The Making and Unmaking of Social Identity Boundaries and Physically Defined Geographical Borders

The interrelated bordering processes of social sectarian division and interface barriers in North and West Belfast, Northern Ireland

Ilse Korving (3462986)
I.Korving@students.uu.nl
Utrecht University
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Universiteit Utrecht

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"Men hate each other because they fear each other, and they fear each other because they don't know each other, and they don't know each other because they are often separated from each other"
\- Martin Luther King (1958)

Acknowledgements

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List of Abbreviations

ARK	Access Research Knowledge
BIP	Belfast Interface Project
BMSSP	Black Mountain Shared Space Project
CRC	Community Relations Council
DCP	Duncairn Community Partnership
DOJ	Department of Justice
ICR	Institute for Conflict Research
IFI	International Fund for Ireland
NBIN	North Belfast Interface Network
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NILT	Northern Ireland Life and Times survey
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PWP	Peace Walls Programme
SLIG	Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group
TBUC	'Together: Building a United Community' strategy by the OFMDFM
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
YLT	Young Life and Times survey

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Figure 1: Belfast City Hall - Photo taken by Nathalie van der Aar, 20-05-2015.

1. Introduction

Seventeen years after the signing of the Good Friday Peace Agreement that formally ended the intrastate conflict euphemistically termed as the "Troubles" (1969-1998), Northern Ireland is still considered to be a deeply divided society. Officially an armed struggle between the Provisional Irish Republican Army and the British government over the status of Northern Ireland, this intractable conflict is "characterised by the complex interconnectedness of religion and nationalism within a political context" (Van der Aar & Korving 2013:23; Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Date of retrieval: 2015/06/17); Hughes et al. 2008:522). This because "Irish nationalists, mostly Catholic, wished "to absorb all the six counties of Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland" while British Protestants who had lived in Northern Ireland for generations wanted to "maintain the loyalty of the region in the British Union"' (Juergensmeyer 2003:37 in Van der Aar & Korving 2013:23). Despite significantly reduced levels of intercommunal violence and successes in the peace process, segregation between national and socio-religious identities (often referred to in the narrative of the Protestant and Catholic communities) is still a common occurrence in many aspects of daily-life in Northern Ireland. Besides segregation in areas like education, work and sport, the high level of residential segregation whereby these two majority ethnic communities are physically divided from each other is particularly significant (Hughes et al. 2007:35; 2008:522; Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:4; Schubotz & Devine 2014:1). Capital Belfast, in this sense, "remains one of the most segregated cities in the world" and is often described as a patchwork quilt of Protestant and Catholic communities; North Belfast in particular knows a complex geography of conflicting loyalties (Murtagh 2008 in Boulton 2014:101).[1] Moreover, besides being a divided city where 98 per cent of social housing is divided along community and religious backgrounds, it is also the place that had the highest death toll during the Troubles (Byrne et al. 2006 and Fay et al. 1999 in Byrne 2011:3).

Residential segregation along sectarian fault lines already existed well before the start of the Troubles through so-called interface zones that signified an area where the two communities met. Some of these more "cognitive boundaries based on knowledge of local geography" were turned into physical manifestations of divisions when so-called 'interface barriers' – more commonly known as 'peace walls' – were put up from 1969 onwards (Boulton 2014:103; McAtackney 2011:81). While meant to be temporary constructions as a way to create more time for intercommunal tensions to resolve, they increasingly got a more permanent

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[1] Sean O'Hagan, 'Belfast, divided in the name of peace', *The Guardian*, published on: 22-01-2012, consulted on: 26-03-2015. Source: http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/jan/22/peace-walls-troubles-belfast-feature.

character. Moreover, the amount of structures quickly rose over the years, even after the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994 (Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:4; McAtackney 2011:86; Boulton 2014:102). Some of these barriers are located in Derry/Londonderry and the towns of Portadown and Lurgan. The vast majority, however, can be found in Belfast, specifically the inner city working class areas of North and West Belfast, where they are estimated to have a combined length of 21 kilometres (Nolan 2014:67; International Fund for Ireland [IFI] 2014:14). Reports have shown that a general consensus does exist in Northern Ireland for the removal of the barriers in the distant future. However, evidence from a 2012 survey suggests that the number of people in favour of this had declined and that pessimism and reluctance for their immediate removal still remains due to fears of intercommunal violence, specifically among residents that live in near proximity of an interface barrier (Byrne et al. 2012:20, 27-28, Nolan 2013:81-82). All in all, despite the fact that a few barriers have been physically altered or completely removed[2] in recent years, interface barriers remain part of Belfast's present as one of the most visible and physical manifestation of division. In addition, the year 2019 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the construction of the first physical barrier (Byrne et al. 2012:4; Nolan 2014:67; Boulton 2014:102; McAtackney 2011:81).

Since the 1994 ceasefires, political and ongoing peace processes, including reconciliation, have dealt with – and are still working on – various contentious, conflict-related issues (Byrne et al. 2012:4). Reconciliation as a form of conflict resolution is considered to be a broad and complex process encompassing many elements and instruments, such as justice and reparations. From a relationship-oriented view, reconciliation can be understood as the process of addressing conflictual and fractured relations that are aimed to be restored so that people learn to live non-violently with differences in order to move from a divided past to a shared future (Bloomfield 2006:8; Ramsbotham et al. 2011:246; Smeulers & Grünfeld 2011:456). Interestingly, in the case of Northern Ireland, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) recently incorporated a commitment in their 'Together: Building a United Community' strategy to create a ten-year programme for reducing all interface barriers by 2023 in order to facilitate reconciliation, improve community relations and to build a "united and shared society" (OFMDFM 2013:63-64). In other words, not only social relationships are thus

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[2] Two examples:

Maurice Fitzmaurice: 'Barrier at sectarian interface replaced with less formidable gate after cross-community talks', *BelfastLive*, published on: 02-04-2015, consulted on: 07-04-2015. Source: http://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/belfast-news/barrier-sectarian-interface-replaced-less-8969840#ICID=sharebar_twitter.

Claire Graham, 'North Belfast: Interface barrier removed at Newington Street', *BBC News NI*, published on: 26-11-2014, consulted on: 29-03-2015. Source: http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-30210613.

taken into account in Northern Ireland when it comes to reconciliation, physically defined geographical borders have also started to be addressed.

Moreover, this indicates that there exists a relationship between physical borders and social identity groups. However, despite the fact that it is academically acknowledged that maintaining physical barriers can have "major repercussions on attempts to reintegrate divided societies" (McAtackney 2011:95), what is missing in international studies on constructing physical barriers, is a discourse "that explores exit strategies that advocate the removal of barriers and other forms of physical lines of demarcation" (Byrne 2011:9). In other words, limited knowledge exists on the required processes to "de-construct barriers and walls if the context for their initial emergence no longer exists and there is some willingness for their removal" (Byrne 2011:9). So, the lack of knowledge on how to "unmake" these constructed physical barriers complicates not only (policies on) actual deconstruction processes when a willingness for removal arises, it, in turn, also complicates reconciliation processes that aim to restore strong conflicting relationships. This, then, underlines the significance of scrutinising the relationship between social boundaries and physically defined spatial borders in the context of promoting reconciliation in order to address this existing theoretical lacuna. It is deemed imperative to understand the entire process of how these borders came into being and how they have developed until present day in order to fully understand the process of aiming to overcome these borders. The current study will therefore analyse the construction and interrelatedness of social identity boundaries and material territorial borders in the case of North and West Belfast where interface barriers are prominently present. In other words, central to this study are the interrelated making and unmaking – or hardening and softening – processes of social identity boundaries and interface barriers as physically defined geographical borders within a broad time frame.

It is aimed to fully understand the dynamics of these bordering processes and their interrelatedness in the case of North and West Belfast by analysing this from different relevant empirical perspectives. Taken into account here are the perspectives of several researchers[3] who have conducted extensive research on issues around interface barriers and community relations in order to provide a case-specific academic lens on empirical social and spatial bordering processes. Empirical evidence is furthermore provided by different bodies that are (indirectly) engaged in the processes of improving community relations and/or (altering) interface barriers. Whereas existing literature and reports inform most of the data on historical bordering processes

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[3] Respectively Dr Neil Jarman from the Institute for Conflict Research (ICR) and Dr Jonny Byrne and Dr Cathy-Gormley-Heenan from the Ulster University (UU).

in the case of Northern Ireland, it is these bodies that, for the most part, provide a deeper understanding on the current empirical context when it comes to (the relationship between) social boundaries and physically defined spatial borders as well as the undertaken process of removing or transforming interface barriers.[4] These include bodies such as the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), Belfast Interface Project (BIP) and various grassroots community relations organisations, most of which are funded by the IFI under its Peace Walls Programme. An overview of these bodies can be found in Appendix II while a more elaborate explanation for the rationale behind choosing these perspectives is provided in the methodology chapter.

A recurring theme that can be discerned in this study is evidently that of 'borders' or 'boundaries'. Academically, this research is therefore situated within contemporary border studies. Borders are traditionally understood by (political) geographers as constituting the physical and highly visible lines of separation between states and countries - or political and socio-economic spaces – and focus has thus concentrated on international borders (Newman 2006:143-144; Newman & Paasi 1998:189; Newman 2006b:172). Over the past decades, however, border studies has undergone a renaissance which has been accompanied by a crossing of disciplinary boundaries[5] (incorporating academic disciplines such as anthropology and economy) and an increasing focus on bordering processes instead of the border per se (Newman 2006a:143; Newman 2006b:171; Wastl-Walter 2011:2). Contemporary border studies, therefore, take on a broader definition also taking into account borders on a non-state level:

> [B]order scholars conceptualize borders not only as spatial or geographical phenomena that demarcate the sovereign territories of states but also as social, political or economic expressions either of belonging or of exclusion within state territories, for example, nations, religions, groups and individuals (Paasi 2003 in Wastl-Walter 2011:2).

Borders, then, are complex and dynamic phenomena that can manifest themselves in a variety of ways, either material or non-material, and can have various functions and roles (Wastl-Walter 2011:2). When looking at the themes studied by different academic fields on borders and boundaries, Newman and Paasi (1998) identified a common underlying theme: the connection between territoriality, lines and identities. They explain this by stating that boundaries, by definition, constitute lines of separation or contact which "may occur in real or

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[4] The researchers discussed above also provide some empirical evidence on the current situation in Belfast through their work on (perceptions towards) community relations and interface barriers.
[5] A development which can be seen as part of a larger 'postmodern' academic discourse "in which many disciplinary boundaries are being eroded" (Jameson 1983 in Newman & Paasi 1998:191).

virtual space, horizontally between territories, or vertically between groups and/or individuals" that usually creates an "us" and an "other" identity (Newman & Paasi 1998:91).

This study also scrutinises the relation between social identity boundaries and spatial borders in the case of interface barriers and sectarian division in the local, urban, setting of North and West Belfast, by linking a traditional understanding of geographical borders with an anthropological understanding of social identity boundaries. This is done from a social constructivist approach as influenced by Fredrik Barth on ethnic groups and boundaries, which involves issues of sameness and difference (Delaney 2005:43; Barth 1998; Jenkins 2000, 2008). Due to the fact that this study mainly focuses on physical spatial borders[6], or 'concrete territorial lines' as Wastl-Walter (2011:2) describes it, recent studies of walls (Brown 2010; McAtackney 2011) are also taken into account as well as the role of imagination and 'imaginative geography' (Said in Brown 2010) in understanding the interrelatedness of social and (physical) spatial bordering processes; both the making and unmaking thereof. By doing this, the current study not only aims to contribute to a broader academic understanding of borders and boundaries in general, it does this moreover by including the perspective of promoting reconciliation as has been explained above. This research aims to address the existing theoretical lacuna of how to deconstruct, or unmake, physical barriers that hamper re-integrating divided societies, and in doing so, might also broaden our academic thinking on the process of reconciliation and add insights in how to overcome (socio-spatial) borders; a theme recently emerging within border studies (Wastl-Walter 2011:2-3).

This thesis is structured using a classic approach where a theoretical framework is presented first, after which the collected empirical date (both generated as well as naturally occurring date) is discussed. The presented empirical data is derived from a fieldwork period of fourteen weeks in Belfast, where a triangulation of various research methods have been used. An elaborate description of the methodology is provided after this introduction. Hereafter, the theoretical framework that substantiates this entire study is comprised out of four different sections. The first section provides a general introduction to contemporary border studies after which both traditional geographical as well as anthropological understandings of borders are discussed. These two approaches are aimed to be bridged by taking into account the role of 'imagination' and concrete territorial lines by means of the study of walls. The final section within the theoretical framework, then, focuses on the overcoming of borders in relation to reconciliation processes. After this, this thesis can be divided into three empirical sections that

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[6] Instead of the more cognitive borders of interfaces in general (Boulton 2014:103).

roughly follow a chronological order and engage in a dialogue, as explained by Ragin (1994), between (empirical) evidence and the (theoretical) ideas set out in the theoretical framework.

As stated by Wastl-Walter, borders have continuously changed throughout history which is why they can only be understood in their context (2011:1). This opinion is shared by Brown when looking at walls when she stresses the importance of context as this affects the way walls are perceived and experienced (2012:75). This study therefore not only analyses the current situation in North and West Belfast, but also the historical context of border making as well as the aimed unmaking or overcoming of borders in the context of promoting reconciliation. Hence, chapter four scrutinises social and spatial bordering processes in Belfast's socio-historical context, i.e. before, during and after the Troubles, to understand how social identity boundaries and interface barriers were constructed. Chapter five moves onto present-day Belfast and looks at how social division and interface barriers are perceived today by people on the ground according to local bodies working closely with affected communities. As shortly discussed above, the current context of Northern Ireland wherein peace and reconciliation are promoted differs significantly from the context in which interface barriers initially emerged, which underpins the necessity of analysing how this impacted bordering processes and the interrelatedness between social boundaries and physically defined geographical borders. Focus then shifts in chapter six towards the governmental plans in Northern Ireland for the removal of all interface barriers in the near future and therefore aims to add empirical insights in how to deconstruct social boundaries and physical geographical borders. This part critically analyses how this process of removing or altering the physical appearance of interface barriers takes place on the ground and how social boundaries come into play here. The final chapter discusses the research findings and provides a conclusion, as well as some recommendations. The bibliography is followed by two appendices, the first containing the research questions that underlie this research and the second a list of local bodies that were involved in this study.

2. Methodology

In order to add new insights into contemporary understandings of borders and how to overcome them in the context of post-conflict reconciliation processes, the social phenomenon of socio-spatial borders in Belfast is approached from multiple theoretical angles: the traditional and anthropological understandings of borders, the study of walls, and reconciliation. Besides this theoretical triangulation, a triangulation of data collection techniques has also been applied for both naturally occurring data as well as generated data (Boeije 2010:176). Empirical data was collected during a three and a half month fieldwork period conducted in Belfast, Northern Ireland, from February until May 2015. Due to the interpretative epistemological nature of this research aiming to understand a social phenomenon, a qualitative research methodology was employed but is supported by research conducted by other scholars that take on a quantitative approach, most notably including surveys. Different steps can be discerned in the research method, although these were not strictly separated and, at times, even overlapped with each other. Moreover, throughout the whole fieldwork period, a continuous reverting to theory took place to guide data collection techniques in order to stimulate the systemic dialogue between ideas and evidence as explained by Ragin (1994).

A first step for understanding the social phenomenon analysed in this research, was to read around the subject and conduct a small literature research, involving academic literature, relevant (policy) reports and news articles on interface barriers, in order to get a better overview of the complexity of the development of interface barriers, existing attitudes towards them and plans for their removal. An important research technique used here, which is considered to be a form of observation, was the mapping of existing (and recently removed) interface barriers throughout Belfast to create an awareness of their geographical distribution (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011:83). Considering the fact that it can be difficult for outsiders to recognise interface barriers as it often requires local knowledge on geography and social relations to notice them, mapping was greatly aided by an existing report from 2012 commissioned by the Belfast Interface Project (BIP).[7] Some of the maps in this report wherein several clusters[8] of interface barriers in Belfast are clearly demarcated will feature throughout this thesis which will be supported by photographic evidence. Photographs were either collected through secondary literature, e.g. reports or news articles, or taken by the author themselves by means of the BIP report or during

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[7] Belfast Interface Project (2012), *Belfast Interfaces: Security Barriers and Defensive Use of Space*, Belfast, United Kingdom: Belfast Interface Project.
[8] Clusters are defined as: "groupings of distinct and separate but related instances of defensively used space within the city" (BIP 2012:12).

meetings with informants from different organisations, which will be discussed in further detail below. Moreover, as a result, focus shifted towards North and West Belfast as these areas proved to be most significant for this research due to the strong presence of interface barriers there.

