differing political identities that distort the allocation of limited public resources in a geographical area

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<sup>15</sup> Dunlop, R Adams and T Toner, *North Belfast Community Action Project: Report of the Project Team*, (Department for Social Development 2002) para. 51

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* para. 54

experiencing some of the highest levels of deprivation in Northern Ireland. In order to begin to address these challenges the Dunlop Report sought to encourage government to develop a major site to serve as a symbol of hope and economic regeneration for north Belfast that would generate investment, increase economic opportunity, improve the environment and lift the spirits of the wider community. In this context the Dunlop Report noted that the Crumlin Road Gaol which had closed in 1996, along with the adjacent Girdwood Barracks which had been used as a base for the British Army since the early 1970s had the potential to meet a wide range of needs for the communities of North Belfast. It was in this context that the Draft Masterplan for Crumlin Road Gaol and the former Girdwood army base was drawn up.

### **The Draft Masterplan for Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood**

Following the publication of the Dunlop report, ownership of the former Crumlin Road Gaol in North Belfast was transferred to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) in August 2003 under the 'Reinvestment and Reform Initiative' which had been established by the UK Treasury in order to help boost the Northern Ireland economy.<sup>17</sup> In February 2005, the UK Government announced its decision to close the adjacent Girdwood Army Barracks and the following September the then Minister for Social Development, David Hanson,<sup>18</sup> announced that the development of both sites would be taken forward through a Masterplanning process. In early 2006, ownership of both sites (comprising some 27 acres) was acquired by the Department for Social Development (DSD) from the Ministry of Defence (see below).

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<sup>17</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007) 8

<sup>18</sup> At that time the Stormont Assembly was suspended and Northern Ireland was administered by 'Direct Rule' from Westminster. David Hanson, a member of Tony Blair's Labour Government, was Minister for Social Development with responsibilities for this area

Aerial photograph of Crumlin Road Gaol and the former Girdwood army barracks. Copyright courtesy of the Girdwood Masterplan, Business Design Partnership, with permission.



In order to take forward the development of the combined site, an overall Masterplan was required in line with the site's zoning under the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP). In March 2006 David Hanson, the Minister with responsibility for the site, established an advisory panel, comprising political, community and statutory representatives which was tasked with overseeing the production of a Masterplan and making recommendations on the agreed plan.

Building Design Partnership (BDP) (London) Ltd was selected as the preferred Masterplanner for the site in February 2007 and following consultation with statutory bodies, voluntary agencies and community groups, proposals were presented to the advisory panel. By this time, a new devolved Northern Ireland Government at Stormont had replaced the Direct Rule administration from Westminster and the new Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie of the Nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) launched the Draft Masterplan for a period of public consultation in October 2007 on behalf of the Department for Social Development and the Office of the First Minister

and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM).<sup>19</sup> The fact that the Department for Social Development Minister, Margaret Ritchie, launched the document on behalf of her own Department and OFMDFM was to prove highly significant. In effect, this ensured that any progress on the Masterplan could only take place with the agreement of OFMDFM and therefore, by definition, the two communities. This was to prove decisive given the subsequent opposition to the proposals from the Unionist community, including among elected representatives of the DUP.

Margaret Ritchie announced a period of public consultation on the draft Masterplan commencing on 16 October 2007 and ending on 22 January 2008, announcing that the consultation process would be designed to stimulate public debate on the issues involved and encourage feedback from a wide variety of interests in order to identify matters that would help to shape the final plan.<sup>20</sup> The consultation document went on to state that it was hoped that all sections of the community could play their part not only in helping to shape the policies of the Masterplan but also in developing a new inclusive vision for the people of North Belfast. At their first meeting, the advisory panel had in fact unanimously agreed the following mission statement:

To create a regeneration project of international significance which brings maximum economic, social and environmental benefits to the local and wider community and in so doing creates a vibrant, inclusive and diverse environment which attracts present and future generations of people to live, work and visit.<sup>21</sup>

In order to deliver this vision for the site the advisory panel agreed a number of development principles for the project that included a desire for a 'transformational shared future scheme' which would address pressing needs

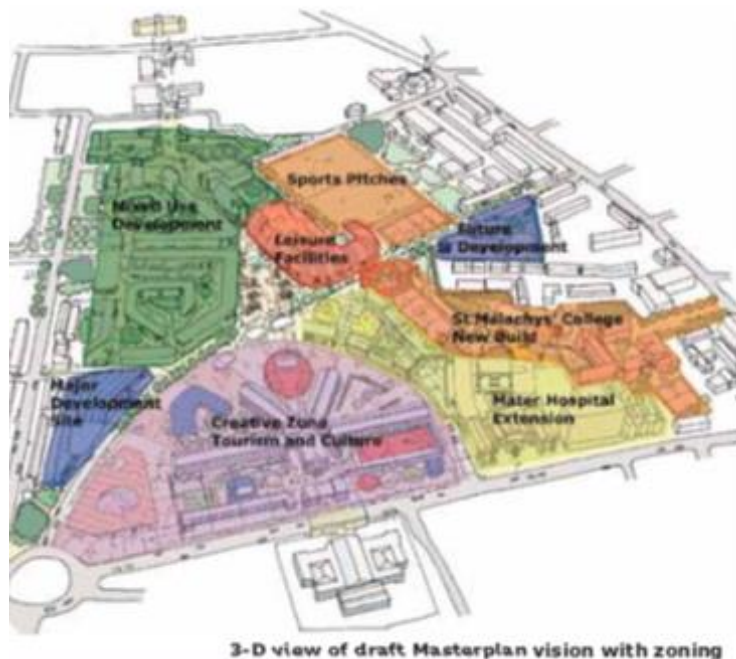
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<sup>19</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007) 8

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007) 4

in the locality and the wider area. Bringing people into the area, both as residents and visitors, was considered fundamental to the success of the Plan and in order to achieve this the aim was to maximize connectivity and access in order to facilitate and encourage movement throughout the site and indeed between the site and the rest of the city. It was agreed from the outset that opportunities for the development of the site should embrace principles of equality, based on objective assessment of need and a 'Shared Future', i.e. that the site needed to be developed in such a way that there would be access and use by both communities. The illustration below provides an outline of the overall vision for the draft Masterplan with zoning.



The Masterplan proposed that the Crumlin Road Gaol, designed by the Victorian architect Charles Lanyon, was to serve as the 'anchor' for the site acting as a landmark attraction with an international profile that would be visited by people from across the city as well as those from further afield, located within a safe, attractive environment, that was easily accessible by car, public transport, or on foot. This would be combined with 'mixed use development' (including retail, housing, workshops, and training facilities) for

the largest part of the site to create a new 'city quarter' based upon the concept of 'sustainable living' with a new access road, the ARC Route, at the heart of the site linking the Crumlin Road with the Antrim Road (see above).<sup>22</sup>

### **The Planning System and Telescoping Division**

The subsequent disagreements around the Girdwood Masterplan illustrate the way in which the operations and recursive practices of the planning system served to cause an irritation within the political system. Within the Unionist community, one of the chief objections to the Masterplan was that the social and economic benefits of the proposals were focused almost exclusively on the geographic area *within* the boundaries of the redevelopment site thereby ignoring the needs of deprived Protestant communities immediately adjacent to the site

The regeneration of the site was seen as if it was a site that could be developed conceptually with a wall around it. The consultants ... were brought in and asked 'how would you regenerate this site?' when actually the political question was, 'how can this site be regenerated so that everybody in a much, much wider area, can benefit from it?'.<sup>23</sup>

The original Masterplan had in fact claimed that the proposals would bring 'maximum economic, social and environmental benefits to the local and wider community' and that the redevelopment of the site would create a vibrant, inclusive and diverse environment 'which attracts present and future generations of people to live, work and visit.'<sup>24</sup> The Plan had also claimed that the provision of a range of mixed tenure housing on the site would ensure that

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<sup>22</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007) 30

<sup>23</sup> Interview: Protestant Clergyman (2011)

<sup>24</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007) 4

'existing residential areas adjacent to the site would eventually be strengthened and diversified'.<sup>25</sup>

The Girdwood/Crumlin Gaol site was seen as a potential development site which could help to lift that whole area of north Belfast, economically and socially.<sup>26</sup>

The difficulty was that within Protestant communities immediately adjacent to the site there was a high degree of skepticism that these objectives would be achieved

All the buzz words were used... but the flaw in that thinking and it is a profound one, is that the context of regenerating a much wider area was not part of the brief. The assumption was made that if we can get these 27 acres agreed, everybody will be happy.<sup>27</sup>

The question of where planners ought to 'draw the line' is one that arises in any regeneration context, as do tensions between a desire to stay focused on a particular site and the relationship between that site and its wider hinterland.

You don't just look within the line of the site, whether it's Laganside, the Maze, or any major regeneration scheme, your prime responsibility is to secure the regeneration of that site but to do that you've got to understand the hinterland, and you've got to be able to have ways that you can improve those areas as well, and that also reflects your mind set because that means you're respecting and acknowledging the wider problems of the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Interview: Planner/Property Developer (2011)

<sup>27</sup> Interview: Protestant Clergyman (2011)



area...at the same time though you don't want it to go too big, so that you lose your focus.<sup>28</sup>

This debate tends to be focused around the phenomenon of gentrification where across the globe, tensions arise with regard to how much local communities benefit from urban redevelopment. The problem with the Girdwood Masterplan was that with territory demarcated strictly according to group identity, the boundary line of the regeneration site, and the question of how far benefits extend directly beyond that line, assumed much greater political salience, particularly within a context in which the Protestant community already felt under threat

If you telescope these issues down to a relatively small geography, you are going to create these pressure points...it's going to be very difficult for people to see the wood for the trees, and it's going to translate into a zero sum game...if we get this, you lose out, we get our housing, you're going to lose some land that you maybe thought was yours... telescoping of spaces ...can be counterproductive in that way.<sup>29</sup>

This view is endorsed by the senior government official with responsibility for regeneration of the site who felt that focusing on a narrow geography served to increase tensions

North Belfast itself in terms of population and the issues is a small area, but by looking at north Belfast, you're looking at the overall community needs. What was happening, given the very nature of north Belfast, we started to bring it down to very small, geographical areas, and given the territoriality in north Belfast,

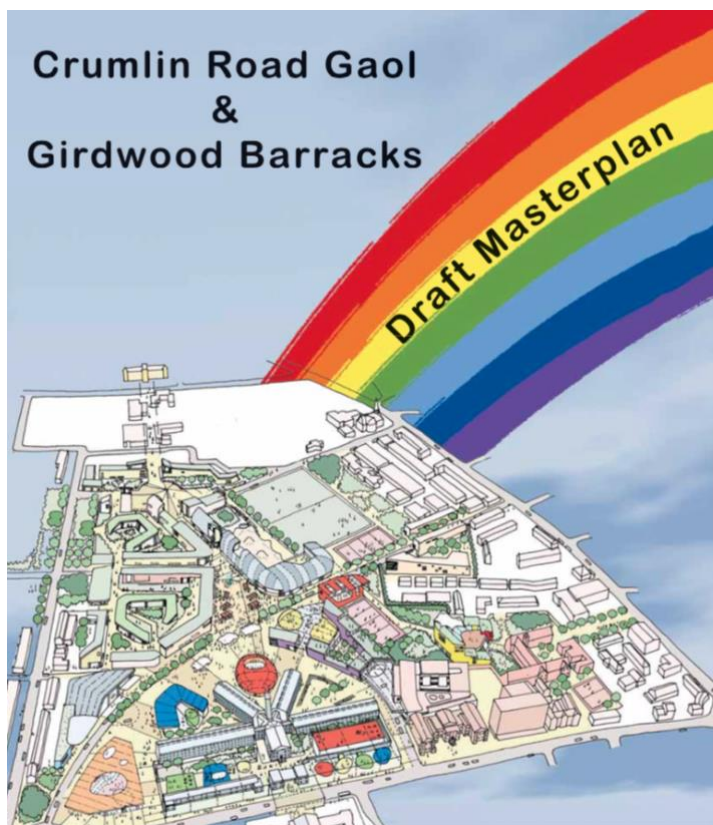
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<sup>28</sup> Interview: Planner/Public Official, (2011)

<sup>29</sup> Interview: Academic/Urban Planning (1) (2011)

you were never going to shift some of the people to think outside those territorial areas.<sup>30</sup>

In this case the ‘telescoping’ effect was further magnified by the design and graphics of the Plan with a front cover showing an isolated and discrete ‘island’ of redevelopment and prosperity, illustrated in colour without any natural hinterland (see below). The presentation of the Plan therefore served to concentrate and highlight spatial divisions in an area where ‘hypersensitivity to turf, to defensible space, seems to possess everyone.’<sup>31</sup>



Business Design Partnership, ‘Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan’ (Business Design Partnership 2007) Front cover

This image was not lost on the representatives of the surrounding Protestant communities who could point to the fact that they were literally, as well as figuratively, airbrushed from the future plans for the area and that the economic

<sup>30</sup> Interview: Public Official OFMDFM (2011)

<sup>31</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 33

and social benefits of the intervention were weighted towards 'Catholic' needs through additional housing on the site

Unless they're seeing regeneration in their own communities, then what will be in Girdwood will be as Jackie Redpath says, a flagship development that sails past them. That's the big issue there.<sup>32</sup>

In Northern Ireland, where paintings, symbols and imagery carry particular weight and meaning this was a problem that at least one member of the advisory plan was aware of in advance

The original Lagan-side concept plan, which was 1987...it had exactly that again, the Waterfront area was in colour, with lovely designs of buildings, and the rest of the city was grey, but it was the start, because people at that stage, were only thinking about the economic and physical development of the Waterfront... our later plans ... show the surrounding area and linkages...The same interestingly is occurring with the Maze here... it's the architects ...if they're designing a building, they only ever just show the building, I always want to see the surrounding street.<sup>33</sup>

This debate arises in cities across the globe where concerns exist with regard to the tendency for urban regeneration to lead to 'gentrification', whereby local communities are adversely affected by rising property prices and often displaced.<sup>34</sup> Within the context of north Belfast however, which is characterised by micro-territorial claims, 'where the Ulsterman carries the map of...religious geography in his mind almost from birth'<sup>35</sup> the issue assumes much greater political salience. In effect this highlights the way in which the

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<sup>32</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

<sup>33</sup> Interview: Planner/Public Official (2011)

<sup>34</sup> P Collier, *The Future of Capitalism: Facing The New Anxieties* (Harper Collins 2018)

<sup>35</sup> A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (Blackstaff 1977) 182

operations of the planning system, especially with regard to the need for boundaries to be established indicating the regeneration site, with accompanying illustrations, causes an irritation within the political system which is characterized by the need within the Unionist community to protect territory.

There is another important point with regard to the way in which the operations of the planning system irritated the political system with regard to the Masterplan and it is this. Although the Masterplan was drawn up in order to provide a 'snapshot' of a future vision for the city, within the two main communities the proposals were viewed through the lens of the city ecosystem, i.e. from the perspective of the processes that had shaped the area over time. From the perspective of the Catholic community the Masterplan represented an opportunity to address long-standing housing need by utilising land which had previously been used by the British Army. From the perspective of the Protestant community, the proposals represented further Catholic encroachment on a community facing population decline that already felt under threat and spelt the beginning of the end for those living nearby in Lower Oldpark. With the Girdwood proposals it is clear that a failure to appreciate the extent of opposition to the Plan from within the Protestant 'hinterland' of the Lower Oldpark in particular was due, to a large extent, to the way in which the proposals seemed to be weighted to 'the other side'. This in turn fed into a narrative of territorial loss and community decline.

With us, it's been very strongly felt that we're not looking at Girdwood until you look at Lower Oldpark and Lower Shankill, because they have been just left to lie for decades... any trickle down isn't going to be big enough and significant enough, and it's also a bit daft...how can we go into a community and say there's no resources to do what you've needed for decades but we've found a hundred million for ten yards across the road.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

Where socio-economic inequality and identity politics intersect around ownership and access to territory differences were further 'telescoped' by the fact that the Girdwood site was located directly between the Catholic New Lodge and the Protestant Lower Oldpark areas

If you've spoken to anyone in Lower Oldpark you'll know that there are strong feelings there about Girdwood... it sits on a fault-line almost.<sup>37</sup>

One of the ways in which the proposals had sought to extend benefits to the surrounding hinterland was by using the physical development on the site to leverage jobs and training to the local communities through 'contract clauses' which would require supply chain companies to engage with the new 'Learning Hub'.<sup>38</sup> There was also a strong emphasis within the original Masterplan that the new leisure facility and playing fields would be accessible to local communities as well as those from other parts of the city. The difficulty was that the Learning Hub, Community Hub, and Children's Centre were originally located at the southern, i.e. Catholic end of the site and, given the sectarian geography of the area, therefore less likely to be used by members of the Protestant community in the Lower Oldpark which lay beyond the north east of the site. Moreover, the differing demographic profiles of the two communities meant that employment opportunities targeted at training young people in construction industry and other skills would favour the Catholic community. Again, this illustrates the way in which demographic imbalances between the two communities and hypersensitivity to turf ensured that efforts to promote employment and provide leisure facilities were viewed differently by Unionist and Nationalist representatives. Where distrust and suspicions run deep even the topography of the land was viewed as being tilted in favour of one community.

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<sup>37</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

<sup>38</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007) 51

It's on the other side of Clifton Park Avenue, it's backed onto by the Mater, by St Malachy's and goes down to the lower Antrim Road, so its natural streetscape, took it down the road rather than up the road.<sup>39</sup>

From the perspective of the Unionist community therefore, the key to breaking the Girdwood log-jam was bringing forward proposals that would *specifically* address the problems 'up the road', and in particular, address the depopulation and dereliction of the Lower Oldpark area, immediately beyond the line of the regeneration site. In effect the Girdwood Masterplan illustrates the way in which the recursive processes that comprise conventional planning orthodoxy (i.e. the operations of the planning system), which rely upon the presentation of a draft plan for a development site, complete with colour illustrations, caused an irritation within the political system which viewed the proposals as through the lens of zero-sum sectarian politics. As the next section will show, the belief within the Protestant community was that the Masterplan provided a blueprint for continued Catholic expansion in this area of the city.

### **Urban Design, Conflict and The Politics of Territory**

Jacobs viewed planning as fundamental to the 'ecology of cities' and identified a city ecosystem as being composed of physical-economic-ethical processes active at a given time within a city and its close dependencies.<sup>40</sup> An important element of the physical processes active within the city ecosystem at any given point is the urban design or architectural philosophy that shapes the urban realm. Urban design serves an important function with regard to facilitating or impeding the movement and flow of people and resources and as a consequence can either bring communities together or keep them apart,

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<sup>39</sup> Interview: Protestant Clergyman (2011). 'Down the road' leads to the Catholic New Lodge while 'Up the road' refers to the PUL community in Lower Oldpark.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. xvi

illustrating what Yitachel has characterised as the emancipatory or socially coercive aspects of architecture and urban planning.<sup>41</sup>

Fundamental to the success of the Masterplan was the need to bring people into the area, both as residents and visitors, and in order to achieve this Plan aimed to maximize connectivity and access in order to facilitate and encourage movement throughout the site and indeed between the site and the rest of the city. From an architectural perspective this required a reversal of the urban design philosophy that had been put in place by the Joint Working Party in the early 1970s and which has steered the planning system in Belfast ever since. Although the Masterplan made no explicit reference to the defensive design practices of the past, it aimed to reverse this approach in order to bring people into the area rather than keep them out. In order to achieve this the Masterplan placed a high degree of importance on the use of 'quality public realm' in ensuring a successful urban environment by encouraging movement through effective signposting, lighting, planting and paving.<sup>42</sup> Trees, of differing heights and maturity responding to the scale of adjoining development would line all public routes to reduce the impact of the vehicular environment while change in materials would also help to reduce the speed of vehicles passing through the site and therefore enhance safety for pedestrians and cyclists. The desire to reduce the speed and the impact of traffic contrasts with the Joint Working Party strategy document from the early 1970s.

The Masterplan sought therefore to transform the architectural scabs and scars that characterized the conflict into democratically productive spaces.<sup>43</sup> The emphasis in the Masterplan was on using urban design to facilitate movement and enhance connectivity rather than reduce and impede it illustrating the desire on the part of the planners to make the new development

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<sup>41</sup> O Yiftachel, 'Social control, urban planning and ethno-class relations: Mizrahi Jews in Israel's 'Development Towns' (2003) 24 (2) *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 418-437

<sup>42</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007) 38

<sup>43</sup> M Mihai, 'Architectural Transitional Justice? Political Renewal within the Scars of a Violent Past' (2018) 12 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 515

function effectively in facilitating the movement of people in and around the site. This aspect of the Plan illustrates Wilson's point that architecture

is of its nature assertive – it proposes a certain way of doing things, of bringing together or separating activities – and this will either create an order that affronts or one that enhances the quality of life.<sup>44</sup>

The design of the streets, and the use of shrubs and trees represent the way in which the operations of the architectural system proposed a 'certain way of doing things' that involved facilitating the flow of movement and people around the site – the opposite of the design practices of the 1970s and 1980s. Reference to the use of colour and texture to enrich the environment in the Masterplan contrasts with the verdict of Bollens that much of the planning in the city during the conflict delivered 'greyness where colour matters'.<sup>45</sup> The urban design philosophy of the Masterplan, which sought to maximise connectivity between this area and the rest of the city and provide a quality living environment also contrasts with a government report on the nearby Lower Oldpark area that outlined the legacy of the defensive design principles. The report on the Lower Oldpark area found a 'streetscape mirroring the divisions in wider society - inward facing avenues, defensible homes and dead-ends'<sup>46</sup> where 'direct routes which residents could have previously walked or driven on no longer exist making it difficult to navigate the area and access services and facilities elsewhere'.<sup>47</sup> The report on the Lower Oldpark concluded that urban design of the area gave rise to 'a low quality living environment for residents' and for visitors to the area the impression is created that this is territory that is 'closed to outsiders'.<sup>48</sup> In effect the report on the

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<sup>44</sup> Colin Wilson, *Architectural Reflections: Studies in the Philosophy and Practice of Architecture* (Manchester University Press 2000) 25

<sup>45</sup> Bollens, S. (1999) *Urban Peace-Building in Divided Societies: Belfast and Johannesburg*. Westview Press: Colorado 107

<sup>46</sup> Department for Social Development, *Building Successful Communities: Lower Oldpark and Hillview Action Plan* (Department for Social Development 2016) 12

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid* 9

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid* 9



Lower Oldpark and the design aspects of the Masterplan exemplify two contrasting architectural approaches, one rooted in the defensive design practices that characterized the conflict, and another, which aims to stitch together the urban fabric of the city.

Crucially however, this reconfiguration within the planning system, and the use of architecture to facilitate movement and bring people together was not driven by 'transformational' objectives per se, nor by political agreement between the two communities, but rather, was a function of the economic basis of the Masterplan which was contingent upon making the area attractive to private investors. In other words, the imperative within the economic system that urban regeneration be underpinned by inclusive design in order to bring people onto the site necessitated a reversal of the design philosophy that had been established to manage conflict, without the consent of the two communities in the area. This was to prove decisive in terms of hardening opposition to the proposals from within the Protestant community which will be explored in the next section.

