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Publication Status:
Published: 01/07/2006

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

'God's Little Acre' and 'Belfast Chinatown': Cultural Politics and Agencies of Anti-Racist Spatial Inscription

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Abstract

Considering the Chinese Welfare Association's (CWA) recent architectural production in Belfast, of Hong Ling Gardens Sheltered Housing Scheme and a forthcoming Chinese Community and Resource Centre, this paper gives an overview of the conditions under which the projects were realised and discusses the cultural politics of their spatial production. It focuses on concepts of the 'public', discourses of multiculturalism and aspects of the community relations policy outlined in *A Shared Future* (2005), issued by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. The CWA pursued good relations with local communities in areas where the buildings were proposed and in certain situations, involved mutual material benefit, while in others the plans were contested. Those contestations articulated through racialized discourses indicate the inadequacy of an interculturalism or multiculturalism emphasizing 'culture' or 'cultural diversity' to promote 'tolerance' or social transformation, without an anti-racist commitment to dismantling racialized and ethnicized power relations and closures.

Keywords: multiculturalism, anti-racism, culture, Belfast, Chinese Welfare Association

Introduction

Over the past decade, the Belfast-based, regional Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) has instigated two building projects in South Belfast to serve some of Northern Ireland's diverse Chinese population. Hong Ling Gardens Chinese Sheltered Housing Scheme, 'Hong Ling' translates as 'health and peace', opened in 2004 and provides sheltered accommodation for 59 Chinese senior citizens. A second building will establish a Chinese Community and Resource Centre and is

scheduled to open in 2008. Both projects involve locations adjacent to the Ormeau Road, a major artery linking the inner city and outer suburbs. During their planning processes, in various areas local 'ethnic majority Irish' residents have challenged both projects as, amongst other things, unwanted changes to place identities. The majority of residential areas in Belfast are divided into predominantly 'Protestant' or 'Catholic' districts, linked with politico-cultural identities of unionist or nationalist, though not all Protestants identify as unionist, or Catholics as nationalist. This sectarian division now tends to be described in terms of 'ethnicity' (Murtagh 2002, p. 31; Boal 1982, p. 249; Boal 1976, p. 79; Bollens 2000); with segregation involving a dynamic between 'ethnicity' and place identity which shapes the construction of place, its symbolic meanings, and social relations. However 'ethnicity' is also contested for offering, as Bill Rolston contends, means for analysing the Conflict which neglect history, colonialism, and structure, in a depoliticizing multiculturalist agenda (Rolston 1998, p. 268).

Aaron Kelly unpacks the 'new, multicultural discourse of equality and reconciliation' in the current market-led, state-sponsored aspect of the Peace Process, to reveal how it serves the economic imperatives of globalization (Kelly 2005, p. 548). 'Culture', he argues, is used to reinforce the Agreement's consociational 'Two Traditions' paradigm which calcifies identities and inhibits the formation of public space; and 'culture' is deployed in the promotion of Belfast's new 'cultural Quarters' to fabricate a 'fantasy space in which we all share equally a regenerative diversity'. Kelly eloquently describes how redevelopment and segregationist urban planning have yielded two forms of privatized space:

> What is evident in the current reorganisation of Belfast is that the working class suffers a double disadvantage in terms of these two interlacing kinds of private space: ghettoised by the sectarian notion of self-contained, homogenous and non-public communities that has driven the urban planning strategy of Belfast's development during the conflict; and also ever further excluded by the recent emphasis on commercial, private ownership of space (Kelly 2005, p. 549).

Both spaces marginalize many, including the working class, women, and people with disabilities. In multiple and varying ways, women and men of racialized, ethnicized minorities are marginalized in spaces claimed by white majorities and in supposedly 'neutral' commercial and leisure zones. Inner South Belfast had the highest number of recorded racist incidents between 1996 and 2001, with the exception of 1998, and these occurred in both residential and leisure zones (Jarman/Monaghan 2003, p. 39). Spaces are non-public if their affairs are constituted in terms of cultural values. Seyla Benhabib reminds us of what modern liberation movements have revealed of the public/private distinction. The Black Civil Rights movement made equality of access a matter of public justice, and the women's movement turned what were considered matters of private values into public issues of justice by showing how the public/private dichotomy legitimizes women's oppression (Benhabib 1992, pp. 79, 92, 93). Discursive public spheres

come into existence when those affected by social and political norms converge and engage in a practical discourse which is not positioned under constraints of 'neutrality' (Benhabib 1992, p. 87). For Benhabib, because the struggle to have something included in the political agenda and make it public is a struggle for justice, a distinction between the social and political is unsupportable in the modern world (Benhabib 1996, p. 79). Conceived accordingly, Hong Ling Gardens, and a Chinese Community and Resource Centre endeavour to produce publics in discursive and spatial terms, in non-public spaces.