The first step in the employed research method also contributed to the process of reaching informants in the field. By approaching several (local) organisations and institutions emerging from this literature review, access to other organisations and relevant informants was established by the 'snowball' or 'networking' method (Boeije 2010:40). From an early stage onwards, multiple relevant reports and articles by Dr Neil Jarman from the Institute for Conflict Research (ICR), Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan and Dr Jonny Byrne, both from Ulster University (UU), came by which resulted in contacting these researchers in person in order to create an academic lens on bordering processes. As has been explained in the introduction, besides researchers, several different bodies were also taken into account in this research that are (indirectly) involved in issues concerning (altering) interface barriers and improving community relations. From the initial research steps, contact was established with the BIP who were involved with the mapping of interface barriers, as well as the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) who launched a Peace Walls Programme (PWP) in 2012 that aims to create the conditions to commence discussions about the removal of peace walls in association with eight local organisations[9] in Northern Ireland, six of which are in Belfast (IFI 2014:11). The local organisations from the inner cities of North and West Belfast that were taken into account in this then research were: 1. Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG), 2. Black Mountain Shared Space Project (BMSSP), 3. North Belfast Interface Network (NBIN) as part of TASCIT, and 4. Duncairn Community Partnership (DCP), and as can be seen in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Key programmes under the IFI's Peace Walls Programme, International Fund for Ireland (2014:13)

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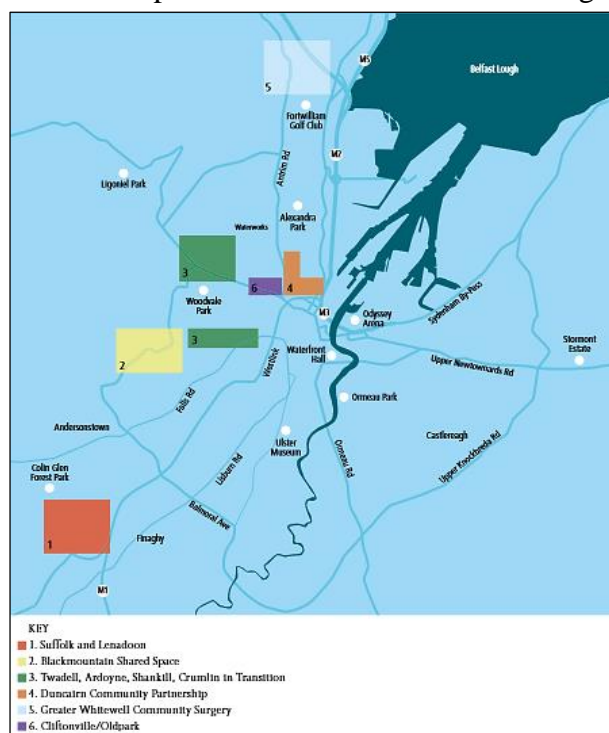
[9] These are: Duncairn Community Partnership; Greater Whitewell Community Surgery; TASCIT; Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group; St. Columbs Park House; TRIAX; Lower Oldpark/Cliftonville Regeneration and Black Mountain Shared Space Project. Source: http://www.internationalfundforireland.com/peace-walls-programme/102-what-we-do/peace-walls-programme-case-study/556-peace-walls-programme21, last updated on: 03-07-2015, viewed on: 03-07-2015.

The particular areas where access was possible via organisations working on different clusters of interface barriers as identified in the BIP report (2012), which are portrayed below in Figure 2.2, then were: 'Suffolk – Lenadoon' and 'Upper Springfield Road' in West Belfast and 'Duncairn Gardens', 'Limestone Road – Alexandra Park' and 'Crumlin Road – Ardoyne – Glenbryn' in North Belfast.

Cluster 1:   Suffolk - Lenadoon
Cluster 2:   Upper Springfield Road
Cluster 3:   Falls - Shankill
Cluster 4:   The Village - Westlink
Cluster 5:   Inner Ring
Cluster 6:   Duncairn Gardens
Cluster 7:   Limestone Road - Alexandra Park
Cluster 8:   Lower Oldpark - Manor Street
Cluster 9:   Crumlin Road - Ardoyne - Glenbryn
Cluster 10:   Ligoniel
Cluster 11:   Whitewell Road - Longlands
Cluster 12:   Short Strand - Inner East
Cluster 13:   Ormeau Road and the Markets

Figure 2.2: Clusters of interface areas in Belfast with security barriers and defensive architecture, Belfast Interface Project (2012:5, 10)

Other bodies[10] that were included via the snowball-method, were the Department of Justice (DOJ), the governmental department responsible for all the interface barriers built by the state, and the Community Relations Council (CRC) which is a non-governmental public body involved in promoting better community relations to get insights in issues on interface barriers and community relations from a more top-down perspective.

Importantly, at the start of this research, the aim was to get access to local residents living near interface barriers in order to understand their perceptions on social and physical borders and their experiences with the process of changing interface barriers. From a previous research conducted two years ago by the author on reconciliation organisations in Belfast, it became clear to try and gain access to local residents via local organisations due to the sensitive nature of the topics discussed and an existing research fatigue. This led to the involvement of another organisation in North Belfast in this research which was not connected to the IFI's PWP

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[10] When meeting with the Duncairn Community Partnership (DCP), I also got the opportunity to speak with Gordon Walker, an informant from community organisation Intercomm who also used to work for the IFI.

or specifically concerned with the transformation of interface barriers, namely 174 Trust However, despite extensive networking efforts throughout the fieldwork period, only one in-depth interview was managed to be carried out with a former resident who is involved with community work which also addresses interface barriers, indicating the difficulty to reach this population on the ground as an outside researcher. Insufficient to make claims about the experiences and perceptions of residents, it warranted a shift in research population towards local and international bodies which (indirectly) work with communities on issues such as community relations and interface barriers as explained above.

Besides personal tours around certain areas by informants to gain a better understanding of the area and existing issues surrounding interface barriers there, the most important data collection technique used was conducting in-depth interviews. A total of thirteen interviews was conducted during the fieldwork period which differed in duration from fifty minutes up to almost two and a half hours and included the three researchers and informants from the bodies and organisations mentioned above, as well as one interview with a former resident of Tigers Bay in North Belfast and a more isolated interview with Mark Hackett from the Forum for Alternative Belfast, a not-for-profit organisation concerned with the city planning of Belfast, that provided more insight into the relationship between the use of space in Belfast and social groups. The in-depth interviews were semi-structured in nature and for the most part recorded to enable the researcher to fully pay attention to the informant and his/her answers. Interview questions were set up beforehand using a predefined topic list derived from academic theories and information gathered from reports and news article. This allowed for an interview to cover the same main themes but made it also possible for informants to talk more freely and add extra information they deemed important, e.g. personal narratives or new insights. Interview questions therefore progressed throughout the fieldwork period as interviews were not only adjusted to the (position of the) informant in question, they were also at times revised due to data arising from previous interviews (Curtis & Curtis 2011:29).

Additional data that was gathered during the fieldwork period were, as already shortly addressed above, were relevant (quantitative) research reports, papers and articles, among others by the researchers involved in this thesis, as well as reports from some of the included bodies, policy reports and news articles. Moreover, an online data base[11] with annual surveys conducted in different age groups on a range of issues complements this qualitative study with quantitative data. All in all, despite not being able to reach the intended research population of

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[11] This is Surveys Online (SOL) as a constituent part of Access Research Knowledge (ARK), which includes the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) and the Young Life and Time (YLT) survey.

local residents at interfaces, this was compensated with access to many other informants involved with interface barriers and community relations in multiple ways, enabling a shift in focus. Furthermore, the data collected from these different perspectives is bolstered by the plethora of other data sources, including published quantitative surveys, which resulted in a triangulation of data collection techniques that ensured a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the issues discussed in this thesis.

Figure 3: Interface barrier at Cupar Way which divides the Protestant/Loyalist area of
Shankill Road from the Catholic/Nationalist area of Falls Road, West Belfast
– Photo taken by Elske van Putten, 16-03-2015

3. Theorising Borders: Conceptual framework

3.1. Border studies

We live in a very bordered world - Diener & Hagen 2012:1

Borders are complex, ubiquitous phenomena whose functions and roles have constantly changed throughout history (Wastl-Walter 2011:1-2). Even though borders seem natural, they are human creations "shaped by history, politics, and power as well as cultural and social issues" that have appeared and disappeared over time, which is why they can only be understood in their context (Paasi 2003 in Wastl-Walter 2011:1). Borders are thus socially constructed by humans that draw lines to "divide the world into specific places, territories and categories" (Diener & Hagen 2012:1; Brunet-Jailly 2005:634). Besides taking on a social constructivist approach when analysing social boundaries and spatial borders in the (socio-historical) context of Belfast, Northern Ireland, this study also draws on contemporary border studies; an academic field which has undergone major transformations over the past couple of decades which has been characterised by a crossing of disciplinary boundaries as part of a larger postmodern academic discourse (Wastl-Walter 2011:1; Newman 2006b:171; Newman & Paasi 1998:191). This postmodern trend arose in the 1980s when a new multidisciplinary generation of border scholars emerged, drawing from academic fields like anthropology, economy and social psychology, as a manifestation of the increasingly interdisciplinary character of contemporary social science (Kolossov 2005:613; Wastl-Walter 2011:2). Border theory departed from a "static, cartographic vision of territory" (Delaney 2005:64) which is why borders are traditionally understood by (political) geographers as "constituting the physical and highly visible lines of separation between political, social and economic spaces" (Newman 2006a:144), or in other words the dividing lines between states and countries within the international system. Nevertheless, geographers took on new approaches towards borders based on this developing interdisciplinary field of border studies during the 1990s (Newman 1006b:172; Wastl-Walter 2011:16).

Due to this development, 'borders' are currently understood as not only confined to inter-state divisions that have to be geographical or physical constructs, but are believed to be complex and dynamic phenomena that manifest themselves in various ways (Kolossov 2005:172; Wastl-Walter 2011:2). This can be material like a brick wall, but also less visible, more symbolic, non-material boundaries and are "conceptual distinctions created by actors to

categorize components of belonging and exclusion" (Wastl-Walter 2011:2). Despite differing etymological meanings, the terms 'border' and 'boundary' are often used interchangeably and are at times even described as twin concepts (Shields 2006:224; Lamont & Molnár 2002:167). Shields explains that 'border' denotes a territorial or strongly material edge and that 'boundaries' describe a broader set of distinctions that can also be immaterial in nature (2006:224, 227). For the purpose of clarity, the term 'boundary' will be used in this study when the body of anthropological literature on social identity construction is involved and will therefore indicate social, less tangible dividing lines between identity groups. 'Border', on the other hand, will first and foremost indicate a geographical perspective pointing towards spatial borders that can be physical in nature. However, the use of 'border' does not exclude social boundaries as these are also incorporated in contemporary understandings of borders and can thus also function as an overarching term. Borders, then, are conceptualised as "not only spatial or geographical phenomena that demarcate the sovereign territories of states but also as social, political or economic expressions either of belonging or of exclusion within state territories, for example, nations, religions, groups and individuals" (Paasi 2003 in Wastl-Walter 2011:2).

As it has become more and more difficult to discern separate academic fields within border studies, some authors have argued that the field of border research has now fused (Lugo 1997 in Wastl-Walter 2011:18). This has resulted in an emerging claim within border studies to develop a single model or general border theory to overcome disciplinary confines (Kolossov 2005:606; Wastl-Walter 2011:27).[12] This proved difficult, however, due to different empirical understandings of what constitutes a border. Moreover, scholars seem to start refraining from this idea and started perceiving this as unattainable, futile, and even undesirable (Wastl-Walter 2011:27, 43-44; Newman 2006a:145; Kolossov 2006:606-607). This, because it is difficult to create a single explanatory framework that could be applied to borders everywhere as their "meaning, forms and contents of representation and interpretation" is dependent on the context in which it manifests itself (Van Houtum & Strüver 2002:142). Moreover, developing a single theory would be problematic as this would make the context-bound phenomena more or less fixed, which is contradictory to the diverse nature of contexts that are not static but can change over time (Paasi 2009b in Wastl-Walter 2011:27-28). Nevertheless, a number of common themes can be distinguished that appear to be applicable to most understandings of the socially

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[12] In his article *Theorizing Borders: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Brunet-Jailly (2005) presents a theory of border and borderland studies as a general framework for understanding borders that incorporates several analytical lenses derived from current cross-disciplinary debates on borders. Considering the substantial range of this model encompassing four analytical lenses (1. Market forces and trade flows, 2. Policy activities of multiple levels of governments, 3. Local cross border political clout, 4. Local cross border culture), it is beyond the scope and focus of this thesis to take this theory into account.

(re)produced phenomena of borders (Wastl-Walter 2011:44). The most relevant for the current research will be discussed below.

A general trend within contemporary border studies is to focus on borders as *processes* instead of on the border itself as a pattern, and to perceive them as *institutions* that are managed instead of physical lines that are simply the static outcome of a decision-making process. This underlines the rationale to analyse bordering processes as a whole in this study, where focus lies on the making and unmaking of borders and not just the border per se. Central to these notions are the closely related concepts of border demarcation and management (Newman 2006a:148). Border demarcation, then, is not just the drawing of lines on a map, it is the process "through which borders are constructed and the categories of difference or separation are created" (Newman 2006a:148). In other words, it is the process through which the nature or criteria of inclusion and exclusion from various social categories and groups is determined (Newman 2006a:148; Shields 2006:228; Wastl-Walter 2011:35). The demarcation of fixed borders can create an "ecological fallacy" due to the fact that a single border hardly ever is completely congruous with a spatial or social category; an incongruence which may occur when categories change over time because of social or economic dynamics while the border remains static (Wastl-Walter 2011:35).

Once borders are created, they become a reality which impacts on daily life and are transformed into institutions with their own set of rules. Border management then takes on the function of controlling the means of border crossing (Wastl-Walter 2011:36). Or in other words, border management is about "the procedures by which the crossing of borders is eased or becomes more restrictive" and is controlled by border managers (Newman 2006b:178). Borders can thus experience processes of opening or closing "reflecting the degree to which cross-border separation or contact takes place" (Wastl-Walter 2011:33). Interestingly, border crossing can also occur when the border itself is relocated while the people around it remain in place (Newman 2006b:178). Even though the crossing of a geographical border can be a small movement in space, it can have a significant effect for the traversing body or object. The former changes from being an insider to an outsider or foreigner, while the latter can turn from a produce into a contraband (Shields 1996 in Shields 2006:229). This process of changing permeability of borders is contingent upon existing social and/or political conditions (Newman 2006a:149; Wastl-Walter 2011:33). This moreover indicates that, due to the fact that the meaning and form of borders are not constant as they are contingent upon the (spatial and temporal) context in which they are manifested, political transformations may cause for some borders to lower or become *softer* while others become *harder* (Wastl-Walter 2011:14). Besides

looking more closely at border hardening processes in the next paragraphs, paragraph 3.4 will go deeper into the process of opening and/or overcoming borders, a theme recently emerging within border studies (Wastl-Walter 2011:2-3), in relation to post-conflict reconciliation processes. First, however, attention will shift to geographical and anthropological understandings of borders before aiming to overcome their disciplinary confines in the paragraph thereafter.