### **The Political System and Defensive Design**

The difficulty for the Girdwood Masterplan was that the primary driver behind the more emancipatory and transformative design aspects of the Masterplan originated within the economic system, namely, the need to bring people onto the site to finance for the redevelopment through the sale of apartments. When the Masterplan proposals were eventually published this vision caused an irritation within the political system where the imperative within the Unionist community was still to retain and protect territorial boundaries. From the perspective of those living within or representing the Unionist community within the Lower Oldpark area which lay just outside the Girdwood site boundary but adjacent to the proposed mixed-use development (aerial photograph, top left), the new design philosophy that lay at the heart of the Girdwood Masterplan was viewed with horror

There were principles [in the Masterplan] that you would apply in every other city in the world, but whenever you come to North Belfast, it spooks the hell out of people. Freedom of access is a wonderful design principle, and it's all about getting inclusion and connection to a site. In North Belfast, freedom of access means somebody can come and attack my house...<sup>49</sup>

Concerns that the design of the plan failed to take account the territorial nuances of the local area were not restricted to members of the Unionist community, as the views of the North Belfast Housing Manager make clear

Where housing would go on the site...if you look at Clifton Park Avenue, with Lower Oldpark, the Crumlin Road and the Lower Shankill ... the initial plan saw new housing going right on the interface ...which wouldn't necessarily, you would think, be a tremendously good idea.<sup>50</sup>

This view was also endorsed by the senior government official with responsibility for taking forward the regeneration of the site who felt that the design of the Plan served to increase rather than allay fears within the Protestant community by locating the proposed new housing in direct proximity to existing interfaces and by the presence of a new road, or 'arc route', that had the effect of dividing the area into two segments.<sup>51</sup>

BDP designed what would have seen as a model estate, on how a model estate should be developed, and that was the one where you had the road basically dissecting the site...whenever I looked at this, I came in just after that was finished, and I said that's not

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<sup>49</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

<sup>50</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

<sup>51</sup> Interview: Public Official OFMDFM (2011)

going to happen... because it is dividing the site into Protestant and Catholic [territory]... and it's just not going to wash.<sup>52</sup>

There is little doubt that fear, particularly fear that the redevelopment of the site would encroach on an already vulnerable and beleaguered Protestant community in the nearby Lower Oldpark was a key factor in the rejection of the proposals by Unionist politicians and representatives. These feelings were allied to what was viewed within the Unionist community as an unhealthy and crude attachment to innovation and international precedent which ignored the spatial realities of the local area and failed to recognize legitimate concerns within that community

The core mistake they made was international precedent, their answer to criticisms always was, well, all the other cities in the world do things like this. Yes, wonderful, fine, we're not every other city...it was always used as a fait accompli...well Barcelona does that so you're being localized and parochial and a bit of an idiot, and you can't see the bigger vision and the grander vision and all the rest of it so just sit down....<sup>53</sup>

From this perspective, the problem was not innovation or international comparators per se, but rather, the way in which these models were applied in a 'one size fits all' approach to urban development.

We tend to define innovation in Northern Ireland terms as copying somewhere else...innovation would have been no, how can we actually get a Masterplan for the site that deals with the localised issue of fear.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Interview: Public Official OFMDFM (2011)

<sup>53</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

<sup>54</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

In effect, the disagreements around the design aspects of the Girdwood Masterplan illustrate two competing visions about the quality of life, both of which have been shaped by the conflict. On the one hand, within the Catholic community, and among those engaged in economic development, the aim is to open up the north of the city to new people and new investment. Within the Protestant community, where access means someone can attack my house, the desire is to preserve the territorial integrity of communal boundaries. Again this highlights the capacity of the operations of the planning system, characterised by design orthodoxy, to irritate<sup>55</sup> the political system. This is especially important within a context in which the political system is predicated upon the need to maintain separation of the two communities in order to prevent a return to conflict.

### **The Planning System and the Politics of Elsewhere**

Several members of the Advisory Group felt frustration at what they perceived to be a failure on the part of those closest to the ground to embrace a new vision for North Belfast and move forward. From this perspective, examples of best practice from beyond Northern Ireland that had been used to illustrate the potential of the site fell victim to localised and sectarian mind-sets that were closed to viewing the economic potential of the site.

It didn't matter that we went and looked at Oxford, that we brought in examples of what happened in Brighton, that we talked about these matters and it didn't matter what we said about the Gasworks...It was a lack of maturity, and that's why who marches where, and what flag is flying where, was the dominant paradigm that we were in ...if we were sitting in Manchester, that would not have been the discourse. The discourse would have been, here is 26 acres, here's a fantastic potential site to light the fuse for North Belfast, to become the absolute big anchor, a new

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<sup>55</sup> G Teubner, 'Legal Irritants: good faith in British law or how unifying law ends up in new divergencies' (1998) 61 (1) *The Modern Law Review* 11

site for the new future, and none of them had the vision to grasp that, none of them...<sup>56</sup>

Some of the views expressed here would tend to lend weight to the objections of Unionist politicians and community representatives who felt that there was an unwillingness to embrace genuine fears and concerns. As outlined in the previous chapter a common criticism of official planning documents over the past forty years in Northern Ireland has been a failure to recognise the link between identity and territory and adopt a 'planning for anywhere' approach<sup>57</sup>

If you looked at planning documents here, over the years, like the Belfast Urban Plan, you could be forgiven for thinking that they're talking about planning in Nottingham or somewhere...<sup>58</sup>

Certainly, there were aspects of this approach within the Masterplan, not helped by the fact that the design consultants were London-based and therefore less aware of the complexities of the issues than they ought to have been.

I found that BDP were ok about doing the drawings and doing the numbers but not very good at how you would develop a site that would maximise the benefits and gain the confidence of the two communities around there...they had urban planning skills but not community planning skills... although maybe they had experience of community planning...[but not]...North Belfast community planning.<sup>59</sup>

These comments further illustrate the difficulties that arise with regard to applying technical planning and design skills to an area in which territory and

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<sup>56</sup> Interview: Public Official, Belfast City Council (2) (2011)

<sup>57</sup> B Murtagh, Planning for Anywhere: Housing Policy in Northern Ireland, *Housing Studies* (1998) 13 (6) 833

<sup>58</sup> Interview: Academic/Urban Planning (2011) (1)

<sup>59</sup> Interview: Public Official, OFMDFM (2011)

identity are inextricably linked, and where a 'hypersensitivity to turf, to defensible space, seems to possess everyone'.<sup>60</sup> Conventional approaches to urban design that characterize the recursive operations of the planning system might well suggest for example the location of a new 'city quarter' for the largest part of the site, and an 'arc route' running through the development. The difficulty is that the spatial legacy of the conflict guaranteed that such an approach was viewed as a direct attack on the Protestant community of Lower Oldpark

North Belfast is an area of micro-territorial claim and what people don't realise is once you threaten the occupation of their territory, you actually strip them of their confidence and their own identity.<sup>61</sup>

Further evidence that technocratic planning 'experts', rooted in professional orthodoxy, blinded some officials to legitimate concerns from local communities is provided by the senior public official with responsibility for managing the project and bringing forward the Masterplan

That road that just bisected the site...I said why was this done, and the answer was 'well... they're the planners and they know'. And I kept asking and challenging...and then it got to the stage I suppose, it was a bit of frustration from me, and I said ...tell me what you think my job is, is my job, to regenerate the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood site, or is my job, to try and sell this plan to people. And they said, no, your job is to sell this plan. I said, well, I don't see my job that way.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 33

<sup>61</sup> Interview: Protestant Clergyman (2011)

<sup>62</sup> Interview: Public Official, OFMDFM (2011)

In effect this epitomizes the way in which the recursive operations of the planning system have the capacity to irritate the political system. In several respects frustrations with the urban design elements of the Masterplan mirror some of the difficulties that arose in the 1960s when leading figures in the planning profession, such as Sir Robert Matthew, arrived in Belfast and applied techniques that had been developed in Britain and the United States with disastrous consequences.

The criticisms of the design aspects of the Girdwood Masterplan indicate this same tendency within the planning system – namely the application of international precedent and mainstream planning orthodoxy in a city of micro-territorial claims. This tendency is evidenced by the inclusion of the Arc route on the site, and the location of new housing nearest the Lower Oldpark. This tendency is also evident in the belief that ‘they’re the planners, and they know’ highlighting a continued deference to technical expertise despite widespread agreement that the location of the road on the plan was a major error of judgment. Moreover, the distinction highlighted by one senior public official between community planning, and north Belfast community planning illustrates further the degree to which the Girdwood Masterplan failed to take account of the spatial realities within a divided city. This story highlights the inherently political nature of urban space in Belfast and the degree to which urban design has the capacity to provoke fears and precipitate conflict.

Disagreements over the design aspects of the Masterplan illustrate how efforts to promote a post-conflict planning agenda for Belfast continue to be politically contested, namely, around the question of whether architectural practices ought to be used to facilitate movement or defend territory. Further examples of the way in which the recursive processes that shape the planning system have the capacity to provoke rather than alleviate conflict, especially with regard to addressing the spatial legacy of the conflict are outlined in the next chapter.

## Conclusions

This chapter examined the relationship between urban planning, conflict, and systemic inequality through the redevelopment of the former Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Army Base in north Belfast. By looking at a range of primary sources, and through interviews with a number of key figures who were involved in discussions around the Girdwood Masterplan this chapter highlighted the degree to which urban planning in Belfast continues to be highly politicised. This chapter showed how efforts to address spatial inequalities in an area experiencing some of the highest levels of deprivation in Northern Ireland were impacted by concerns within the Protestant community about Catholic territorial expansion in north Belfast.

An important legacy of previous design philosophy is that large areas of Belfast, including the Girdwood site, are in effect cut off from the physical, social, and economic mainstream of the city. This in turn has concentrated patterns of socio-economic inequality and left areas like the one surrounding the Girdwood site not only bereft of resources, but also no-go zones, experiencing chronic levels of deprivation. The economics of the Girdwood Masterplan required that private investment, and in particular, new residents, be attracted into this area of the city. Within the Catholic community in the area around the Girdwood site, which is expanding due to natural population growth, there was a much greater desire to reconnect, literally and figuratively with the rest of the city. Within the Protestant community, which feels beleaguered and under threat, and which is experiencing population decline, the desire is the opposite. The design aspects of the Girdwood Masterplan characterized an unhealthy tendency within the planning profession towards reliance upon international precedent, technical expertise, and mainstream planning orthodoxy. The problem for the Masterplan was that in a city of micro-territorial claims, where every inch of ground carries political meaning, international precedent and planning orthodoxy were subject to local territorial imperatives. The location of the arc-route road on the Masterplan for example was a major error of judgment, as was the decision to publish a document which airbrushed surrounding communities and failed to recognize that the



Girdwood site sits on a sectarian fault-line. In the same vein, locating the residential development at the north-west corner of the city, adjacent to the Protestant Lower Oldpark increased fears within that community.

In terms of the overall objective of this thesis, this chapter has highlighted the complex challenges facing efforts to develop a more holistic approach to transitional justice that addresses structural and systemic conflict legacy issues. In particular, this chapter has highlighted the important relationship that exists between planning and architectural practices, social and economic inequalities, and political conflict. This is an important finding given the limited attention that that has been focused on these relationships to date within wider transitional justice scholarship.

## **Chapter 6 The Girdwood Masterplan and the Politics of Territory**

### **Introduction**

This chapter examines further the relationship between urban planning, conflict, and systemic inequality through the redevelopment of the former Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Army Base in north Belfast. In particular, this chapter focuses on the political dimensions of urban planning in the contested territory of north Belfast, highlighting how decisions around housing provision and attempts to address socio-economic inequalities are driven by the imperative to prevent a return to conflict. By considering the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Army Base in the context of other redevelopments that have taken across the city in recent decades, this chapter will show that the gridlock that developed around the Masterplan was a function of wider political developments, notably, the consociational arrangements at the heart of the Belfast Agreement. This in turn highlights the limitations of conventional planning and design orthodoxy in a city in which urban redevelopment has the capacity to precipitate a return to conflict.

### **The Economics of Regeneration Versus the Politics of Territory**

The proposal for mixed use development for the largest part of the site, adjacent to the Protestant community of the Lower Oldpark, proved to be the most controversial and ultimately most divisive aspect of the proposals. In order to understand the importance of the mixed-use development for the overall success of the Plan it is important to consider the important reconfiguration that has taken place within the economic system in Northern Ireland and indeed the rest of the UK over the previous decades.

As outlined in chapter four, beginning in the 1980s an important reconfiguration had taken place within the economic system in the UK so that economic

regeneration came to be characterized by a significantly reduced role for the state, especially with regard to public sector housing provision. As a consequence of this change, urban development became predicated upon attracting private sector investment, a factor which was crucial in shaping the Masterplan for the site. Key to understanding the operations of the economic regeneration of the Girdwood site was a financial appraisal paper (Appendix 1), which was prepared, using the draft Masterplan as the basis for estimations. This appraisal concluded that the gross development costs for the project would be in the order of Stg231 Million (including land costs) with a net realization of Stg266 Million leaving a Stg34 Million surplus with a profit of 15.10%. The financing of the proposals was based on the assumption that private developers would pay for the infrastructure works (road, basement car park and sports pitch) as part of the first phase and that land would not transfer to the developer until works were completed with St Malachy's College and the Mater Hospital paying for their own development. The financial appraisal also assumed that there would be housing in the first phase, which, in effect would pay for the infrastructure development so that construction costs would not be carried over the lifetime of the project. Without the inclusion of private housing in the first phase, the infrastructure cost would be carried for the full implementation period potentially adding up to Stg68Million to the cost plan.

There were several key objectives of the Masterplan. The first, and most important from the point of view of the Plan itself, was to attract private investment from the sale of high-end residential accommodation that would appeal to young families and professionals. In addition to profits generated from the sale of private residential units, the Plan also sought to attract investment through the inclusion of shops, restaurants, cafés, with the redeveloped Gaol complex serving as the economic anchor that would draw people and money into the area.

The increased economic activity brought about by a larger community, with a range of disposable income levels living in the area is not to be underestimated.<sup>63</sup>

The Plan included several measures designed to help address social and economic inequalities including social housing provision and several schemes designed to promote employment equality as well as a community hub. The entire costing of the project however, including the infrastructure works (i.e. a new road, basement car park and sports pitch) was contingent upon profits generated from the private residential development on the site. This approach followed conventional economic regeneration theory and reflected the vertical chain of recursive processes at the heart of any major redevelopment process i.e. an anchor tenant that serves as a flagship for the project, private residential accommodation that provides the financial leverage for the scheme, followed by proposals that aim to address social and economic deprivation. One member of the Advisory Panel, from an economic regeneration background, summarized the recursive processes that lay at the heart of the Masterplan as follows

How to resolve the problem at Crumlin Road/Girdwood was as clear as the nose on your face for anybody who had come from an urban regeneration framework. There is a basic economics to doing regeneration, the public sector puts a certain amount of money in for the infrastructure, then you need private sector anchors, and then, within that context, you can put more social economy or more projects in that will help the local community.<sup>64</sup>

Central to the economics of the Plan therefore was the need for people to be brought into the area who would be living on the site, who would purchase or rent the new residential units, and spend money in the cafes, bars, and

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<sup>63</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007) 64

<sup>64</sup> Interview: Public Official, Belfast City Council, (2011) (2)

restaurants provided, as well as avail of the new facilities in the refurbished Gaol complex

The overall regeneration of the site from a straightforward theoretical regeneration basis is that you need people living on a site like this to give it life... and we would have been totally on board with this...as being a mixed tenure site.<sup>65</sup>

The Plan stated explicitly that 'it is hard to conceive the successful regeneration of a large inner-city urban site without the vitality of people living there'<sup>66</sup> a view shared by public officials and several members of the Advisory Panel

I was very strongly of the view, and the master planners were also of the view of that if you don't put residents on this it's a dead site, so you have to have people living on the site, absolutely.<sup>67</sup>

For some members of the Advisory Panel, there was also a sense that this approach represented a new way forward for this area of the city which had in effect become a 'no-go' zone not only for visitors from outside Northern Ireland, but also for residents of other parts of Belfast. From this perspective, the redevelopment of the site was viewed as a way of beginning to address the socio-economic legacy of the conflict that has left areas like inner city North Belfast bereft of resources and economic activity

If you walk a mile from the front of the City Hall south, you end up in Queen's University and look at what the resources and assets that are there. If you walk a mile north you end up in

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<sup>65</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

<sup>66</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007) 64

<sup>67</sup> Interview: Public Official, Community Relations Council (2011)

Crumlin Road Jail, now look at the assets that are there, and now the contrasts are incredibly stark.<sup>68</sup>

Some of the words in the Adams stuff, they were inspirational...<sup>69</sup>

The economic aspects of the Plan also very much cut with the grain of a buoyant Belfast property market at that time which had led to high demand for private residential accommodation both from owner-occupiers and the private rental market

The idea of very high-end apartments and housing, close to the Gaol, within a ten-minute walking distance to the city centre, in any normal city that would have been snapped up at that time.<sup>70</sup>

The mixed tenure housing model proposed for the site falls within the framework for housing provision favoured by the NIHE that has moved away from large single tenure developments which have come to be regarded as creating barriers to social mobility and concentrating poverty

The old days where you build big housing estates of 300-400 houses, all social housing, are simply gone, and that's not perceived as the way to go...<sup>71</sup>

Although the economics the Plan were predicated upon the sale of private residential units, the proposals did aim to strike a balance between attracting households with higher income levels into the area and addressing the socio-economic inequalities experienced in the area. At the same time, although there was a desire to ensure that the redevelopment of the site went some way towards addressing housing need in local communities there was a strong

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<sup>68</sup> Interview: Public Official, Community Relations Council (2011)

<sup>69</sup> Interview: Public Official, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2011). This reference is to the main author of the Plan, Roy Adams

<sup>70</sup> Interview: Public Official, Belfast City Council (2) (2011)

<sup>71</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

sense that simply extending the boundaries of the working class communities in the Lower Shankill or the New Lodge was not the answer for this part of the city

Simply reproducing the New Lodge is not actually going to benefit the residents of the New Lodge either, we actually have to do something far better than that and the Lower Shankill... There's a real imperative to do something which actually offers some kind of long-term possibility that there will be employment, that there will be resources and assets, and Crumlin Road/Girdwood needs to be also producing some of that and for that to happen.<sup>72</sup>

Although the Masterplan reflected the way in which the economic system within Northern Ireland had moved away from an approach to regeneration that was predicated upon large-scale public investment to a model that reflected a much more limited role for the state, the Plan ultimately required approval from local politicians. The difficulty with this economic model was that it failed to take account of the politics of the city ecosystem and the extent to which demographic imbalances and patterns of housing inequality between the two communities shape redevelopment.

### **Systemic Inequality and a Shared Operating System**

While the Masterplan conceded that there was political disagreement over the provision of housing on the site, failure to appreciate the extent of Unionist objections to mixed development ensured that discussion on redevelopment became gridlocked. For those seeking to reach a compromise on a way forward for the Masterplan, the difficulty with the Girdwood proposals was that there were in fact two very competing visions about how the area ought to be developed, one of which, as explicitly set out in proposals, was predicated upon bringing people onto the site. This approach however was in direct

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<sup>72</sup> Interview: Public Official, Community Relations Council (2011)

contrast to the dominant view within the Unionist community in the area, which was predicated upon restricting access to the site and keeping people out.

Access is, and for the last 30 years has been, a dirty word, not a good word, and then you get this big plan... When you walk in with that plan to the Lower Oldpark, they were looking at the map going, they can get in there, they can get in there, they can get in there...now they can get in here, here and here, and they're building houses here, here, and here. We're for the hills.<sup>73</sup>

In order to appreciate the extent of these differing perspectives on the way forward for the site it is necessary to consider how identity politics and demography are linked to patterns of inequality and conflict in the city. With respect to the Masterplan, the major impediment to achieving agreement was the way in which the demographic imbalance and different patterns of housing need between the two communities skewed the allocation of social housing on the site in favour of the Catholic community. This in turn cemented Unionist opposition to the proposals

It is as base as this, if there's more housing then it becomes Catholic because the waiting list is 95% Catholic, there isn't anywhere near the same proportionate need for housing in Protestant Unionist areas...<sup>74</sup>

In other words, the disproportionate levels of housing inequality experienced by the Catholic community determined that any social housing on the Girdwood site, would, almost by definition, be allocated to members of the Catholic community. The Plan acknowledged that the issue of residential development on the Gaol/Girdwood site was 'extremely contentious' and that the housing issue had been debated by the panel at various community and cross-community meetings as part of a wide and inclusive consultation

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<sup>73</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

<sup>74</sup> Interview: Republican Politician (2011)



process.<sup>75</sup> A key concern of the Unionist community was that the site would cease to be 'neutral' if housing were to be included in the proposals, while a major concern for Nationalists was that the site had to be used to help address the significant housing inequalities experienced by the Catholic community.

There is very little land available in Catholic areas to build new housing, although we are forever looking for land...that's one of the reasons why Girdwood is seen, on the Catholic side, as an opportunity to tackle the high levels of housing need within that community, a windfall site if you want to call it that.<sup>76</sup>

Viewed through the prism of the Girdwood Masterplan, efforts to address housing inequalities between the two communities were viewed as a zero-sum game with the Catholic community pushing for housing on the site in order to address patterns of inequality in that community. At the same time, concerns within the Unionist community about Catholic expansion into traditional Protestant territory meant that the issue of housing became in fact a deal-breaker for securing their agreement to redevelop the site. In order to try and break the logjam around the housing issue the Masterplan had recommended that a priority for the way ahead ought to be further discussions about how housing might be delivered in a way that addressed both Unionist and Nationalist concerns. In other words, the Plan sought to find a framework that would allow for some housing to address the housing inequalities experienced by the Catholic community, but which would also alleviate concerns within the Protestant community that the site would be part of Catholic expansion .area.

In order to achieve this the Masterplan outlined details of an innovative new public housing development in Northern Ireland, Carran Crescent, located outside the town of Enniskillen in County Fermanagh, which had been developed and completed under the principles of 'the Shared Future'

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<sup>75</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007) 64

<sup>76</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

community relations strategy. Within the Carran Crescent development project properties had been allocated to applicants on the Common Waiting List in accordance with the rules of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, i.e. on the basis of housing need with a pre-condition that community balance should not exceed 70% from either of the two main community groupings in Northern Ireland. A second pre-condition of the scheme was that the majority of tenants should agree to the development of a 'Neighbourhood Charter'.

The Carran Crescent development, by virtue of the fact that the housing waiting list in the area was balanced between Catholics and Protestants, was able to ensure that the allocation of housing was balanced between the two main communities and that the 70% threshold for either community was not exceeded. While acknowledging that the case study site in Co. Fermanagh was very different from the one in North Belfast and that the numbers of houses involved there were relatively small, the Masterplan proposed that this new 'Shared Future' approach to housing development demonstrated that it was possible to manage the allocation of housing to create a mixed (i.e. cross-community) social housing development and that this could be of relevance for determining how housing might be delivered in the future in North Belfast. The Carran Crescent example was an illustration of the way in which thinking around the need to address housing inequalities were linked to efforts to maintain good relations between the two communities, first, by ensuring balance in terms of allocation, and second, by the use of the Neighbourhood Charter.

### **Systemic Inequalities, Shared Operating Systems, and the Politics of Housing**

The Masterplan for the Crumlin Road/Girdwood site in North Belfast posed the question as to whether similar principles might be usefully deployed in the Girdwood development.<sup>77</sup> In effect, the Girdwood Plan was seeking to establish whether the 'Shared Future' housing model at Carran Crescent could

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<sup>77</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007) 65

provide a framework that would address both Unionist concerns that the site ought to remain 'neutral' and Nationalist concerns about the need to address the chronic housing inequalities in their area. In particular, the inclusion of a Neighbourhood Charter aimed to ensure that territory could not be claimed by one particular community, thereby going some way to preserving the neutrality of site. In several respects, citing the Carran Crescent development as a possible way forward was somewhat disingenuous given the very different demographics in North Belfast. In the Enniskillen development, the waiting list for allocation of social housing was fairly evenly balanced between the two communities, thereby enabling a balance of Protestant and Catholic tenants on the new site.

Within north Belfast however, the demographic imbalance between the two communities and the disproportionate levels of housing inequality among the Catholic community ensured that such an approach would be impossible. By law, the Housing Executive is required to allocate housing from the Common Waiting List, on the basis of an objective points system and therefore any efforts to manipulate the housing waiting list in order to choose residents on the basis of their community background, regardless of motive, would be deemed direct discrimination.<sup>78</sup> This principle prohibited any efforts to introduce quotas or limits that would restrict the proportion of Catholics who would be permitted to live on the site after redevelopment.