In the redevelopment of Belfast city centre, cultural zones featuring ethnic restaurants in addition to theatres, galleries and public art, have been proposed to create a pluralist ambiance.[1] This implies a 'celebratory multiculturalism', a term David Parker uses to describe a version which qualifies difference as a social and economic asset (Parker 2000, p. 71). However, managing the aesthetics of cultural diversity is no guarantee that its social claims will be engaged, as Barnor Hesse argues in the British context (Hesse 2000, p. 16). The CWA's actions demonstrate that social rights for racialized minorities, the purveyors of 'ethnic' catering, are claimed through activism and negotiation. Social capital provides access to resources, but its reach can be curtailed by racism. Drawing on cultural and social theory, reports, interviews and policy documents this paper gives an overview of conditions of the CWA's spatial production. Informed by Ronit Lentin's description of the 'subversive inscription of racialized spaces' by Travellers, African asylum seeker-activists and members of racialized ethnic groups establishing anti-racist practices in 'white-settled-Catholic Ireland', I examine dynamics of the CWA's spatial inscriptions in white, segregated, settled Belfast (Lentin 2001, 3.5). Looking at cultural politics as a cultural critic, I begin by examining the community relations policy outlined in terms of 'interculturalism' in *A Shared Future*, a framework document issued by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in 2005. I then consider multiculturalism's contested discourses, terms of anti-racism, and focussing on the CWA's spatial productions, ask whether Belfast can be described as a 'diaspora space', following Avtar Brah's paradigm, or an impossible space of diasporas inimical to place making by racialized migrants and minorities (Brah 1996, p. 208).

'A culture of tolerance': interculturalism, multiculturalism and anti-racism.

A Shared Future (ASF) proposes the terms under which the overall aim of *'a shared society defined by a culture of tolerance'* can be established in Northern Ireland. This it defined as

> […] a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere and where all individuals are treated impartially. A society where there is equity,

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[1] For example, see Gaffikin/Morrissey/Sterrett 2001, p. 153.

respect for diversity and recognition of our interdependence (*A Shared* 2005, p. 7).

And furthermore:

> A shared society […] is at ease with individual diversity, from which dynamism and vitality stem. It is held together by a willingness to engage in dialogue, on a basis of equality, and by a commitment to the common good-by a culture of tolerance (*A Shared* 2005, p. 9).

The document claims that the underlying difficulty that needs to be remedied is 'a culture of intolerance' (*A Shared* 2005, p. 8), thus locating, as Robin Wilson contends, the fundamental problem to the domain of culture in the broad sense (Wilson 2005). Operating in lieu of politics, 'culture' is multifariously defined as 'education, planning, and the arts', and the aim is 'a ring of diverse cultural expressions where interactions can thrive' (*A Shared* 2005, p. 8). By conceptualizing culture as 'a cultural variety set in constant motion' rather than 'a limited variety of cultures set in aspic', *ASF* eschews an essentializing model of culture-as-difference, and thus the paradigm which Máiréad Nic Craith observes is invoked in exclusivist claims about cultural identity as ethnicity (Nic Craith 2003, pp. 2-3). Wilson acknowledges that *ASF* doesn't counter-pose a 'culture of tolerance' to the pursuit of equality (Wilson 2005). Nonetheless, 'tolerance' will remain limited to a liberal notion that racism and sectarianism are personal prejudices that can evaporate with greater awareness of cultural diversity, without a commitment to dismantling inequitable power relations. The document is principally addressed to the sectarian division, which it disallows as a matter of inequality following achievements of the Civil Rights movement in Northern Ireland (*A Shared* 2005, p. 8). Obfuscating inequities within and amongst communities, it claims that despite the narrowing of inequalities between Catholics and Protestants, intolerance prevails between them and toward 'newer minority ethnic people' (*A Shared* 2005, p. 8). It thus neglects how 'newer minorities' are asymmetrically positioned and recasts relations of power, including racialized relations, as those of 'culture', while the rhetoric of 'in/tolerance' can deflect issues of discrimination and social justice central to the Conflict.

ASF borrows its principles from wider debates on 'interculturalism' to assert the right of everyone to be treated as an individual, in a proposed society where the state remains neutral between competing claims (*A Shared* 2005, p. 9). Notwithstanding the questionability of the state as a neutral mediator,[2] the document aims to recognise individuals rather than groups, and thus the discrepancies of gender, class, generation, disability and sexuality concealed by bundling people into 'minorities', 'majorities,' and 'communities'. It attempts to acknowledge the individuals who form publics to debate norms, yet since these

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[2] The neutrality of the state, according to Stuart Hall, only works when there is cultural homogeneity amongst the governed (Hall 2000, p. 228).

are also struggles over power inequities, their relations remain in excess of 'interculturalism'. Ronit Lentin has analysed how interculturalism is offered as an alternative to multiculturalism in the Irish context to politically mean a parity of cultures, but argues that there is no fundamental political difference between the terms because interculturalism does not destabilise 'the power base from which the "race relations industry" operates' (Lentin 2003, p. 8). Surveying policy definitions of interculturalism, Lentin pinpoints how they do not give serious attention to racial harassment or commit to deconstructing dominant power relations between majority and minority migrant populations (Lentin 2003, p. 13).