3.2. Geographical borders and social identity boundaries

As has been stated above, Newman and Paasi (1998) identified a common underlying theme within border studies based on various academic fields: the connection between lines, territoriality and identity. They explain this by stating that borders, by definition, constitute lines of separation or contact which "may occur in real or virtual space, horizontally between territories, or vertically between groups and/or individuals" that usually creates an "us" and an "Other" identity (Newman & Paasi 1998:91). It is argued that identities are "closely linked with the formation and existence of borders" (Wilson and Donnan 1998 in Newman 2006b:175). 'Identity', then, is a common keyword used interdisciplinary and is often accompanied by the concepts of "inclusion/exclusion" or "inside/outside" (Wastl-Walter 2011:16). The current study will also scrutinize these interdisciplinary themes from a social constructivist perspective by combining a traditional understanding of geographical borders with that of an anthropological understanding of social identity. This will, then, provide a basis for the next paragraph in which it is aimed to transcend these two disciplinary understandings in order to obtain a deeper insight into the relationship between the two types of borders and get a more comprehensive understanding of borders in general within contemporary border studies. By doing this, this study moreover intends to contribute to academic discussions on how to deconstruct or unmake physical barriers in relation to the relationship-oriented understanding of reconciliation discussed in paragraph 3.4.

Geographical borders
Traditional geographical discourse on borders used to focus on categorising border types; creating typologies of borders that not only reflected the way borders were demarcated and delimited, but also reflected political relations between neighbouring states on the base of the relative openness of a border. One known traditional typology of categories included

antecedent, *subsequent*, s*uperimposed* and *natural* borders. The first type, *antecedent*, indicated the type of border that had been delimited prior to settlement of an area considered to be unsettled land, where the border then determined *ipso facto* the creation of difference between societies, while *subsequent borders* were those which were demarcated according to the existing settlement patterns, supposedly reflecting ethno-territorial patterns. As the name already suggests, *superimposed borders* were borders imposed by an outside power with little regard for existing social patterns in the region while *natural borders* were aligned with physical features of the landscape (Newman 2006a:145; Newman 2006b:174). According to Newman (2006b), using terminology from the traditional geographical discourse on borders today would brand you a traditionalist, at best, or a determinist, at worst. He, nevertheless, argues that some of these terminologies could be transferred to contemporary border discourse which, as has been explained above, focuses on "issues of identity, border management and the understanding of border as process […]" (Newman 2006b:174-175).

Geographical borders are believed to primarily serve the purpose of separating and demarcating the "social, political, economic, or cultural meanings of one geographic space from another" (Diener & Hagen 2012:4). It is argued that borders constitute space as a territory and that without borders, there is no territory (Shields 2006:225). For geographers, 'territory' – here defined as a geographically bounded meaningful space (Delaney 2005:15; Diener & Hagen 2012:2) – remains an important focus when studying borders, although studied in a less deterministic way then in the past. As the case with borders, territory is not only perceived as just the simple outcome of decision-making processes; both are understood as processes themselves which have their own internal dynamics (Newman 2006a:146). Borders, from a geographical perspective, are thus seen as manifestations or expressions of territory that "provide a means to assign things to particular spaces and regulate access into and/or out of specific areas", i.e. border management (Diener & Hagen 2012:6; Wastl-Walter 2011:22). It is argued that some mode of 'territoriality' is required when creating territories, which refers to the relationship between territories and *some other social phenomena*, like the territorial aspects of identity or social being, which treats territory as "an aspect of various dimensions in social life" (Delaney 2005:15; Diener & Hagen 2012:4). Another important emergence within the field of border studies, then, was the study of territorial identities where the importance of the border or boundary in people's everyday life is aimed to be understood by analysing its role in the social consciousness of people and their self-identification with territories (Kolossov 2005:614).

Importantly, even though geographers still mainly focus on borders as manifestations of the territoriality of states and perceive them as crucial to the discursive landscape of social power in the sense that border demarcation and management are determined by societal managers (Newman & Paasi 1998:187; Wastl-Walter 2011:22), when analysing geographical borders, this study will not focus on borders on a state-level but instead on a more local, urban level. Furthermore, even though power relations will be taken into account when looking at the geographical bordering process of urban material borders, these power dynamics will not be specifically problematized as this is beyond the scope of this study. Interestingly, this refocusing of the border away from state-level is another trend occurring in recent border literature (Newman 2006a:148). Moreover, as has been explained above, this study will take on a contemporary border discourse and incorporate anthropological understandings of boundaries, especially when it comes to the process of social identity construction as influenced by the work of Barth on ethnic identities (Demmers 2012:25).

Social identity boundaries

Anthropological understandings of borders or boundaries differs in significant ways from (political) geographical understandings. First of all, focus within anthropology has been less on the exercise of power than the geographical understandings mentioned above (Delaney 2005:43). Moreover, where tangible demarcation criteria characterises the traditionalist geographic border discourse, it is the more abstract lines between "us" and "them", or the social and symbolic constructions of boundaries between social collectivities rather than state borders, where sociologists and anthropologists are concerned with (Newman 2006a:154; Newman 2006b:176; Newman & Paasi 1998:194). Sociological categorisations of boundaries have therefore been indicated by means of a series of binary distinctions where the boundary constitutes the line of separation between, inter alia, "us-them", "self-other", "include-exclude" and "inside-outside". Border demarcation, then, consists out of criteria, or social categories, which determine on what side of the boundary you are located (Newman 2006b:176).

These categorical characteristics locate people in social space and refer to the social construction of social identity. In other words, social identity is "about the relationship between the individual and the social environment" (Demmers 2012:21). Social categories such as gender, religion and nationality, as products of human action and speech that can change over time, are distinguished by two main features: rules of membership and content. The first decides who is a member of that particular category or not, i.e. social boundary rules or what Barth describes as social processes of boundary maintenance (Barth 1998; Demmers 2012:26), whilst

'content' points towards the set of characteristics (e.g. beliefs or physical attributes) believed to be typical or expected of members of that social category. The latter then also takes into account the social valuation of members of this category compared to other categories (Fearon & Laitin 2000:848; Demmers 2012:21-22). Someone is thus considered to have a certain social identity when he or she shares the same characteristics with others, which can apply to multiple social categories that have different meanings and are of different importance depending on the specific context a person is situated. Moreover, besides having multiple identities which are contextual, dynamic and changeable, social identities are never constructed in total abstraction. This because identification with a social identity can only occur in relation to others, which makes them also limited in the sense that people construct their identity "by perceiving themselves as that which the other is not and vice versa" (Demmers 2012:21; Jenkins 2008:18; Van der Aar & Korving 2013:9). Or in other words, "identity is not something that someone *is*, but is an understanding of knowing who we are as well as knowing who other people are" (Jenkins 2008:18 in Van der Aar & Korving 2013:8).

Social identity construction, then, involves a complex internal-external dialectic between how people identify themselves, how others are identified and how people themselves are categorised by others (Demmers 2012:21; Jenkins 2000:8). The notion of identity is thus the outcome of the constantly negotiated relationship between similarity and difference, of agreement and disagreement with social others, in the sense that there can only be an "us" if there is also a "them" and is therefore understood as an ongoing process of 'being' or 'becoming' (Jenkins 2008:17-18, 20). Much of contemporary border discourse which takes this anthropological understanding of boundaries into account is characterised by the practices of boundary maintenance and negotiation which involve issues of sameness and difference, even though discussion within contemporary social theory does exist on the importance of differences in approaches to identity (Delaney 2005:43). Some scholars such as Jenkins (2008) argue that similarity, or what Barth would call the cultural stuff that (ethnic) boundaries enclose, is just as important in identity construction as identity boundaries themselves. Within the 'difference-paradigm', however, a sense of knowing who is who is considered a matter of differentiation between people and focus is thus on boundaries or 'membership rules' as crucial for defining the social category (Jenkins 2008:19-21). Importantly, social identities can also crystallise or become cemented at certain moments in times, for instance through violence. This process through which a "putative identity is turned into something hard, unchangeable and absolute" is referred to as 'reification' and can then become a powerful and compelling reality (Demmers 2012:27).

All in all, from an interdisciplinary perspective, "borders determine the nature of group (in some cases defined territorially) belonging, affiliation and membership, and the way in which the processes of inclusion and exclusion are institutionalised" (Newman 2006a:147). Even though social categories that make up a group in itself are not related to territorial or spatial locations, social distinctions can be exacerbated trough spatial patterns of residential segregation (Newman 2006b:176). Within recent critical geographical debates, then, borders (as well as territory) are perceived, not only as visible and concrete manifestations, but are also perceived in our mental maps and images (Van Houtum & Strüver 2002:141; Newman 2006a:146). The next paragraph will further scrutinise the relationship between imagination, concrete territorial borders and social boundaries.

3.3. Imaginative geography and material borders

As has been made clear above, within contemporary border studies, borders are no longer understood as self-evident lines that can be taken for granted; they not only constitute the separation line between geographical spaces, but are also perceived as the lines that create (or reflect) the difference between "us-them", "here-there" and "insider-outsider" and are therefore perceived by border scholars as both things or ideas in itself as well as representations (Newman 2006a:148; Van Houtum & Strüver 2002:141-142). This development has made it possible for the concept of 'imagination' to enter discussions of (spatial) borders. This because, in order for narrating or imagining a border to constitute that difference between "inclusion-exclusion" or "us-them", it is crucial that the existence and/or threat of an "other" is imagined (Van Houtum & Strüver 2002:141-142). Going back to the idea that social identity locates people into social space, border demarcation, then, is a way of marking and/or creating difference in social space as well as people on the other side of that border, which seemingly justifies to neglect the "other" as it is imaginatively there, but not actually present (Demmers 2012:21; Van Houtum & Strüver 2002:142). Even though constructed borders thus might be imaginative, this does not make it – or its consequences – less real (Van Houtum &Strüver 2002:142).

When referring to the work of Georg Simmel's *Soziologie*, Van Houtum and Strüver underline that "spatial relations are conditions and symbols of human relations and that social boundaries are similar to spatial borders" (2002:142). It is therefore not novel for scholars to stress the relevance of spatial demarcations on the process of identity construction (Frank 2009:71). The mental organisation of space producing identities is referred to by Said as

'imaginative geography', which constitutes "the universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs""; a practice which dramatizes the distance and difference between what is close and what is far away (Said 1995:54-55 in Frank 2009:71; Brown 2010:73). In other words:

> Imaginative geography, then, is a strategy of identity construction which equates (spatial) *distance* with (cultural, ethnic, social) *difference* associating the non-spatial characteristics of 'self' and 'other' with particular places (Said 1995 in Frank 2009:71).

Interestingly, within this practice, it is not necessary for the "other'" to acknowledge a boundary as it "is enough for 'us' to set these boundaries in our minds; the 'they' become 'they' accordingly" (Said in Brown 2010:74). This does not, however, necessarily mean that the relationship between social and spatial distance is always straightforward. This because being and feeling socially close does not require spatial proximity, while people who are spatially close but belong to another group (or social category) are often socially remote. This phenomenon, according to Simmel, mirrors the tensions between nearness and distance (Simmel 1909/1997 in Van Houtum & Strüver 2002:143). A crucial element within the making of this imaginative geography according to Brown, is the phenomenon of walls as concrete territorial lines of demarcation (2010:73). Since focus in this study is on interface barriers as physically defined geographical borders, the study of walls is also incorporated here.

Within social sciences, walls have been studied in three specific ways: "the study of walls as a means of exploring spatial configurations linked to function; the study of walls as instruments of social control; and the study of specific walls connected to political and military control or oppression" (McAtackney 2011:78). This study mainly follows the second category as focus is on a specific type of physical border, i.e. interface barriers, and the relation with the surrounding social environment in the case of social identity construction while power dynamics are not specifically problematized. Moreover, even though walls are commonly perceived as mundane, unremarkable everyday phenomena intended for a material task such as dividing, protecting or separating, they are a prominent physical (and visually noticeable) manifestation which can significantly affect physical experiences of a city and have tangible impacts on how people physically negotiate their surroundings (Brown 2010:73; McAtackney 2011:81). Besides being functional, walls organise human physic landscapes which are capable of (re)producing cultural and political identities as they are not only implicated in urban planning but also in the social negotiation of space which links back to Said's 'imaginative geography' (Brown 2010:74; McAtackney 2011:81). Moreover, in ethno-territorial or political

conflict, the visible manifestations of borders through concrete walls or fences are often constructed or moved "as a means of consolidating physical separation and barriers" (Newman 2006a:146). Walls or other physical lines of demarcation, then, can institutionalise and enforce distinctions and divisions between competing social identities, or in other words, reify social identities by amplifying the difference (i.e. identity boundaries) between them. By solidifying social relations and preventing interaction, physical barriers can therefore become constitutive of the social division they at times merely seem to reflect (Donnan & Jarman [forthcoming]:3-4; McAtackney 2011:77).

Walls, thus, do not simply exist; they also "play both positive and negative roles in controlling access, use of space, and in creating a sense of security and belonging – or insecurity and exclusion – in the urban environment" (McAtackney 2011:78). Spatial borders and structures, then, can also "convey moods or feelings by their design, placement and relationship to built or natural environments" and produce spatial imaginaries, which are usually imaginative or figurative values or judgements such as 'ugly', 'righteous' or 'magnificent' (Brown 2010:73-75). Importantly, a wall in itself has no intrinsic meaning or significance as it cannot narrate. However, walls emerge from and figure in discourses and, in this way, can become discursive statements themselves and carry ideological meanings such as representing power and domination or fear and isolation (Brown 2010:74; McAtackney 2011:81). In this way, walls can thus have multiple - and at times contradictory - meanings, like acting as a canvas to communicate opinion and maintain identity as well as prohibiting movement, solidifying social relations, preventing interaction and creating areas of tension (McAtackney 2011:77, 81). The fact that the meanings and discourses around walls can undergo temporal and spatial shifts underlines the importance of context for understanding how walls are perceived and experienced, which is why social sectarian division and interface barriers in the case of North and West Belfast, Northern Ireland, are scrutinised in this study within a larger socio-historically specific context (Brown 2010:75-77). However, before moving onto these case-specific chapters wherein border demarcation and management processes are analysed, focus will first shift towards the theoretical debates on overcoming borders and processes of post-conflict reconciliation.

3.4. Reconciliation and overcoming borders

The introduction already stated that, despite the fact that within academic discussions on constructing physical barriers a lack of knowledge exists on how to deconstruct physical barriers and other physical lines of geographical demarcation, so-called interface barriers are addressed in the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland in order to move towards a shared future (Byrne 2011:9; OFMDFM 2013:63-64). Reconciliation is a complex concept, most notably because there is little agreement on how to define it as a theoretical concept or carry it out as an empirical goal. This absence of consensus and conceptual confusion can mainly be attributed to the fact that reconciliation is perceived as both an end-state or *goal* to achieve as well as a *process*, or in other words, a means to achieve that goal (Aiken 2010:168; Bloomfield et al. 2003:12; Bloomfield 2008:4). Many scholars, however, have emphasised reconciliation as a long-term process instead of an end-state of harmony. Bloomfield explains that one reason for already doing this in one of his earlier works[13] was due to suspicion towards the end-state definition as being rather idealistic in nature. Nevertheless, it is still seen as a relevant part of the conceptual definition since it can motivate actors (Bloomfield 2006:6). As an outcome, 'reconciliation' can then be defined as:

> [Reconciliation] consists of mutual recognition and acceptance, invested interests and goals in developing peaceful relations, mutual trust, positive attitudes, as well as sensitivity and consideration for the other party's needs and interests (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004:15 in Bloomfield 2006:6).

Nevertheless, confusion remains as people, in particular victim groups, can be resistant towards a reconciliation process when no differentiation is made between the two definitions. This because they might suspect a process which compels them into an end-state that is perceived as this harmonious idea where everybody is equal and all is forgiven, which people might not necessarily be interested in at that time (Bloomfield 2006:7). Focus in this study will therefore remain mostly on reconciliation as a process.

Furthermore, reconciliation is a broad and complex process that consists out of several components such as truth, justice, forgiveness and healing and is therefore seen as an umbrella term wherein different instruments complement each other (Bloomfield 2006:11). Most interesting for this study, is the understanding of reconciliation from a relationship-oriented view that multiple scholars adhere to, which sees this process as primarily concerning people

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[13] Bloomfield refers here to 'Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: A Handbook' by Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse (2003).

and the creation of new types of relationships (Bloomfield 2006:8). Taking all this into account, 'reconciliation' is understood here as: the overarching long-term relationship-building process, encompassing multiple instruments, where relationships are aimed to be restored - or transformed from antagonistic to more harmonious ones - and where people learn to live non-violently with radical differences in order for a society to move from a divided past to a shared future, which can also be seen as the ultimate goal of conflict resolution (Aiken 2010:168; Bloomfield et al. 2003:12; Bloomfield 2006:8, 11; Ramsbotham et al. 2011:246).