Perhaps the biggest problem in north Belfast was not the legal impediment to introducing quotas, given that the law could be changed, but rather, the demographic imbalance that meant housing need was skewed almost exclusively in favour of the Catholic community. This is an important point because claims about the need for a 'Shared Future' model of housing, similar to the Carran Crescent development have a long pedigree in Northern Ireland,

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<sup>78</sup> The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is required by Article 22 of the Housing (NI) Order 1981 to allocate dwellings in accordance with a scheme approved by the Department of Social Development for Northern Ireland

going back several decades.<sup>79</sup> The difficulty with most contributions to this debate however is that the challenge is often posited from the perspective of legal impediments in the form of equality laws (i.e. located within the legal system) and the need for effective policing to address the issue of intimidation, while failing to explain how such an approach would address the demographic dimensions to the problem.<sup>80</sup> Public officials, politicians, and those closest to the ground are however acutely aware of the fact that it was demographic challenges that presented the main challenge to shared future type social housing developments

We're interested in promoting the concept of Shared Future, but the question is how do you do it in a place like Girdwood? If you stick a couple of hundred houses into the Girdwood site, and a lot of them are social housing, the need isn't there on the Unionist side, especially if you're also trying to regenerate these areas, the people that would get housing in here, the need, as measured through the waiting list would be predominantly Catholic, so it's very difficult in a one-off scheme, to have that sharing.<sup>81</sup>

Certainly, there was little doubt among elected representatives and other stakeholders about the difficulties of securing agreement on the issue of residential development for the site given the history around this issue and the extent to which debates around housing inequality have become polarised

Some of these things nearly become controversial, almost by stealth, but, housing has always been a huge difficulty in North Belfast.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *A Citizen's Inquiry: The Opsahl Report on Northern Ireland* (1993)

<sup>80</sup> Boyle and Hadden argue for example that residential integration 'is not impossible with the combined support of tenants, the police and other agencies'. No mention is made how the problem is shaped by demographic imbalances and how these imbalances can be surmounted. K Boyle and T Hadden, *Northern Ireland: The Choice* (Penguin 1994) 177

<sup>81</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

<sup>82</sup> Interview: Republican Politician (2011)

The big thing of course, which is the usual hand grenade in North Belfast, is houses.<sup>83</sup>

They can't agree about the residential use...that's right to the stark reality of North Belfast.<sup>84</sup>

Key to understanding the strength of feelings around this issue is the demographic imbalance and differential levels of housing inequality alluded to in the Dunlop Report, the North Belfast Housing Strategy, and elsewhere. As outlined in chapters three and four, these imbalances have their origins in the planning practices of the 1960s, the population movements that occurred in Belfast during 1969-73, and the defensive planning practices of the 1970s and 1980s. The past five decades therefore have been characterized by a decline in the Protestant population in north Belfast and a corresponding growth in the Catholic population. This is one reason why efforts to address housing inequalities within the Catholic community have come to be viewed by Unionists as something of a Trojan Horse to drive Protestants from the city, which also impacted on the way the proposals were viewed

If you do not have a balanced demography, then by definition, the regeneration will favour the majority constituency in that area ...So, inevitably, when the land becomes available, and you have a nationalist community, in dire need of housing, and relatively few Unionists or Loyalists, in dire need of housing, inevitably, the availability of a significant piece of land becomes, and I think it was Alban Magennis used the phrase, a 'windfall site' for housing. That was a most unfortunate term. Even if it was true it was still a very unfortunate term because what that meant, was, that the leaders of the nationalist community were claiming territory for themselves.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

<sup>84</sup> Interview: Public Official/Planner (2011)

<sup>85</sup> Interview: Protestant Clergyman (2011)

It is also clear that the politicization of territory in areas like north Belfast meant that redevelopment proposals invariably became embroiled in other contested issues such as that of parading. Given that the Girdwood site sits on the route of the annual Protestant 'Tour of the North' Parade, as well as parades commemorating the anniversaries of the Battle of the Boyne on July 12<sup>th</sup>, and the Battle of the Somme on July 1<sup>st</sup>, the question of whether new housing on the site would be allocated to Catholics assumed even greater significance from the perspective of those parading

In the late 1990s, prior to Masterplan, we were brought in to do a development brief for Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood, and they'd been talking about it before that... and basically everybody knew at that stage that if you got new land like Girdwood for housing it was essentially going to be Catholic housing. From the Protestant point of view, that is from the residents of lower Clifton Park Avenue and Lower Crumlin Road, this was Catholic housing coming more and more in their direction and creating a new flashpoint... and they weren't happy with the prospect even that housing would come onto the front of the Crumlin Road, opposite the courthouse, because they felt that would mean you'd suddenly have new residents who'd be objecting to their tradition when they were marching down the Crumlin Road, the usual thing.<sup>86</sup>

Disagreements over residential development on the Girdwood site were given added significance by growing housing need within the Catholic community and several decades of housing provision based upon the retention of historical boundaries. As outlined in the previous chapters, since the early 1960s, Unionist politicians had repeatedly acted upon concerns about the need to limit Catholic housing provision in order to protect the identity of

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<sup>86</sup> Interview: Academic/Urban Planning (1) (2011)

traditional Protestant communities. In this context, disputes about the need for housing on the Girdwood site was part of a recurrent theme regarding redevelopment in Belfast

It's perfectly reasonable for citizens looking for some kind of accessible housing...to be asking public authorities what that's going to look like and where it's going to be...But in not doing so, what you do is turn every single inch of land in North Belfast into the same row, every single one.<sup>87</sup>

As ever in Belfast, in addition to the issue of parading, micro-territorial claims impinge on land use planning in another important respect centered around the relationship between houses and votes

Aside from all the stuff about not letting Catholics get houses and not letting them move in, it's not just as simple as bigotry, or we don't like Catholics, or we're not doing that... because if you were to ... allow nature to take its course, demolish all the walls, build houses... then you would reach the amazing position where there would be no Unionist MPs in Belfast.<sup>88</sup>

In fact, North Belfast parliamentary constituency has in recent years been one in which Sinn Féin have sought to replace the then sitting Member of Parliament, Nigel Dodds of the DUP, which in turn exacerbated tensions around new housing developments<sup>89</sup>

You've got Gerry Kelly there from Sinn Fein who obviously is very keen to take the seat and you've got Nigel Dodds holding on, and

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<sup>87</sup> Interview: Public Official, Community Relations Council (2011)

<sup>88</sup> Interview: Former Nationalist Politician (2011)

<sup>89</sup> Nigel Dodds eventually lost his Westminster seat to John Finucane of Sinn Fein in the general election of December 2019

quite frankly housing estates here there or anywhere is the key thing that will change those demographics...<sup>90</sup>

In addition to representation of the North Belfast parliamentary constituency, political control Belfast City Council was also a factor in shaping the discussions

Belfast Council is very evenly split between nationalists and unionists, with the balance of power held by the Alliance Party at the minute...But that part of the North Belfast constituency within the Belfast City Council area would be very finely balanced, so obviously...if the population of that particular part of Belfast were to grow, it could in theory swing not only that seat, but it could swing control of the City Council as well.<sup>91</sup>

Sinn Fein had sought to allay these fears, arguing that since regeneration tends to decrease rather than increase populations, the regeneration of areas like the New Lodge would actually benefit the Unionist community – in effect making Gerry Kelly's job of winning the seat more difficult.<sup>92</sup>

The unionists had this big thing about votes, and we tried to argue many, many times, by saying, look, the New Lodge...has to be regenerated, and you lose at least a third, sometimes up to two thirds of the population, so you're not talking about more votes coming in, you're not talking about more people coming in, you're talking about being able to expand in modern housing terms, so that people can have a bit of a garden and all of that, but, it never worked....<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (1) (2011)

<sup>91</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

<sup>92</sup> Interview: Republican Politician (2011)

<sup>93</sup> Interview: Republican Politician (2011)



One senior civil servant within the OFMDFM adopted a slightly more nuanced opinion, but one which would be inclined to lend more support to the Sinn Féin view by stating that given the pressures on housing within the Catholic community, any additional social housing would go to existing tenants in the area, many of whom were living with relatives.<sup>94</sup> Among Nationalists and Republicans, much weight in fact was given to the proposed boundary changes for the North Belfast parliamentary constituency that would in effect make the position of the Unionist MP more secure by moving the overwhelmingly Protestant Shankill area into the North Belfast parliamentary constituency and reducing the number of parliamentary constituencies in Belfast from four to three.<sup>95</sup>

To be a bit basic about this, the boundary changes have come in, and I think Nigel Dodds feels a bit more secure...because I would have been his main competition, in terms of the MP job, and I think he'll feel more secure in the boundary changes because they've changed it to three constituencies.<sup>96</sup>

Crucially however, the DUP, while acknowledging the role of electoral outcomes in terms of heightening tensions were quite dismissive of the likely impact of boundary changes on making an agreement on housing more tenable 'no, but I can see why somebody would think that'.<sup>97</sup>

Opposition to Catholic housing by Unionist politicians fearful that they might lose their electoral majority has been a perennial problem in Belfast where political conflict is shaped by demography and where populations 'are voters as well as occupiers of land'.<sup>98</sup> As the Protestant population of the city continues to decline and the Catholic population continues to expand, thereby

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<sup>94</sup> Interview: Public Official, OFMDFM (2011)

<sup>95</sup> Nigel Dodds lost his seat to John Finucane of Sinn Féin in the 2019 General Election

<sup>96</sup> Interview: Republican Politician (2011)

<sup>97</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

<sup>98</sup> O McEldowney, J Anderson, and I Shuttleworth, 'Sectarian demography: Dubious discourses of ethno-national conflict', in K Hayward and C O'Donnell (eds) *Political Discourse and Conflict Resolution: Debating Peace in Northern Ireland* (Routledge 2011) 160

increasing patterns of housing inequality, these issues continue to retain significance. At the same time it would be a mistake to conclude that concerns about electoral majorities are the only factors in explaining the nature of territorial claims. Although voting patterns and electoral boundaries serve as a catalyst for heightening tensions around an already toxic issue, other more fundamental 'micro-territorial claims' ensure that even when electoral demographics were not relevant, the territorial imperative remains strong. This is evidenced by the fact that the longest waiting lists for social housing within Belfast are located in the west of the city, a Sinn Fein electoral stronghold. However the fact that Unionist politicians have long since given up hope of winning an election in west Belfast has not in any way diminished the strength of feeling within the Protestant community about the need for adherence to traditional territorial boundaries in that area of the city.<sup>99</sup> This would lend credence to Stewart's claim that conflict in Northern Ireland is very much concerned with the relationship of people to land giving rise to 'a territorial imperative that is extremely insistent'.<sup>100</sup>

It is also important to note that intra-community party-political tensions also played a role in heightening tensions around the proposed development Plan, a factor that was especially evident within the Catholic community as the SDLP and Sinn Fein sought for political supremacy

The SDLP were fighting every street with Sinn Fein in North Belfast, so the decisions were being taken on voting, they weren't being taken on 'What is good for this site?' Margaret Ritchie was never going to push that agenda because she had all her SDLP activists in North Belfast saying, 'we need the SDLP not Sinn Fein delivering this, and if you start saying we're not going to have social housing on the site we'll get this on the doorsteps'.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2) (2018). See also studies that have focused for example on the efforts that have gone into maintaining the small Protestant enclave of Suffolk in the west of the city

<sup>100</sup> A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (Blackstaff 1977) 182

<sup>101</sup> Interview: Public Official, Belfast City Council (2) (2011)

Developments within the political system served to increase tensions with the Unionist community when the SDLP made a number of announcements about the future of the site. Speaking at the SDLP annual conference in February 2010, Minister for Social Development Margaret Ritchie announced that 200 new social housing units were to be built on the site.<sup>102</sup>

I was bringing some people around the Gaol on Saturday morning and they told me that they'd just heard on the news, that Margaret was down at the party conference and had announced that there was going to be social housing on the Girdwood site...That then, I think, moved people away from 'is there something here we can negotiate with', to 'why even bother. You're going to do this, we're not going to do it'...<sup>103</sup>

The comments above illustrate further the extent to which the political system in Northern Ireland generally, and in north Belfast in particular, is predicated upon the territorial imperative. This perpetuates the hypersensitivity to turf that is manifest in conflicting claims around protecting electoral majorities and concerns about parading. Again, this highlights the way in which the spatial legacy of the conflict is characterized by contested urban space, and how territory has shaped, and indeed shaped by, political conflict. Moreover, the comments above highlight the difficulties associated with addressing the spatial legacy of the conflict, in particular systemic and structural patterns of inequality in a context in which 'housing is a hand grenade' and the political imperative is to prevent a return to violence.

Tensions that arise around the relationship between demographic imbalances and housing provision, which are linked to potential opposition to Protestant marches or the loss of electoral majorities further illustrates Jacobs' point about

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[http://www.sdlp.ie/newsroom/press-releases/2010/6449-minister\\_ritchie\\_announces\\_funding\\_for\\_girdwood\\_barracks/](http://www.sdlp.ie/newsroom/press-releases/2010/6449-minister_ritchie_announces_funding_for_girdwood_barracks/)

<sup>103</sup> Interview: Public Official, OFMDFM (2011)

the need to consider the city ecosystem in the context of processes that are beginning and ending, rather than as a snapshot. This is exemplified by the way in which the Girdwood Masterplan was seen through its potential impact on future events, especially ones that confirmed the narrative in the Protestant community about the loss of territory. Finally, the comments above also illustrate the complex challenges associated with efforts to address the spatial legacy of the conflict in a context in which the economic, political, and planning systems have competing and sometimes mutually exclusive objectives. This is especially evident by the way in which the economic system required that people be brought onto the site in order to make it financially viable while the political system was characterized by an imperative within the Protestant community to keep people out and retain territorial boundaries.

### **The Politics of Inequality**

A year after the publication of the original Masterplan, in March 2011, by which time Margaret Ritchie had been replaced as Minister for Social Development by her party colleague, Alex Atwood, another similar announcement was made, this time indicating that 220 new houses would be provided on the site.<sup>104</sup> In neither case did any house construction actually take place – both announcements required cross-party support by virtue of the fact that responsibility for redeveloping the site was shared between DSD and OFMDFM.

Before the matter could proceed any further Alex Attwood of the SDLP was replaced as Minister for Social Development by Nelson McCausland of the DUP and one of his first actions as Minister was to cancel all plans for new social housing on the site and announce a review of all housing provision in the area.<sup>105</sup> The announcements from the two SDLP Minister's proved to be highly controversial, not least given the obvious lack of political agreement that

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[http://www.sdlp.ie/newsroom/press-releases/2011/8992-maginness\\_welcomes\\_housing\\_boost\\_for\\_north\\_belfast/](http://www.sdlp.ie/newsroom/press-releases/2011/8992-maginness_welcomes_housing_boost_for_north_belfast/)

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[http://www.sdlp.ie/newsroom/press-releases/2011/9615-maginness\\_disturbed\\_by\\_ministers\\_girdwood\\_decision/](http://www.sdlp.ie/newsroom/press-releases/2011/9615-maginness_disturbed_by_ministers_girdwood_decision/)

was essential in order for the housing to go ahead in the first place. Controversy over the announcements within the Unionist community was matched by skepticism on the part of the senior officials about the wisdom of the announcements

Margaret Ritchie ...she made the decision, oh, I'm going to put houses on this...and then instructed the housing people in DSD to start working on proposals about how you could get housing on it. But even though they were instructed to do that, it's like putting together a plan for getting gold out of seawater.<sup>106</sup>

Certainly, outside of the SDLP there was a strong sense that these meaningless statements had served only to increase tensions around an already toxic issue

The SDLP, played an extremely foolish game with houses on that site, they promised twice that there was going to be 200 houses built, and they were ghost houses, they didn't exist, they were never ever going to happen in the way that they had proposed or described. And that has not helped, because one, it's basically got the Unionist community's backs up, and made a promise to communities in housing need, in nationalist areas, that wasn't going to be kept.<sup>107</sup>

There is little doubt that within the Unionist community, announcements from SDLP Ministers that social housing was to proceed caused significant difficulties, not least given the timing of the announcements

The 200 houses were to be built in this financial year and they didn't even have planning permission... the Minister didn't have the legal authority to say, I'm going to build houses on these

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<sup>106</sup> Interview: Public Official, OFMDFM (2011)

<sup>107</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

sites, but two Ministers in a row did it, and did it, two and a half months before an election, both times... So those are the sort of things that have been going on all around it and messing it all about.<sup>108</sup>

Concerns and doubts about the wisdom of the announcements also extended to Sinn Fein

What the SDLP did ... they just made announcements, and that's what made the situation worse, because their announcements meant nothing...because the Unionists of course came straight out and said, well, you can make all the announcements that you want, but it has to go to the Executive and it isn't getting through...so it really was just a propaganda act, and a propaganda act which of course wound the situation up worse...<sup>109</sup>

The difficulty was that in a context in which housing was already considered 'a hand grenade' any little hope that existed of political compromise or agreement on the provision of residential accommodation on the site quickly evaporated as the prospect of short-term electoral gain trumped incentives for compromise. This stalemate illustrates how the political system continues to impact upon the planning system and the consequences that this has for addressing the spatial legacy of the conflict, in particular, the disproportionate levels of housing need in the Catholic community in north Belfast.

### **Consociations, Consensus, and The Politics of Peace**

As outlined previously, the economic model that underpinned the Girdwood Masterplan reflected a recursive approach to urban regeneration predicated upon the public sector initially clearing the development site in order to attract inward investors, a process known as 'pump-priming', followed by the securing

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<sup>108</sup> Interview: DUP Politician Political Advisor (2) (2011)

<sup>109</sup> Interview: Republican Politician (2011)

of an anchor tenant, and the subsequent drawing in of other private investors with some additional public sector investment. This approach lay at the heart of other similar developments across the city over the past several decades, notably, the Castle Court and Laganside Developments in the city centre in the 1980s, and the Gasworks redevelopment in south Belfast in the 1990s. The recursive nature of this economic development model is further illustrated by the fact that several of the key figures who had been involved in these earlier projects were directly or indirectly involved with taking forward the Girdwood Masterplan. For example, Roy Adams, who had played a central role in the Castlecourt development, was the main figure behind drawing up the Girdwood Masterplan, while Kyle Alexander, the former Chief Executive of Laganside Development Corporation, was a member of the Girdwood Advisory Panel. Again, this illustrates the way in which the recursive operations of the economic system have shaped regeneration in the city over several decades, with the same model for economic regeneration in some cases implemented by the same group of individuals. In effect this highlights Jacobs' belief regarding the need to consider the city ecosystem in the context of processes of beginning and processes of ending, rather than through snapshot observations – something that the authors of the Masterplan singularly failed to do.

An important difference between the Girdwood Masterplan and the earlier developments at Castlecourt, Laganside and the Gasworks was that there had been a significant reconfiguration within the political system which ultimately led to the collapse of the planned redevelopment for the site. As Northern Ireland moved through a wider process of transition from conflict, the political system moved from one of direct rule from Westminster, to power-sharing by local political parties. At the heart of these political arrangements is the consociational power-sharing mechanism enshrined in the Northern Ireland Act 1998.<sup>110</sup> One of the core elements that defines consociations as distinct constitutional arrangements is parity through cross-community power-sharing

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<sup>110</sup> Northern Ireland Act 1998, s.16

– that is, arrangements that encourage or oblige communities to make public policy and law *jointly*, through executive, legislative, judicial, policing and bureaucratic institutions that ensure that the relevant groups are represented adequately in such institutions.<sup>111</sup> One of the foremost scholars in this field has pointed out that the Agreement of 1998 was

an exemplary constitutional design for an ethno-nationally divided territory over which there were rival claims to its sovereignty, ethnically polarized party and paramilitary blocs, and no reasonable prospects of peaceful integration within one civic nationalist identity. Internally, it was a consociational settlement. Externally, it established confederal relationships, and prefigured imaginative federalist relationships and a novel model of double protection: of a minority that might become a majority, and a majority that might become a minority.<sup>112</sup>

The empirical evidence outlined above illustrates that there is an important point to note about the way in which the political system, through consociational governance has shaped the redevelopment of the Girdwood site and it is this. The original Masterplan, as outlined in chapter five, was drawn up under direct rule from Westminster, by David Hanson MP. Oversight of the Masterplan, again as outlined in chapter six, was subsequently taken over by Margaret Ritchie, and then Alex Attwood of the SDLP, and then by a succession of Ministers operating a form of de facto Direct Rule before going back to the current devolved administration. In effect, responsibility for the site over the past two decades has oscillated between direct rule and devolved administrations, but at all times, the common theme has been the need to secure the agreement of the two communities on the ground. In political terms, this has meant Sinn Fein and the DUP. The possible exception to this has

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<sup>111</sup> C McCrudden and B O’Leary, *Courts and Consociations: Human Rights versus Power-Sharing* (OUP 2013) 6

<sup>112</sup> B O’Leary, (2001) ‘Comparative Political Science and the British-Irish Agreement’, in J McGarry (ed) *Northern Ireland and the Divided World: Post-Agreement Northern Ireland in Comparative Perspective* (OUP 2001) 53



been the period during which the SDLP held the DSD ministerial portfolio and both Margaret Ritchie and Alex Attwood announced large numbers of social housing for the site which lacked cross-community support. The SDLP has also expressed opposition publicly to the Conceptual Framework for the site. The political reality however has been that the only redevelopment that actually took place on the site was that which was able to secure cross-community support. Moreover, there is little doubt that both Margaret Ritchie and Alex Attwood were well aware that their proposals would be vetoed by the representatives of the DUP in the OFMDFM. The announcements for social housing on the site from SDLP Ministers were therefore more about political posturing than any objective reality that the site could be developed in a way that did not bring the Unionist community on board.<sup>113</sup>

In this respect the Girdwood redevelopment illustrates the difference between de jure and de facto consociational governance. In other words, even when devolved government has been suspended, the political imperative has been to secure cross-community agreement on a way forward for the site. Moreover, even when a devolved minister unilaterally announces redevelopment proposals, these are circumscribed by political arrangements which require cross-community approval. The cross-community consociational arrangements at the heart of the Belfast Agreement, given legal effect by the Northern Ireland Act, have been subject to a significant degree of criticism, not least because these arrangements, it has been argued, entrench sectarianism and group divisions.<sup>114</sup> The evidence from this case study suggests in fact that the opposite in fact is the case, namely, that the consociational arrangements evident in the Northern Ireland Act merely give de jure and legal recognition to the de facto political reality of a divided community. The single theme emanating from the empirical work carried out on this case study is that political reality dictates that redevelopment within the

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<sup>113</sup> The SDLP are by no means the only party to engage in this tactic, which has become known in local political parlance as a Minister doing a 'solo run'

<sup>114</sup> R Wilson, 'From consociationalism to interculturalism' in R Taylor (ed.) *Consociational Theory: McGarry and O'Leary and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Routledge 2009)

contested territory of north Belfast can only take place with cross-community agreement. This is further evidenced by the way in which Belfast City Council, which is not subject to formal consociational governance arrangements, and which now has responsibility for planning in this area of the city, also operates on the basis that redevelopment of north Belfast takes place subject to cross-community consensus. In other words, in so far as the urban reality of Belfast is concerned, the political system is characterised by formal sharing of power, whether the law requires it or not.

In fact, the legal system gave formal recognition to the need for cross-community political arrangements in the Northern Ireland Act of 1998, notwithstanding that the political system has operated on the basis of cross-community agreement independently, and for much longer. For instance, most interviewees mentioned previous cross-party discussions about the need to regenerate north Belfast which pre-dated the Girdwood Masterplan, and the Agreement. Moreover, the primary driver for cross-community consensus within the political system is the need to focus on building and maintaining relationships between the two communities in order to prevent a return to violence. The way in which consociational politics has shaped the Girdwood site reflects Ignatieff's model of horizontal governance and a shared operating system through political coalition building for cities that are ethnically diverse.<sup>115</sup>

Another important lesson from this case study is the nature of the spatial compromises that are necessary in order to maintain relationships between the two communities and prevent a return to conflict. The evidence of this case study shows that the primary focus of stakeholders on the ground in north Belfast was to ensure any redevelopment of the Girdwood site was subject to cross-community consensus in order to prevent a return to violence. This need led to a rejection of the original Girdwood Masterplan. This failure led to the

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<sup>115</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 67

development of another model for regenerating the area that allayed fears within the Protestant community of a Catholic takeover and sought to address patterns of dereliction in the Lower Oldpark. In effect, the new political arrangements at the heart of the Agreement ensured that the economic model which had been utilized in the earlier redevelopments of the 1980s and 1990s came unstuck.