Multiculturalism is a widely contested discourse with different though related histories in Britain, Europe, Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand (Brah 1996, p. 227). Alive to its compliance with liberal capitalism, Kenan Malik contests multiculturalism for fetishizing difference and argues that the policies prescribed for controlling society in its 'cultural diversity' can reinstate ways of thinking rooted in racial theory (Malik 2005, up). Somewhat similarly, in their study of the new political order of globalization, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that as a theory of social difference, the cultural position is no less essentialist than the biological one since it establishes an equally robust theoretical ground for segregation. It is a pluralist position insofar as all cultural identities are deemed equal and are accepted so long as we agree to act on the basis of these differences. Although lauded as an anti-essentialist substitute for 'race', 'culture' is turned into something akin to a premise of race-preservation, thus contemporary imperial theory can adopt what is usually seen as an anti-racist position to maintain a principle of social separation (Hardt/Negri 2000, p. 192).[3] Malik argues that in liberal capitalism's narrowed political sphere, which hinders dialogue towards a collective language of citizenship, social solidarity is defined in terms of ethnicity or culture, while identity politics has overtaken the politics of ideology. He qualifies multiculturalism as a concept that embodies both a description of a diverse society and a prescription for its control. However, as Stuart Hall contends, it is important to distinguish between the 'multicultural', as an adjective that describes the social characteristics of any culturally heterogeneous society, and 'multiculturalism', as the policies used to manage diversity (Hall 2000, p. 210).

Hall argues that 'multiculturalism' has been reduced to a pedestrian political doctrine, although it describes a variety of incomplete political strategies and processes. There are very different multiculturalisms just as there are very different multi-cultural societies. They include 'conservative multiculturalism',

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[3] For Hardt and Negri, the difference between colonial racism and the racism of globalization's political order, which they call 'Empire', is that the former disavows and then recuperates the Other as negative foundation of the Self, while the latter 'integrates others within its order and then orchestrates those differences in a system of control' (Hardt/Negri 2000, pp. 192-195). As they put it, 'Empire does not create differences. It takes what it is given and works with it' (Hardt/Negri 2000, p. 199). It thrives on the mixture and mobility lauded by postmodernism, in the strategy of 'incorporate, differentiate and manage', which they argue has replaced colonialism's 'divide and conquer' (Hardt/Negri 2000, p. 201).

which insists on assimilation to majoritarian norms, and an integrationist 'liberal multiculturalism'with culturally particularistic practices relegated to the private realm. 'Pluralist multiculturalism' formally enfranchises differences between groups and 'commercial multiculturalism' proposes that if the marketplace recognizes diversity, the problem of difference dissolves through private consumption, obviating any need for redistributing resources and power (Hall 2000, p. 210). 'Critical multiculturalism' seeks to be 'insurgent, polyvocal, heteroglossial and anti-foundational' (Goldberg in Hall 2000, p. 210), foregrounding 'power, privilege, the hierarchy of oppressions and the movement of resistance' (McLaren in Hall 2000, p. 210). Nic Craith proposes that Northern Ireland could benefit from critical multiculturalism's privileging of polycentric individuals who express their needs even where a wider group views them with hostility. She also insists that to afford national, ethnic and immigrant minorities' protection from symbolic, civic and material exclusions and violations, multiculturalism in Northern Ireland must be accompanied by a politics of anti-racism (Nic Craith 2002, p.196). But rather than constituting an add-on concern, anti-racism needs to thoroughly disrupt dominant discourses and relations between majorities and racialized, ethnicized minorities.

In the British context, Hesse argues that dominant discourses are maintained by repressing the discrepancy of racism so its exposure opens up the nation to challenge. Incomplete de-colonization left white racism intact and unresolved discrepancies are initialized in 'race' (Hesse 2000, pp. 15-16). Though a fruitful understanding, this cannot be seamlessly transferred onto Northern Ireland. An account of some of the bases of its white racism must examine factors including national identity discourses of 'Irishness' and 'Britishness', and how they connote 'whiteness'; the racialization of consciousness through representations and stereotypes disseminated by culture, the media and religious ideologies; the historical positioning of Ireland within the British Empire and the participation and profiting of Irish people in the white settlements, colonization, genocides and slavery of the Americas, Australia, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia; anti-Traveller sedentarism; racialized anti-immigration practices and discourses in the Republic of Ireland and Britain, in mainstream politics and at the fringes; and Ireland's location within 'Fortress Europe' and empowerment through the privileges of its white European-ness (see McVeigh 1998a, p. 28; Garner 2004; Rolston/Shannon 2002; and Lentin/McVeigh 2002).

'Race' is an invention of Western imperialism based, without scientific credibility, on differencing bodies in an arbitrary social and historical process (Omi/Winant 2002, pp. 122-123). Yet despite 'race' being a construct many people, as Lentin and McVeigh contend, 'still believe that there is something "genetic" and "natural" about phenotypic differences' (Lentin/McVeigh 2002, p. 5). Racialized differentiation, which always has culturalist associations, continues to serve globalized capitalism's order of control and plays an ineluctable role in the biopolitics of capitalist society. As Paul Gilroy argues, anti-racism must not be defined as a limited project which trivializes the struggle and isolates it from other

political contests – labour against capital, women against men, as though racism can be sequestered from everything else (Gilroy 2002a, p. 253). Gilroy also condemns anti-racism which reduces 'the rich complexities of black life' to solely a response to racism, insisting that this is an operation which reveals antiracists' 'conceptual trading with the racists and the results of embracing their culturalist assumptions' (Gilroy 2002a, p.263).