Some scholars argue that after periods of mass group-based violence in divided societies, strong identity boundaries and cultural differences need to be addressed in a reconciliation process in order for a peace process to be successful. This due to the fact that these can breed mistrust and misunderstanding and can cause a relapse into violence, even after a formal political settlement has been reached (Aiken 2010:168-169; Kelman 1998 and Ross 2000 in Maney et al. 2006:184, 191; Van der Aar & Korving 2013:19). Within academic debates on reconciliation, attention has thus already been focused on how to reconstruct relationships between social groups or, in other words, how to unmake strong antagonistic identity boundaries. These insights, which will be further discussed below, are based on the premise that social identity boundaries are human constructs, implying that social identities then, at least theoretically, can also be deconstructed and/or reconstructed (Demmers 2012:35). Since (physically defined) spatial borders are also perceived as social constructs, these ideas might contribute to discussions on how to deconstruct physical barriers that, as has been explained above, can reify social division between identity groups and therefore stand in the way of true reconciliation.

Reconciliation is often seen as the coming together of two things "with the aim of matching them to a point that differences between them cease to exist so that a perfect unity is created" (Daly & Sarkin 2007:181 in Van der Aar & Korving 2013:19). In the case of social identity, then, reconciliation would eventually result in the erosion of group boundaries and distinctive identities of former conflict parties into a shared identity. This, however, is often perceived as a futile way to pursue sustainable peace as it may be too extreme for many people within diverse societies and is considered to be an unrealistic aim for ethno-nationally divided societies such as Northern Ireland (Daly & Sarkin 2007:181-182; Van der Aar & Korving 2013:19; Nagle & Clancy 2012:79-80). This is also acknowledged from a border studies perspective looking at processes of opening geographical borders when it is stated that, despite the fact that this transforms borders from a barrier where the other side is invisible to a place where reconciliation, cooperation and coexistence can take place, the opening of spatial borders would

not automatically result in the hybridisation of ethnic and/or cultural identities. This, due to the fact that social identities are dependent on the existence of social categorisation (and associated boundary rules) which goes back to the relational and limited nature of social identities, in the sense that there can only be an "us" if there is a "them" (Newman 2006a:147-148; Demmers 2012:21).

In addition, controversy exists within academic debates around the so-called contact-hypothesis which states that "the more contact there is between conflict parties, the more scope there is for resolution" (Hewstone and Brown 1986 in Ramsbotham et al. 2011:248). Some authors argue along the line of "good fences make good neighbours" and are thus in favour of separation of groups in order to end ethnic civil wars (Ramsbotham et al. 2011:248). However, as has been stated above, even though an uneasy peace may be maintained by physical borders in the short term, their existence "can have major repercussions on attempts to reintegrate divided societies" which is why physical separation is not considered to be a feasible reconciliation strategy (McAtackney 2011:95; Ramsbotham et al. 2011:248). Scholars on the other side of the spectrum in this discussion, however, argue that a redefinition of the constructs of "self" and "other" is necessary for conflict resolution in order for the "us-them" divide to be replaced with a more inclusive "we" (Ramsbotham et al. 2011:248). This touches upon the argument by border scholars stating that overcoming borders is mainly about "overcoming the socially constructed imaginations of belonging to a certain place and of the need for a spatial fixity" which requires the reimaging of borders as well as the reimagining of "others" for the latter to transform from outsiders to insiders and is explained by stating that, since imagination has the potential to divide people, it also has the ability to unite them (Van Houtum & Strüver 2002:142).

Linked to this, are the ideas of a growing body of social psychological scholars who argue that reconciliation must involve an element of 'identity negotiation' which goes further than just restoring broken relationships and implies the engagement of former enemies in a process where antagonistic identities and belief systems are (re)created into more positive relations and systems of interaction (Aiken 2010:168-169; Kelman 2006:23; Van der Aar & Korving 2013:19-20). Here, emphasis lies on the necessity of what can be termed 'social learning' in divided societies where (former) antagonistic parties confront the legacies of past violence and reconsider the nature of their relations with the "other" which is centred around "changing the motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions of the great majority of society members regarding the conflict, the nature of the relationship between the parties, and the parties themselves" (Aiken 2010:169). Essential to the process of changing relationships

between groups, then, is the identity negotiation process where each party revises its own identity just enough to accommodate the identity of the "other" which constitutes a certain degree of acknowledgement of the "other" as a central component of each party's own identity (Aiken 2010:169; Kelman 2006:23). So, this approach does take into account the relational nature of social identity construction as discussed above. In other words, "[i]dentities need to be softened and transformed to a point that they incorporate both an understanding of the self as well as new perceptions of others, not as enemies but as fellow human beings" (Ramsbotham et al. 2011:261 in Van der Aar & Korving 2013:20).

Moreover, when it comes to spatial borders, it is important to take into account that their forced opening can be impeded because not all people beside borders are interested in interacting with the other side, particularly in the case of long-rooted tensions and conflict in a region or between particular groups. The notion of "good fences make good neighbours" thus often reflects "the disposition of peoples who wish to maintain and perpetuate their difference, even where this is not necessarily accompanied by animosity or outright political exclusion" (Newman 2006b:181). This, again, underscores the necessity of incorporating physically defined spatial borders in reconciliation processes in order to truly speak of a society that has moved from a divided past towards a shared future. However, even when the physical attributes of spatial borders (e.g. walls, fences or guard posts) are removed, this does not necessarily mean that they no longer have any impact on the daily lives of those people living in close proximity to these borders (Wastl-Walter 2011:41).

This study will therefore scrutinise the process of opening up, or unmaking of, physically defined geographical borders (i.e. interface barriers) as currently undertaken in North and West Belfast by different bodies and organisations, and the way social sectarian identity boundaries are implicated in this. This will be done by taking into account the aforementioned reconciliation approaches from a relationship-oriented understanding (i.e. the level of intergroup contact, identity negotiation and social learning) and the role of imagination herein. Before doing this, however, chapter four will look at the case-specific social and spatial border demarcation processes in Northern Ireland within a historical timeframe with the aim of understanding how social categories of difference were constructed and how interface barriers as physically defined geographical borders came into being. Or in other words: the making of social boundaries and spatial borders. Focus will then shift in chapter five towards border management processes in contemporary North and West Belfast. Here, the dynamics of border opening and closing – or softening and hardening – will be analysed by combining geographical and anthropological understandings of borders. This will be done by incorporating themes from

discussions on walls, e.g. spatial imaginaries assigned to interface barriers and identified narratives[14] that surround these barriers, to gain insights into the different meanings assigned to interface barriers. Moreover, taken into account are also the (perceived) effects of the continuing presence of interface barriers on social relations according to organisations working closely with the communities affected by interface barriers. By scrutinising the role of interface barriers on the imaginative geography of residents, a deeper understanding of the interrelatedness between social identity boundaries and material spatial borders in contemporary North and West Belfast will be acquired. This, then, constitutes the context for the final empirical chapter which analyses the process of transforming interface barriers and the role of strong identity boundaries herein in order to promote reconciliation. As has been explained in the introduction, the main focus in these case-specific chapters will be on the current situation and approaches towards altering borders for promoting a more shared future. This because collected empirical data was mainly concerned with these aspects, but more importantly, it is these case-specific understandings of (the interrelatedness of) social identity boundaries and concrete spatial borders which can contribute to academic discussions on borders in general and debates on how to deconstruct them as a way of promoting reconciliation.

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[14] These are narratives and surrounding discourses on interface barriers as identified by organisations working on community relations and interface barriers, as well as the researchers included in this study who conducted research on these themes.

Figure 4.1: "Belfast IRA man on patrol in West Belfast 1987 – Pacemaker"
Picture source: Belfast Telegraph Troubles Gallery[15]

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[15] 'The Troubles gallery - 40 years of conflict in Northern Ireland from the Belfast Telegraph archives', *Belfast Telegraph*, published on: 18-02-2014, consulted on: 20-07-2015. Source: *http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/archive/events/the-troubles-gallery-40-years-of-conflict-in-northern-ireland-from-the-belfast-telegraph-archives-29947576.html*.

4. Socio-Historical Context: Demarcating borders and boundaries in Belfast

4.1. The Troubles

Due to the fact that borders continuously change throughout history, it is considered paramount to understand the social phenomena of social identity boundaries and physically defined geographical borders within a larger socio-historical context as this affects the way borders are perceived and experienced (Wastl-Walter 2011:1; Brown 2012:75). So, in order to fully comprehend sectarian division and interface barriers in contemporary North and West Belfast, as well as their (perceived) interrelatedness within reconciliation processes aimed to overcome these strong borders, this empirical chapter will first focus on bordering processes before, during and after the so-called "Troubles". The Troubles is the euphemistically coined term referring to a period of unrest and armed struggle in Northern Ireland between the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and the British government between 1969 and 1998 which resulted in approximately 3,600 conflict related deaths and over 30,000 people injured (Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (Date of retrieval: 2015/07/14); Fitzduff and O'Hagan 2009 in Leonard & McKnight 2011:570). In this intractable armed conflict, the PIRA aimed to achieve reunion with the republic of Ireland which withdrew from the Union with Great Britain in 1921 whilst the British government perceived Northern Ireland to be part of British territory. After decades of fighting, during which bombings, shootings and sectarian murders took place, the signing of the so-called Good Friday Peace Agreement in April of 1998 marked the official end of the conflict (UCDP (Date of retrieval: 2015/07/14); Juergensmeyer 2003:37).

The prelude of the Troubles were clashes occurring in late 1968 between the British police force called the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) which consisted mainly out of Northern Irish Catholics and demanded liberal reforms in relation to discrimination in areas such as housing and employment. The RUC was unable to adequately address the significant escalation of civil disorder throughout 1968 and into 1969, in particular in urban settings like Derry/Londonderry and Belfast (Byrne 2011:27-28; UCDP (Date of retrieval: 2015/07/14)). The events that triggered a breakdown in policing, then, were intense riots in Derry/Londonderry in August of 1969 which led to civil disorder throughout Northern Ireland and eventually resulted in the British Army patrolling the streets of Belfast with the aim of keeping the peace, maintaining order and supporting the exiting civil authority. The PIRA (which later became known as the IRA) wanted to pursue a

hard-line campaign in order to achieve independence from British rule in Northern Ireland and declared that they perceived the British Army as a foreign army on Irish soil. Fighting between the British Army and the IRA intensified significantly by 1971, turning these initial clashes into a full-fledge armed conflict (Byrne 2011:28; UCDP (Date of retrieval: 2015/07/14)).

Importantly, the issue of the constitutional status of the Northern Irish territory also concerned organisations besides these two main warring parties. Both Nationalist/Catholic paramilitary groups and Loyalist/Protestant militias were involved in the fighting from an early stage and were responsible for carrying out lethal "revenge acts". While the British government tried to win the conflict by 'containing the terror' and to 'fight the terrorists within the law', the IRA, on the other hand, employed various warfare tactics such as different types of bombings and targeted shootings of representatives of the British state (UCDP (Date of retrieval: 2015/07/14)). Various organisations were thus responsible for conflict-related deaths which are presented in Table 1. Noteworthy, however, is that Loyalist/Protestant paramilitaries were responsible for the majority of civilian casualties which can be explained by the fact that, whilst they targeted Catholic civilians, Nationalist/Catholic paramilitaries mainly targeted security forces (McKeown 2013:10).

Table 1: Number of deaths from 1969-2001 by religion and organisation

Religion	Organisation					
	British Security	Republican Paramilitary	Loyalist Paramilitary	Irish Security	Not Known	Total
Catholic	303	450	727	1	41	1522
Protestant	43	981	231		32	1287
Not from NI	17	630	58	4	11	720
Total	363	2061	1016	5	84	3529

Source: Sutton, CAIN in McKeown (2013:11)

An intense level of conflict continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s with the highest concentration of overall conflict-related deaths occurring in the first seven years after its onset (McKeown 2013:10l; Morrissey & Gaffikin 2006:879; UCDP (Date of retrieval: 2015/07/14)). Even though the level of battle-related casualties reduced in the 1990s, attacks were still ongoing in this period which was characterised by an upsurge in sectarian violence and tit-for-tat killings that resulted in an increase in civilian victims (UCDP (Date of retrieval: 2015/07/14)).

In the late nineties, a peace process was initiated with the signing and implementation of the Good Friday Peace Agreement which officially ended the Troubles. Herein, it was agreed upon that a power-sharing government between Nationalists and Unionists would be set up in Northern Ireland and that there would be no change in constitutional state without the support of a majority (McKeown 2013:12). Despite positive developments in the peace process, a reduced level in conflict and an ostensible improvement in community relations, political violent incidents continue nevertheless and Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society. It is even argued by some that it would be naïve to believe that the conflict is truly over as the possibility to return to violence remains a reality today (Hughes et al. 2008:523; McKeown 2013:13l; Morrissey & Gaffikin 2006:880). One example of this, is the recent flag protests two years ago. Riots broke out in December 2012 after the Belfast City Council took the decision to restrict the flying of the Union flag at City Hall to eighteen designated days a year. Four months of sustained protest against this decision, which resulted in a total cost of £21.9 million for police operations, was attributed to several underlying causes, amongst others the fact that Loyalists "had come to see the peace process as a zero sum game in which Nationalists gains and Unionist losses are part of the same equation" (Nolan et al. 2014:9-10). The turbulence generated an increase in sectarian acts and caused for a deterioration in community relations while, ironically, the decision to restrict the flying of the Union flag resulted in an increase of displays of the flag elsewhere across Northern Ireland (Nolan 2014:11; Nolan et al. 2014:11). Overall, the conflict had devastating societal consequences for Northern Ireland, most notably the physical effects of high levels of segregation that "continue to be characterised by sectarian hostility, particularly in Belfast" (Hughes et al. 2008:523; McKeown 2013:10-11).

Important to take into account is that not all areas in Northern Ireland were affected the same by the conflict. Capital Belfast saw a disproportionate share of violence over these three decades as approximately 1540 deaths resulting from political violence occurred here – over forty per cent of the total figure – whilst the city consisted out of less than twenty per cent of the overall regional population. The north and west of the city in particular bore the brunt of this violence (Morrissey & Gaffikin 2006:880; McKeown 2013:11). The spatial concentration of violence and political deaths in these two parts of the city, is for some part attributed to the complex interfaces between Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Unionist communities here (Morrissey & Gaffikin 2006:880), which will be discussed in greater detail in paragraph 4.3 when geographical border demarcation processes are scrutinised in their historical context. However, it must be stressed that Belfast has always been a divided city (Leonard & McKnight 2011:570). Despite the Troubles often being portrayed as a religious conflict between Catholics

and Protestants, this understanding is too simplistic due to the fact that tensions and conflict are caused by the often interlinked religious, ethnic, social and/or political divisions in the area which have long historical roots tracing back to several centuries ago when England colonised Ireland and tensions between the Irish and English started to develop. As a term, the Troubles are therefore also used when indicating the historical context of strife between the British and the island inhabitants of present Ireland (Leonard & McKnight 2011:570; UCDP (Date of retrieval: 2015/07/14)). These socio-historical bordering processes of interlocking of social identities will be analysed more in-depth in relation to the roots of the Troubles in the next paragraph that is premised around analysing social boundary demarcation processes.

4.2. Constructing social boundaries: Sectarian community identities

The previous paragraph already suggested that, even though the Troubles are often portrayed as a religious conflict in nature, it was actually the interlinking of religious, ethnic, social and/or political divisions in Northern Ireland that caused for tensions and conflict. Or in other words, it was competing identities based on intertwined religious, national and political ideologies which are dichotomised into the labels Catholic and Protestant that underpinned the political conflict in Northern Ireland (Leonard & McKnight 2011:570; McKeown 2013:6). Cairns and Darby argue that Northern Ireland is entangled in a conflict characterised by a high level of immutability due to the fact that group loyalty and the maintenance of group boundaries are dominant features herein (1998:754). The recent troubles, however, were not the beginning of conflict in the area but rather one of "the most recent outpourings from an intermittently active vent of violence" which emerged from a complex history of discrimination, militarisation and colonisation with roots tracing back to several centuries ago when England colonised Ireland (Doherty & Pool 1997 in Boulton 2014:101-102; Hamilton et al. 2008:10; UCDP (Date of retrieval: 2015/07/14)). This paragraph will therefore analyse the old roots of this identity conflict by scrutinising how social identity boundaries were constructed or demarcated, as well as how these were maintained and reinforced throughout history.