In order to understand how this reconfiguration impacted on the redevelopment proposals it is necessary to consider again the extent to which the Girdwood Masterplan was shaped by the politics of the wider peace process. In several respects the Girdwood Masterplan can be seen to epitomise the spatial legacy of the conflict. The debate around the future of the site began when the British Army vacated the Girdwood Barracks thereby providing the opportunity for an alternative, post-conflict vision for this area of the city. An important theme of the debate around the development of the Girdwood site however is the way in which agreement on a way forward for the site became embroiled in identity politics, especially with regard to the strength of feeling within the Unionist community opposing residential accommodation on the site. In particular, those members of the Advisory Panel who had played a role in previous regeneration efforts in the city expressed frustration at the way in which local politicians failed to recognise the economic opportunities that were presented by the Plan. Several interviewees contrasted the post-conflict politics of redevelopment, evidenced by the disagreements around the Girdwood site, with the political arrangements that prevailed during the 1980s and 1990s when Richard Needham, Environment Minister in the Conservative Government under Margaret Thatcher, played a significant role in the redevelopment of the city. Needham had given political approval for the development at Castle Court and Laganside in the 1990s in the face of much opposition. Several of those interviewed contrasted the Needham approach with the way in which local politicians failed to agree a way forward. For one interviewee, who played a key role in drawing up the Girdwood Plan, Needham was crucial in providing the political clout that ensured developments such as Laganside went ahead,

If there had not been the equivalent of Richard Needham there, somebody with the power and the balls to take the decision, I'm not sure what would have happened.<sup>116</sup>

Failure to secure political agreement on the Plan certainly led some members of the Advisory Panel to lament the absence of the Direct Rule approach that 'got things done'

Richard Needham made Castle Court happen, and we didn't have a Richard Needham...if you'd had a Minister who was prepared to say 'I don't care, we're going forward, and you can fight to the cows come home, we're making this happen', but you didn't have that.<sup>117</sup>

Others adopted a more nuanced approach, recognising the limitations of the Direct Rule model of governance while also conceding the advantages of a single entity with a clear remit and a single Minister with political clout to take difficult decisions

You had a focus behind Castle Court, you had a certain set of people who were responsible who went ahead and did the thing, then they moved on the river and set up Laganside, they set up a corporation for it, and the corporation had a remit that said within that area you're given a fair leeway to kind of do something and co-ordinate it.... Now, there are democratic deficits to all of that, there is an issue about how accountable these people are and how can you get wider involvements and so on but nevertheless the virtue is that it has a clear remit, that it has a clear budget line to do something.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Interview: Planner/Property Developer (2011)

<sup>117</sup> Interview: Public Official, Belfast City Council (2) (2011)

<sup>118</sup> Interview: Academic/Urban Planning (1) (2011)

At the same time, it is important to recognise the limitations inherent with this 'democratic deficit', especially in the context of the politics of Belfast. In the early 1990s, similar disagreements around the issue of housing arose with respect to the development of the Gasworks site in south Belfast, which lay between the Catholic Lower Ormeau/Markets area and the Protestant Donegall Pass. As with Girdwood, due to the disproportionate levels of housing need and patterns of housing inequality in the area, residential development on the Gasworks site would have resulted in any social housing being allocated to members of the Catholic community which led to concerns about a Catholic encroachment onto Protestant territory in south Belfast. According to one of the officials with responsibility for the Gasworks development site at the time

That was going to be a big sticking point, and the decision was made not to have a residential development on the site...that was done because at that stage the site was owned by the Council and the Council was dominated by Unionists so in a sense they made the decision, we'll develop the Gasworks without any residential development. I can remember one well known Unionist councillor in the first development brief I wrote for the Gasworks, we'd made some reference to residential, he swore in no uncertain terms there'd be no reference to residential. It was a political decision and it was the fact that one political grouping was in power and was able to make that call.<sup>119</sup>

The Gasworks example illustrates how planning decisions which impacted upon efforts to address patterns of housing inequality were politicized and undermined by concerns to halt expansion of the Catholic community, highlighting also the limitations of the reforms of the early 1970s which sought to introduce a technocratic and neutral ethos into the planning system. The

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<sup>119</sup> Interview: Planner/Public Official (2011)

same official concedes that the power sharing arrangements in place by the late 1990s, changed the dynamic fundamentally with regard to decisions about urban redevelopment in the city

With Girdwood, politically things had changed, if Girdwood/Crumlin Road had been in the 1990s, with a Unionist dominated Council, they would have simply said, no, there won't be any residential here, let's get ahead and develop it...<sup>120</sup>

It is clear therefore that concerns about the tendency of consociational politics to lead to 'gridlock' need to be balanced against that which had gone previously, namely, a command-and-control form of Direct Rule from Westminster and Unionist controlled Councils that in some cases secretly and unilaterally amended development plans to further their own political ends. The Gasworks development, unlike Girdwood, went ahead with some degree of success. The absence of disagreement about 'Catholic housing' on the Gasworks however was not an indication of consensus, or lack of housing need, but rather was a function of the fact that residential provision was quietly removed from the original plans due to the dominance of Unionists in Belfast City Council. The example of the Gasworks in south Belfast needs also to be considered alongside attempts by Unionist politicians to undermine the Poleglass developments in the 1970s which further illustrates the way in which politicians manipulated planning policies to further political objectives, i.e. limit and contain the growth of the Catholic community.

The gridlock around the issue of housing on the Girdwood site reflected the changed political reality that saw elected representatives of the Catholic community involved in political decision making at a high level for the first time. In a context in which political identity, population imbalances, and patterns of inequality are built into the fabric of the local landscape, and where parading and election outcomes are all contingent on where residential development

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<sup>120</sup> Interview: Planner/Public Official (2011)

may, or may not be located, deliberations on the Girdwood Masterplan can appear to be a case of the irresistible force encountering the immovable object

The public sector as such lacked leadership because once you allow a lot of vested interests from the political and community side to sit round the table and to be part of the process then you're never going to get to agreement, they became the Palestinian/Israeli peace talks, over an urban regeneration site...."<sup>121</sup>

It is also clear however that in a post-conflict context, local politicians increasingly have control over shaping the urban landscape as political negotiation replaces urban conflict

I suppose the Girdwood project is an example where it's the local politics has been key in terms of what has been done, or not done on the site, but in some ways that's not unique, because I think more and more in NI politics comes into play and whether or not there is going to be residential uses on the site has been the key issue.<sup>122</sup>

Although members of the local Catholic community, and their representatives, had some concerns about the Masterplan, it is clear that among the political leadership of the Catholic community there was a desire to reach agreement and embrace what was viewed as an unprecedented opportunity to regenerate this area of the city. With regard to the presence of housing on the site, representatives of the Catholic community, in particular Gerry Kelly of Sinn Fein, indicated a willingness to compromise both with regard to the number and location of housing on the site

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<sup>121</sup> Interview: Public Official, Belfast City Council, (2011)

<sup>122</sup> Interview: Planner/Public Official (2011)

...the Catholic community have needs...in terms of housing...[but] 'I'm not talking about housing all over the site...it doesn't profit us to have another community fearful...it doesn't profit us to have another interface where Catholic homes could be attacked'.<sup>123</sup>

Within the Protestant community, and especially among the political leadership of Unionism, the inclusion of housing within the Plan *per se* was viewed as a deal-breaker. In a context in which the post-conflict political arrangements ensured that the Masterplan would only proceed with the support of both Unionist and Nationalist politicians, this meant that by the time the proposals were issued for consultation they were already in effect, dead in the water. For one member of Advisory Panel, who played a key role in drawing up the Masterplan, there is little doubt as to why the Plan ultimately failed

Where things went wrong, in my opinion, was the intransigence of the DUP.... I was seeking to get agreement on the seven principles, let's not get into the detail, let's just agree on the principles...but I could not get them to agree the wording on housing. And I went to see Nelson McCausland and Diane Dodds separately, from the others, on several occasions, trying to get the wording of the clause, or the principle changed to a point where they would agree to it, but they never would. And at the end, they said, we can't agree to any of this, and I said, if you agree to this vision statement which talks about people living in the place, how can you live in a place where there's no housing.<sup>124</sup>

The same interviewee argued that DUP rejection of the proposals arose from a mixture of concern about protecting votes and how the Plan was perceived by their constituents on the ground

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<sup>123</sup> Interview: Public Official, OFMDFM (2011)

<sup>124</sup> Interview: Planner/Property Developer (2011)



I am certain that there was a votes issue in North Belfast, which was concerning them. Whereas most of the housing, whatever I said, would end up going to Catholic people, and secondly, I don't think they could sell it to the nearby Protestant wards which they were representing.<sup>125</sup>

The view that it was a combination of factors concerning the Unionist community rather than one single issue which led to rejection of the Plan was also shared by the senior public servant with responsibility for taking forward the regeneration of the site

To be honest with you, I thought it was all those other factors which prevented us from getting to what was the real issue, which is how do we develop this site, that meets [the] needs of both communities.<sup>126</sup>

In a city in which territory and identity are inextricably linked, and where the reflex action of Unionist leaders for the past two hundred years has been to halt the growth of the Catholic community across the city, there is a strong suspicion within some elements of the Nationalist community that the primary motive behind opposition to the original Girdwood Masterplan was an atavistic sectarian desire to keep Catholics, literally and figuratively, in their place.

Everything else that has been presented as a reason for not building housing on Girdwood is completely spurious, the DUP, in the shape of Nigel Dodds and Nelson McCausland, all of them, all their excuses and explanations are completely contrived to prevent those acres being filled in, because the demand for housing is enormous.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Interview: Planner/Property Developer (2011)

<sup>126</sup> Interview: Public Official, OFMDFM (2011)

<sup>127</sup> Interview: Former Nationalist Politician (2011)

To attribute failure on the part of the DUP to agree to the Girdwood Masterplan because of an atavistic sectarian reflex to keep the Catholic community at bay would be unfair in a number of respects. First, as one member of the Advisory Panel, Roy Adams, has pointed out above, he did not believe that the DUP could sell the plan to their voters in the surrounding wards in areas like the Lower Oldpark. This leads to the second point, namely, that in so far as the Unionist community were concerned, the Girdwood Masterplan offered them very little. The third point to note is that within the contested streets of north Belfast, where territory, votes, and identity are inextricably linked, the Girdwood Masterplan did not offer much by way of a solution to the very real patterns of deprivation, dereliction and depopulation facing communities in areas like the Lower Oldpark. In a context therefore in which the political system is predicated upon seeking agreement from both communities, it is unsurprising that the Protestant community failed to endorse the Girdwood Masterplan.

What is especially notable about the way in which debate around the Girdwood Masterplan unfolded is that it illustrates how the political system in Northern Ireland shifted from a command and control approach to one much more characterized as what Ignatieff refers to as a shared operating system.<sup>128</sup> As outlined above, the command-and-control form of governance that led to the Gasworks and Laganside developments going forward was also one which ensured that housing provision was removed at the request of one community, namely the Unionist leadership on Belfast City Council. Frustrations on the part of those who had been closely involved with bringing the Masterplan proposals forward ought also to be considered from the perspective of Ignatieff that

If human rights activism wills the end of a successful transition, it  
must also will the means, that is, the less than perfect political

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<sup>128</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 70

processes that make a democratic transition possible....It is also a fact that outsiders do not have the power, if we ever did, to determine how fast or slow any local transition proceeds anywhere. We have no ultimate standing on the question of questions: Whose place is this? Who rules?<sup>129</sup>

In other words, the post-conflict move from command-and-control to horizontal governance highlights the messy and chaotic nature of urban development in a context in which there are no certainties, and where the operating system is constantly tested, constantly renegotiated, but usually reaffirmed in the ebb and flow of daily life. This takes place in a context in which, as O'Leary has pointed out

Slow demographic change continues to extrude into local political geography, shaping school openings and closures, residential housing markets and disputes over access to public housing, and controversies over electoral districting.<sup>130</sup>

O'Leary's verdict mirrors that of Keynes, who, as outlined in chapter one, pointed to the importance of

growth of population and other fundamental economic causes, which, escaping by their gradual character the notice of contemporary observers, are attributed to the follies of statesmen or the fanaticism of atheists.<sup>131</sup>

This approach also fits with Jacobs' notion of a city ecosystem that ought to be viewed not as a snapshot but rather as a series of processes of beginning and ending, occurring simultaneously. In this context one can conclude therefore

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid. P.136

<sup>130</sup> B O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland: Consociation and Confederation*, (Vol 3, OUP 2019) vii

<sup>131</sup> J M Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (first published 1920, Penguin 1971) 14

that the failure to secure agreement around the Girdwood Masterplan illustrates the endgame for an urban regeneration model based on the command and control politics of direct rule and the shift towards a more shared operating system, predicated upon political coalitions and horizontal governance. The next chapter will explore how the testing and renegotiating that characterize post-conflict deliberations around urban space led to the development of a very different set of proposals to those contained in the Girdwood Masterplan.

### **Conclusions**

As with chapter five, this chapter examined the relationship between urban planning, conflict, and systemic inequality through the redevelopment of the former Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Army Base in north Belfast. By looking at a range of primary sources, and through interviews with a number of key figures who were involved in discussions around the Girdwood Masterplan this chapter highlighted the degree to which urban planning in Belfast continues to be highly politicised.

In particular, the data considered in this chapter illustrates how the politicised nature of territory in Belfast shapes patterns of housing inequality. In a context in which politicians, planners, the NIHE, and tenants are all too aware of the areas that are deemed safe or suitable for each community, in effect two housing waiting lists exist, so that even before housing is constructed, there is an awareness of whether the accommodation provided will be occupied by Catholics or Protestants. The location of the Girdwood site, the demographic imbalance in the area, and the chronic levels of housing need within the Catholic community, ensured that inevitably, any social housing provision on the site would be occupied by the Catholic community.

There is little doubt from the evidence of this case study about the way in which debate around the provision of housing on the Girdwood site, necessary in order to help address substantial housing inequalities within the Catholic community, were impacted by political factors. As with the experiences of the

1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, these factors included concerns about the impact of Catholic residents upon Unionist electoral majorities, concerns about Catholic opposition to Protestant marches, and fears of a Catholic takeover of traditional Protestant territory. These fears and concerns illustrate the extent to which the planning system continues to be steered by identity politics and the continued role of the planning system with regard to shaping patterns of inequality. This point is of crucial importance in understanding not just how structural and systemic patterns of inequality and socio-economic deprivation have come to be shaped, but also, how they might be addressed. In a context in which the primary objective within the political system to prevent a return to conflict, the next chapter will show how this objective has led to a very different approach to redeveloping the site from that envisaged in the Masterplan.

The distinction between community planning, and north Belfast community planning, and the failure of the design aspects of the Masterplan to recognize the importance of local tensions, illustrates further the inherently political nature of urban planning in Belfast and the degree to which urban design has the capacity to provoke fears and precipitate conflict. In particular, the case study shows how key principles that lie at the heart of effective urban planning, specifically, the desire to promote connectivity, and encourage movement around a city, failed to gain traction in a context in which access is a dirty word and connectivity translates as 'someone can come and attack my house'. In many respects the competing approaches towards urban design favoured by the two communities mirrors the competing approaches to housing provision. For a growing and expanding Catholic population, facing high levels of housing inequality, the imperative is to facilitate the growth of that community through additional residential units and an urban design philosophy predicated on opening the area up and redeveloping tracts of vacant land. For the Protestant population of north Belfast, which is older, and does not have the same demand for housing, the imperative is to protect territory. This in turn favours an urban design philosophy predicated upon the retention of walls, barriers, and clearly defined territorial boundaries. The next chapter will show how the subsequent development of the site, which involved a political compromise,

sought to balance these two competing, and in many respects mutually exclusive planning visions for the city.

This chapter also illustrated the various ways in which planning, and patterns of housing inequality are shaped by the politics of horizontal governance. As outlined in the case study, the model of planning that characterized the politics of the conflict was based upon direct rule Ministers like Richard Needham, who had been appointed by the UK Government at Westminster, driving through their own model for redevelopment of the city. There were clearly negative as well as positive aspects of this approach. In a context in which the politics of planning and urban regeneration is shaped by cross-community consensus, a much messier and complex situation arises. This is a theme that will be explored in more detail in the next chapter as alternative proposals to the Girdwood Masterplan can to be developed and agreed by Sinn Fein and the DUP.

Finally, this case study illustrates the way in which competing systems, with their own recursive processes, can irritate one other, producing in some cases unintended consequences. This is shown for example by the way in which the economic system, predicated upon a diminished role for the state, and the need to attract inward investment, delivered a Masterplan that was focused on bringing people onto the Girdwood site through the sale of private residential units. This shows how the conventional economic model for regeneration, predicated upon pump-priming, anchor tenants, and inward investment irritated a political system predicated upon the retention of communal boundaries, and the protection of Protestant territory from Catholic expansion. This desire to protect territory is the key driver within the political system which aims to manage relationships between the two community and prevent a return to conflict. The case study also illustrates the relationship between the design aspects of the planning system, and the political and economic systems. In this case the economic aspects of the Masterplan required a reconfiguration of the urban design philosophy in the area which caused a major irritation within the political system. In this case, the desire to promote connectivity

conflicted with the belief in the Protestant community that access is a dirty word. Again, the political imperative to protect territory, was irritated by a design philosophy based on conventional planning orthodoxy that favours free movement and access.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Spatial Inequalities & The Politics of Territory**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter examines how post-conflict planning in Belfast is a function of political compromise. In particular this chapter highlights how political concerns about patterns of socio-economic and identity-based inequality experienced by the two communities in north Belfast offer two very different approaches towards urban regeneration. This chapter will also show how urban design and economic development in Belfast continues to be shaped by the recursive planning practices that characterized the conflict – namely the need to protect Protestant territory from the expansion of the Catholic community. The desire to preserve communal boundaries illustrates further the way in which urban planning, and efforts to address spatial inequalities are impacted by political considerations, not least, the need to prevent a return to conflict by continuing to separate and segregate the two communities. In terms of the overall focus of the thesis, this chapter illustrates the compromises and complexities evident in efforts to address the social and economic legacy of conflict in north Belfast and highlights lessons that can be learned regarding the development of a thicker understanding of transitional justice that incorporates structural and systemic conflict legacy issues.

#### **Beyond The Girdwood Masterplan**

Although political disagreement halted progress on implementation of the original Girdwood Masterplan it was developments within the economic system that dealt the final blow to the proposals. In particular, the global economic downturn of 2009, which precipitated a collapse in the market for the type of residential accommodation needed to finance the Girdwood redevelopment, ensured that the vision of a new city quarter for the site was at an end. For some, this was a missed opportunity, symptomatic of the kind



of sectarian zero-sum approach to urban development and politics that still characterizes certain areas of the city

At the heart of this is 'I don't want to share my territory with you'...the folks in the Lower Oldpark have said to me explicitly, they do not want any redevelopment of Girdwood while their area is untouched. That is the road to complete stalemate...Unless I'm getting something, you're getting nothing, ok, got it...this is barren community dynamics and politics. This is a desert area, so we leave the whole area desert, as long as you don't get one over on me, we'll keep it a desert...that's where we're at, and that's where political representation has brought us to.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, for those who were most opposed to the original Masterplan, notably, the leadership of the DUP, the changed economic circumstances were viewed as an opportunity to develop proposals more aligned with the political reality

It's now probably going to be a bit more piecemeal in its development...just out of practicality...it's probably going to take longer and be done in smaller pieces which isn't necessarily that bad, because, getting it done right, and showing that the sky hasn't fallen in, might be a device for getting people to relax around the site and get it developed properly.<sup>2</sup>

With a lack of political agreement about where to go next regarding the development of the site it was the public sector, in the form of Belfast City Council who stepped in, providing the impetus for regeneration of the site by submitting a funding application to the Special EU Programs Body for a new community facility in the area.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview: Protestant Clergyman (2011)

<sup>2</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

We put the [community facility option] in front of them, as much as a catalyst as anything...what we were saying is...if we could get some sort of public services hub...we didn't quite know what it was at the time... we felt that it could work as a catalyst to actually get people together and talk about it which then might feed into a broader conversation.<sup>3</sup>

In 2012 the EU announced that the funding application had been successful and that £16Million would be made available under their peace and reconciliation program for a new 'community hub'. In May of that year, the Minister for Social Development, Nelson McCausland of the DUP; who had by this time replaced Alex Attwood of the SDLP; announced that a revised 'Girdwood Masterplan Conceptual Framework (GMCP) had been agreed.<sup>4</sup> This revised 'Conceptual Framework' differed significantly both in content and approach from the original proposals – this time there was no published draft Masterplan for consultation, nor indeed, a final published detailed plan. The sensitive negotiations around the future of the site required a deliberately vague announcement and presentation to the media and notable absence of a detailed published plan.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike the previous Ministerial announcements from Margaret Ritchie and Alex Attwood with regard to social housing provision, the 'Conceptual Framework' secured cross-community support in the Northern Ireland Executive, and therefore had the necessary political agreement in order to proceed.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, the community hub, which was, under the original proposals, to have been situated within the refurbished Gaol complex (see previous chapter) was built on the land originally set aside for mixed use development i.e. the area to the north west of the site adjacent to the Protestant Lower Oldpark. No mixed tenure residential development was

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<sup>3</sup> Interview: Public Official, Belfast City Council (1) (2011)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-18141475>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-18162637>

<sup>6</sup> Army Base Housing Plan Agreed, Press Release, Northern Ireland Executive May 21 2012

constructed but some new social housing was provided at the southern end of the site, adjacent to the Catholic New Lodge, with additional new build social housing situated just beyond the line of the original site boundary, within the Protestant Lower Oldpark area. The politics of territory in north Belfast ensures that the new social housing for the Lower Oldpark is designed to benefit the Protestant community, the housing at the southern end of the site is designed to benefit the Catholic community, and the Hub serves as a buffer on the site between the two communities.

The Conceptual Framework approach exemplifies the way in which urban planning in north Belfast continues to be driven by a desire to prevent a return to conflict, in an area of the city where ‘hypersensitivity to turf...and to defensible space...seems to possess everyone’.<sup>7</sup> No new Masterplan for the area was published indicating the number of houses and their location on the site. Lack of detail regarding the shape of the final plans for the site was crucial in terms of allowing both sides political space to negotiate around how best to maximise the benefits of new development in the area for their own communities. The compromises at the heart of the Conceptual Framework highlight the difficulties associated with addressing systemic and structural conflict legacy issues and raise some important questions about both the means and ends that may be required in order to prevent the politics of territory precipitating a return to violence.

### **The Conceptual Framework and the Politics of Inequality**

The difficulty with the Conceptual Framework approach is that rather than ‘getting it done right...and developed properly’ there is a strongly held view, especially outside the DUP, that the redevelopment that actually took place in the area perpetuates some of the most egregious defensive and sectarian planning practices of the past. At the same time, there is an equally strong view within the local Unionist community, and indeed among some other stakeholders, that the final proposals represent a compromise necessary to

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<sup>7</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 33



Girdwood site were so controversial. In particular, the fear within the Protestant community was that the Lower Oldpark would be 'overwhelmed' by an expansion of the Catholic population into territory which had hitherto provided a buffer for their area illustrating how the spatial legacy of the conflict continues to impact upon redevelopment and regeneration proposals. The fact that the original Girdwood Masterplan said nothing in particular about redevelopment of the Lower Oldpark, but rather, viewed the Girdwood site as a discrete and isolated entity, left representatives of the Lower Oldpark community with the feeling that alternative proposals were needed which addressed their specific concerns.

I always thought probably the solution to Girdwood was to show that you had a comprehensive plan that was also going to deliver something in the surrounding community areas, and I think that was especially the case on the PUL side... to demonstrate you were working in a wider area.<sup>9</sup>

My negotiation theory training was always saying, look, there is the cake, whenever cutting the cake doesn't work, try to make the cake bigger...you're not getting your deal on this, well, let's look around, can we see something bigger happening in some way.<sup>10</sup>

One of the biggest challenges facing attempts to regenerate areas like the Lower Oldpark is that, like many other inner-city Protestant communities in Belfast, the spatial legacy of the conflict has left the area in geographical isolation with high levels of socio-economic deprivation augmented by a demographic 'time bomb'. The Lower Oldpark has a current estimated resident population of 711 persons of whom a disproportionate number are older people and a below average number are in the younger age bracket

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<sup>9</sup> Interview: Planner/Public Official (2011). PUL refers to Protestant Unionist Loyalist community

<sup>10</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

compared with Northern Ireland as a whole. High levels of benefit dependency and anti-social behavior, low levels of educational attainment and issues of sectarian unrest and paramilitarism mean that the Lower Oldpark is one of the most deprived communities in the whole of Northern Ireland.<sup>11</sup> In a context in which ethno-national conflict is shaped by demography and where populations are voters as well as occupiers of land,<sup>12</sup> the political imperative within areas like the Lower Oldpark is to address socio-economic deprivation and population decline while retaining territorial identity.