Exploring Gilroy's 'radical humanism' which extends anti-racism beyond 'equality' to demand a transformation of the centre, Daniel Jewesbury advocates a 'parallel deconstruction of the identities of the marginal and dominant' since the centre's 'imagined community' structures its nationalistic, patriotic and cultural identities on racist bases, including structural exclusions within, racialized immigration controls and global economies arising from historic exploitations (Jewesbury 2006, p. 5). Deconstructing the identities of Northern Ireland's 'imagined communities' also involves deconstructing the notions of 'whiteness' which Robbie McVeigh contends underpin both of the dominant cultural and political traditions, despite the absence of its discussion which, as he observes, is itself a function of hegemony (McVeigh 1998a, p. 17).[4] Gilroy recognises that relinquishing 'race' might be resisted both by beneficiaries of the hierarchy and by racialized populations whose oppositional identities have been hard-won, but insists that liberation from 'race', that is, from all racializing and raciological thought and ways of seeing, thinking, and thinking about thinking, is the only ethical response to the wrongs still perpetuated by raciologies (Gilroy 2000, p. 40).

'Reclaiming Shared Space': Racism, Sectarianism, and non-public spaces.

ASF proposes a public sphere where space will be reclaimed from sectarianism and racism to shift the balance from what Morrissey calls 'ethnic space' to 'common public space' (Morrissey 2005, up). It identifies racism and sectarianism as spatial practices and links them to segregated housing, arguing that policy needs to challenge, not adapt to communal sectarian segregation, which feeds intolerance (*A Shared* 2005, p. 15).[5] Thirty-five of Belfast's fifty-one electoral wards

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[4] Critical studies of 'whiteness' as a socially, politically and culturally produced location based in ideologies of domination proliferated during the 1990s. Their provenance is in the works of W.E.B. Du Bois, William Baldwin, Frantz Fanon and Black feminists including Toni Morrrison, and Audre Lorde who demands the transformation of the homophobic, racist patriarchal state (Lorde 2000). Examining the interplay of ethnic and racial consciousness in the United States, David Roediger uses 'white ethnicity' to refer to immigrants and their descendants who see themselves as white, and as belonging to definable ethnic groups, e.g. Irish and Italians (Roediger 2002, p.328). 'White ethnicities' might be useful in describing the dominant identifications to be deconstructed in the Northern Irish context.

[5] Analysts of residential segregation include Boal, Murray and Poole 1976; Boal 1982, 1994; Bollens 2000; Murtagh 2002; and Doherty and Poole 1995. It has been a feature of Belfast since its formation but intensified during the Conflict, when intense sectarian violence led to widespread population movement. Between 1969 and 1973, approximately 60,000 people were forced to leave vulnerable

have a population that is at least 90 percent Catholic or Protestant (Bollens 2000, p. 195; Nic Craith 2002, p. 13). Residential segregation is most prevalent in working class areas, which have borne the brunt of the Conflict and *ASF* recognises that sectarianism and racism have especially negative impacts on disadvantaged communities (*A Shared* 2005, p.39). However, this is not to deny that racism and sectarianism exist equally amongst privileged classes. Several of its key recommendations for reclaiming shared space centre on divisive spatial practices and visible manifestations of racism and sectarianism, though primarily on the flags and emblems of the latter. *ASF* mentions racist graffiti, but not the impact of racism on place-making by those who are racialized (*A Shared* 2005, p. 20).

Thirty years ago, Frederick W. Boal, Russell C. Murray and Michael A. Poole speculated that

> The Catholic-Protestant conflict is perhaps further exacerbated by the fact that there has been no recent influx into Belfast of new immigrant ethnics who might have performed a 'useful' role as recipients of displaced Catholic-Protestant antagonisms. Daniel Bell's quotation from Sigmund Freud is appropriate here: 'It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness' (Boal/Murray/Poole 1976, p. 122).

They suggest that immigration would provide alternative targets for Northern Ireland's opposed blocs, yet to view racist hostility as a substitute for sectarian aggression is questionable. Although racist harassment of people of colour and racialized minorities is hardly a new occurrence in Northern Ireland, reported incidents are increasing. As already noted, a range of both longstanding and contemporary factors maintain its white racism, which is neither recent nor always necessarily dependent on actual contact with non-white Others, when the media or cultural forms provide ubiquitous and often stereotypical representations, and have for centuries. Patrick Yu, the Chair of the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities and Eleanor McKnight, Race Relations Officer with the CWA, linked a rise in racist harassment to the ceasefires, though both Yu and the RUC indicated 'crude economic gain' as their reason (Hainsworth 1998, p. 45). Neil Jarman and Rachael Monaghan offer the following outline:

> As sectarian residential segregation has continued to increase it is likely that some people have identified the minority communities as the new 'other' and turned their attentions away from the Protestant or Catholic minority towards the Chinese and Indian communities who are beginning to create new interfaces in some working class communities. This is not to argue that racism and sectarianism are exactly the same thing but that they have

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homes at interfaces and by 1977, 78 percent of households lived in streets with a less than 10 percent minority of Protestants or Catholics (Bollens 2000, p. 194).

common roots in a society which does not tolerate difference, which is focused in upon itself, is insecure and which accepts violence and abuse as a broadly legitimate form of expression (Jarman/Monaghan 2003, p. 21).