It is argued that the troubles started in the twelfth century with the English invasion in an area of Dublin, even though English rule was still rather limited at this time (McKeown 2013:3). The influx of English and Scottish Protestants into Ireland throughout the seventeenth century with the main purpose of increasing control for the English government, also known as the Ulster Plantation, gave rise to patterns of division along the lines of 'settler-native' which

are still noticeable in contemporary Northern Irish society, namely "an ethnic differentiation between English and lowland Scots and the resentful Irish dispossessed" (McKeown 2013:3; Nolan 2013:13). The first ethnic markers between the two groups which became apparent at this point, then, were language and religion. Whereas the "native" inhabitants of the region spoke Irish and were mostly Catholic, the Protestant settlers spoke English (Boulton 2014:102; Nolan 2013:13). It is at this point, thus, that the first lines of demarcation were constructed between the two competing social identities and categories of difference were created. Language and religion, then, not only defined the content of each of these social categories (i.e. Irish and Catholic versus English and Protestant), they also marked the membership rules or social boundaries of the two social identities as these determine the criteria of inclusion and exclusion. This links back to the understanding of social identities as being able to incorporate multiple social categories and being constructed in relation to an "other", as described in paragraph 3.2.

Throughout this period in history, the majority of land was given to Protestants which resulted in serious conflicts between Protestants and Catholics. Some of these conflicts are still celebrated today, like the contentious remembrance of the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 by the Protestant community every twelfth of July (McKeown 2013:3). So, from the beginning of British settlement, a Protestant dimension was involved, but it was due to religious discrimination and economic deprivation that the Catholic dimension of Irish nationalism increased as "the Irish Catholics felt united by their religion and oppressed as a nation by the British Protestants" (Rieffer 2003:223 in Van der Aar & Korving 2013:24). Here, another social category can thus be discerned that is connected to the two competing social identities, namely nationality or political ideology. This because most Catholics favoured a united Ireland whilst the majority of Protestants wished to remain in the union with the United Kingdom (Doherty & Poole in Boulton 2014:102).

The two identity groups are thus defined by their religious backgrounds as well as their opposing political identities. British Protestants, then, are referred to as Unionists or Loyalists, both political ideologies in favour of maintaining strong legal, economic and political ties between Britain and Northern Ireland, while Irish Catholics are often associated with Nationalism or Republicanism which are political ideologies in favour of independence of Northern Ireland or a re-union with the Irish Republic. Loyalist and Republican are considered to be the more hard-line, military strings of respectively Unionism and Nationalism (Cairns & Darby 1998:754; Hamilton et al. 2008: 10; McKeown 2013:5; UCDP (Date of retrieval: 2015/07/14)). The content of Nationalism as a social category is focused around two key

perceptions: that the people of Ireland form one nation and that the fault for Ireland being divided lies with Britain. Unionism, on the other hand, is premised around the ideas that there are two distinct people in Ireland (Unionists and Nationalists or Protestants and Catholics) but that the core of the problem lies with the Nationalists who refuse to recognise this and therefore deny Unionists the same right of self-determination as they claim themselves (McKeown 2013:5). Interestingly, even though the terms Catholic and Protestant are used to signify the two conflicting identity groups, religion itself is one of the least important interlinked divisions causing conflict as people in Northern Ireland might identify themselves as non-religious but would, at the same time, describe themselves as either Catholic or Protestant. In other words, use of these terms "is as much ethnic and political as [it is] religious" and can best be seen as a "badges of difference" which symbolise deeper attachments to national "roots" (Cairns & Darby 1998:755; Moxon-Browne 1991:23 in McKeown 2013:4). For now, this study will also use these religious terms when indicating the two majority communities in Northern Ireland for the sake of clarity, but it is recognised that these are merely markers for more complex social identities that encompass multiple interlinked and fluid social categories. This is further scrutinised in paragraph 5.1 when analysing social identity boundaries in contemporary Belfast.

It was by the eighteenth century, when the British colonists occupied 95 per cent of the area, that Protestants became a majority in the northern part of Ireland (i.e. Ulster) compared to the Catholic majority in the south (Cairns & Darby 1998:755). Following this development was the declaration of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801 which, in turn, prompted Irish Nationalist protests and a series of armed struggles in order to remove the English monarchy in Ireland, most notoriously was the 1916 Easter Rising. Tensions between the two communities grew stronger in the 1920s when "years of oppression by the colonists and rebellion by the native Irish" led to the war of independence (1919-1921) and resulted in the island of Ireland being divided into two different sovereignties (Cairns & Darby 1998:755; McKeown 2013:3). The Government of Ireland Act (1921) dictated that twenty-six counties in the south would become the Irish Free State and part of the British Commonwealth, whilst the six predominantly Protestant counties in the north would become Northern Ireland under British rule. Fighting continued, though, as the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland was subjected to decades of discrimination by the British government and British Protestants in the region and Irish Nationalists wanted full independence from Britain. The latter was achieved to some extent in 1949 when the Republic of Ireland was realised. However, Northern Ireland was ruled from Stormont; the seat of Northern Irish government that was answerable to London. Nevertheless, periods of significant violent conflict continued between Catholic and Protestant

communities following this partition as Irish Catholics considered Northern Ireland to be occupied by Britain while the British government continued to perceive the region as part of British territory (Cairns & Darby 1998:755; McKeown 2013:3-4; UCDP (Date of retrieval: 2015/07/14)). It is even stated that the partition of the Republic of Ireland resulted in "a siege mentality, in which both communities felt beleaguered, and deeply threatened by the other" (Bull 2006:42 in McKeown 2013:4). This, thus, resulted in a hardening of identity boundaries.

As has been explained in the theoretical framework above, social identity boundaries can be reified under specific circumstances such as through violence. This was also the case with the violent episodes in the history of Northern Ireland as numerous inter-communal riots on the basis of religion resulted in the polarisation of the two dominant communities (Byrne 2011:24-25). Even though the period between 1930 and 1960 saw minimal intercommunal and sectarian violence, Northern Ireland was definitely not a stable and cohesive society in the mid-1960s as there "was an undercurrent of tension emanating within working class Loyalist and Republican communities in Belfast and other cities and towns throughout the 1960s" (Byrne 2011:26-27). The violence taking place during the latest Troubles further solidified the religious, ethnic, social and/or political divisions or boundary rules between these communities (Leonard & McKnight 2011:570). In other words, violent events maintained and strengthened the social identity boundaries between the two communities throughout the past centuries. Moreover, these competing identities under religious markers were further institutionalised and more or less reified in the Good Friday Agreement as this is based on a recognition of 'the two communities' (McKeown 2013: 4; Nolan 2013:13).

The social division, segregation and polarisation between these two communities have not only been further maintained and reaffirmed by politicised readings and retellings of history, but also countless lesser events such as numerous acts of sectarian brutality and violence on the base of the victim representing the "other". Moreover, this has been done through a politics and a bureaucracy that has institutionalised these categories of difference and "failed to confront the structures of polarisation" (Hamilton et al. 2008:10). Also, more mundane practices strengthen the social identity boundaries between these two communities like rituals (e.g. parades and paintings) that celebrate one communities' culture and identity while excluding the other. In conclusion, "[t]he history of the north of Ireland is based on the sense of difference and otherness of the two main communities, which has been marked out and affirmed by major events that dot the landscape of history […] that are still cited and commemorated" (Hamilton et al. 2008:10). This then resulted in the hardening of the social boundaries that demarcate the "us" and "them", or "inclusion" and "exclusion", and institutionalised categories of difference.

Border management processes of social identity boundaries in contemporary Belfast are further analysed in paragraph 5.1. The next paragraph will scrutinise geographical border demarcation processes in Belfast's socio-historical context, in particular the construction process of material or physically defined spatial borders, i.e. interface barriers.

4.3. Establishing spatial borders: Development of interface barriers

The previous paragraph proved that tensions between the two main social groups in Northern Ireland have long historical roots dating back to the twelfth century and that these social identity boundaries have been maintained and reaffirmed through major violent events (not the least the recent Troubles), politics and mundane rituals which polarised the two communities under religious markers of difference, namely Protestant and Catholic. These social divisions are accompanied by patterns of (residential) segregation, which, as the introduction made clear, already existed well before the onset of the Troubles. Focus in this paragraph is on geographical border demarcation processes, particularly in capital Belfast, that underpin territorial and residential segregation. From the initial settlement of British Protestants in Ireland, Belfast was a segregated city where ethnic-nationalist groups formed enclaves while little social intermixing took place. Research suggests that the city was characterised by separation and communal division, in particular since the onset of industrialisation when an influx of Catholic families into Belfast in search of employment and housing was considered a threat and challenge to the Protestant community, the dominant community in the city up until that point. Residential and territorial segregation was thus already an accepted reality for many Protestant and Catholic working class communities in Belfast since the seventeenth century (Byrne 2011:24; Boal 2002 in McAtackney 2011:80).

The numerous incidents of intercommunal violence and conflict that occurred throughout history resulted not only in the polarisation of the two communities as described above, this was also followed by the displacement of Catholic and Protestant families as they sought security in their own communities (Boal 2002 in Byrne 2011:24-25). This created so-called interface zones which can be defined as "the common boundary line between a predominantly unionist area and a predominantly nationalist area" and are cognitive spatial borders based on knowledge of local geography (Belfast Interface Project (BIP) 1998:4; Boulton 2014:103). Here, the role of imagination becomes clear in border demarcation processes as these spatial borders that demarcate the territories considered to be dominated by

one of the two communities are cognitively narrated or imagined to constitute the difference between an "us" and "them" (Van Houtum & Strüver 2002:141-142). Moreover, interfaces can be understood as "spatial construct[s] pre-eminently linked to the performance of violence" due to the fact that riots often occurred at these spatial borders between the two communities which were "a customary way for setting boundaries, citing ceremonial marches as an equivalent gesture for the demarcating of space" (Feldman 1991:28 in Boulton 2014:103). So, besides reifying social identity boundaries, violence and rituals (such as marches or parades) also contributed to the process of demarcating spatial borders as expressions of territory.

Importantly, Northern Ireland has experienced periods where some religious and ethnic intermixing occurred. Nevertheless, periods of sectarian strife – which recurred throughout the mid nineteenth and twentieth centuries – were accompanied by an increase in residential segregation. Housing patterns in Belfast in the twentieth century show that "segregation increases more in bad times than it eases in good times" and that there was little reintegration between the two communities in Northern Ireland in the relatively calm period from the 1930s to late 1960s (Hepburn 2001:93 in McAtackney 2011:80). Prior to the onset of the Troubles in 1969, many working class communities were thus already living in areas segregated along religious fault lines. However, the sectarian violence that erupted late 1960s led to a huge population movement in August 1971 in which mostly working class Catholics and Protestants who lived in mixed areas relocated into segregated areas as a way to move to "safer ground" where they could live among "their own kind". This was the result of either (the fear of) violence and threats from the "other" community or because people were forced or intimidated out of their homes by the majority community in an area to make way for inbound populaces. This high level of residential segregation, and strengthening of spatial borders, was thus a direct result of the Troubles (Boulton 2014:102; Donnan & Jarman [forthcoming]:10; Leonard & McKnight 2011:570).

These interface areas, or spatial borders, where communities live adjacent to each other continue to characterise the geography of some parts of Belfast today and were also the areas mostly affected by the Troubles. As stated above, it was particularly the north and west of the city that suffered disproportionately as approximately 70 per cent of conflict-related deaths occurred within 500 metres of an interface. This is partly attributed to the complex geographical distribution of interfaces between Catholic and Protestant communities in these areas. However, in turn, sectarian violence resulted into 'enclaves' where people sought safety with their own kind, creating in this way more interfaces where violence flourished (Leonard & McKnight 2011:570; Morrissey & Gaffikin 2006:880). This is not an uncommon development as an

"important characteristic of segregated areas within conflict situations is that the sense of identity, both individual and collective, tends to be stronger than in more mixed communities" which can be explained by the fact that these "communities were formed as a consequence of violence and intimidation directed at individuals who share a common religious/political identity" (Hughes et al. 2008:526). This, then, often leads to a cyclical and inter-dependent relationship between two groups where segregation – as a response to fear of the "other" – "ensures the long-term prevalence of such negative emotions" (Hamilton 1995 in Hughes et al. 2008:526). This underpins the intrinsic relationship between spatial borders and social identity boundaries which, thus, both can be reified by (the fear or threat of) violence, particularly in conflicts where competing identities lie at the heart of the dispute.

Materialising spatial borders

Essential in these spatial bordering processes in Belfast's socio-historical context, is the fact that some of these interfaces were further reified when several of these "cognitive boundaries based on knowledge of local geography" were turned into physical manifestations of social division since the onset of the Troubles (Boulton 2014:103; McAtackney 2011:81). It is these physical structures, here referred to as 'interface barriers', which are the main focus of this study as these barriers remain a prominent aspect of some areas in Belfast as the most visible signs of continuing sectarian division despite an initiated peace process after the signing of a peace agreement seventeen years ago (Byrne et al. 2012:4).[16] As the above already indicated, our understanding of Belfast as a polarised or divided city stems from the time British settlers arrived in the area. It was already at this early stage that walls were used to delineate the different population groups in the city as approximately five per cent of the Irish population – "whose defining characteristics were their otherness, in that they were also rural and predominantly Catholic in comparison to the settlers" – mainly lived outside the city walls in the early eighteenth century (Boal 1994/2002 in McAtackney 2011:79). It was not until the mid-nineteenth century when industrialisation allowed for a labour demand in Belfast that caused an influx of Catholic families into the city walls, who were then perceived as a distinct group: the "Irish in Belfast" (Boal 2002 in McAtackney 2011:79). In other words, the crossing of these physically defined geographical borders turned Catholics from insiders to being perceived as outsiders by the majority population in Belfast (Shields 1996 in Shields 2006:229).

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[16] Nevertheless, it is acknowledged here that interface barriers are material manifestations of interfaces, or cognitive geographical borders, which is why the next chapter on bordering processes in contemporary Belfast will place the discussion on interface barriers within larger patterns of geographical segregation.

The first physical barrier that was erected with the aim of ensuring social distancing and separation between Catholic and Protestant communities, however, was in 1935 in the Sailortown neighbourhood in North East Belfast.[17] Inward migration of rural Catholics had resulted in a rapidly grown population in the area and throughout the summer of 1935 regular incidents of sectarian violence occurred which restricted local residents in their movements and thus reified cognitive geographical borders. After accusations that the local police was unable to protect the residents of Sailortown, the British Army came in and erected a large fence to divide the opposing communities as a military response to increased communal violence. This stayed up for about nine months until it was dismantled due to a significant decrease in violence (Byrne 2011:25-26).

The heightened tensions and outbreaks of sectarian violence during the onset of the Troubles in 1969, however, led to local communities constructing a number of informal barricades themselves along the entrances and exits to their neighbourhoods in order to keep the other community out. These makeshift, unofficial security barriers first emerged within Catholic communities and were composed out of "burnt out cars, paving stones, household furniture and barbed wire" (Calame and Charlesworth 2009 in Byrne 2011:571; Leonard & McKnight 2011:571). This ad hoc security method was quickly adopted by Protestant communities which resulted in a situation where large parts of working class residential areas in Belfast were closed off by barriers which were, in essence, bottom-up structures. When the British Army were brought in to bring back order and control to the streets of Belfast, these community barriers were first perceived as problematic due to the fact that they limited the army's movement throughout the city and represented the lack of governmental control in some parts of the city. However, a new type of security policy enabled the replacement of these illegal community barriers into more formidable, officially sanctioned and authorised barricades constructed by the British Army as a means to address intercommunal violence, which were then referred to as 'peace lines' or 'peace walls' (Byrne 2011:29-30; Leonard & McKnight 2011:571).