### **Deprivation, Socio-Economic Inequalities, and Territory**

The demographics of the Lower Oldpark illustrate how the social and economic legacy of conflict continues to impact upon redevelopment within the city. Addressing the twin problems of social deprivation and population decline has been a concern of elected representatives from the Unionist community across the city for several decades. Although the most egregious urban renewal practices of the 1960s and 1970s have ceased, suspicions remain within the Protestant community that economic development is something of a Trojan Horse, aimed at facilitating the removal of their Protestant community from the city.<sup>13</sup> Part of the difficulty here is that the urban redevelopment process necessitates some form of population reduction, something that the statutory body with responsibility for social housing provision concedes. Citing the example of the redevelopment of the

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<sup>11</sup> In the 2010 Multiple Deprivation Measure Lower Oldpark has an overall rank of 7 out of 890 Super Output Areas, Department for Social Development, Building Successful Communities Programme, Lower Oldpark and Hillview Area Analysis (DSD 2013) 15

<sup>12</sup> Owen McEldowney, James Anderson, and Ian Shuttleworth, 'Sectarian demography: Dubious discourses of ethno-national conflict', in Hayward, K. and O'Donnell, C., *Political Discourse and Conflict Resolution: Debating Peace in Northern Ireland*, Oxford: Routledge, (2011) 160

<sup>13</sup> The extent of population decline in these areas due to redevelopment is illustrated by the fact that between 1971 and 1978, the total population of the Shankill area declined from 46,363 to 33,297, a fall of 13,066 people or 28.1%. This compares to an overall Belfast average of a decline of 19%. These declines are explained mainly by the clearance of the old densely populated areas and their replacement with new housing at lower densities. In 1978, of those families who left the district, the most popular destinations were Newtownabbey, Bangor, and Antrim. Northern Ireland Housing Executive, *Draft Introduction to the Seven Districts Housing Statements* (Northern Ireland Housing Executive 1980) para 2.6 ENV/21/1/39/A

Unionist 'Village' area of South Belfast a senior official with the NIHE concedes

If you have a big area, for example the Village, which is one which we're in the middle of at the minute, there's about 700 houses to be taken out, and they are to be replaced with about 300, and it's done in phases...at each phase, people are required to move out of their homes, so some will move to other areas and not return. The process of redevelopment in itself, which can take many, many years from the beginning to the end, has almost built into it the process of people moving out of the area....<sup>14</sup>

Suspicious that population decline within the Protestant community has been socially engineered by redevelopment have been fueled by the experience in the 'Torrens' area, located less than a mile from the Lower Oldpark. Like the Lower Oldpark, Torrens was a traditional working-class Protestant enclave that underwent substantial redevelopment during the 1980s

As the troubles progressed, people moved out and didn't want to live in the area, but they had more choice...There were a lot of empty properties in Torrens but there would have been maybe 70-100 families living in it... about 2005 it had gone down to nearly a dozen, ten, and when it reached that point, the families came to see us as a group and said look we want out, we can't stick it anymore, so they were rehoused into areas that they wanted to go...they eventually left, and the land subsequently was developed and it was Catholics who moved into it.<sup>15</sup>

The experience of Torrens is crucial to understanding the continued 'hypersensitivity to turf' within the Protestant community, particularly in the north of the city. As with many aspects of life in Northern Ireland the factors

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<sup>14</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

behind the decline of the Protestant community of Torrens are politically contested. Within areas like the Lower Oldpark there is a strongly held view that the Torrens experience is evidence of a conspiracy, involving the NIHE, and the wider Catholic community, including the IRA, to drive working-class Protestants from the city. In fact, 'there won't be another Torrens'<sup>16</sup> has become something of a rallying cry for the Unionist community in the area and accentuated the political imperative for Unionist representatives to protect Protestant territory from Catholic expansion. Further examples of this 'hypersensitivity to turf', or 'territoriality'<sup>17</sup> is provided by the comments from one representative of the DUP, interviewed for this study, who alluded to a conversation that had been overheard by a member of his party in which a senior official in the NIHE expressed a view that the organization was happy to 'let the Lower Oldpark die'.<sup>18</sup> It is of course impossible to verify whether these views were actually expressed but certainly there is a belief within elements of the DUP and the wider Unionist community that post-conflict urban policy is to socially engineer the removal of Protestant communities from this area of the city.

The legacy of the Torrens experience in shaping the Unionist response to the Girdwood Masterplan is all the more powerful given that the Lower Oldpark area is in close geographical proximity to Torrens and in many respects resembles Torrens both in terms of its geographical isolation and demography. The proposals contained within the Girdwood Masterplan, predicated upon conventional theory and design practice, singularly failed to take account of the legacy of Protestant depopulation and deprivation and fit a narrative within the Unionist community which held that significant redevelopment was taking place on the 'Catholic side' while the Protestant community in the Lower Oldpark would be 'left to die'.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview: Former Political Advisor (Nationalist) (2011)

<sup>17</sup> F Boal, 'Territoriality on the Shankill-Falls Divide, Belfast' (2008) 41 (3) *Irish Geography* 349-366

<sup>18</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)



### **Segregation and the City Ecosystem**

Outside of the Unionist community there is an alternative explanation for the processes that have shaped areas like Torrens. Among government officials and representatives of the Catholic community the view is that Torrens became socially and economically unsustainable and that residents of the area exercised choice and moved to more desirable housing elsewhere. From this perspective, the declining population in areas like Torrens, and the Lower Oldpark can be traced to the urban renewal programmes that began in the early 1960s that have ensured that many traditional Protestant communities have passed the 'tipping point' beyond which they are sustainable. As a consequence, social mobility and the availability of better accommodation outside the city in towns such as Newtownards and Carrickfergus encouraged a Protestant exodus from the city beginning in the 1960s (see chapter four). This phenomenon is common to many cities in Britain and the United States and is typically referred to as 'white flight'. From this perspective, the exodus from the city by the Protestant community from the north of the city is explained partly by the result of political violence, but also, by wider social and economic factors that characterized urban policy across many post-industrial cities. Outside of the Unionist community there is little sympathy or support for the view that the declining Protestant population in the north of the city can be attributed to any form of conspiracy or hidden agenda on the part of either the Catholic community or public officials. These differing perspectives illustrate both the contested nature of the urban legacy of the conflict and the way in which this contested legacy can serve to impact upon post-conflict redevelopment.

What complicates the spatial legacy of the conflict in Belfast is that Protestant exodus from the city took place within a context where territorial boundaries in many areas were retained which in turn impinged upon the movement of new populations into areas of surplus housing stock. The 'hypersensitivity to turf', characteristic of these areas therefore ensured that patterns of housing

inequality in the Catholic community became concentrated within discrete boundaries and sat alongside, but was separated by barriers from, Protestant areas experiencing high levels of dereliction and population decline. This is in stark contrast to the way in which the phenomenon of white flight that characterized urban centres in the USA and Britain over the same period took place. In cities such as Detroit, Baltimore, London, and Bradford, white communities moved to surrounding suburbs with little interest in what happened to the territory that they left behind. In Belfast, this was not the case where Protestant exodus from the city was matched by a political imperative to ensure territorial boundaries were retained, highlighting how global trends impacted quite differently in a city hypersensitivity to turf and defensible space is linked to political identity.<sup>19</sup>

In order to fully appreciate the spatial legacy of the conflict from the perspective of facing class Protestant communities in areas like Torrens and Lower Oldpark, which are characterised by high levels of social housing, it is necessary to consider the wider population changes that have taken place within the private housing sector. As members of the Protestant community have moved away from owner-occupied housing in areas like the Cliftonville Road, these houses have in turn been purchased by upwardly mobile Catholics moving onto the property ladder from over-crowded Catholic areas like the New Lodge

I remember canvassing the Cliftonville Road 25 years ago, and there was this sense then that the great unwashed were coming up from the New Lodge, and moving into flats and all the rest of

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<sup>19</sup> Several interview subjects drew comparisons between Protestant exodus from Belfast with 'white flight' in the USA. Comparisons were also made between Catholic population growth and increased political power in Belfast over recent decades with similar developments in US cities where African American communities have replaced white populations both in terms of occupation of territory, and political power. Comparisons were also drawn in chapter four between the impact of urban renewal on Catholics in Belfast and African American communities in the US. It would be an oversimplification to completely equate the experiences of Catholics in Belfast with African Americans and Protestants in Belfast with white communities in Britain or the US over the past several decades. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that there are several similarities which were alluded to by a number of interview subjects

it, and occasionally you would knock the door of this very nice detached house on the Cliftonville Road and an elderly woman would come out who was clearly a Protestant who had been overwhelmed and left behind in the great tidal wave that came up from the New Lodge...mahogany door, brass, all the rest of it, and you just felt that time had passed her by, and at that time there were half a dozen of them on the Cliftonville Road, and in some respects there are a number of other places like that in North Belfast.<sup>20</sup>

The difficulty for those living in traditional Protestant social housing developments therefore is that they have in effect become 'surrounded' by 'the other side' as members of their own community have left traditional heartlands. Upward and outward mobility and individual choices within the Protestant community played a major role in undermining attempts to sustain traditional communities in the city, something that political representatives are acutely aware of

Right now, if you regenerate, there's a high risk, if we got in with people, got them jobs, got them working, then bye bye. Getting on means getting out in too many of these communities...<sup>21</sup>

In a context in which communal identity is a proxy for political affiliation, urban redevelopment policy in Belfast is inextricably linked with electoral representation which further fuels concerns among Unionist representatives that territory needs to be defended

I would make a general point in terms of regeneration, if people are still wanting to leave where you are representing, then you've a problem that you need to solve in your area...<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Interview: Former Nationalist Politician (2011)

<sup>21</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

<sup>22</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

The significance of this point is that post-conflict planning in the city is invariably bound up in the spatial legacy of the conflict which has skewed the demographic profile of the two communities which co-exist amidst a patchwork quilt of territorial boundaries. Moreover, these boundaries reflect a continued hypersensitivity to turf that impacts upon any efforts to provide a post-conflict planning agenda for the city. In some respects the spatial legacy of the conflict has been fueled by wider economic and social factors, notably, the tendency for younger Catholic families to purchase property in the private housing market from older Protestants and the fact that for many people in the Protestant community, a surplus of good and affordable housing in 'Protestant' suburbs has driven population movement. In effect, the economics of de-industrialization and Protestant flight has precipitated tensions within the political system about the need to protect Protestant territory from Catholic advance which in turn has ensured that redevelopment is a hostage to the politics of territory and the social and economic legacy of the conflict in north Belfast. The challenges presented with addressing these complex and systemic patterns of inequality, which are closely connected with falling population will be explored in the next section.

### **Group Inequalities, Social Mobility, and Territory**

The way in which the spatial legacy of the conflict continues to impact upon plans for economic regeneration is illustrated by the desire on the part of Unionist politicians in areas like the Lower Oldpark to address patterns of deprivation and population decline, while at the same time seeking to ensure that social mobility does not facilitate further Protestant exodus from this area of the city. Achieving this objective requires reversal of a trend that has been established over several decades, where the city ecosystem has been characterised by Protestant population decline

We need people to be staying ... to give those communities a bit of life... young people ... who can use the shops and facilities because if the trend continues ... then those are going to be

absolutely dying communities, and you're not reaching a critical level for core services like schools and shops.<sup>23</sup>

A significant barrier to achieving this objective is that in many Protestant communities new social housing provision has not been a priority for public agencies given the lack of demand for housing as populations continue to decline and waiting lists diminish as residents move elsewhere. Public housing provision in Belfast, as elsewhere, is driven largely by demand and therefore a 'chicken and egg' situation has developed in which Unionist representatives contend that areas are in decline because of lack of new housing and public agencies argue that lack of demand negates new house build. For representatives of the Protestant community, the lack of new build social housing, tracts of vacant land, and vacant housing stock the message is clear

There's an important sub-text here that gets missed...you're asking me to offer a dismal vision to the community that I primarily represent...you're in decline, you will continue to be in decline...and this is where you're back into the broader definition of regeneration...Why could regeneration not be about those communities growing again, as opposed to, well you're Prods, you can go and live in Newtownabbey and Carrick?<sup>24</sup>

The link between regeneration, demography and political identity outlined here affirms O'Leary's observation that

Slow demographic change continues to extrude into local political geography, shaping school openings and closures,

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<sup>23</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

<sup>24</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

residential housing markets and disputes over access to public housing, and controversies over electoral districting.<sup>25</sup>

A key political objective of the DUP, and in particular the former Social Development Minister Nelson McCausland, is to offer an alternative to this 'dismal vision' that seeks to reverse the exodus of members of the Protestant community from traditional heartlands in the north of the city and deliver economic regeneration that will in turn help to secure Unionist electoral majorities and begin to rebuild Protestant communities. This in effect is the objective of the housing-led approach to regeneration as framed within the 'Building Sustainable Communities' (BSC) strategy, launched by Nelson McCausland on 28 October 2013<sup>26</sup>

You've got a lower demand for housing [in Protestant areas] because people are willing to go and move to East Belfast or wherever it is, so the idea is to try to build better housing, nicer housing, and using that to either attract those people back into the community who have left or to encourage people to stay within the community, for people like Nelson McCausland that would be very much the agenda...<sup>27</sup>

The housing and regeneration debate illustrates how socio-economic inequalities, notably, housing need, and dereliction, are manifest in different ways across the two communities with Protestant areas characterized by low-medium housing demand, tracts of vacant land, and dereliction, while Catholic communities are characterized by overcrowding, a shortage of available land and high levels of housing demand. The point here is that efforts to address spatial inequalities are highly politicised given that the two communities are characterized by very different patterns of *inequality*. For

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<sup>25</sup> B O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland: Consociation and Confederation*, (Vol 3, OUP 2019) vii

<sup>26</sup> Department for Social Development, *Building Successful Communities Programme, Lower Oldpark and Hillview Area Analysis (DSD 2013)* 3

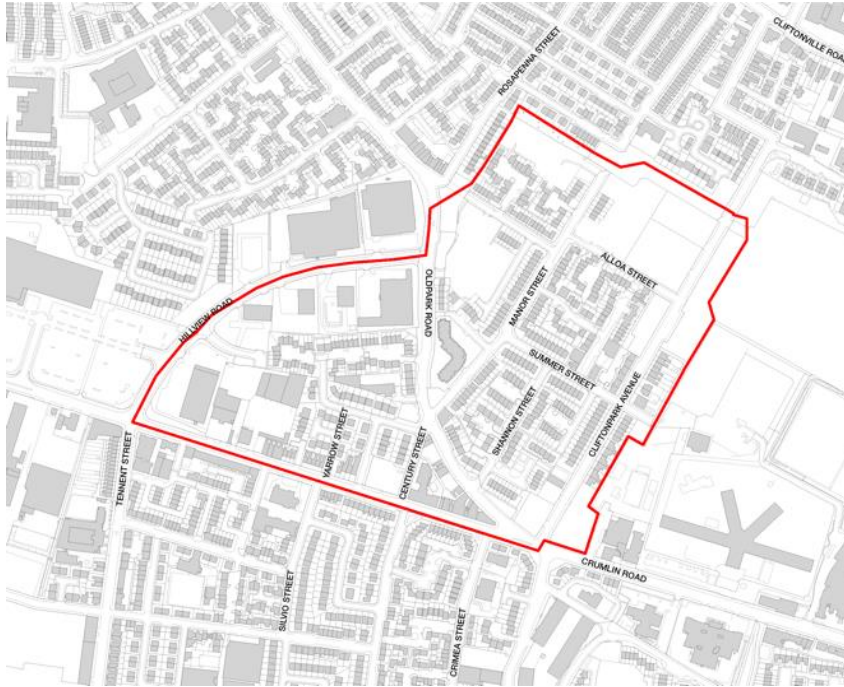
<sup>27</sup> Interview, DUP Politician/Political Advisor (1) (2011)

example, efforts to address socio-economic deprivation and housing inequality; as measured by overcrowding and time on the housing waiting list; will, by definition, disproportionately benefit members of the Catholic community. At the same time, efforts to address socio-economic deprivation and dereliction, will, by definition, disproportionately benefit members of the Protestant community. Similarly, initiatives that target inequality which are based on increasing education and employability are viewed within the Protestant community as potentially destabilizing given that, as outlined above, 'getting on means getting out'. Such fears are much less within the Catholic community given that Catholic areas are characterized by overcrowding and a surplus population.

Given that local politicians are acutely aware of these differences it is therefore unsurprising that very different approaches and priorities for addressing inequality and the spatial legacy of the conflict exist across the political parties. The debate outlined above also leads on to another important point, namely, the link between urban design, inequality, and conflict. In a context in which the fear within the Protestant community is of a growing and expanding Catholic population, the use of urban design to protect traditional territory becomes all the more important. This is considered in the next section.

### **Designed to Exclude – Interfaces and Identity**

Allied to high levels of deprivation, depopulation, and isolation, the Lower Oldpark exemplifies another important spatial legacy of the conflict, namely the defensive design practices that shaped the planning system of Belfast during the 1970s and 1980s. Barricaded by the Hillview Enterprise Park to the west, the peace wall to the north, and the Girdwood site to the East the only 'open' end of the Lower Oldpark is to the south which fronts onto the overwhelmingly Protestant Crumlin Road.



Lower Oldpark with the boundary of the pilot area for the Building Sustainable Communities (BSC) initiative in red.<sup>28</sup>

Within the Lower Oldpark area itself, the current road network and street design has lost much of the pre-1960s layout (as evidenced when the figure above is compared with the pre-1960s map of the area) with the streetscape mirroring the divisions in wider society - inward facing avenues, defensible homes and dead-ends. The original street pattern of housing fronting onto roads and back garden areas serving as private spaces has been replaced with closely knit residential pockets i.e. cul-de-sac developments or courtyards which provide no through access to main roads. The changes that were brought about to the street patterns during the 1970s and 1980s ensure that direct routes which residents could have previously walked or driven on no longer exist, making it difficult to navigate the area and access services and facilities elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> The net effect of the cleared sites, the peace wall and the street network is a low quality living environment for

<sup>28</sup> Department for Social Development, *Building Successful Communities: Lower Oldpark and Hillview Action Plan* (Department for Social Development 2016) 2

<sup>29</sup> Department for Social Development, *Building Successful Communities: Lower Oldpark and Hillview Action Plan* (Department for Social Development 2016) 9



residents and for visitors to the area the impression is created that this is territory that is closed to outsiders. This sensation is augmented by a streetscape that is hard in appearance with little street planting and a dominance of hard paved surfaces with few landscape features to aid in softening the visual appearance of the environment and very little differentiation in materials to help denote public and private spaces and to enforce any sense of route hierarchy. The BSC Area Analysis report for the area describes Hillview Road as ‘unsightly and unwelcoming... dominated by security style fencing and gates, along with a high peace wall’<sup>30</sup> while Century Street is described as ‘dark and dismal... could benefit from new housing and perhaps the re-opening of the street giving better access to the Crumlin Road.’<sup>31</sup> In effect this report highlights the impact of urban design in shaping the spatial legacy of the conflict through the use of defensible space that was predicated upon keeping the two communities apart.

As a way forward for addressing the design legacy of the conflict the Lower Oldpark BSC Action Plan proposes restructuring the existing layout of the area through rebuilding or remodeling existing properties to remove design weaknesses and improving the streetscape by ensuring that new development addresses the street. The Plan also focuses on improving access within communities through the creation of new streets that will make it easier to move around and navigate the area.<sup>32</sup> These proposals illustrate the important role that urban design can play in addressing patterns of social and economic disadvantage with the Action Plan setting out a framework that aims to promote connectivity and remediate some of ‘shatter zones’ created by the defensive design tactics of the 1970s and 1980s.

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<sup>30</sup> Department for Social Development, Building Successful Communities Programme, Lower Oldpark and Hillview Area Analysis (DSD 2013) 41

<sup>31</sup> Department for Social Development, Building Successful Communities Programme, Lower Oldpark and Hillview Area Analysis (DSD 2013) 42

<sup>32</sup> Department for Social Development, *Building Successful Communities: Lower Oldpark and Hillview Action Plan* (Department for Social Development 2016) 20

The DSD Design Team completed concept proposals to upgrade and improve the local public realm of the area including decorative entrance features to Hillview Road at Crumlin Road and Oldpark; resurfacing of footpaths using natural stone paving bands, grass verges and asphalt; decorative street lighting, railings, gates and street furniture; and semi-mature tree planting. This plan envisioned that new housing development, beginning at Manor Street and Cliftonpark Avenue on cleared and gap sites will assist in addressing design weaknesses with respect to lack of supervision of back alley spaces and car parking courts and poor design as well as offering an important opportunity to maintain a feeling of change and growth within the community.<sup>33</sup> In addition to presenting a physical symbol and foundation of change the initiative aims also to lift the community's confidence in the process of regeneration providing them with a sense of empowerment to embrace further change.<sup>34</sup> The BSC program therefore aims to begin to address some of the demands made by the PUL community during the course of the consultations on the Girdwood Masterplan

The demand [was made] both publicly and certainly to me...that there should be no development whatsoever on the Girdwood site until the contiguous area in Manor Street was properly developed and the Protestant community restored and regenerated so that there would be a balanced community in the wider area.<sup>35</sup>

While the original Girdwood Masterplan was predicated upon bringing people into the area by increasing connectivity between the site and the rest of the city the 'Conceptual Framework' approach encapsulated within the BSC Action Plan is firmly predicated upon respecting the integrity of existing territorial boundaries and divisions between the two communities and

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<sup>33</sup> Department for Social Development, *Building Successful Communities: Lower Oldpark and Hillview Action Plan* (Department for Social Development 2016) 13

<sup>34</sup> Department for Social Development, *Building Successful Communities: Lower Oldpark and Hillview Action Plan* (Department for Social Development 2016) 21

<sup>35</sup> Interview: Protestant Clergyman (2011)

keeping people apart. The retention of territorial boundaries is in fact explicitly spelt out in the BSC Plans<sup>36</sup> which state that the Hillview Enterprise Park provides ‘a necessary interface barrier’ and that the existing peace line at Manor Street ‘could be developed to include commercial/retail property.’<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the location for the first new housing units on Cliftonpark Avenue<sup>38</sup> is referred to as a ‘significantly strategic location for demonstrating ongoing investment in the area’ with ‘early delivery of new housing on these visually prominent sites’ presenting ‘a strong indication of the commitment to delivering new housing in the area’.<sup>39</sup> Within the context of the Belfast territorial imperative, the significance of these visually prominent sites for new housing is that there will be no encroachment from the Catholic community along Cliftonpark Avenue but rather ‘shoring up’ new housing on the ‘Protestant side’, as illustrated below.

The BSC Strategy therefore has two discrete and mutually reinforcing aims. The first aim is to provide a framework for opening up access and increasing mobility and connectivity *within* the PUL community of the Lower Oldpark in order to address the problematic streetscape and road network that was put in place in the 1980s. The second aim is to consolidate and enhance existing boundaries *between* the Lower Oldpark and the Catholic communities in surrounding areas in order to ‘hold the line’ and provide reassurance of a future Protestant presence in the area. These two objectives illustrate Yiftachel’s contention that the public regulation and production of space can be conceived as ‘double-edged’, capable of both emancipation and oppression.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Department for Social Development, Building Successful Communities Programme, Lower Oldpark and Hillview Area Analysis (DSD 2013) 43

<sup>37</sup> Department for Social Development, Building Successful Communities Programme, Lower Oldpark and Hillview Area Analysis (DSD 2013) 44

<sup>38</sup> 20 units of affordable housing on either side of Cliftonpark Avenue.

<sup>39</sup> Department for Social Development, *Building Successful Communities: Lower Oldpark and Hillview Action Plan* (Department for Social Development 2016) 22

<sup>40</sup> Yiftachel, O. “Social control, urban planning and ethno-class relations: Mizrahi Jews in Israel’s ‘Development Towns’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 24 (2), pp. 418-437



New social housing, located at the 'Protestant end' of Cliftonpark Avenue, situated on the right of the photograph, behind the trees and fence. The location of housing here is significant in that it confirms that the territorial boundaries of the Lower Oldpark are being respected and that the area is not 'being left to die'. Photograph by Tim Cunningham

This aspect of the case study highlights arguably the most controversial aspect of the approach adopted by Unionist politicians regarding redevelopment of traditional Protestant communities, namely, that housing-led regeneration sits alongside the preservation of existing territorial boundaries. The aim therefore is that housing-led regeneration will be engineered, through the retention of barriers, in such a way as to exclude the Catholic community. Rather than increasing connectivity to 'bring new people into the area', which was the aim of the original Girdwood Masterplan, the retention of territorial boundaries illustrates how defensive urban design around the Lower Oldpark provides a de facto exclusion mechanism that prevents encroachment from the Catholic community and the natural

population growth up the Antrim Road. The retention of communal boundaries highlights again the way in which the defensive urban design model favoured during the conflict continues to be the default position for the Unionist community with the recursive design practices of the 1970s and 1980s deployed in order to protect territory.