Jarman and Monaghan indicate racialized minority place making as a negotiation of potentially hostile majority territoriality (Jarman/Monaghan 2003, p. 21). It can involve groups of, or isolated homes or businesses in an otherwise all or predominantly white 'ethnic majority Irish' street or area. Chinese catering entrepreneurship, for example, may need locations with minimal competition from other outlets. These can become, as Parker has theorised the Chinese takeaway serving counter in Britain, sites for 'the brutal condensation of social relationships', where staff bear the pressure of the late-night neighbourhood and all of its racism, sexism and drunken abuse (Parker 2000, p. 82). Jarman and Monaghan's distinction between racism and sectarianism recognises their particularities as socially and politically produced systems of power and discrimination. However, Mc Veigh argues that they can be considered the same thing depending on whether both sectarianism and racism are defined 'ontologically' or 'dialectically' (Mc Veigh 1998b, p. 18). The ontological concentrates on 'what something is', while the dialectical examines social relations. By defining them both ontologically, with a focus on sectarian categories as ethnicities, McVeigh sees little substantive difference between racism and sectarianism. But if they are defined dialectically, as social relations between differently constituted groups, Mc Veigh recognises that there are good reasons to argue that they are not the same: anti-Black racism characterises relations between 'people of colour' and 'white' people, while sectarianism characterises relations between Catholic and Protestant Irish people. For Mc Veigh, whether sectarianism is racism depends on the definition of racism, but insofar as both are about ethnicity, they are much the same (Mc Veigh 1998b, p. 19). Thinking in the British context, where 'race' is usually applied to Afro-Caribbeans and 'ethnicity' to Asians, Stuart Hall contends that a simplistic race/ethnicity binary is untenable and instead both terms must be used with awareness of their inadequacies (Hall 2000, p. 222). Since racism's biological signifiers also connote cultural and social differences, he speaks of biological racism and cultural differentialism as racism's 'two registers', or its 'two logics' (Hall 2000, p. 223). Hall recognises that there are many conflicts focussed on 'ethnicity' rather than 'race', although in most situations, both are at play. However, since the combinations vary and because the histories and effects of racialized and ethnicized closures differ in places and periods and have very different consequences, they should not be homogenized (Hall 2000, p. 224).

Racialized minorities and people of colour have been exposing racism in Ireland, North and South, for many years (Mann-Kler 1997; Fitzgerald 1992); enacting the 'subversive inscriptions of racialized spaces' described by Lentin (2001, 3.5.), and what Hesse in the British context terms 'multicultural transruptions' which unsettle norms and hegemonic practices (Hesse 2000, p. 17). Northern Ireland's Chinese Chamber of Commerce was established in 1983 in response to the

difficulties faced by Chinese people, and founded the Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) in 1986. It promotes community relations and equal opportunities, monitors racist harassment and police responses, develops anti-racism training, and provides services including interpretation, language classes, social care, health-awareness, youth work, education, and welfare and immigration advice. [6] The CWA estimate the number of Chinese people in Northern Ireland at around 8,000, and recognises the heterogeneities of recent migrants who include Mandarin speaking professionals with marketable skills, and those seeking asylum or undocumented workers at risk of exploitation, in addition to longstanding Chinese residents. [7] Thus it remains self-reflexive by acknowledging the diversity of individuals, while maintaining a strategic coherence (CWA 2005, p. 4). This distinction between group rights and a homogenizing group identity is critical when advocacy of group rights, as Lentin argues, tends to neglect questions of gender, sexuality, class, generational or religious differences, and power inequalities within minorities (Lentin 2001, 3.10).

Belfast's 'Diaspora Spaces'.

Avtar Brah's concept of 'diaspora space' describes a site where borders of inclusion and exclusion are challenged and redefined. It is comprised of those who have migrated and their descendants and equally, those represented as 'indigenous' (Brah 1996, p. 209). This is not meant to suggest an undifferentiated relativism, but rather, to think models of difference situated within fields of multi-axial power relations. In rethinking 'England' as a diaspora space where boundaries are contested, Brah seeks to dissolve its misrepresentation as the nation space of a rooted indigenous community (Brah 1996, p. 209). Northern Ireland is misrepresented in a rivalry of political, symbolic and territorial claims and identifications. Thinking it as a 'diaspora space' offers a potential for deconstructing these misrepresentations along with those of the 'immigrant', lacking in describing Belfast as a space of diasporas, including a 'Chinese diaspora'.

'Chinese diaspora' can signal a 'Chinese' identification as a trans-national, transruptive inscription to a dominant white-centredness. However, hyphenated identities, as Nic Craith contends, including 'Northern Irish-Chinese' might predetermine the confines of difference (Nic Craith 2002, p. 197). 'Chinese diaspora' also risks invoking notions of a common heritage and 'racial' descent, in

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[6] The CWA is one of the most effective Chinese support organisations in the UK (Manwah Watson/McKnight 1998, p. 132); and operates within the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order (1997), the Northern Ireland Act (1998), European Council Race Directive, Race Equality Strategy, Government Priorities and Budget 2005-2008, and *A Shared Future* (CWA 2005, pp. 5-6).