The first official material line of demarcation, then, was constructed in 1969 and consisted of a green corrugated iron sheeting over three meters tall with several sections that only opened during the day at Cupar Way in West Belfast, which continues to divide the mainly Catholic Falls from the Protestant Shankill area (Byrne 2011:30-31). Besides reducing and

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[17] Another view perceives the first interface barrier to be constructed back in 1866 when the city fathers of Belfast opened a cemetery that included an underground wall of nine feet deep in order to separate Protestant graves from Catholic Graves (Nolan 2014:67).

restricting violence, these barriers were considered to be able to instil a sense of safety and security within communities and also aid the work of security forces. Due to the fact that this security measure indeed immediately decreased sectarian violence in an area, these "peace walls" were considered to be a viable security policy as a response to community fears (Byrne 2011:32; Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:4). A Joint Working Party established by the Stormont government drafted a report in 1971 which stated that the "peace walls" had served their initial purpose to prevent major sectarian incidents and that, despite not being able to put an end to all violence and disorder, it did restrict confrontations to just take place between communities and security forces, instead of inter-communal attacks. However, the report also warned for negative long-term effects as it was argued that these physical structures created an atmosphere of abnormality which could have psychologically damaging effects on local residents as it could "too readily become a crutch for the community [where] the abnormal can come to be taken for granted, and the search for fundamental solutions set aside for another day" (Final Report of the Joint Working Party on Processions etc. 1971:11 in Byrne 2011:34-35).

Interestingly, the early structures put up by the British Army consisted mainly out of barbed wire across streets that separated neighbouring communities where riots took place. Important to take into account, is the fact that this policy of separation and division was considered to be a *temporary* tool to create time for tensions to resolve. Nevertheless, as violence continued and escalated, more interface barriers were erected, in the majority of cases at the request of local communities. Most barriers were constructed in the inner working class communities of North and West Belfast, the areas most affected by the conflict and with complex interface patterns.[18] The geographical distribution of the major interface barriers, or 'peace lines', as well as a crude indication of the residential segregation along religious fault lines in Belfast can be seen in Figure 4.2.[19] The

Figure 4.2: Enduring remnants of Belfast's strife – Source: USA Today

... Source: ...HiGrkO3gVQ, viewed on 18-06-2015, uploaded on17-07-2014.

[19] Photo by Pete Santilli, AP in: Pogatchnik, S. 'Despite peace, Belfast walls are growing in size and number', *USA Today*. Source: http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2008-05-03-1826820552_x.htm, published on: 05-03-2008, consulted on: 27-07-2015.

structures quickly got a more permanent character, e.g. changing from barbed wire to corrugated iron and finally into concrete walls (Donnan & Jarman [forthcoming]:10; Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:4; McAtackney 2011:86).

Throughout the 1980s, the constructing of interface barriers "became part of the 'normal' range of security policy interventions employed by the British government in response to communal violence and sectarian disorder" (Jarman 2008 in Byrne 2011:46-47). Moreover, it was during this period that other different statutory agencies and bodies also started to get involved in constructing these so-called "peace walls", like the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)[20], even though the final decision to do this remained the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Office (NIO)[21]. Between 1972 and 2010 the NIO held responsibility for the interface barriers constructed by the government and the British Army. From 2010 onwards, ownership and responsibility of these barriers fell to the local Ministers through the Department of Justice (DOJ) after devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly (Byrne et al. 2012:10). Furthermore, the 1980s were also the period when the NIO, with the support of the British Army, started to transform the appearance of both new and already existing interface barriers in order for them to become 'more aesthetically pleasing' and less militaristic in their design, and eventually make them less visible, for instance by planting trees around the structures or extend buildings in order for these to become "natural" barriers between the two communities (Byrne 2011:47).
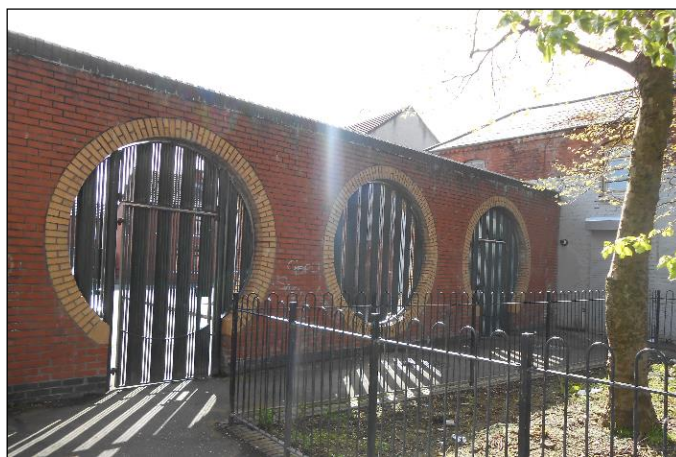
Figure 4.3: Interface barrier Duncairn Gardens, North Belfast. The New Lodge junction with Hallidays Road is closed by a wall and fence structure while gates allow pedestrian access at certain times. Owner: DOJ, built in 1970s (BIP 2012:66). – Photo taken by author on 11-05-2015.

Reifying Belfast's ethnic geography

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[20] The NIHE is Northern Ireland's overall strategic housing authority. Source: http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/about.htm, consulted on 24-07-2015.
[21] The NIO is a ministerial department that represents Northern Irish interests within the UK government and also represents the UK government in Northern Ireland.

It can be argued that the construction of the first official interface barriers reflected the general acceptance of the physical reality of division and an ongoing desire to create barriers between the two communities (McAtackney 2011:82). This would suggest that these material borders can be perceived to some extent as *subsequent borders* which supposedly reflected ethno-territorial patterns; imposed by an outside power to some (i.e. the British Army) with the consent of the communities. However, the construction of these barriers does not follow social relations in an uncomplicated way. Despite the fact that interface barriers are often presented as merely the physical manifestations of fraught community relations, or social identity boundaries, they have also been constructed as a means of maintaining territorial claims to space (McAtackney 2011:82-83). Indeed, despite originally being constructed as a way to halt violence and rioting, the interface barriers might have actually exacerbated the issue due to the fact that these politically charged interface barriers provided communities with a mechanism for identifying 'friendly territory'. By creating a network of defensible spaces, the physical barriers served "to create and reinforce a sense of territoriality and a belief that each residential area belongs to one of the two ethno-national communities" (Donnan & Jarman [forthcoming]:8; Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:4; Boulton 2014:103). In this way, spaces of inclusion and exclusion were created where for each group "the opposite side of the barricade became seen as 'outside', and one's own side became a sanctuary" (Feldman 1991 in Boulton 2014:103; Donnan & Jarman [forthcoming]:8).

Interface barriers thus functioned as a tool for the mental organisation of space, or imaginative geography, where a familiar space is designated in one's mind as "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs" (Said 1995:54-55 in Frank 2009:71; Brown 2010). The physicality and permanent nature of interface barriers had the effect of reducing opportunities for movement and casual contact between members of the two main communities, in this way "heightening the importance of the interface as an indicator of difference" and thus, paradoxically, became a target to attack turning these barriers into points of contention instead of neutralising the sectarian tension (Donnan & Jarman [forthcoming]:8). So, even though the barriers did not create patterns of segregation, they did reinforce and freeze the ethnic geography of the city (Boal 2002:693; Donnan & Jarman [forthcoming]:8). In other words, interface barriers are not only indicators of pre-existing segregation, they also ensured that social identity boundaries, as well as a sense of territorial belonging, were further maintained and solidified which resulted in a rather fixed imaginative geography in some parts of Belfast (Hamilton et al. 2008:10; McAtackney 2011:82-83; Nagle 2009:326).

Post-1969

The moment that the military and violent aspects of the Troubles came to an end, it "became apparent that the government had no other policy response to address communal violence outside of the conflict, other than the construction of barriers and walls" (Jarman 2007 in Byrne 2011:18). Contrary to one might think, not only did the vast majority of interface barriers that were built during the conflict still remain in place, many new barriers in a more solid and permanent form have been constructed despite of political transitions. Table 2.1 shows the dates of the construction of barriers, largely based on data of barriers constructed by the NIO, in different parts of Belfast as identified by the Belfast Interface Project. So, since the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994, the number of barriers has increased while many of the older structures have either been "raised in height, extended in length or strengthened in some way" (Donnan & Jarman [forthcoming]:11).

Table 2.1 Construction Dates Interface Barriers

Owner	Total	Central	East	North	South	West
Unknown	34	11	4	9	1	9
1969	2					2
1970-1979	18		4	9		5
1980-1989	12	2	1	4		5
1990-1994	12 (3)			5		7 (3)
1995-1999	14 (2)	1	1	12 (1)		(1)
2000-	7 (16)	(1)	(6)	5 (7)		2 (2)
Total	**99**	**14**	**10**	**44**	**1**	**30**

Source: Belfast Interface Project. The figures in brackets refer to the number of barriers that have been subjected to rebuilding or extension during the relevant decade (BIP 2012:13).

The rise in barriers, their increasingly permanent form and the fact that attempts were made to make the barriers more aesthetically pleasing indicates that the erection of these barriers was planned "without any consideration for possible demolition in the future" (CRC 2009:38 in McAtackney 2011:84-85). Communal differences, or social identity boundaries, were thus further strengthened by a post-conflict phase which followed the notion "good fences make good neighbours" (Nagle 2009:326).

Ironically, the last official barrier constructed by the NIO was an eight-metre high fence running through the playground of an integrated primary school[22] in 2007 which was still considered a legitimate policy response to communal violence and a genuine symbol of a shared future at that time, despite decisions being taken just weeks earlier on newly agreed power-

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[22] Less than 10 per cent of primary school children attend an integrated school which seek to educate Catholic and Protestant children together in an integrated setting (Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:4).

sharing arrangements[23] and to form the devolved government (Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:4). Noteworthy, however, is that within months of the establishment of the *Together: Building a United Community* strategy by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) in 2013, which includes a commitment to remove all interface barriers within ten years, a retractable security fence made from wired netting was erected by the Department of Justice (DOJ) on the grounds of a Catholic church in East Belfast which is located at an interface.[24] Even though this is not recognised as an official interface barrier by the DOJ, many still perceive it to be one as it demarcates an interface.[25]

Figure 4.4: Interface barrier at junction of Springfield Road and Springmartin Road, West Belfast. Three metre high wall with 2.4 metre high sheet metal fence above, 90 metres long with a buffer zone at either side, owned by DOJ, (re)built in 1990 and 1994 (BIP 2012:26) – Photo taken by author on 22-04-2015.

So, despite a 1971 report warning for the long-term effects of maintaining interface barriers, an ongoing peace process and a recent governmental commitment towards the removal of interface barriers as a way to promote reconciliation, interface barriers remain a reality in particular areas of Belfast. It is estimated that they have a combined length of 21 kilometres running through the city and can take many different forms as a noticeable variation exists in the used materials, designs and types of constructions (Nolan 2014:67; International Fund for Ireland (IFI) 2014:14). Table 2.2 gives an indication of the different types of physical structures across

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[23] These arrangements mainly concerned Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the two largest parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly (Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:4).

[24] Kevin Magee, 'New 'peace fence' at St Matthew's Church in east Belfast', *BBC News NI*, published on 08-11-2013, consulted on 25-07-2015. Source: http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-24856275.

[25] Cathy Gormley-Heenan and Jonny Byrne, 'Belfast's Peace Walls: Can you remove the conflict architecture?', *Political Studies Association*, published on 02-01-2014, consulted on: 13-04-2015. Source: http://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/blog/belfast%E2%80%99s-peace-walls-can-you-remove-conflict-architecture.
This was also recognised by Joe O'Donnell from the Belfast Interface Project (Interview on 26-03-2015).

Belfast as identified by the BIP. While some barriers are solid brick or metal constructions which completely obstruct the possibility to see the neighbouring areas, others, on the other hand, can include transparent and/or temporary elements such as mesh fencing. The use of these more ephemeral building materials, however, "hints at the status of these barriers as temporary constructions, despite their reality as essentially permanent" (McAtackney 2013:83-85). This variation, in particular the different types of constructions, will be further scrutinised in paragraph 5.2 when looking at the criteria of what actually constitutes an interface barrier. The next chapter, in general, will focus on border management processes and the interrelatedness of social and physically defined spatial borders in contemporary North and West Belfast.

Table 2.2 Categories of Barriers across Belfast

Type of barrier	Total	Central	East	North	South	West
Metal fence	35	5	1	18		11
Wall with metal fence above	23	3	4	8	1	7
Buffer with fence	14	4	3	3		4
Road closed with ped. access	12	1		10		1
Solid wall	8		2	5		1
Gate with vehicle access	7	1				6
Total	**99**	**14**	**10**	**44**	**1**	**30**

Source: BIP 2012:11.

Figure 5.1: Loyalist mural on Shore Rd./Mount Vernon Estate, 2001 –
Picture source: Devon Smith for the Pulitzer Center[26]

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[26] Devon Smith 'Belfast: A City Divided', *Pulitzer Center*, published on 17-11-2013, consulted on 20-07-2015. Source: http://pulitzercenter.org/sites/default/files/11-15-13/ready_for_peace_prepared_for_war.jpg.

5. Social Boundaries and Spatial Borders in Contemporary North and West Belfast

5.1. Social division in contemporary Belfast

The previous chapter has established that, despite an ongoing peace process, sectarian division is still very much a reality in Northern Ireland years after the official end of the Troubles in 1998. Social identity boundaries have been maintained and reified by decades of violence, politicised retellings of history, a politics and bureaucracy which institutionalised these categories of difference, various rituals, and, most notably, the continuing existence of interface barriers that strengthen and solidify patterns of ethno-national segregation in particular parts of Belfast. The latter will be further scrutinised in the next two paragraphs while, here, social boundary processes are analysed in greater detail for contemporary Belfast by looking at how categories of difference and sameness, or boundary rules and content of social categories, are perceived and managed in North and West Belfast according to local organisations and researchers who work with communities at interface areas. Moreover, the perceived level of social division will be examined by looking at levels of intergroup perceptions and contact.

With the signing of the Good Friday Peace Agreement, it was hoped that a (social) climate would be created where the people of Northern Ireland could forge a new shared identity which transcended "the insular-looking group identities of the past" (Byrne 2000:8 in Nagle & Clancy 2012:79). Nevertheless, several authors have stated that the slowly consolidating peace process has not been accompanied with the weakening of strong division and that, in fact, social segregation and political polarisation appear to be intensifying. This is attributed to the terms of the peace agreement itself as well as the political institutions created to sustain peace as these are based on a recognition of the 'two communities' as has been explained above. Moreover, some commentators assert that they "do little to deal with the root causes of conflict and instead institutionalise and encourage conflicting ethno-national interests thereby providing a disincentive for a shared vision of a society" (Taylor 2008 and Tonge 2009 in Nagle & Clancy 2012:79). In other words, social identity boundaries have also been reified by developments associated with the peace process.