### **Systemic Inequality, Deprivation, and Design**

Outside of the DUP there is a high degree of skepticism about the value of seeking to regenerate areas while retaining territorial boundaries and in particular, through providing additional social housing in areas where there is a lack of demand and where existing residents are 'voting with their feet'

Some in the PUL community say the housing executive needs to take the lead in regenerating these areas, and begin to fix these houses up, and people will come...we have never been comfortable buying into that because ... if you suddenly build new houses, for which there is no waiting list, who's going to move into them...it's going to be people from other houses, and they will leave those other houses empty, or people maybe will come back in from Newtownabbey, or whatever, but leave vacant properties there...<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the potential displacement effect of social housing tenants, and waste of public resources, more fundamental concerns have been expressed at the likely profile of applicants for housing in areas that interface with the Catholic community and are known to have high levels of deprivation, low levels of educational attainment and associations with loyalist paramilitarism.<sup>42</sup> Several studies, including the Dunlop Report, have highlighted the extent to which interface areas in Protestant communities in North Belfast have become 'dumping grounds' for undesirable, anti-social 'problem tenants' including people with criminal convictions, mental health

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<sup>41</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

<sup>42</sup> Interview: Public Official OFMDFM (2011)

problems, and other behavioural issues. Sinn Fein representatives express concern about this issue

One of the difficulties is that Nelson McCausland has a view that he can re-populate Protestant areas ... Where I think he is flawed...and I don't have a principled difficulty with what he would like to do because why would you not try and reinvigorate some of these old Protestant areas ... but he's got to deal with the paramilitaries.... and it's a post-conflict thing, the loyalist paramilitaries are turning into drug-dealing criminal gangs, and that's the biggest difficulty, and if you don't deal with that, how are you going to attract people back into these areas, to populate them?<sup>43</sup>

DUP politicians concede themselves that there are significant difficulties with convincing members of their own community to return to areas like Lower Oldpark where success and social mobility is equated with living in more affluent suburbs on the outskirts of the city

To some degree there's almost become a culture of it, you're successful now when you move out, it's a sign of your success.... People can complain about the other community, or this public agency, or that public agency, whatever they like, my comment is, in North Belfast, the Unionist community has to have a serious discussion with itself. Why is it when somebody does good the first thing they do is head to Carrick? They're now going to have to commute at extra cost, the house price differential disappears, so they're not getting a cheaper house, so why do these people want to leave?<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Interview: Republican Politician (2011)

<sup>44</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2011)

For some members of the Advisory Panel, the retention of territorial boundaries are in fact a major factor in ensuring Protestant exodus from traditional areas and the cause, not the solution to the problem

There's no evidence that interfaces have protected the demographics of Protestant communities, absolutely not, they've driven everybody who had a choice, out. Catholic communities had far less choices and therefore stayed... their best bet is to attract a few more people to move there and frankly, as long as you have massive great walls you have absolutely zero possibility of that.<sup>45</sup>

Notwithstanding these concerns, the NIHE have conceded a willingness to

explore taking some calculated risks around beginning to fix up properties that are derelict, to try to generate a waiting list.<sup>46</sup>

For a public agency with finite resources 'generating a waiting list' when there are a large number of areas in the city with existing lengthy housing waiting lists is a highly controversial approach to social housing provision. Moreover, there is also the legal difficulty of providing housing for Protestants when they are not as highly represented on the waiting list. The legal problems were surmounted by the adoption of the 'Building Sustainable Communities' (BSC) strategy, launched by Nelson McCausland on 28 October 2013.<sup>47</sup> The BSC strategy allowed for new social housing to be located in the Lower Oldpark area under the rubric of a pilot scheme predicated on housing-led regeneration.<sup>48</sup> The NIHE concede that if there had been 'no building successful communities there would have been no new build in Lower

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<sup>45</sup> Interview: Public Official, Community Relations Council (2011)

<sup>46</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

<sup>47</sup> Department for Social Development, Building Successful Communities Programme, Lower Oldpark and Hillview Area Analysis (DSD 2013) 3

<sup>48</sup> <http://belfastmediagroup.com/housing-bosses-admit-two-belfast-multi-million-regeneration-schemes-are-in-areas-of-low-to-medium-need/>

Oldpark' given the lack of demand in the area.<sup>49</sup> The BSC strategy is specifically aimed at regenerating communities experiencing blight, dereliction and decline through a housing-led approach to regeneration.<sup>50</sup>

Under BSC...new homes are built that would not have been built using the traditional approach, with BSC you do things you don't normally do....<sup>51</sup>

Six BSC 'pilot areas' were selected initially for this housing-led approach to regeneration, including the Lower Oldpark,<sup>52</sup> all of which experienced problems such as stigma, blight, void stock, anti-social behavior, low or medium projected housing need and vacant government land that could be developed to bring new housing back into the area.<sup>53</sup> The BSC strategy in north Belfast is targeted predominantly at Unionist communities - unsurprising given that this programme is very much a creation of the DUP, and in particular, the then Minister for Social Development Nelson McCausland

BSC came directly from the Minister...Only Nelson was the Minister it would never have happened<sup>54</sup>

The BSC strategy illustrates the way in which the political system shaped the development of alternative proposals from the Girdwood Masterplan. In particular the BSC pilot program in the Lower Oldpark played a crucial role in facilitating new build social housing in the area as part of the 'Conceptual Framework' agreed by the political parties, illustrating the way in which

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<sup>49</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2) (2018)

<sup>50</sup> Department for Social Development, *Building Successful Communities: Lower Oldpark and Hillview Action Plan* (Department for Social Development 2016) 1

<sup>51</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2) (2018)

<sup>52</sup> Three of the pilot areas were in West Belfast, Lower Shankill/Brown Square; Lenadoon/Glencolin; and Lower Falls; two were in North Belfast, Lower Oldpark/Hillview and Tiger's Bay/Mountcollyer; and Doury Road, Ballymena was the one pilot area selected outside Belfast

<sup>53</sup> Department for Social Development, *Building Successful Communities Programme, Lower Oldpark and Hillview Area Analysis* (DSD 2013) 3

<sup>54</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2) (2018)



housing provision continues to be shaped by broader political objectives. In this case the political objective was to try and regenerate Protestant communities through the addition provision of social housing.

The 'Conceptual Framework' that replaced the original Girdwood Masterplan was therefore not only a political compromise, but also provided legal cover for the proposals given that the formal process for location of new housing was not followed. The 'Conceptual Framework' did subsequently generate a legal challenge with a Catholic public housing tenant, Ellen Doyle, who had been on a housing waiting list for 13 years, taking a judicial review of the proposals outlined by Nelson McCausland in 2013.<sup>55</sup> Lawyers for the plaintiff argued that the motive behind the revised Girdwood proposals was sectarian - designed to halt the advance of the Catholic community in the New Lodge.<sup>56</sup> An out of court settlement was agreed which included an assurance that there would be additional social housing at the southeastern end of the Girdwood site that allowed the revised, and unpublished 'Conceptual Framework' for the area to proceed.<sup>57</sup> In effect the legal challenge provided leverage in the negotiations about the amount of additional new build housing that would be located on the eastern end of the site i.e. that would be accessible to Catholics without fundamentally altering the overall 'Framework' of the regeneration.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the introduction of a 'points system' and a common waiting list based on the notion of objectively determined housing need was one of the key legal reform measures introduced in the early 1970s when the Northern Ireland Housing Executive was established, the purpose of which was to address the sectarian housing allocation that had taken place under Unionist controlled councils between 1921-1971. The *Doyle* case

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<sup>55</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-22797984>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/nelson-mccauslands-blocking-of-homes-plan-is-sectarian-court-told-29075280.html>

<sup>57</sup> As part of the settlement a statement was read out by senior counsel on behalf of the department and minister clarifying and updating the position on implementation of a Masterplan Conceptual Framework (MCF) for the Girdwood Park site agreed by elected representatives the previous May <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-22797984>

reflected both the controversial nature of the proposals and the limits of law in this area where complex issues of urban regeneration interface with identity politics and where a reluctance on the part of courts to stray into areas of public policy that are generally regarded as the purview of elected representatives.

### **Inequality, Conflict, and the Economics of Regeneration**

In terms of assessing the 'Conceptual Framework' approach to regeneration of the Girdwood/Lower Oldpark area a number of preliminary conclusions can be drawn. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the DUP, the main architects of this approach, are quite positive about the programme and are of the view that following new house build on Cliftonpark Avenue interface violence has reduced, which is a

...direct result of the intervention...Building houses was a statement to the Unionist community that they had a future in the area...<sup>58</sup>

The NIHE also concede that a combination of new social housing and the work of a number of community workers from the Lower Oldpark Interface Programme has ensured that 'the Lower Oldpark has got really settled'.<sup>59</sup> Certainly, the new housing delivered as a result of the 'Conceptual Framework' for the area has helped allay Unionist fears 'that Lower Oldpark was going to be another Torrens'<sup>60</sup> which has in turn had a positive short term impact on reducing inter-communal tensions and violence.

Initial anecdotal evidence also suggests that some of concerns about levels of demand and occupancy have not been realized. According to the DUP, 30 new social housing units were built in the area as a result of the BSC

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<sup>58</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2018).

<sup>59</sup> Manus Maguire and those working through the Lower Oldpark Interface Programme and the International Fund for Ireland were singled out for particular praise

<sup>60</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2) (2018)

program all of which were filled right away with people moving from the Mid-Shankill, confirming that 'there was a waiting list but it was people who were not directly in the area...when you build them they will come....'<sup>61</sup> The Housing Executive have also conceded that in spite of 'initial skepticism about BSC...it has worked to an extent' with some unexpected positive outcomes from the program, not least of which is that there has been an increase in diversity with some new housing units occupied by ethnic minorities 'because that's where the available housing is...'<sup>62</sup>.

One consequence of this type of approach to regeneration is that members of ethnic minority communities, facing longer waiting lists in over-crowded Catholic areas, may have an opportunity to avail of social housing in traditionally Protestant areas that 'traditional Protestants' no longer find desirable. Furthermore, according to the Housing Executive, there is no evidence to date of displacement of tenants to the Lower Oldpark from other areas or tenants moving into the area who had previous issues with anti-social behaviour.<sup>63</sup> They do concede however that this has been partly a result of an overall increase in housing need generally in the area. In other words, more Protestants in need of housing generally has led to more 'needy' tenants moving to the Lower Oldpark.

There is need for caution with regard to these early indications of success however not least given this is a pilot program. That the BSC is a creation of the DUP, implemented by the DSD, would cast some doubt about partiality with respect to initial assessments of success. A two-stage process has been outlined for monitoring the impact of the BSC initiative that requires collecting output/outcome measures relating to specific projects and interventions on an annual basis and periodic neighbourhood monitoring, which will measure impacts of the regeneration process on neighbourhood baseline conditions over 3 yearly intervals. As yet, no data has been released in order to allow

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<sup>61</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2018)

<sup>62</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2) (2018)

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

for a more robust examination of the extent to which BSC has succeeded in delivering the outcomes that have been set. Until such time as this data becomes available there must remain some doubt as to whether or not the pilot scheme for the area can be deemed a success.

### **Socio-Economic Inequality And The Economics of Territoriality**

Ultimately any decision about whether or not the new house build program continues in the Lower Oldpark area in its present form will be a political one, highlighting again the way in which urban planning and efforts to address inequalities continue to be politicised amidst the contested space of north Belfast. Within the Unionist community suspicions remain about the sustainability of the initiative regardless of its success

‘the Housing Executive don’t like the concept...they’re hoping that a nationalist [Minister] will take over [DSD] and scrap the idea....’<sup>64</sup>

Notwithstanding initial positive feedback that the ‘Conceptual Framework’ for the area has succeeded in delivering positive outcomes with respect to helping the Lower Oldpark/Cliftonpark Avenue interface ‘get settled’; providing reassurance to the PUL community that they will not face ‘another Torrens’; and addressing some of the more problematic streetscape and design features of the 1970s and 1980s; much more fundamental questions remain about the long-term economic sustainability of the program and this approach to regeneration generally.

In particular, questions arise with regard to the extent to which the retention of territorial boundaries will serve to undermine the need to attract inward investment, private sector development, and crucially, new people. There must also be some doubt as to what economic leverage the addition of this number of social housing units can provide in an area experiencing the level

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<sup>64</sup> Interview: DUP Politician/Political Advisor (2) (2018)

of deprivation and dereliction that exists in the Lower Oldpark with an existing residential population of 711, a disproportionate number of whom are older people. This was an issue that Roy Adams addressed during discussions around the original Girdwood Masterplan

There were exchanges that took place in meetings in the Lower Oldpark ... where I said, your community is dying, putting in a few more housing executive houses, or even 100 more housing executive houses, isn't going to change the fact that its dying. Its dying, because you need a new dynamic, new blood, new investment, new everything, you need a transfusion of something that is more than just more subsidized housing...<sup>65</sup>

Several other members of the original Advisory panel are equally skeptical about the extent to which housing-led regeneration predicated upon maintaining the integrity of sectarian boundaries can provide a long-term basis for sustainable economic and social development

Social housing does not bring regeneration, if it did, half of Belfast would be regenerated. We had the best track record in social housing in Western Europe... Did it regenerate anything? No, it just gave poor people better houses to live in, it didn't get them jobs, it didn't bring money into those communities, it just brought better environments to the houses that they lived in...the economics of regeneration are that you have to...create wealth in those communities<sup>66</sup>

An examination of the data on multiple deprivation across Belfast illustrates clearly that 'interface areas' are among the most deprived areas of the city and that the most deprived PUL communities in Belfast are those immediately adjacent to poorer Catholic communities. What emerges from the data is a

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<sup>65</sup> Interview: Planner/Property Developer (2011)

<sup>66</sup> Interview: Public Official, Belfast City Council (2) (2011)

pattern in which the poorest sections of both communities, in areas which have experienced the highest levels of violence, are competing with each other for limited resources in a zero-sum game. One interviewee describes this phenomenon in the context of the New Lodge and the Protestant community immediately to the north in Tigers Bay areas

What we're actually seeing is the decay of places like Tigers Bay into essentially derelict zones and everybody who gets options is moving to somewhere where that decay is not the everyday reality they have to face. So what you face is you've the New Lodge sitting there full, looking for additional resources and you have Tigers Bay empty and kind of fighting a rear guard action which is ultimately like a bath with the plug out as water is going in and the whole scenario is that everybody is poor.<sup>67</sup>

Outside of the Unionist community, there is a view that the key to regenerating areas like inner city North Belfast lies not with preserving territorial boundaries, and indeed, preserving existing communities, but rather, removing barriers and using mixed tenure residential developments and other economic anchors to serve as a generator for economic development

There comes a point when there's too many old people, there's too many drug dealers and you need to get all those people out of that area, you need to flatten it, turn it into a car park, and re-house those people in mixed communities that are on the upward trajectory.<sup>68</sup>

This highlights again the politicised nature of urban planning, economic regeneration, and efforts to address socio-economic inequalities in a context in which territory and identity are inextricably linked. The data outlined above

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<sup>67</sup> Interview: Public Official, Community Relations Council (2011)

<sup>68</sup> Interview: Public Official, Belfast City Council, (2011)

presents two very different political frameworks for promoting economic regeneration, illustrating further the extent to which the political system continues to shape urban planning policy. For the Protestant community, the retention of territorial boundaries is a sine qua non for any new redevelopment program while outside that community territorial boundaries are viewed as the problem not the solution. This debate further illustrates the way in which the defensive design approach to urban planning that characterized the conflict has continued to be favoured within the Protestant community in order to prevent Catholic encroachment which in turn highlights the extent to which urban design, systemic inequalities and the legacy of the conflict are inextricably linked.

### **Inequality, Territory and Communities**

An important theme of the original Girdwood Masterplan was economic 'sustainability' and fundamental to this was the provision of new housing with the Plan claiming that mixed tenure quality residential development would respond to housing need in the local and wider community and provide a sustainable framework within which communities could become established and to grow. The original Masterplan conceded that the role of design was crucial in creating a sense of security and in that context ensuring natural surveillance and activity throughout the day and evening by providing a mixture of uses and tenures would make streets and spaces feel safer. Quality design was also considered essential for ensuring the sustainability of the development and in this context the Plan stated that new public spaces and routes should be attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively. For this reason a coherent and clearly defined urban structure was proposed, characterized by a network of interconnected routes defining blocks of housing, open spaces and other uses. Legible, easy to understand places providing recognizable routes, intersections and landmarks were considered to be an essential element of the design strategy.

Notwithstanding the very welcome and necessary improvements made to the streetscape and new housing on Cliftonpark Avenue and Manor Street the

actual redevelopment that has taken place to date on the Girdwood site and the immediate surrounding area is very different from that envisaged in the original Masterplan which aimed to create a vibrant, inclusive and diverse environment ‘which attracts present and future generations of people to live, work and visit.’<sup>69</sup> Inward looking, isolated, defensive, and territorial, the actual redevelopment that took place on the Girdwood site and Lower Oldpark mirrors in many ways the worst aspects of the defensive planning practices of the 1970s and 1980s. Catholic social housing at the southeastern end of the site, and social housing for the Protestant community in Lower Oldpark beyond the northwest of the site is in effect ‘buffered’ by the Girdwood Community Hub in the centre of site, as illustrated in the photograph over leaf.



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<sup>69</sup> Business Design Partnership, ‘Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan’ (Business Design Partnership 2007) 4



New social housing occupied by members of the Catholic community is on the left, at the southern end of the site with the new Girdwood Community Hub on the right with open land in between. Photograph by Tim Cunningham

The original Girdwood Masterplan had situated the Community Hub between two wings of the redeveloped Gaol with mixed use residential development on the largest area of the site. Under the revised 'Conceptual Framework' the Hub was moved from the Gaol exercise yard to the original site for mixed tenure housing on Cliftonpark Avenue. The significance of the decision to change the location of the Hub, which again was taken by the Minister Nelson McCausland, was not lost on one senior official who pointed out how the different location limited the number of houses that could be located on the site

Nelson came in and said ok, well I support this, but I want it in the middle of the site. So you put it in the middle, and you put the access roads in, that limits the space for housing... certainly the numbers [of houses on the site] could be reduced significantly.<sup>70</sup>

The current redeveloped Girdwood site has a sterile and fragmented feel, in many respects the antithesis of the vibrant 'city quarter' envisioned by the original Masterplan and unlikely to bring 'maximum economic, social and environmental benefits to the local and wider community.'<sup>71</sup>

What I didn't want to see happening was a segmentation of the territory, what I was looking to do was to achieve something that was a truly holistic thing that was more than the sum of its parts, and it could have been a shared space, right now I don't think it

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<sup>70</sup> Interview: Public Official, OFMDFM (2011)

<sup>71</sup> Business Design Partnership, 'Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Barracks Draft Masterplan' (Business Design Partnership 2007) 4

will ever be a shared space, except insofar as, people from both sides of the community go to the Mater Hospital, and people on both sides might go to visit the Crumlin Road Gaol.<sup>72</sup>

From a defensive planning perspective, the community hub and new streetscape halt any further Catholic encroachment from the New Lodge towards the Lower Oldpark and the new house build delivered under the auspices of BSC provides assurance that the integrity of Protestant territory will be respected. The design of the new facility and surrounding streets is symptomatic of the worst kind of desert planning that characterized urban design during the conflict, where life is in effect 'built out' of the area (see Chapter Three). The original Masterplan had proposed that the Crumlin Road Gaol, serve as the 'anchor' for the site, combined with 'mixed use development' based upon the concept of 'sustainable living' with 'garden city blocks' providing the basis for the urban design structure in order to create an 'authentic urban feel'. Instead, a publicly financed leisure facility serves to act as a barrier between the two communities very ably assisted by high fences, open spaces and a road network that restricts movement from one community to the other with 'no access' the order of the day. These two approaches highlight again the important role that urban design can play in either increasing connectivity and boosting the economic and social life of an area or, conversely, amputate sections of a city through the use of defensive architecture and planning practices. The adoption of the latter approach, in evidence in the photographs below, illustrates how the planning system in the city continues to be steered by the desire to keep communities apart rather than bring them together.

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<sup>72</sup> Interview: Planner/Property Developer (2011)



The Girdwood Community Hub viewed from the Protestant end of the site at Cliftonpark Avenue. Photograph by Tim Cunningham



Metal bollards at the new Girdwood Community Hub prohibit access from the Catholic end of the site to the Protestant areas on Cliftonpark Avenue. The sign indicates 'no through road'. Photograph by Tim Cunningham

### **Inequality, Defensive Design and the Politics of Territory**

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of the redevelopment that took place on the Girdwood site and the Lower Oldpark is that it in many respects it represents a continuation of the same approach to urban planning that characterised the conflict. The former Director of Urban Regeneration at Belfast City Council recalls how demand for increased social housing has been something of a default position for Unionist politicians across the city for several decades

The answer from Unionist politicians was always for the housing executive to build sheltered housing for elderly people... Sorry, that doesn't work economically, no shop is going to locate in an

area that is full of old people, or maybe one shop will. You are not going to regenerate the area if you do that....<sup>73</sup>

There is evidence that pressure from Unionist politicians has been applied to pursue an approach similar to that contained within BSC for the past several decades – although less explicitly. For example, the BSC Action Plan notes that in addition to new house build in Lower Oldpark there has also been a degree of refurbishment that has included new roofs, windows and doors, insulation, kitchens and bathrooms, boilers, rewiring and plumbing, rendering inside and out and new fences, railings and boundaries, all of which is part of the wider package aimed at boosting a demand for housing in the area and stabilizing Protestant population. One interviewee, who worked for the NIHE during this period has described how an identical approach was deployed to help sustain the similarly isolated Protestant community in the Suffolk area of West Belfast in the 1980s as a result of pressure from Unionist politicians

We did work in the mid-80s in Suffolk, looking at why Suffolk was a 'difficult to let' estate, and at that time they were pumping literally millions of pounds into fixing up the houses, but there was nothing wrong with the houses, the problem with Suffolk was that it was a Protestant enclave, not that it was a problem estate, and all they did was knock down houses... it cost about 90K to build a housing executive house, so the amount of waste of the public resource, that was invested in maintaining a Protestant population in that area, at huge public expense, it was just inordinate, and it was treated as a housing problem, so we went out and put in new kitchens, we put in new bathrooms, we painted the front of the houses, did environmental improvements, everybody got a new black fence...that is not what the problem was there, so you were getting almost these sort of risible

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<sup>73</sup> Interview: Public Official, Belfast City Council, (2011) Suffolk is a geographically and demographically isolated Protestant community located in south west Belfast

debates about what the fix was, and I think that this is the uncomfortable thing...<sup>74</sup>

Another interviewee also recalls how new house build was used to try and maintain a Protestant presence in the north of the city during the same period

I can remember speaking to the regional controller of the NIHE at the time, a guy called Billy McGivern and talking to him about this, and he said to me basically, look, the Protestant population is ageing, they're moving to smaller houses, there's nobody new coming in, and what they're actually doing is their representatives are getting new houses built and they're moving around North Belfast, but they're not moving into these areas that are empty.<sup>75</sup>

Bollens also identified this phenomenon in his study of Belfast in the 1980s recommending that a strategy be developed that 'identifies and prioritizes Protestant neighbourhoods in terms of their potential for regeneration...' and proposed that 'difficult decisions be made regarding which neighbourhoods should be cut off from publicly funded life support'<sup>76</sup>. For Bollens, the solution lay with creating a consolidated, more viable Protestant community in the city that would over time feel less threatened and could assume a greater willingness to allow some normalization of Belfast's geography to meet a portion of Catholic objective needs. This approach would in effect require difficult decisions to be made about which Protestant communities would be saved, and which would be sacrificed as part of a wider strategy aimed at consolidation of territory. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in a city in which every inch of territory is replete with meaning, such a strategy has never been implemented. The point however is that the current problems facing the Protestant community in Lower Oldpark reflects similar challenges that have

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<sup>74</sup> Interview: Academic/Urban Planning (2) (2011)

<sup>75</sup> Interview: Former Nationalist Politician (2011)

<sup>76</sup> S Bollens, *Urban Peace-Building in Divided Societies: Belfast and Johannesburg* (Westview Press 1999) 148

arisen across the city in the past several decades as the demographic balance of the city has shifted.

The Conceptual Framework approach adopted for the Girdwood redevelopment appears therefore less of an innovative approach to addressing the legacy of deprivation and dereliction through housing-led regeneration, but rather a repackaged attempt to 'hold the line'. Rather than difficult decisions being made regarding which neighbourhoods to cut off from life support the rallying cry for urban planning within the Unionist community is to ensure that there will 'never be another Torrens'. Undoubtedly the biggest challenge facing this 'not an inch' approach is the demographics of the two communities themselves – it is clear that in spite of the efforts of Unionist politicians, and the presence of walls and barriers, housing need ensures that Catholic advances in the city continue

We got notification through a letter to the Department saying we're going to take down a peace wall, this is a great victory...the young people within the area did the survey and they've agreed now that it should come down. But the reason that this wall was coming down was because there were no longer Protestants who lived on the other side it...the demographic of the area had changed so much that the interface wall, was in fact, between two CRN communities, and therefore could come down.<sup>77</sup>

Notwithstanding the concerns among representatives of the Protestant communities in north Belfast about the levels of dereliction and blight that afflict their areas, there remain significant doubts about the likelihood of successfully repopulating inner city, traditionally Protestant areas by adhering to territorial boundaries when the populations that shaped those original boundaries have long since moved elsewhere. In particular, there is a strong view across a range of stakeholders that the population movements that have

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<sup>77</sup> Interview, DUP Politician/Political Advisor (1) (2011)

taken place over the past thirty years are inexorable and the level of choices available elsewhere render efforts to rebuild working class Protestant communities a futile exercise.