[7] There is debate over numbers. The 2001 Census indicated 4,145, while the Multi-Cultural Resource Centre estimate up to 8,000, contending that factors including mistrust, and language barriers could mean that people do not complete the census forms (Jarman/Monaghan 2003, p. 14).

the sense of the 'ethnic absolutisms' Gilroy critiques in *The Black Atlantic* (Gilroy 2002b, p. 3). This produces a mythical homogeneity when even a macro demographic level indicates myriad differences between Hong Kong, 'Mainland' China, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia and other locations of 'Chinese diaspora' – the birthplaces of most of those born outside of Northern Ireland. Chinese people began to settle in Northern Ireland in the early 1960s as part of post War migration to the United Kingdom, primarily from Hong Kong and the New Territories, and established a key section of its catering industry (see Manwah Watson/McKnight 1998). Chinese migration to the Republic in the early 1960s was also part of this phenomenon, and could involve moving between Ireland and the UK to pursue markets in smaller towns and suburbs, with informal support networks interweaving several countries.[8] In Northern Ireland, a survey in 1977 estimated a population of 1000 Chinese residents, which increased in the 1980s with an improved political situation (Manwah Watson/McKnight 1998, p. 129). Chinese people continued to come to Northern Ireland during the Conflict, and in 1989 the 'community' was estimated at 4,500 people. There are now third generation Chinese and an aging first generation population who have been settled for four decades.

A need amongst Chinese senior citizens for local authority housing prompted Hong Ling Gardens Chinese Sheltered Housing Scheme. Chinese elders can be isolated if family members work in the complexly challenging catering industry, where hours are extremely long, arduous and unsociable. Many Chinese elders do not speak English, and although Cantonese is Belfast's second spoken language, linguistic difference is a primary barrier to services and existing provision. Anna Lo, Chief Executive of the CWA, states that in its absence eligible members of the Chinese community had to leave families in Northern Ireland, to return to Hong Kong or for schemes in Scotland and Britain where Chinese speaking staff afford residents access to social services, companionship, and self-reliance (Lo 2005). The CWA identified the need for sheltered housing for Chinese elders in 1990, and from 1996 worked with Belfast Improved Housing (BIH), Northern Ireland's largest Housing Association, which was willing to develop the project subject to sufficient demand. Despite that a survey confirmed the need for at least 30 units of sheltered accommodation, according to Lo the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), the regional housing authority, was initially unsympathetic in the light of policy that housing provision must be based on need for housing rather than ethnic background. As she points out, most housing is segregated and the policy ignores the need for special schemes for minorities (Lo 2005). The CWA's demand for a form of 'ethnic space' is a multicultural transruption both to

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[8] Arriving in Britain from Hong Kong, my father moved to Ireland in the 1960s and operated a takeaway. The crystallization of the 'Chinese takeaway' into a sign of 'Chineseness' in the symbolic economy of the 'ethnic' business belies the agency, complexity and diversity of the workforce. It conceals differences of gender, generation and class, and elides dynamic and subversive counter-narratives of and to 'Chineseness' and 'Irishness'. Businesses might sometimes comprise Cantonese, Hakka and, or Mandarin speakers and Europeans, with English as the common second language.

conceptions of neutral space that is Anglophone and observes dominant cultural traditions, and to policy centred on challenging sectarian divisions between majorities. *ASF* iterates that 'residence in a particular area should be a matter of housing need or personal choice rather than an insistence that only "one sort or colour" live in certain streets or districts' (ASF 2005, p. 29).

Yet Hong Ling Gardens demonstrates that a stress on challenging sectarian segregation misses the need for housing provision in specific circumstances for minorities, whose marginalization from health and social services make it not a question of maintaining private 'cultural' values, but a public issue of social justice. The home and the familial realm, usually marginalized in the public/private division, were made the locus of a struggle for rights. As a result of lobbying the NIHE, its Chief Executive supported the CWA initiative. BIH proposed premises in Ballynafeigh, which is considered a relatively 'mixed' area.

According to Lo, public consultations with locals in Ballynafeigh revealed intense racist hostility to the proposals and the CWA decided to look elsewhere to prioritise the safety of residents of the proposed scheme (Lo 2005).[9] In 1999, a privately owned site was identified and purchased in McAuley Street, adjacent to the Markets, a disadvantaged working class residential area strongly identified as Catholic, nationalist, republican, in the Lower Ormeau. The BIH Briefing Note identifies this as an ideal location, 'Chinese people will not be "invading" anyone else's territory', and records how the nearby communities of the Lower Ormeau and Donegall Pass had confirmed their support (BIH 2005, up). It also states that

> Based on experience gained trying to implement the scheme since 1998, and following consultation with the community leaders in the Markets area, it became very apparent that the Chinese community could not be integrated into this community without attempting to meet the urgent housing need which existed in the area. BIH and the CWA were very aware that the provision of housing for the elderly Chinese community was conditional upon meeting the urgent housing need of the indigenous population (BIH 2005).