Nevertheless, the demographical landscape of Northern Ireland has changed since the late 1990s. Data from a 2011 census indicates that Northern Ireland is becoming increasingly diverse and is now made up of minorities due to the fact that "no one religious group constitutes more than 50 per cent of the population" (McKeown 2013:14-15). One particular demographic

shift several informants noted, was an increasing Catholic and declining Protestant community in Belfast; a development often referred to as "the greening up" of the city as there is no example of an area which has become more Protestant in the last twenty years.[27] This trend is backed up by data from the 2011 census which showed a narrowing gap between Catholics and Protestants, the former now constituting 45.1 per cent and the latter 48.4 per cent of Northern Irish population (Nolan 2014:21). This has been perceived by Protestant communities, particularly in North Belfast, as an attempt to drive the "us" out which has been accompanied by the perception of a diminishing community and feelings of (cultural) threat amongst the Protestant community towards the growing Catholic population.[28] This is underpinned by the fact that issues of identity in Northern Ireland are often framed in a sense of perceived threats to that identity (especially after the recent flag protests discussed above) rather than by exploring its varied components, or the actual content of a social identity. It is argued that "today's reality is that community perceptions in Northern Ireland are not founded on commonality, but on deep divisions" (Hall 2013:3, 18). In other words, community perceptions are not based on sameness, or content of a community identity, but on difference, i.e. identity boundaries or membership rules. Interestingly, despite the fact that these differences between social identities are not always visible, individuals are capable to subtly categorise other people without actually asking them about their social identity. This categorisation based on social cues, e.g. someone's name or school he/she attended, remains an important part of everyday life in Northern Ireland (McKeown 2013:24). Rab McCallum (NBIN) affirms this by explaining that people in (North) Belfast are always aware with whom they speak, which he believes is a legacy from the conflict where it was deemed important to find out who the other is. This everyday practice, then, is an indicator of remaining tensions between the two competing identities.[29]

Important to take into account, is that despite changes in the demographic composition of Northern Ireland, the "underlying values of segregation and negative attitudes" are still dominant in Northern Irish society (McKeown 2013:15). Results from the Life and Times surveys, show that, despite a detectable rise in optimism on how the relationship between the two main competing social identities in Northern Ireland is perceived by respondents compared to five years ago, there is also a fluctuation noticeable over the years.[30] For instance, the

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[27] Interviews: Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015, Bill Shaw (174 Trust) – 24-04-2015.
[28] Interviews: Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015, Bill Shaw (174 Trust) – 24-04-2015.
[29] Interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[30] For comprehensive overviews on the development of community relations perceptions in Northern Ireland, see: SOL (http://www.ark.ac.uk/sol/surveys/community_relations/time_series/CRencyperceptions.htm) and YLT (http://www.ark.ac.uk/sol/surveys/community_relations/time_series/ylt/yltpercept.html).

proportion of respondents of an ARK survey that believed the relationship between Catholics and Protestants was better now than five years ago dropped from 62 per cent in 2010 to 45 per cent in 2013 (Kelly 2014). This suggests that "attitudes are not immune to external events" such as the flag disputes which led to a deterioration in community relations (Schubotz & Devine 2014:5). Moreover, crime statistics by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) show that, even though sectarian crime rates have reduced the last couple of years, (violent) sectarian behaviour is not something of the past (McKeown 2013:16). Also, despite the fact that people are beginning to interact more with each other, Rab McCallum (NBIN) explains that this is only to a certain degree as people perceive themselves mainly in the sense "I am not that" which links back to the relational dimension of social identity construction. The antagonistic attitudes between the two social identities, then, make it difficult for intercommunal contact and connections.[31] Group identities and associated negative attitudes are, in turn, maintained by these high levels of segregation and low levels of inter-communal contact (McKeown 2013:16).

Social identity boundaries

McKeown states that the 2011 census indicates that the traditional dichotomous identities of Catholic/Irish/Nationalist versus Protestant/British/Unionist, i.e. the different social categories fixed under the narrative of the "two communities", no longer "represents an accurate description of identity preferences in Northern Ireland" (2013:15). When looking at identity patterns in Northern Ireland, which have been recorded by the Life and Times surveys[32], a shift can be detected from traditional identity patterns. In her study, McKeown (2013) explains that, even though the majority of respondents within the two majority ethno-national communities in Northern Ireland identify themselves with the traditionally expected national categories, i.e. Protestants largely identifying as British and Catholics as Irish, a trend can be discerned where a minority states to identify themselves with a Northern Irish identity (McKeown 2013:26-27). Noteworthy, however, is that the most recent survey results show a slightly different picture. Whereas McKeown (2013) takes into account data running up until 2010, data from the 2012 Life and Times surveys show a slight drop in this trend which is accompanied with a rise in identification level amongst Protestant respondents with the British national identity. Table 3.1 shows results from SOL (which includes several surveys, e.g. NILT) and 3.2 from the YLT survey for the years 2008, 2010 and 2012 to give an indication of this development.

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[31] Interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[32] Both the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) and Young life and Times (YLT) surveys) which are available at Surveys Online (SOL), http://www.ark.ac.uk/sol/, and Access Knowledge Research (ARK), http://www.ark.ac.uk/.

Table 3.1 Percentage of respondents self-identifying with different national identities – Results SOL

	British			Irish			Northern Irish		
	2008	2010	2012	2008	2010	2012	2008	2010	2012
Protestant	57	60	68	4	3	3	32	29	24
Catholic	8	7	9	61	58	68	25	26	17
No religion	45	32	42	14	19	11	30	37	30

Source: SOL[33]

Table 3.2 Percentage of respondents self-identifying with different national identities – Results YLT

	British			Irish			Northern Irish		
	2008	2010	2012	2008	2010	2012	2008	2010	2012
Protestant	45	52	62	4	1	1	41	42	33
Catholic	2	3	4	79	78	73	17	15	18
No religion	32	28	30	21	22	18	35	36	38

Source: YLT[34]

Even though various factors can contribute to this development, it is not unlikely that the flag disputes at the end of 2012 had a significant impact on the results that year.

Despite this trend, throughout the fieldwork period for this research, it became clear that the narrative of the "two communities" is still very strong in Belfast. Many different terms were used by informants, e.g. Catholic-Protestant, Nationalist-Unionist or Republican-Loyalist, to indicate deeper interlinked social divisions. This was most often indeed the religious terms that functioned as markers of difference, even though it is widely acknowledged that these identities have little do with religion itself and are more perceived as ethnic identities. Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan explains that it does not matter how people define these two majority communities in Northern Ireland as these are just short hands – whose use may depend on the audience someone is speaking to – but effectively mean the same thing: communities where there is a stronger affinity towards the protection of the union with the United Kingdom and communities where there is a stronger affinity towards the building of a united Ireland. In other words, it is that political identity which is mashed over with the religious identity mashed over with the ethnic identities.[35]

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[33] Data results on 'Community Relations: Identity'. Source: http://www.ark.ac.uk/sol/surveys/community_relations/time_series/CRencyidentity.htm, last updated on: 05-06-2013, consulted on: 26-07-2015.
[34] Young Life and Times Survey 'Community Relations: Identity'. Source: http://www.ark.ac.uk/sol/surveys/community_relations/time_series/ylt/yltidentity.html, last updated on: 24-05-2013, consulted on: 25-04-2015.
[35] Interview Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015.

An interesting development since a research conducted in Belfast by the author two years ago[36], is an increasing use of the terms PUL (Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist) and CNR (Catholic-Nationalist-Republican) communities. While used as a catch-all to cover most aspects of social division, the use of these concepts are not unproblematic, most notably due to the fact that the social categories themselves are considered to be fluid and changeable. The religious terms are thus used as an overall term to define the communities and actually function as markers for ethnicity based on a shared national identity, religion and beliefs. Noteworthy, is that multiple informants explained that these religious terms as indicators of ethnic identity are perceived as social categories which people are "born into".[37] This rather primordialist understanding of ethnic groups as a *natural* community instead of socially constructed (Demmers 2012:24) explains why these are perceived as fairly unchangeable and static. The other included denominations, however, refer to political identities where there is some degree of choice. Unionist and Nationalist, then, are considered to be the broad political orientations often more associated with middle or upper classes, while Loyalist and Republican are sub-sets of these political orientations which will often accept the use of violence and are generally associated with working class.[38] Even though the national identities of British and Irish are left out in this equation, Dr Neil Jarman explains that, to some extent, Unionist and Nationalist could be talked about in terms of being British or Irish. Importantly, even though Catholic is often interlinked with Irish, Nationalist and/or Republican and Protestant with British, Unionist and/or Loyalist, this is definitely not always the case. However, when referring to PUL or CNR communities (or just "two communities") multiple social categories are combined under one denominator: religion, ethnicity, political and national identity, whilst class can also be incorporated. This everyday practice thus has the potential to reify social identity boundaries by uniting different social categories under one overarching term, while these are actually fluid and changeable in nature, and therefore perpetuates the existing dichotomy of competing identities along sectarian fault lines.

The relationship between different social categories appears even more complex when looking at results on ethnic belonging in the 2014 Young Life and Times survey. As Figure 5.2 shows, the categories of ethnicity also include religion, nationality and various combinations of the two. Moreover, the results are also presented into three religious categories: Catholic,

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[36] Van der Aar, N. & Korving, I. (2013). '*Reconciliation in a World of Diversity: Looking for a Shared Future in the Local Context of Post-Conflict Belfast'*, thesis for the undergraduate programme 'Culturele Antropologie en Ontwikkelingssociologie' at Utrecht University, Utrecht.
[37] Interviews Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015, Neil Jarman (Institute for Conflict Research) – 07-05-2015, Dympna McGlade (Community Relations Council) – 14-05-2015.
[38] Interviews Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015, Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015.

Protestant or No religion.[39] Considering the above, it is not clear whether these three categories then refer to religious affiliation or to religion as an overarching term for other interlinked social categories. More importantly, by doing this, the narrative of a dichotomy between two competing social identities is again further maintained and their identity boundaries reified. Whilst acknowledging the complex and fluid nature of the prominent socially constructed identities in Northern Ireland, in order to analyse the relationship between social identity boundaries and (material) spatial borders in the following paragraphs, this study will continue to refer to the multiple interlinked social divisions in Northern Ireland with different terms, either religious/ethnic or political. These will then function as overarching badges of difference that incorporate multiple social categories.
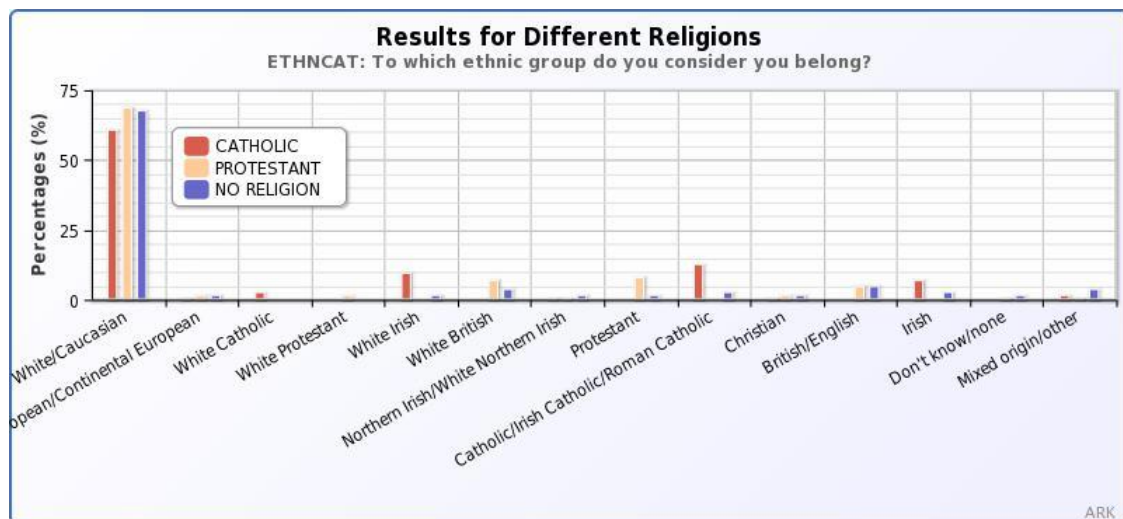
Figure 5.2: Results YLT survey 2014 – Source ARK.[40]

5.2. Interface barriers in working class communities

Decades of conflict and violence in Northern Ireland have resulted in a highly divided society. The polarisation between Catholic and Protestant communities has manifested itself in various ways, such as largely parallel systems and structures for education, housing and social life. The most visible form of this, however, is residential segregation. Despite successes in the peace process since the Troubles, segregation remains a reality as many Protestant and Catholic communities are still physically divided from one another, especially in urban working class communities (Byrne et al. 2006:10; Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:4; McKeown 2013:17).

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[39] This was also the case with the results in Table 3.1 and 3.2.
[40] Young Life and Times as a constituent part of ARK. Source: http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2014/Background/ETHNCAT.html, published on 06-05-2015, consulted on 25-07-2015.

Issues of segregation and division have started to be addressed in the peace process, but the most obvious and physical manifestation of division, namely interface barriers, has not been sufficiently addressed yet (Byrne et al 2012:4). Importantly, findings from a recent research into existing attitudes towards these barriers have shown that a striking 78 per cent of the general population believes segregation is common even in the absence of these physical barriers, which suggests that segregation and division are perceived as something bigger than the physicality of interface barriers (Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:5-6). Taking this into account, the discussion of physical manifestations of urban geographical borders – the main focus of this study – will be placed within larger existing patterns of residential segregation.

Noteworthy, is that various scholars have different perceptions on the current level of segregation in Northern Ireland compared to during the Troubles. Whereas data from the 2011 census indicates that a significant increase is noticeable in the amount of residential diversification since the signing of the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998 (Hayward et al. 2014:1), others argue that the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994 did not break or reverse patterns of segregation and even state that segregation has actually increased and is more intense today than it was during the height of the conflict (Byrne et al. 2006:20; Hughes et al. 2008:525; Shirlow & Murtagh 2006 in McKeown 2013:13). This discrepancy between perceptions might be explained by the fact that studies have found that, even within 'mixed'[41] wards, residential segregation still occurs on a smaller scale level (Nolan 2014:115 in Hayward et al. 2014:1). Nevertheless, one thing is clear: residential segregation persists in Northern Ireland. Data from the 2011 census indicate that, from the 582 local government wards in Northern Ireland, almost four out of ten are so-called 'single identity' wards where "a single community group makes up more than 80 per cent of the residents", while only one in twenty are fully mixed (Hayward et al. 2014:1). The spatial distribution in Northern Ireland of Catholic and Protestant communities in 2011 is portrayed in Figure 5.3. It is estimated that approximately 50 per cent of the Northern Irish population lives in a mixed neighbourhood. Moreover, a covariance exists between levels of segregation and social class; where affluent middle-class areas tend to be less segregated, disadvantaged working class areas are significantly more likely to be highly segregated (Byrne et al. 2006:16; Hughes et al. 2006:525).

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[41] So-called 'mixed' wards, are wards where no one group is the absolute majority (Hayward et al. 2014).
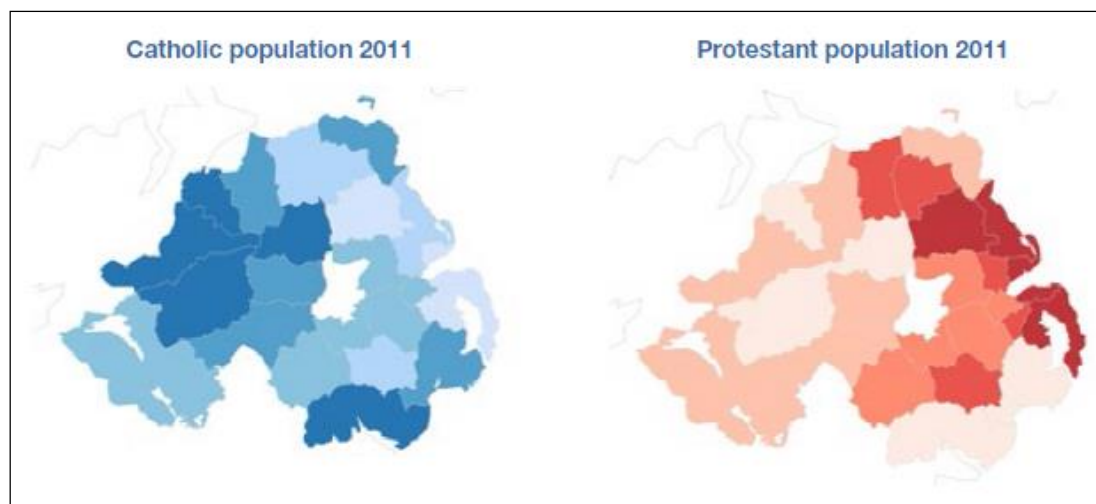
Figure 5.3. Spatial distribution of Catholic and Protestant population in Northern Ireland, census 2011 – Nolan (2014:21).

As stated above, Northern Ireland's capital Belfast remains one of the most segregated cities in the world where 98 per cent of social housing is dived along community and religious backgrounds (Byrne et al. 2006 in Byrne 2011:3; Murtagh 2008 in Boulton 2014:101). Here, the above mentioned relationship between social class and level of segregation is also apparent. Two areas in Belfast which are considered to be more mixed and/or shared are the affluent inner commercial core of the city and the south-east middle-class and university area, whereas the inner city working class areas around the city core are characterised by high levels of residential segregation.[42] This is underpinned by the geographical spread of interface barriers as the most visible evidence of sectarian division (Nolan 2014:67).