The fact of the matter is, Unionists are leaving North Belfast, and they have been leaving in droves, this is a common result of what happens in big cities. It's the Northern Ireland version of white flight and it's precisely what happened in Chicago.<sup>78</sup>

At the same time, one must acknowledge the fact that, at least in the short term, the Lower Oldpark area and interface has 'gotten settled' and recognize the particular context within which urban regeneration policy takes shape in areas like North Belfast

We often feel that we get a bit of the blame for it, but we're prepared to work with communities, and are doing, in many locations and in places to try to break down the barriers, but we can't just simply say, we're going to make this land available, we're going to rip down the wall between Cliftonville and Lower Oldpark, we're going to build houses in there, and Catholics will apply for them. World War III would break out if we did that.<sup>79</sup>

The new house build on Manor Street that has provided assurance to the community in the Lower Oldpark that they will not be experience 'another Torrens' needs to be considered therefore within the context of the last occasion that this community felt under threat at the advancement of Catholic housing onto Protestant territory.

In the summer of 1986, there was massive rioting in Manor Street to prevent Catholics moving in to the new houses, gunfire and all the rest of it...So there's absolutely massive rioting, to try to push

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<sup>78</sup> Interview: Former Nationalist Politician (2011)

<sup>79</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)



the Catholics out of these houses, in this newly built street...and, in the end the houses had to be demolished. And that was the last real attempt by the Housing Executive to push beyond that line...and any attempts to get round that, or into Girdwood, have failed, and that's 25, 24 years ago now.<sup>80</sup>

The redevelopment that actually took place on the Girdwood site, although quite different to the 'visionary' approach contained within the original Masterplan, compares more favourably when viewed in light of the level of violence that the Cliftonpark Avenue and Manor Street interfaces experienced during the 1970s and 1980s. In a city where housing is still 'a hand grenade' and where public housing officials feel that the removal of walls around the Lower Oldpark could lead to 'World War III breaking out'<sup>81</sup>, planners, developers, and indeed everyone else ought to exercise caution before condemning locally agreed political compromises. Those most impacted by an urban policy dictated by adherence to traditional boundaries are of course the local Catholic communities who experience longer waiting lists for much needed housing. Representatives of that community recognize that urban planning, as with every other aspect of life in North Belfast, is dictated primarily by political compromise

My whole instinct would be ...to go up and say, look, take the walls down, there's a need for houses, put them in, etc. etc. The difficulty here is that you could end up by default, ....and I think this is what most people are afraid of, you could nearly re-create deep division on interfaces, and I suppose, I'm quite wary of doing that. ...objective need says one thing, tactics nearly say another.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Interview: Former Nationalist Politician (2011)

<sup>81</sup> Interview: Public Official, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1) (2011)

<sup>82</sup> Interview: Republican Politician (2011)

There is no doubt that the Unionist community in the Lower Oldpark face very real and legitimate concerns, not least of which is a sense that public agencies offer their community 'a dismal vision' and are content to 'let their areas die'. There is also little doubt that the 'Conceptual Framework' redevelopment has had an immediate effect in reducing tensions and violence in the area and has gone some way to taking the heat out of a toxic situation that developed around the original Girdwood Masterplan.

In many respects the approach to housing-led regeneration at the heart of the BSC strategy mirrors other similar efforts over the past number of decades to provide life support to isolated and under-populated working-class Protestant communities in the city. There is a certain irony in the fact that 'if you build them, they will come' is something of a mantra for the PUL community, not only in Lower Oldpark, but across many other areas of the city, adopted as a rallying cry to ensure that 'there won't be another Torrens'. The phrase itself originated in popular culture with the 1989 fantasy/drama movie 'Field of Dreams', starring Kevin Costner, about an Iowa farmer who builds a baseball diamond in his cornfield which brings 'Shoeless Joe Jackson' and other members of the 1919 Chicago White Sox team to his land. In certain respects, the fantasy at the heart of the movie mirrors a similar desire at the heart of communities such as those within the Lower Oldpark who wish to recreate the vibrant Protestant communities that existed in the city during the early decades of the twentieth century when Belfast was the shipbuilding and linen capital of the world. The 1989 movie was a somewhat sentimental but ultimately anodyne piece of fantasy drama. The dream expressed by representatives of communities in areas like Lower Oldpark is much more parlous.

Ultimately, Unionist rejection of the original Girdwood Masterplan and the political imperative to maintain territorial boundaries played an important role in the loss of a substantial private sector investment (231Million) in an area of the city almost wholly dependent upon public resources. The price of containing the Catholic community within the New Lodge is a further

consolidation of the socio-spatial segregation of north end of the city that in turn perpetuates a sectarian zero-sum game in which the default position for both communities is poverty and social deprivation. In particular, the desire to retain Protestant territory must be considered the impact to perpetuate over-crowding within the Catholic community in the north of the city

Ultimately, there will be an explosion, I mean there are people who are desperate for housing, there's huge overcrowding in the New Lodge, Ardoyne and the Unity area...<sup>83</sup>

At the same time, patterns of housing inequality in the Catholic community need to be considered in the wider context in which recent data has highlighted the extent to which the Catholic middle class has continued to leave north and west Belfast giving rise to a growing Catholic population in the south and east of the city.<sup>84</sup> These population movements have been driven by social mobility, rather than the conflict, and reflect the spatial impact of Catholic progression in the labour market.<sup>85</sup> In many respects these population movements are similar to those that took place in the 1950s and early 1960s although they are of a much greater order, given added impetus by the Protestant exodus from the city from the late 1960s onward.

Demographic imbalances in the city have been further fuelled by the fair employment reforms of the late 1980s which 'cut with the grain' of a restructuring within the Northern Ireland labour market and the rise of a new knowledge economy. As rope makers and welders gave way to management consultants the process of deindustrialization and the fair employment reforms of the late 1980s facilitated the large number of young Catholic graduates entering the labour market at the same time that a large proportion

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<sup>83</sup> Interview: Former Nationalist Politician (2011)

<sup>84</sup> Nolan P, *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report Number Three* (Community Relations Council 2014) 115-117

<sup>85</sup> Shuttleworth I, Barr P, and Gould M, 'Does Internal Migration in Northern Ireland Increase Religious and Social Segregation? Perspectives from the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS) 2001-2007' (2013) 19 *Population, Space and Place* 84

of older Protestant males were leaving.<sup>86</sup> One consequence was that a large proportion of Catholic first-time buyers seeking a first step on the property ladder found a willing number of older retired Protestants who were happy to avail of a boom in house prices and move further east. The fact that Catholics were required to choose selectively in what are considered 'safe' areas meant that Protestants living in places like the Cliftonville Road in north Belfast and the Stranmillis and Lisburn Roads in south Belfast were able to secure a premium price for their property.

A cursory glance at the website of any property broker will reveal the degree to which Catholic home-owners in Belfast are willing, or indeed forced to pay an extra premium to live in 'safe' territory. Several decades on, the notion of what is considered 'safe' territory has changed significantly with many Catholics now living in former Protestant strongholds in the east of the city as well as the 'mixed' suburbs around the south-east and north-west. In some cases this has given rise to 'gated communities' as private developers have sought to use urban design to further reassure prospective Catholic buyers. In many other cases Catholics simply purchase old red-brick properties and 'keep a low profile'. The rise in private apartment buildings has also provided an opportunity for a growing Catholic middle class to secure a foothold on the property ladder. Many of these new developments are in the 'neutral' spaces of the city centre although some, notably the developments on Sandy Row are in firmly Unionist territory. The latest defensive design features have ensured that the developments on Sandy Row have remained largely impervious to sectarian tensions although there have been some notable incidents including a controversy that arose when a resident of one private sector development had an Irish tricolour in a window that was visible from the street.

On occasion these population movements precipitate more serious controversy, particularly when a Catholic presence into traditional Protestant

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<sup>86</sup> B Osborne and I Shuttleworth, *Fair Employment in Northern Ireland: A Generation On* (Blackstaff 2004)

territory is deemed to be a step too far resulting in a violent backlash in the form of a forced eviction. In September 2017 Catholic residents were ordered out of a 'Shared' housing development in Cantrell Close on the Ravenhill Road in east Belfast by Protestant paramilitaries.<sup>87</sup> In fact, from April 2016 until March 2017, a total of 477 people reported that paramilitaries had forced them from their homes, illustrating the extent to which the vision enshrined in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement of 'freedom from sectarian harassment' remains an aspiration rather than a reality for many people in the city. Although regrettable, the reality is that in a context in which the Protestant population of Belfast continues to decline and the Catholic population continues to grow, with the two communities reaching almost parity within the city, further tensions and instances of intimidation are inevitable.

Another way in which these tensions continue to play out, particularly in the north of the city is with increased demand for 'peace lines'. A study by Jarman has revealed that during the 1990s it was Loyalists and Unionists that were more likely to argue in favour of peace walls compared to their Republican and Nationalist neighbours which ought not to come as a surprise given that the latter are much more likely to be seeking to move into the territory of the former.<sup>88</sup> In some instances new peace lines have been erected in the form of fences and barriers, in others, such as Girdwood, architects and planners ensure that the problem is 'designed away'. The difficulty with this 'finger in the dike' approach to containing the Catholic population is that there are now too many holes in the dam and the 'tipping point' has long since passed when it would have been possible to keep Belfast a 'Protestant' city. An important question therefore is whether the demographic transformation that Belfast is currently experiencing will pass

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<sup>87</sup> <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2017/09/28/news/catholics-ordered-out-of-belfast-shared-housing-in-sectarian-threat-1148290/>

<sup>88</sup> N Jarman, *Towards Sustainable Security: Interface Barriers and the Legacy of Segregation in Belfast* (Community Relations Council 2008) cited in Byrne J (2011) *The Belfast Peace Walls: The Problems, Policies, and Politics of the Troubles Architecture* (unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Ulster)

relatively peacefully or will serve to ignite a much wider conflict as happened in the late 1960s. This will be explored in the next section.

### **Closed Systems, Core Values, and Conflict**

In seeking to understand whether the recursive processes shaping the new Belfast will indeed precipitate a return to violence one might well conclude that the post-conflict city of the new millennium appears on the surface at least to be replicating some of the mistakes made at the tail end of the last one. The Girdwood Masterplan, in spite of being subject to extensive consultation, that included a range of public meetings and discussions, formal consultation, followed by a full Equality Impact Assessment, ultimately fell victim to zero-sum identity politics. The vision of a new 'city quarter' on the site of the former Gaol and army barracks gave way instead to a sterile and segregated mirror image of the kind of defensive structures that have dominated the city for the last four decades with a publicly financed leisure centre built and designed to serve as a buffer halting further progression of the Catholic population into Protestant territory.

With a political system predicated on competing ethno-national territorial claims; an economic system predicated upon the public sector 'pump-priming' redevelopment sites in order to secure private sector investment through 'anchor tenants' and mixed-use developments that favour 'neutral' spaces over contested ones; and an urban design framework that is predicated upon marginalising suspect communities the challenges are considerable. Certainly, one might well question whether an approach to post-conflict reconstruction of the city that directs benefits away from those areas which suffered most during the conflict and which is still designed to contain the minority community within discrete boundaries will allow a new generation of 'conflict entrepreneurs' to precipitate a return to large-scale politically motivated violence. As outlined in previous chapters, planning, that is, the public regulation and 'production of space' is shown to serve as an instrument of social control and like most other areas of public policy, it is

'double-edged', being capable of both reform and control, emancipation and oppression.<sup>89</sup>

Based on the experience of Belfast it would appear that the framework provided for in the Northern Ireland Act has so far done little to reconfigure the planning system in such a way that the emancipatory, rather than repressive aspects prevail. In autopoietic terms, the targeted sub-systems in question have merely been 'irritated' by the procedural requirements of the wider regulatory framework rather than actually being 'reconfigured'. The net outcome is a city ecosystem in which redevelopment and social and economic gains are steered away from those who need it most. This however is only part of the story. In a context in which the political representation and the population of the city is moving closer towards parity between the two communities, the compromise at the heart of the Conceptual Framework ought to be viewed as a political compromise designed to prevent return to conflict. With the growth of the Catholic population across the city political representatives of both communities are aware of the capacity of territorial tensions to precipitate violence. The Conceptual Framework is imperfect, and yet it illustrates well Ignatieff's point that it may be the case that the only realistic way for diverse populations to live together *is* to live side by side.<sup>90</sup> The next chapter will discuss the compromises at the heart of the Conceptual Framework within the context of wider theory and practice of transitional justice arguing that although imperfect, the approach that was taken to ultimately developing the Girdwood site appears to be the price that must be paid in order to keep peace on the streets of north Belfast.

## Conclusions

This chapter showed how failure to secure agreement on the Girdwood Masterplan led to a very different approach to the redevelopment of the area that reflected the competing political objectives and territorial claims of the

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<sup>89</sup> O Yiftachel, 'Social control, urban planning and ethno-class relations: Mizrahi Jews in Israel's 'Development Towns' (2003) 24 (2) *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 418

<sup>90</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 45

two main communities. The Conceptual Framework approach that replaced the Girdwood Masterplan illustrates how the recursive processes that steered the urban design aspects of the planning system in the 1970s and 1980s, notably the desire to protect Protestant territory from Catholic encroachment, remain in place. The design of the Community Hub and surrounding areas around Cliftonpark Avenue, characterized by fences and wide, open spaces can be contrasted with the way in which the Girdwood Masterplan had sought to use urban design to bring people onto the site in order to attract new residents and inward investment (see previous chapter). This chapter has also shown how the political system ensured that the conventional model to economic regeneration, characterized by anchor tenants and inward investment, has been replaced in the Lower Oldpark by a public-sector driven desire for housing-led regeneration in order to help stabilize the working class Protestant population in the area.

The next chapter will consider what the compromises at the heart of the Conceptual Framework mean for the post-conflict planning vision of the city in a context in which the promotion of equality invariably gives rise to the question – equality of what, and for whom? At the heart of this question is the degree to which efforts to address the social and economic legacy of conflict are compromised by political considerations, not least, the desire to prevent a return to violence, and by the way in which patterns of inequality are configured differently across the two main communities. The next chapter will also examine what the lessons from the Crumlin Road/Girdwood experience say about efforts to develop a more holistic approach to transitional justice that engages the social and economic dimensions of conflict.



## **Chapter 8**

### **Inequality, Transition, Compromise**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines the lessons can be drawn from Belfast regarding efforts to develop a more holistic approach to transitional justice that engages structural and systemic inequalities. The first lesson relates to the various ways in which the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood redevelopment highlights the inextricable link between systemic inequalities and non-recurrence/prevention of future conflict and the need for a more holistic approach to transitional justice that engages socioeconomic dimensions. The second lesson deals with the limitations of established frameworks of transitional justice and the value of systems theory and the theory of autopoiesis for capturing a more nuanced approach to impact upon, and are impacted by, political conflict. The third lesson relates to what an autopoietic or more reflexive understanding of transformational transitional justice might look like in practice. The fourth lesson outlines the limitations associated with a more deliberative approach to transitional justice both in terms of the means and the ends of the process and what type of 'justice' one might reasonably expect to be achieved.

#### **Wither Transitional Justice?**

As outlined in the chapter one, an important aspect of the current debate taking place within transitional justice about the value, or not, of engaging in socioeconomic conflict legacy issues is the perceived danger of extending the boundaries of the field beyond what are deemed to be the 'core' concerns of civil and political rights issues. One weakness of this argument, which is evident from the case study considered in this thesis, is the difficulty of identifying what are 'core' concerns in a context in which a conflict took place over a protracted period, one result of which was that structural and systemic inequalities were literally and figuratively woven into the urban fabric of the city. Writing about South Africa, Paige Arthur asks on what grounds could one argue that socioeconomic claims arising from the legacy

of apartheid should not be considered transitional justice claims? If they can be considered transitional justice she asks, then what specific form should they take, which measures (nationalization, special taxation, expropriation, affirmative action, etc.) are most appropriate to fulfillment?<sup>1</sup>

Looking at the regeneration of the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Barracks site one might make the same argument. As this research has clearly demonstrated, demographic imbalances, housing inequalities experienced by the Catholic community, and social deprivation within the local Protestant community in the north of the city can all be directly traced to a deliberate planning policy carried out by the security forces that took place over more than three decades in order to contain and manage political violence. Moreover, the primary concern from many of the stakeholders involved with the Girdwood regeneration project was a desire to promote economic development in order to help alleviate at least some aspects of the social and economic legacy of the conflict in north Belfast, but to do so in a way that would not precipitate a return to conflict. The possibility of a return to violence arising from the dispute around additional housing for the site was considered to be a very real and significant threat which led to a compromise that respected Protestant concerns about Catholic expansion in the area.

If, as Pablo De Greiff argues, the future of transitional justice depends upon its ability to occupy a much more explicitly 'normative space' that includes non-recurrence and prevention of conflict then the lesson from this case study is that it is very difficult to achieve this goal without examination of the ways in which systemic inequalities intersect with political violence.<sup>2</sup> Socioeconomic root causes of violence and repression are often ignored by transitional justice mechanisms for several reasons, including the difficulty of identifying who or what is responsible for inequality and the challenge of

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<sup>1</sup> P Arthur, 'How "Transitions" Reshaped Human Rights: A Conceptual History of Transitional Justice', (2009) (31) (2) *Human Rights Quarterly* 359

<sup>2</sup> De Greiff P, 'The Future of the Past: Reflections on the Present State and Prospects of Transitional Justice' (2020) 14 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 254

conceiving of practical remedies to address structural violence.<sup>3</sup> These difficulties ought not however be a sufficient reason for transitional justice scholarship from abdicating its responsibilities in this area. Indeed, one might argue that the essence of scholarship, transitional justice or otherwise, is the desire to find answers to difficult questions. One of the issues identified in this thesis is that contemporary debate regarding non-recurrence is characterized by disagreement about the degree to which poverty, inequality and economic, social and cultural rights actually matter for armed conflict.<sup>4</sup> Part of the challenge, as others have pointed out, is the difficulty of disaggregating or unpacking what are 'conflict related' inequalities from what might be considered inequalities arising from the vagaries or shortcomings of global capitalism. This research has shown clearly how horizontal inequalities intersect with socioeconomic deprivation on the streets of Belfast and how both of these have been impacted by secular factors including deindustrialization and Anglo-modernist planning practices to create conflict. As such, one important lesson from this case study is that it is possible to identify the exact nature of the relationship between systemic inequalities and political conflict, provided that one is willing to look hard enough in the first place.

There is another important and related point about the need for robust research on the socioeconomic dimensions of conflict that is highlighted by the material considered in this research and this pertains to the 'definitional' role of transitional justice. Again, as outlined in chapter one, transitional justice as both literature and practice offer more than just a set of neutral instruments for the achievement of the goals of justice, truth and reconciliation; it also serves to narrate conflict and peace.<sup>5</sup> As the documentary evidence uncovered in the course of this research has shown,

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<sup>3</sup> Dancy G and E Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 'Bridge to human development or vehicle of inequality? Transitional justice and economic structures' (2014) 9 (1) *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 51-69

<sup>4</sup> Waldorf L, 'Anticipating the Past: Transitional justice and Socio-Economic Wrongs', (2012) 21 (2) *Social and Legal Studies* 171

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

the acute intersection of socio-economic and identity-based deprivation that characterizes areas of Belfast can be traced directly to a deliberate conflict management strategy established in the early 1970s. This is an important finding that demonstrates how spatial disadvantage was an outcome of efforts to contain political violence and is therefore an important legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict. Prior to this research the dominant narrative was that patterns of segregation and disadvantage were attributed to the preferences of local communities and/or the incompetence of planners and architects.

In a context in which there is a symbiotic relationship between spatial inequalities and the potential for a return to violence, it is imperative therefore that transitional justice scholarship sets itself the task of achieving, as far as possible, narratives about conflict that reflect the nuances and details, or indeed 'the truth' of what actually happened. From this perspective, it is important to stress that established transitional justice frameworks such as truth commissions are by no means the sole mechanism for unpacking false and misleading narratives about conflict. Another approach is the publication of materials which counter false narratives or 'ethnic myths' that aim to attribute patterns of inequality or disadvantage to characteristics or behaviors of certain groups.<sup>6</sup> This highlights the need for transitional justice scholarship that – to paraphrase Miller - renders visible what has hitherto been invisible.<sup>7</sup>

One way in which this can be achieved involves transitional justice scholarship moving outside of its established recursive knowledge processes (including methodologies) and engaging with scholars and practitioners in other disciplines. If transitional justice is to succeed in achieving robust research and more comprehensive narratives of conflict,

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<sup>6</sup> S Steinberg, (2001) *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America* (Beacon Press 2001)

<sup>7</sup> Miller Z, 'Effects of Invisibility: In Search of the 'Economic' in Transitional justice' (2008) 2 *The International Journal of Transitional justice* 266-291

then one lesson from this thesis is that it cannot do so on its own. An important theme of this thesis is that processes that aim to address the social and economic legacy of conflict must be capable of engaging with the complexity inherent within the planning and design of the urban environment. The application of a systems theory theoretical framework allows not only for a better understanding of the complex forces that shape spatial disadvantage, but also provides a better understanding of the scale of the challenges presented by structural and systemic conflict legacy issues. Using a systems theory approach, this thesis examined the relationship between structural and systemic disadvantage and political conflict in Northern Ireland through analysis of spatial inequalities between the two main communities in Belfast. An important element of this analysis was an examination of the ways in which the economic, political, planning and architectural systems interacted to shape patterns of systemic disadvantage over several decades. If transitional justice is to move successfully beyond its traditional territorial boundaries, it is imperative that new theoretical frameworks are adopted which can provide a better understanding of the way in which structural and systemic conflict legacy issues are shaped and systems theory provides one vehicle by which that journey can be achieved.

Another important lesson from this thesis is that a genuinely holistic approach to transitional justice that incorporates the social and economic dimensions of conflict legacy issues cannot ignore the role of planning and architecture. This is especially true in a context in which planners and architects have prime responsibility for the design and organising of urban space and 'we cannot get away from the fact that our polities are spatial.'<sup>8</sup> To date, urban planning and architecture, has received at best, scant attention from transitional justice scholarship.<sup>9</sup> The findings from this thesis

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<sup>8</sup> P Collier, *The Future of Capitalism: Facing The New Anxieties* (Harper Collins 2018) 61

<sup>9</sup> M Mihai, 'Architectural Transitional Justice? Political Renewal within the Scars of a Violent Past' (2018) 12 *International Journal of Transitional Justice*. The Historical Urbanism Project which is an interdisciplinary project looking at the role of the design of the urban

regarding the relationship between the planning and design of the urban environment and political conflict would suggest that this is an oversight that ought to be addressed. Further evidence of the important role that urban planning and architecture can play in precipitating, and preventing conflict is provided by the large body of scholarship from urban theorists, political scientists, and others who have focused attention on this issue and who have been cited in this thesis. It may seem trite to argue that analysis of the relationship between social and economic inequalities and conflict requires input from the range of disciplines that are concerned with exploring how systemic inequalities are shaped in the first place. At the same time, as noted in chapter one, there has been a tendency in the past for economic and social conflict legacy issues to serve as a make weight or add-on to traditional frameworks.

### **From Theory to Practice**

Insofar as the criticism that the practice of transitional justice is guilty of 'isomorphic mimicry'<sup>10</sup>, there is no suggestion here that any truth commission for Northern Ireland, if one were ever to be set up, ought to include the kinds of issues considered in this thesis. Gready has argued that given finite resources, it is doubtful whether even the most expert truth commissions are capable of assembling sufficient expertise to make credible recommendations on a wider range of civil and political rights and economic and social rights.<sup>11</sup> The subject matter of this case study illustrates his point. Any truth commission that sought to examine the kinds of issues considered in this these would invariably be drawn into debates about competing models of urban development and the relative merits of Keynesian versus Monetarist approaches to economic policy. It has also been argued that in so far as the socioeconomic aspects of conflict are

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environment in promoting conflict transformation is a welcome addition to the limited attention transitional justice has given to planning architecture to date, see <https://brandonhamber.blogspot.com/2019/01/historical-urbanism-project.html>

<sup>10</sup> De Greiff P, 'The Future of the Past: Reflections on the Present State and Prospects of Transitional Justice' (2020) 14 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 251-259

<sup>11</sup> P Gready, *The Era of Transitional Justice: The Aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and Beyond* (Routledge, 2010)

concerned, reparations programs may generate even more challenges than truth commissions.<sup>12</sup> Again, the issues considered in this case study that show how spatial disadvantage was been shaped over the past 50 years illustrate why this is something of an understatement. In this context it ought to be noted that the most recent attempt at addressing the legacy of conflict in Northern Ireland, namely, the Stormont House Agreement, provides an example of the sensible 'divisions of labour' that transitional justice ought to be aiming for. Mechanisms for 'dealing with the past' are listed separately from 'institutional reform', as are other issues of political concern notably 'Finance and Welfare' and 'Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition'. This is how it ought to be. Rather than seeking to shoehorn questions about the social and economic legacy of the conflict into an already highly contested space that aims to address killings and injuries in the conflict and provide compensation for those who were injured, or the families of those killed, it is wise that boundaries and territory are respected in this area.