The NIHE developed housing for families and a larger building for elders of the 'indigenous population'. Hong Ling Gardens stands on its own site at the edge of the Markets and provides a smaller number of units for Chinese elders. Simultaneously servicing the housing needs of both 'communities' begat a win-win situation as Lo observes and crucially, the CWA and Chinese residents could not be perceived as having 'parachuted in to take the land' (Lo 2005). The necessity for concurrent provision for both white and Chinese communities denotes terms of the 'conditional' basis for racialized minority place-making and

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[9] The BIH briefing note describes 'extreme pressure from the local community who resisted the development of housing for an ethnic minority in this area' (BIH 2005).

the limits of stressing 'culture' to promote 'tolerance' while ignoring power relations between majorities and minorities.

Hong Ling Gardens has stemmed the flow of Chinese elderly to Scotland and Britain, and allowed some to come from Hong Kong to join their children (Lo 2005). The location's proximity to amenities including George's Market also offers outlets for spatial practices. Architecturally, a few features distinguish it from surrounding buildings: curved eaves, a pair of stone lions flanking the main entrance, larger windows to provide ventilation for stir-frying, and kitchens have rice stores. There is a small 'Chinese'-style garden, bilingual signage, and to observe a traditional superstition, room numbering excludes the number four.

The CWA had, in agreement with BIH, planned that the ground floor of Hong Ling Gardens would accommodate a regional Chinese Community and Resource Centre. However, incomplete fundraising prevented its realization.[10] In late 2003, the CWA identified a building to purchase and refurbish for the Chinese Community and Resource Centre on Donegall Pass, which is adjacent to the Ormeau Road. It is a disadvantaged area and according to David Officer's report, commissioned by the Donegall Pass Community Forum in 2001, Donegall Pass comprised an estimated 2,000 residents, which represented a decline from 5,000 since the late 1960s, and which has since declined further. Seventy one percent rent property from the NIHE and levels of unemployment fluctuate between 20 percent and 25 percent (Officer 2001, p. 3). There is a relatively longstanding local residential Chinese community of approximately 23 households (Jarman 2004, p.19); positioned outside the Protestant, loyalist, unionist identity with which the area is strongly linked (Officer 2001, p. 3). There are also several Chinese-owned businesses, mostly restaurants, on the main thoroughfare of Donegall Pass, from which staff who wished to avail of it would have had access to the proposed Centre. The CWA involved the Donegall Pass Community Forum in their plans, and it became clear that some local residents had concerns about the proposal. A process of open consultation to allow the CWA to explain their plans to the local residential and business communities was agreed. The CWA also commissioned Neil Jarman, a consultant from the Institute for Conflict Research, to facilitate the consultation, who produced a document *Report on the Consultation about proposals for a Chinese Community Centre on Donegall Pass Belfast* (2004).

'God's Little Acre' and 'Belfast Chinatown': Assembling place-identity and 'locality'.

The consultation in June 2004, co-ordinated by Belfast City Council, offered separate open sessions for residents, local politicians and church leaders, the local

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[10] The proposed Centre will provide offices, a hall, library, crèche, training room, conference room, playgroup facilities, an outdoor playground and parking, and will be developed 'as a place of welcome and inclusion for all cultures and traditions' (CWA 2005, p. 11).

business community, and Chinese residents and business people, and none were particularly well attended (Jarman 2004, p. 6). Those from the Chinese community in Donegall Pass who did attend were mostly elderly, and stated that relations with the local white community were generally very good, and strongly supported the CWA proposals. Individuals spoke of isolation and scant social space, and some felt the community received little despite their contribution to the local economy (Jarman 2004, p. 20). By contrast, the consultations indicated widespread opposition from members of the local white residential community, and Jarman details four main themes which emerged from their concerns These themes were: resources; relationships; development; and identity (Jarman 2004, pp. 7, 21).

Concerns over resources centred on a perception that the proposed Chinese Community and Resource Centre would be better placed, as a regional centre, to compete for resources with local projects, which are funded differently, including the Donegall Pass Community Centre run by Belfast City Council (Jarman 2004, p. 11). The concern over relationships was that the CWA's proposed centre would increase segregation and weaken good relations between local Chinese and white residential communities (Jarman 2004, p. 1). Some Chinese people use the extant Donegall Pass Community Centre for English classes and a weekly luncheon club for the elderly. This, according to the report, is an achievement in view of a sometime fraught relationship. Officer also recorded harassment of Chinese residents, which the Community Centre manager successfully countered (Officer 2001, p. 3).[11] Some white residents were concerned that were activities to take place in separate premises, integration would decrease. Further, the loss of users would also undermine the viability of the Donegall Pass Community Centre. However, the CWA argued that their proposal is required to service a much wider range of needs on a regional basis, and to allow regular activities at the local level, while activities were planned that would appeal to the local community.

The theme of development related to the negative impact of free-market development on the community (Jarman 2004, p. 7). Redevelopment has brought increased traffic and congestion, reduced housing stock and pushed property prices beyond the reach of residents, all of whom, white and non-white, experience its effects. Any white working class community experiencing redevelopment, whether in Belfast, Dublin or London Docklands, should not resort to exclusionary constructs of ethnic identity or myths of an 'endangered' white working class, and nor should concerns over redevelopment be used to cloak or excuse racism. Although it was generally acknowledged as unrelated to redevelopment, some viewed the CWA's proposal as another example of unwanted change, and without 'local' benefit. The fourth theme, identity, involved

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[11] See also Manwah Watson/Mc Knight 1998, p. 137; Jarman/Monaghan 2003, p. 39. The Progressive Unionist Party has provided an important role in mediation in collaboration with the CWA (see Hainsworth 1998, p. 42). The CWA also promoted good relations which lessened harassment of Chinese residents, who are more willing to use local amenities (Officer 2001, p. 3).

concerns to preserve the identity of Donegall Pass as Protestant, unionist, loyalist. One resident complained that it 'used to be known as "God's little acre", we now feels it's becoming the "Belfast Chinatown", which some suspected 'planners' wanted; and anxieties about the possibility of organised crime were expressed (Jarman 2004, pp. 14-15). This is a non-progressive invention of 'locality' and manufactures the identities and differences understood as 'local' in restrictive, racialized terms.[12] 'God's Little Acre' is a nostalgic, exclusionary fiction, which inscribes a non-public place as white and Christian, against an imagined and similarly non-public 'Belfast Chinatown' named, as 'Chinatown' usually is, in terms of racialized, ethnicized difference from a wider 'norm'. There are generally, Robbie Goh argues, twin images of Chinatown: the model site of inter-communal commerce and industry; and the sinister, impenetrable place of vice, violence and intrigue (Goh 2004, p. 40). Comments inferred both the tourist appeal of a managed Chinatown of consumable difference, and criminality, but these stereotypes elide the complexities of immigrant communities and their need, like all, for protection from violence and exploitation. Equally, they do not do justice to relationships Chinese people have with Donegall Pass and the social relationships between Chinese, white and other residents, and Chinese-owned businesses and others.

The consultation meetings, as noted, were not well attended overall including by white residents, and many opposed to racism were overshadowed by actions which determined the plans for the site. A racist leaflet was circulated that attacked the CWA's proposal, which the CWA countered in a letter to all households in the area. According to Lo, the Donegall Pass Community Forum also held a meeting with local residents during which hostile comments perceived as racist were made (Lo 2005). It was claimed there was a likelihood of locals taking to the streets in protest if the plans went ahead (Jarman 2004, p. 15). Nor could the potential for paramilitary violence be ruled out. Belfast City Council intervened by offering the CWA an alternative of any City Council site in South Belfast. The CWA proposed a small vacant site on Stranmillis Embankment in the 'Holylands' area, which comprises a mixture of transient student and residential communities, undertook cross party lobbying, and presented their plans to Belfast City Council, who voted unanimously to allocate it. Building is planned to commence late in 2006. The full cross-party political support which exists for this stage of the project contrasts with that in Donegall Pass, where local politicians and religious leaders showed no initiative in improving relations (Select Committee 2004, p. 2).

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[12] In Dublin, alleged plans to develop a 'Chinatown' in Capel Street saw the area posted with an anonymous racist leaflet in December 2003, which propounded xenophobic nonsense about a besieged 'native Irish' and 'Gaelic' identity.

Conclusion

As Lo contends, the opposition to the proposed centre on Donegall Pass is about, 'racism, it is not wanting to share with ethnic minority people in the area' (Select Committee 2004, p. 2). By failing to show an anti-racist commitment to the social rights of all, local political and religious leadership failed all Donegall Pass residents. This is by no means to label an entire 'community' racist, or deny heterogeneities and those opposed to racism. As reported, some white residents welcomed interaction with Chinese people and were concerned about it lessening. The outstanding question is how dialogue could have produced a discursive public working towards an anti-racist commitment to social rights. Such a dialogue could also go against the grain of a legacy of urban planning according to sectarian notions of non-public communities.

Hong Ling Gardens resulted from activism and community relations, and rather than an unqualified 'tolerance' of 'cultural diversity', the BIH Briefing Note identified that its realization had a 'conditional' basis of simultaneous housing provision for the 'indigenous population'. Northern Ireland offers many examples of place making by racialized, ethnicized minorities which have been prevented or opposed, such as the Mosque which was not built in Bleary Co. Armagh, due to the objections of politicians purporting to speak on behalf of 'locals' in 2003, or the many homes of racialized, ethnicized migrants and minorities that have been attacked, and their inhabitants assaulted. The creation of anti-racist discursive and spatial publics involves interrogating inequalities and deconstructing the identifications of the dominant and marginalised, through anti-racist spatial inscriptions rather than re-marginalization in non-public spaces or a mythically 'neutral' commons. It is a demand for justice countering racism, sectarianism, and all racialized and ethnicized discrimination and closure, yet it cannot be an anti-racism which fetishizes difference, homogenizes heterogeneity, or as Gilroy contended, trivializes the complexities of our lives as 'people of colour' or racialized, ethnicized 'minorities', to solely a response to racism.

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