At the same time, the question remains as to transitional justice is, and what it is for? What is a true or bluff definition of transitional justice in the twenty-first century? As with several others who take a more skeptical view about a more holistic version of transitional justice, Waldorf does not deny the importance of addressing past and present socio-economic inequalities as a matter of both justice and potential conflict prevention but argues instead that this should be done 'through democratic politics and distributive justice – not through elite bargains and transitional justice...the remedying of socio-economic injustices is a long-term political project'.<sup>13</sup> As this thesis has demonstrated however, this approach takes a very limited view, not just of transitional justice, but also, of democratic politics. In a context in which theoretical frameworks about reflexive approaches to politics, urban planning and economic regeneration require participation and deliberation

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<sup>12</sup> Dancy G and E Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 'Bridge to human development or vehicle of inequality? Transitional justice and economic structures' (2014) 9 (1) *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 54

<sup>13</sup> L Waldorf, 'Anticipating the Past: Transitional justice and Socio-Economic Wrongs', (2012) 21 (2) *Social and Legal Studies* 171

on the part of stakeholders, ought transitional justice scholars and practitioners to sit on their hand while negotiations about the future shape of the city are carried out by others? I would agree with De Greiff's observation that without socioeconomic transformations, transitional justice will be 'nothing more than a series of more or less isolated events'.<sup>14</sup> As with debates about reflexive law, and reflexive politics, a common theme among those arguing for a more transformative approach to transitional justice is the need for more engagement with civil society and participatory frameworks. One way in which this can be achieved is by practitioners of transitional justice assisting with and participating in deliberations around future development plans for Belfast and assisting politicians and community leaders with the technical knowledge needed for the reflexive politics and reflexive planning processes with which they are engaged.

De Greiff argues that an important legacy of conflict is the way in which normative expectations are shattered resulting in 'a generalized weakening of agency' that applies to both victims and non-victims alike. He characterizes this 'weakening of agency' by a withdrawal from public spaces, disengagement with social networks, and lack of willingness to make claims to authorities and formal institutions.<sup>15</sup> This diminished agency is also characterized by a lack of civic trust and social capital, all of which combine to make social coordination more difficult which in turn has consequences for economic development. The lack of trust, fear, isolation and diminished agency described by De Greiff mirror the findings in this research which found that within the Lower Oldpark for example the community and the physical space was inward looking, defensive, and isolated. As outlined in chapter five, in a context where core planning principles like freedom of access and connectivity means 'someone can

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<sup>14</sup> De Greiff P, 'The Future of the Past: Reflections on the Present State and Prospects of Transitional Justice' (2020) 14 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 254

<sup>15</sup> P De Greiff, 'Articulating the Links Between Transitional Justice and Development: Justice and Social Integration' in P De Greiff and R Duthie (eds) *Transitional Justice and Development: Making Connections* (International Center for Transitional Justice 2009)



come and attack my house' there is little doubt that fear, lack of trust, and a generalized weakening of agency pervades. A healthy and functioning city ecosystem requires that this diminished agency and lack of trust be repaired and reestablished over time. Partly this will involve the reformed Police Service of Northern Ireland gaining the trust of local communities, and the ability of the courts and the political institutions to be seen to offer an alternative way of resolving disputes through the rule of law rather than through physical force. Partly this will also involve the gradual rebuilding of local communities, physically, and emotionally. In other words, helping to support the 'subliminal operating system' necessary in order to preserve some level of peace.

Within Belfast, new economic developments, notably, the Ulster University Belfast Campus and the widening of the M2 at the York Street Interchange have led to concerns from local communities similar to those around the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Barracks. Local communities, local politicians, and indeed, the new planning department of Belfast City Council are all currently engaged in deliberative planning processes that will shape the future city, for better or worse. There is in this context a role for technical expertise and outside knowledge about the social consequences of new development in the city. Planners, architects and local communities need all the help they can get, including from practitioners and theorists of transitional justice about the social consequences of what is being proposed. This is the ground on which transitional justice can become genuinely transformative. Where reflexive planning, and reflexive politics, can meet reflexive transitional justice. There are some examples of this. Projects like 'Hidden Barriers and Divisive Architecture' allow politicians who have been presented with the facts about the spatial legacy of the conflict to make more informed decisions.<sup>16</sup> The politicians may not always listen, or follow advice on best practice, but it is vital that they are provided with

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<sup>16</sup> The project involves a team of academics, lead by Professor Brandon Hamber, Ulster University, who are examining the legacy of defensive planning in Belfast. <https://brandonhamber.blogspot.com/2018/06/hidden-barriers-and-divisive.html>

alternative narratives as they decide the future shape of the city. Given the level of fear and mistrust in local communities, it is important to recognize that theorists and practitioners who enter into the deliberative processes around the redevelopment of the city may not always like the conclusions that the deliberations reach.

### **Compromise, Non-Recurrence, and Reflexive Justice**

One observation from the findings of this thesis is that there is clearly a difficulty in addressing the spatial legacy of the conflict given the different ways in which patterns of inequality have been shaped across the two communities. For the Catholic community, spatial inequality is relatively clear and measurable in the form of 'inequality' as measured objectively by the 'points system' - Catholic tenants on the social housing waiting list have the highest level of points and therefore, in accordance with the law, ought to be prioritised for new house build because they have the greatest level of 'objective need'. According to this criterion, social housing would not have been built in the Lower Oldpark and the priority for the Girdwood site would have been to ensure the maximum number of housing units in order to aim to address the chronic levels of housing inequality experienced by the Catholic community in the area.

The difficulty with this approach is that for the Protestant community living in areas like the Lower Oldpark there are also significant inequalities but identifying and measuring patterns of inequality for these communities is much more difficult. As a former DUP member of Belfast City Council quite rightly pointed out, what is the message for Protestant communities in the city who are offered only 'a dismal vision' of decline that tells them their future lies in one of the suburbs of South Antrim because their area is so undesirable and bereft of resources that no one wants to live there? The Lower Oldpark, by all objective evidence, as outlined in chapter seven, is an area experiencing chronic levels of social and economic inequality one characteristic of which is high levels of dereliction and urban decay. Again, as outlined in chapter seven, it is unsurprising that political representatives

of the Protestant community in north Belfast wish to see public policy interventions that are capable of addressing this form of inequality. From this perspective, the Conceptual Framework approach that shaped the redevelopment of the Girdwood site represents a compromise, based on deliberation between the political representatives of the two main communities. Moreover, this compromise aims to address two very different, and competing patterns of inequality that are shaped by two very different demographics. At the same time, one ought to recognise and acknowledge that the redevelopment of the site took place in a way that maintains, and indeed affirms, communal boundaries. In this respect the patterns of segregation that have characterised the city for the past several decades have been maintained through the design and situation of housing and infrastructure.

In light of the complex challenges that arise as a result of the population imbalances and patterns of spatial inequality that characterise Belfast it ought not be a surprise if compromises such as these are reached by political representatives of both communities that on the surface appear less than optimal, or even appear to defy logic. The 'Conceptual Framework' that ultimately shaped the site of the former army barracks, is an example of the consociational framework at the heart of The Agreement and given effect to in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, working, literally and figuratively, on the ground. These developments, as outlined in the last chapter, are in different respects flawed, but to paraphrase Thomas Hardy, only dogs and other philosophers 'attempt perfectly consistent conduct in a world made up so largely of compromise'.<sup>17</sup>

From this perspective, the prospects for non-recurrence of political conflict in Northern Ireland in the future look more secure, notwithstanding the continued patterns of segregation, division, and occasional violence that characterise the city. In addition to fairly broad support for public institutions,

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<sup>17</sup> T Hardy *Far From The Madding Crowd* (Marshall Cavendish 1986, first published 1908) 42

including the PSNI, the way in which the Girdwood site was redeveloped reflects the kind of 'shared operating system', or 'horizontal governance' identified by Ignatieff. As outlined in chapter seven, patterns of housing inequality in the Catholic community and segregation of housing development in north Belfast need also to be considered in the wider context in which recent data has highlighted the extent to which the Catholic middle class has continued to leave north and west Belfast giving rise to a growing Catholic population in outlying suburbs to the north and west of the city as well as an increased Catholic presence in south and east Belfast.<sup>18</sup> The outcome of this shift is that several decades on, the notion of what is considered 'mixed' or 'Catholic' territory has changed significantly with many Catholics now living in south and east of the city.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the increasing Catholic population and geographic spread across the city as a whole, is located within the same ecosystem as the contested streets of north Belfast where the territorial imperative remains insistent.<sup>20</sup>

The paradox at the heart of the Belfast ecosystem is further evidenced by virtue of the fact that at the time of writing, July 2020, the Northern Ireland Executive has returned having been in suspension for over three years. In the period since suspension Northern Ireland has once again been subject to a form of direct rule from Westminster. At the same time, the future development of the city through implementation of the 2013 Belfast City Masterplan is in the hands of Belfast City Council following the devolution of planning powers. The same parties who did not agree to sit down in the

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<sup>18</sup> Nolan P, *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report Number Three* (Community Relations Council 2014) 115-117

<sup>19</sup> I Shuttleworth and C Lloyd 'Moving Apart or Moving Together? A Snapshot of Residential Segregation From the 2011 Census' (2013) *Shared Space* Vol 16 60

<sup>20</sup> The same phenomenon plays out in the labour market where larger employers, and those workforces with a higher turnover, and in mixed areas, typically have more balanced workforces than smaller concerns located in single identity areas. Fair employment laws, recognizing these differences, do not require workforces with less than 10 employees to monitor their workforces. Workforce monitoring data illustrates these patterns and again highlights the limits to how much integration at neighbourhood and workplace level one can reasonably expect in a divided society. In practical terms this illustrates why a public house on the Shankill of the Falls is unlikely to be expected to have a balanced workforce, but why an institution like the civil service would be expected to be broadly representative of the two main communities.

Northern Ireland Executive for over two years continued to sit down weekly in Belfast City Council chamber in order to plan a future for the city. The Review of Public Administration that took place following the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement means that many of the other key functions of governance have now been devolved to agencies and local government which are overseen by locally elected politicians. Similarly, the 'Together Building United Communities Strategy'<sup>21</sup> launched in 2013 aims to remove all Northern Ireland's interface barriers by 2023. As this case study shows, the outcome of the Conceptual Framework at Girdwood was to consolidate the separation of the Lower Oldpark and New Lodge communities.

It is also worth recalling that, as outlined in chapter five, the original Girdwood Masterplan was drawn up under direct rule from Westminster, by David Hanson MP. Oversight of the Masterplan, again as outlined in chapters five and six was subsequently taken over by Margaret Ritchie, and then Alex Attwood of the SDLP, and then by a succession of Ministers operating a form of Direct Rule before going back to the current devolved administration. In effect, responsibility for the site over the past two decades has oscillated between direct rule and devolved administrations, but at all times, the common theme has been the need to secure the agreement of the two communities on the ground. In political terms, this has meant Sinn Féin and the DUP, but it is important to note that the numerous and lengthy consultation exercises carried out over a period of several years ensured that there was a significant degree of buy in to the final decision from both communities on the ground, reflecting the horizontal or reflexive politics at the heart of deliberations around the future of the site. At no point during the course of the research for example was it suggested by any interviewee that the political parties were at odds with the wishes of their local communities. In other words, the original Masterplan was proposed, negotiated, rejected, renegotiated, by representatives of the two communities, amid the ebb and flow of an ever-evolving peace process.

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<sup>21</sup> Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, Together Building a United Community (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister 2013) 6

This in turn led to a compromise, and alternative Conceptual Framework for the area, as outlined in chapter seven. The point here is that the deliberations around urban space that take place within the political system, and the wider aim to prevent a return to violence, is rooted in ambiguity, paradox, and uncertainty. With urban space, as with politics, the solution in Northern Ireland would appear to be a mix of separation at ground level and sharing at institutional level, characterised at local level by rotation of the Lord Mayoral roles and consociational governance.

The cross-community consociational arrangements at the heart of the Belfast Agreement have been subject to a significant degree of criticism, not least because these arrangements, it has been argued, entrench sectarianism and group divisions.<sup>22</sup> Part of this argument is predicated upon the notion that political frameworks which are based upon communal identity encourage and facilitate separation and segregation more generally. The evidence from this case study suggests in fact that the opposite is the case, namely, that the consociational arrangements evident in the Northern Ireland Act merely give de jure and legal recognition to the de facto political reality of a divided community. In other words, the legal system gave formal recognition to the need for cross-community political arrangements in the Northern Ireland Act of 1998, notwithstanding that the political system has operated on the basis of cross-community agreement for ensuring 'horizontal governance' independently and for much longer. Most interviewees mentioned previous cross-party discussions about the need to regenerate north Belfast which pre-dated the Girdwood Masterplan, and The Agreement. Moreover, the primary driver for cross-community consensus within the political system is the need to focus on building and

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<sup>22</sup> See e.g. R Wilson, 'From consociationalism to interculturalism' in R Taylor (ed.) *Consociational Theory: McGarry and O'Leary and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Routledge 2009); see also B O'Leary, 'Debating Consociational Politics: Normative and Explanatory Arguments' in S Noel (ed) *From Power-Sharing to Democracy: Post-Conflict Institutions in Ethnically Divided Societies* (McGill-Queen's University Press 2005); J Anderson and I Shuttleworth, 'Sectarian Demography, territoriality and political development in Northern Ireland' (1998) 17 (2) *Political Geography* 187

maintaining relationships between the two communities in order to prevent a return to violence. As outlined in chapters five, six and seven, north Belfast is an area of the city in which problematic community relations has, since the 1970s, resulted in gun battles, rioting and civil disorder, and entire streets burnt to the ground as part of a campaign of sectarian intimidation. It ought not be a surprise therefore if politicians, and many others wish to proceed on the basis of consensus and agreement between the two main communities. To date, politicians in Northern Ireland have showed remarkable dexterity in reaching compromise on a range of difficult issues, from Girdwood to the decommissioning IRA arms.

The latter process is instructive in illustrating, like the debates around the Conceptual Framework, that no manual or prescriptive formula exists for how best to deal with conflict legacy issues. The decommissioning of IRA arms took place in a secret location, with no documentary evidence provided to indicate how much weaponry, if indeed any, was put beyond use. There is widespread acceptance that the event took place, and the fact of its occurrence has been confirmed by a small number of hand-picked witnesses who are sworn to secrecy but who have sufficient credibility on all sides that their word has been good enough to convince the most sceptical critics. The agreement of the IRA to put their weapons beyond use was clearly predicated on a lack of detail for public consumption about the exact mechanisms involved.

In a similar vein, when asked about the negotiations that were taking place around an alternative to the original Girdwood Masterplan one Republican politician responded that

North Belfast, has been if you like the microcosm of the overall conflict, the violence went on here...five years longer at higher intensity....after 1998, the Good Friday Agreement...this [area] has the most peace walls...and, in certain ways, if you crack

North Belfast, you can crack it anywhere. And also, some of the biggest steps have actually been taken here, quietly, not always quietly, but, to a great extent a lot of quiet work, there's a lot of, I think community leadership, on the ground as well, so there's a willingness there, now, to get it sorted...<sup>23</sup>

When a former IRA bomber, hunger-striker, prison escapee and elected representative of Sinn Féin states that things need to be done quietly, everyone else ought to listen. The quiet and 'below the radar' nature of the work that interviewee refers to also needs to be considered within the context of the paradoxes that are at the heart of the peace process. In effect, this thesis highlights the compromises that are necessary in order to achieve a successful transition from conflict in a part of city where identity and territory are inextricably linked and woven into the fabric of the built environment.

### **Holistic and Reflexive Transitional Justice**

Efforts to adopt a more holistic approach to transitional justice that takes account of the social and economic legacies of conflict needs therefore to recognise the volatile relationship that exists between territory, identity and inequality in places like north Belfast. Ignatieff argues that the compromises that lie at the heart of these kind of deliberative processes will at times require activists and scholars to acknowledge that they have no standing on the question of 'whose place is this?'<sup>24</sup> The question of 'whose place is this' assumes even greater salience in a context in which 'the Ulsterman carries the map of this religious geography in his mind almost from birth'.<sup>25</sup> Ignatieff's conclusions reflect the findings of this case study where 'the less than perfect political processes' that have prevented a return to violence have indeed delivered solutions that fall outside conventional boundaries of

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<sup>23</sup> Interview: Republican Politician (2011)

<sup>24</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World* (Harvard University Press 2017) 136

<sup>25</sup> A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (Blackstaff 1977) 182



'best practice'. That these solutions also fall out with conventional planning and economic development theory make them, in one sense, all the more questionable. And yet Ignatieff goes on to argue that 'outsiders...' need to recognize '...the dangers that lurk in our own certainties and convictions and avoid them as best we can'....<sup>26</sup> Ignatieff's argument here mirrors that of Turner about the need to eschew certainty and embrace the undecidable.<sup>27</sup> In the streets of north Belfast, the only certainty is that failure to take account of local nuances around ownership of turf is a recipe for disaster.

It is clear that respect for 'the local' in this context means acceptance of a de facto approach to planning that allows for continued division and segregation of the two communities in some areas of the city and allows for some isolated Protestant communities to remain on 'life support' through public funding in order to manage the wider demographic changes taking place across the city. If the lesson of the Girdwood Masterplan and the Conceptual Framework is the need for compromise, and acceptance of the less than perfect solutions that grass-roots deliberative frameworks deliver up, then the question arises as to what this means for transitional justice?

The answer would appear to be that a more holistic approach to transitional justice that is focused on structural and systemic inequalities requires a more 'reflexive' approach that links deliberative transitional justice with deliberative political, planning and architectural processes. In practice, this means transitional justice scholars and practitioners providing expertise, sharing and presenting their research findings in discussions and debates around the future redevelopment of the city, but ultimately accepting that the solutions that are arrived at might be less than optimal from their own point of view. In other words, an approach that sets aside the 'utopianism that concentrates on describing (desirable) end-states and on pointing out

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<sup>26</sup> M Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in Divided World*, (Harvard University Press 2017) 137

<sup>27</sup> C Turner, *Violence, Law, and the Impossibility of Transitional Justice* (Routledge 2016) 165-173

how far away we are from attaining those end states, but that disengages from the task of providing answers to the question about how we get from here to there'.<sup>28</sup> Stewart offers prescient advice to those who do seek to offer their expertise in a situation where 'nuance is all-important':

The function of wise constitutions and just reforms is to help humanity achieve a future that is better than the past, but if they are not to have the opposite effect they must take account of the grain, and not cut against it.<sup>29</sup>

The views of Ignatieff and Stewart, writing almost four decades apart, mirror the findings of this research, namely, the dangers inherent with failing to recognise the importance of 'the local'. They also fit with the notion, inherent within systems theory, that 'if an 'alternative' is to *compete* with an established system it must be presented in terms which cannot be disregarded as totally foreign, permanently outside and of no concern to the system itself'.<sup>30</sup> The key lesson for scholars and practitioners from this study is the need to accept not just the need for new frameworks for addressing structural and systemic conflict legacy issues but also the need to accept less than perfect *outcomes* that arrive from genuinely 'grassroots' processes. The findings here indicate that the main threat to political stability lies not with a failure to address the socio-economic legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict, but rather, to attempt to do so in a way that fails to take account of the subtle ties between identity, territory and inequality that have the capacity to reignite violence. In a context in which the potential for further conflict in Northern Ireland is predicated upon balancing the competing territorial claims of the two communities in and around Cliftonpark Avenue in north Belfast, the words of the late Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney seem especially apposite

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<sup>28</sup> De Greiff P, 'The Future of the Past: Reflections on the Present State and Prospects of Transitional Justice' (2020) 14 International Journal of Transitional Justice 258

<sup>29</sup> A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (Blackstaff 1977) 185

<sup>30</sup> W Carson, (1981) *The Other Price of Britain's Oil: Safety and Control in the North Sea*, (Martin Robertson 1981) 301

Peace on earth, men of good will, all that  
Holds good only as long as the balance holds,  
The scales ride steady and the angels' strain  
Prolongs itself at an unearthly pitch.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> S Heaney, 'Weighing In', *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996*, (Faber and Faber 1998)  
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## **Interview Guide**

Below is list of interviewees along with their official title *at the time of interview*. Where appropriate details of updated roles are added in parenthesis.

### **Planner/Property Developer:**

Roy Adams O.B.E., Chief Executive of Business Design Partnership, lead author of the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Masterplan and Chair of the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Park Advisory Panel. Roy Adams was a significant figure in several major regeneration projects in Belfast during the 1980s and 1990s including the Castlecourt and the Laganside developments.

### **Planner/Public Official:**

Kyle Alexander O.B.E., Director Maze/Long Kesh Redevelopment Project and member of the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Park Advisory Panel. Kyle Alexander has over forty years of experience in public and private sector regeneration in Belfast including the Gasworks Regeneration, and the Laganside Corporation where he served for five years as Chief Executive. (He is currently a Belfast Harbour Commissioner).

### **Former Nationalist Politician:**

Brian Feeney is a historian, author and journalist. He was an elected representative for the nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) in North Belfast for 16 years and has written several books on Irish history and politics. He is a columnist with the Irish News newspaper and frequent broadcaster and commentator on politics in Northern Ireland.

### **Academic/Urban Planning (1):**

Prof. Frank Gaffikin, School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (SPACE), Queen's University Belfast.

### **Academic/Urban Planning (2):**

Prof. Brendan Murtagh, School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (SPACE), Queen's University Belfast.

### **DUP Politician/Political Advisor (1):**

Emma Little Pengelly, Special Advisor to the then First Minister of Northern Ireland, Peter Robinson. (Emma Little Pengelly served as MLA for South Belfast from October 2015-March 2017 and was a Junior Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive. She was Member of Parliament for South Belfast from June 2017-December 2019 and returned to her former role as Special Advisor to the First Minister, Arlene Foster, in January 2020)

### **DUP Politician/ Political Advisor (2):**

Lee Reynolds, Director of Strategy DUP (Appointed Special Advisor to the First Minister, Arlene Foster in November 2020).

**Public Official OFMDFM:**

Tim Losty, Director of the North Belfast Community Action Unit, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, and the public official with lead responsibility for taking forward the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Masterplan. (Currently Director/Minister Counsellor for the Northern Ireland Bureau China)

**Public Official - Northern Ireland Housing Executive (1):**

Maurice Johnston, Area Manager for Belfast, Northern Ireland Housing Executive

**Public Official Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2):**

Jennifer Hawthorne, Regional Manager for Belfast, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (September 2017 to present)

**Public Official, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland:**

Evelyn Collins, Chief Executive of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

**Protestant Clergyman:**

Rev Norman Hamilton, minister of the Ballysillan Presbyterian Church, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (June 2010-June 2011) and leading figure in the Protestant community in North Belfast.

**Republican Politician:**

Gerry Kelly MLA, former member of Girdwood Advisory Panel and Sinn Féin representative for North Belfast since 1998. (Gerry Kelly is currently a member of Sinn Féin's Ard Chomhairle (National Executive Committee) and the party's spokesperson on policing).

**Public Official Belfast City Council (1):**

Gerry Millar, Director of Development Belfast City Council

**SDLP Politician**

Alban Maginness MLA, an elected representative for the nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) in the Northern Ireland Assembly for North Belfast from 1998-2016. He was the first Catholic to hold the position of Lord Mayor of Belfast in 1997.

**Public Official Belfast City Council (2):**

Marie-Therese McGivern, Director of Development Belfast City Council (March 1999-October 2009) and member of the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Park Advisory Panel. Marie-Therese McGivern played a leading role in several major urban redevelopment projects in Belfast during the 1990s and early 2000s including the Gasworks. (Chief Executive and Principle of Belfast Metropolitan College since 2009)

**Public Official Community Relations Council (1):**

Dr Duncan Morrow, Chief Executive, Community Relations Council, and member of the of the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Park Advisory Panel.  
(Currently Director of Community Engagement, Ulster University)