Nevertheless, the two parts of Belfast where most of the interface barriers are located, the inner city working class areas of North and West Belfast, have significantly different segregation patterns. Whereas North Belfast is considered to be a patchwork quilt of Loyalist and Republican areas, West Belfast is much more straightforward. Here, one clear line demarcates rather monolithic blocks of people which enables residents to live rather contained lives without actually having to meet the "other" which is not the case in North Belfast.[43] Importantly, the specific areas in West Belfast taken into account in this study[44] also differ from North Belfast in the sense that the Upper Springfield road is located at the outskirts of Belfast and is therefore a more rural area, while Suffolk is a Protestant enclave surrounded by Catholic

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[42] Interview Neil Jarman, Institute for Conflict Research (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[43] In an interview with Bill Shaw (174 Trust) on 25-04-2015, he explained that the patchwork quilt pattern is also the reason why North Belfast is rarely outside the news when it comes to sectarian incidents. This was also the case with the contentious remembrance of the Battle of the Boyne last 12th of July. See: 'Nine police officers hurt at Belfast parade flashpoint', *BBC News*, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-33516423, published on: 14-08-2015, consulted on 28-07-2015.
[44] For an overview of the included areas in this research, see the methodology chapter.

communities.[45] Even though based on a census from 1991 and demographics have changed since then, Figure 5.4 provides a visual overview of segregation patterns along sectarian fault lines still recognisable today. When compared to the major interface barriers in Figure 4.2 in paragraph 4.3, a relatively similar geographical pattern can still be discerned.
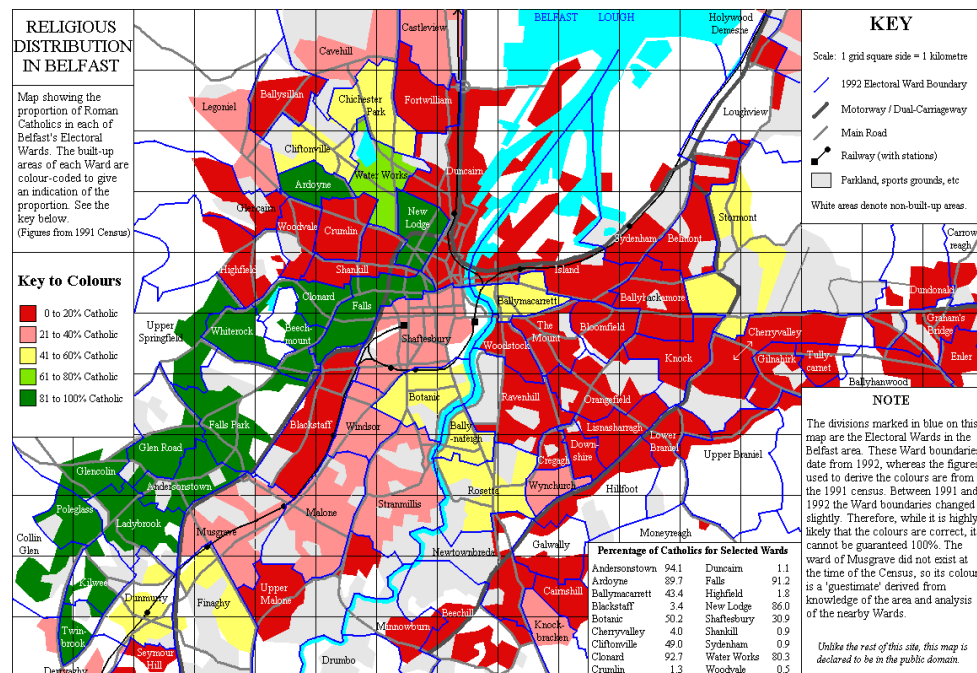

Figure 5.4. Map of Belfast divided into Electoral Wards. Each ward is coloured to indicate the proportion of Roman Catholics who make up the population, 1991 census. Source: CAIN.[46]

Interface barriers: terminology

The previous chapter expounded the construction and management processes of interface barriers from a socio-historical perspective and explained that these physically defined geographical borders remain a prominent aspect in some areas of Belfast, particularly the inner city working class areas in the north and west of the city. An important finding obtained in the current research is the lack of clarity that exists around the concept of interface barriers which, according to Dr Jonny Byrne, exemplifies "the lack of political knowledge and societal understanding and ambiguity about peace walls" (2011:16).[47] Not only is there a lack of knowledge on when some physical barriers were constructed or who owns or has responsibility over them (BIP 2012:12-13), more importantly, opinions differ on what actually constitutes an interface barrier. Even though Rab McCallum explains that "everybody knows what they are

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[45] Interviews Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Bill Shaw (174 Trust) – 25-04-2015, Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015, Seamus Corr (BMSSP) – 22-04-2015, Suzanne Lavery (SLIG) – 08-05-2015.
[46] CAIN. "Maps of Ireland and Northern Ireland". Source: http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/maps/maps.htm, last updated on: 30-07-2014, consulted on: 27-07-2015.
[47] Interview Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.

as it is clearly defined for them locally"[48], a plethora of terms are used on the ground, e.g. 'peace wall/line', 'interface barrier', 'security barrier' of 'buffer zone', which all indicate some sort of geographical demarcation line between Protestant and Catholic communities but mean different things to different people which confuses discussions on issues of segregation and interface barriers. Even though it is beyond the scope of this study to create a substantial definitional framework on this, it is necessary to briefly address this as it affects our understanding of the social phenomenon studied here. Moreover, the lack of a (governmental) definition has consequences for the different sectors working on interface barriers, which will be discussed in greater detail in next chapter.

It is said that the terminology around these geographical demarcation lines that constitute the difference between "inclusion" and "exclusion" for local residents have evolved over the years. The concepts 'peace wall' and 'peace line' are perceived as the terms coined in the 1970s and 1980s but prove problematic for several reasons. Besides the absence of clear definitions, these terms are also regarded as misnomers because they do not actually bring peace, as became clear in the previous chapter.[49] McAtackney furthermore asserts that "use of the word 'peace' acts to justify their existence through associating their construction with enforcing peace through separation" (2011:82), which is why these terms have not been employed in this study. Nevertheless, their usage is still common in every day conversations while the different assigned meanings to these terms cause for confusion. First of all, the term 'peace wall' seems to only indicate wall-like structures even though this can also include fences, gates or security barriers. This is why the term 'peace line' was actually used in the surveys that underpin the research report 'Attitude To Peace Walls' (Byrne et al. 2012). The fact that for a lot of people these concepts mean much more than the above mentioned types of physical structures complicates things even further. Some would also take into account other tangible structures, such as car parks or derelict houses, which were not constructed with the intention to function as an interface barriers but over time became territorial markers for local residents. Furthermore, some people would even include less tangible lines of demarcations such as a specific (corner of a) street or a derelict space that marks an interface area and can function as a buffer zone between predominantly Catholic and Protestant communities.[50] Especially these less tangible borders are difficult to recognise for outsiders as it is local knowledge that informs

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[48] Interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[49] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 27-03-2015.
[50] Interviews Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 27-03-2015, Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.

people on these more imaginative borders and tell people to either turn left or right.[51] So, even though they are imaginative, their implication on people's lives is no less real (Van Houtum & Strüver 2002:142).

An important contributor to confusion around the existing concepts can be attributed to the fact that people do not differentiate between what Dr Jonny Byrne calls 'contested space' and 'physical space'[52], or in other words the physicality of a geographical border. This is why this study makes a distinction between interfaces as the cognitive geographical borders between the two main ethno-national communities in the urban setting of Belfast[53] and their physical manifestations, i.e. interface barriers. This study thus uses the term 'interface barriers' (understood as an aspect of larger ethno-territorial patterns) to indicate the physical structures constructed in urban interface areas with the purpose of separating the two main competing identity groups in Northern Ireland. This could then also warrant a declassification of structures when their initial function becomes redundant, e.g. due to demographic changes in a neighbourhood. However, the different criteria which are used to define interface barriers, such as ownership, function, location and physicality, has resulted in different perceptions on the actual number of interface barriers that exist in Belfast today. Depending on your definition, this can vary between 52 and 99 (Nolan 2014:67).

Table 3.3: Summary of DOJ peacewalls structures at 31/03/15

Location	TOTAL No. Walls/fences	TOTAL No. Gates	TOTAL
East Belfast	4		4
West Belfast	12	6	18
North Belfast	14 (15)	3 (5)	17 (20)
North West (L'derry)	4	3 (7)	7 (11)
South West (P'down/Lurgan	6		6
TOTAL	**40 (41)**	**12 (18)**	**52 (59)**

Source: John Chittick, DOJ. The figures in brackets are original number of structures.

The former is based on the number of official physical interface structures owned by the DOJ throughout Northern Ireland which are presented in Table 3.3, while the latter is the number of

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[51] Interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[52] This is understood as a physical structure that inhibits space and movement – Interview Dr Jonny Byrne (30-04-2015)
[53] Here, Belfast is specifically included due to the fact that, to complicate matters even further, the term "interface" is often associated with larger urban settings which is why the same patterns of segregation outside of Belfast are referred to as "contested space". Source: interviews Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 27-03-2015 and Dympna McGlade (CRC) – 14-05-2015.

barriers identified in Belfast in a report commissioned by the Belfast Interface Project (BIP)[54] in response to the existing confusion around interface barriers. Here, a wider definition is used, also including blighted land, derelict houses and car parks. The spatial distribution of these physical structures can be found in Figure 5.5. These numbers also show that, almost 50 years after the first interface barrier was constructed, the vast majority still dominate the landscape of North and West Belfast even though some have been removed.
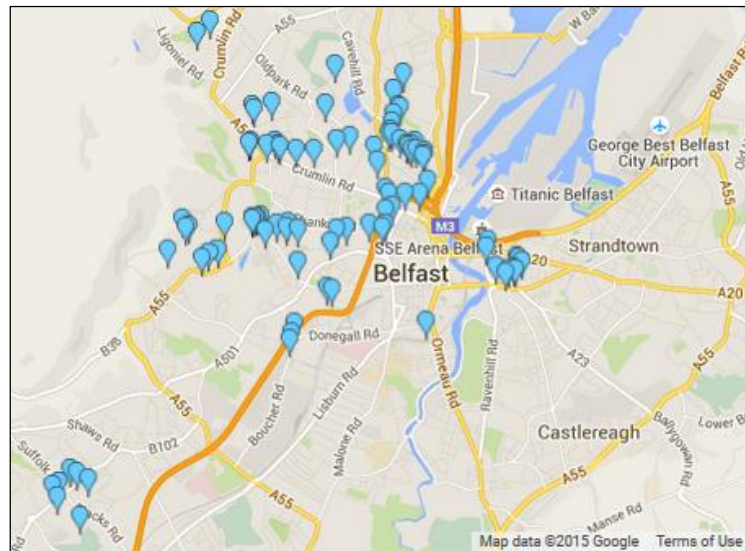

Figure 5.5: BIP – interactive map via Google Maps.
– Source: http://www.belfastinterfaceproject.org/interfaces-map , consulted on 24-07-2015.

Border management

Even though both interfaces and interface barriers demarcate the geographical border between predominantly Catholic and Protestant communities, it is the latter which has a strong effect on the mobility of people in certain neighbourhoods. In other words, the possibility for border crossing becomes more restrictive due to interface barriers as they lower the degree of permeability of geographical borders. Whereas people are not always able to tell from which of the main social identity groups someone is when crossing a less tangible interface, this is much more obvious if someone walks through a gate in a big barrier; marking that person as an outsider.[55] Interestingly, the lack of knowledge around interface barriers also extends to border management processes which control the means of border crossing in the case of gates in interface barriers (Wastl-Walter 2011:36). Some gates are electronic and can be controlled from further away, while others need be manually opened or closed, but it is not always clear who is

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[54] Belfast Interface Project (2012), *Belfast Interfaces: Security Barriers and Defensive Use of Space*, Belfast, United Kingdom: Belfast Interface Project.
[55] Interviews Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 27-03-2015.

responsible for this. Sometimes this can be done by local police stations (in case of electronic gates) or contractors hired by the Department of Justice (DOJ), whilst there are also examples of local shop owners or community representatives who do this, or the local park ranger in the case of an interface barrier running through Alexandra Park in North Belfast. The opening and closing times[56] of these gates then are believed to be established in agreement with community representatives.[57] In other words, it is not always sure who the exact border managers are and what procedures control the crossing of borders (Wastl-Walter 2011:36).

Perceptions and attitudes towards interface barriers

Studies on walls have underpinned that walls have no intrinsic meanings in itself, but emerge from and figure in discourses, and can have multiple – and at times contradictory – meanings (Brown 2010:74; McAtackney 2011:77, 81). This is also the case with physical interface barriers in contemporary North and West Belfast. First of all, it is recognised that in Belfast barriers serve different purposes and mean different things to different people which is often related to the proximity of someone's home to an interface barrier. Barriers are most significant for people who live nearby as someone whose house is backed up against a barrier is more conscious of the impact of such a barrier than do people who live several streets away.[58] Interestingly, even though the 'Attitudes to Peace Walls' report (2012) indicated that a staggering 82 per cent of the general population and 75 per cent of residents living in near proximity of an interface barrier find these barriers ugly and are considered to be an annoyance to mobility for some[59], many informants noted that these barriers are often not even noticed by people due to the fact that they are perceived as a normal part of the built environment or streetscape. An often heard saying, then, is that in Belfast the abnormal has become normal (Byrne et al. 2012:12).[60] This sense of inertia where people are comfortable with what they know, is perceived as a contributing factor to the continuing existence of interface barriers.[61] Concerns that this could happen were indeed already expressed in the 1971 report by the Joint Working Party which warned for the negative long-term effects of constructing physical barriers where the abnormal could easily be taken for granted (Byrne 2011:34-35).

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[56] Most barriers are opened from dusk till dawn. Source: interview Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015.
[57] Interviews Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 27-03-2015, Dympna McGlade (CRC) – 14-05-2015; Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) - 18-05-2015.
[58] Interviews John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015, Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 27-03-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.
[59] Interviews Ciáran Shannon (DCP) and Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015, Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) - 18-05-2015.
[60] Interviews Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015, Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) - 18-05-2015.
[61] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 27-03-2015.

Research has pointed out that the significance of interface barriers can be framed in various ways, including financial and international perspectives and within the context of health and social well-being. Another frame is to analyse interface barriers from a good relations perspective, which this study also does, as interface barriers "continue to emphasise the cultural, political and religious differences" that exist in Northern Irish society (Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:5). A final lens which is most prominently present in North and West Belfast, is the significance of interface barriers from a security perspective. Already from the outset of their construction, interface barriers are framed as a means to address intercommunal violence and were considered to be able to instil a sense of security and safety within communities (Byrne 2011:29-30, 32; Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:5). Also in contemporary (North and West) Belfast are interface barriers still believed to protect residents from violence, whether this is a real or perceived threat.[62] Local residents in particular are more inclined to view issues on interface barriers through a security lens (Byrne et al. 2012:11). This is also acknowledged by Boal when he states that interface barriers in Belfast has provided "a localised degree of security from physical attack and a modicum of psychological security" (2002:693). An important aspect of this security frame, then, is that people think of barriers as a way to protect them from the "other" community and not necessarily the other way around.[63] Nevertheless, a recent study found that young people do not consider interface barriers as effectively reducing violence and disorder, but rather as a method of exclusion, underlining the argument that interface barriers can have multiple and contradictory meanings to different people (Leonard & McKnight 2011 in Byrne et al. 2012:12).

So, people often frame the issue of interface barriers in relation to security issues and violence instead of in terms of segregation (Byrne et al. 2012:28). However, as already pointed out above, there are more perspectives applicable as it is recognised that issues of interface barriers are not just about security but indeed are aspects of a wider social issue.[64] It can be argued that the fact that interface barriers constructed by governmental forces and departments now fall under the responsibility of the Department of Justice (DOJ) reinforces in people's minds that interface barriers are indeed just a security issue.[65] Moreover, a change in function of interface barriers is also recognisable since the time they were constructed. Whilst originally intended to stop violence and instil a sense of security in interface communities, what they do

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[62] Interviews Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015, Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) - 18-05-2015.
[63] Interview Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.
[64] Interview Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015.
[65] Interview Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015

now, is create clear lines of demarcations (or territorial borders) throughout Belfast that allow communities to exist within a very tight network.[66] In this way, they served to "formalise, symbolise, and in some respects heighten, the differences between each side" (Boulton 2014:105). The next paragraph will further scrutinise this intrinsic relationship between social identity boundaries and interface barriers.

5.3. Perceived interrelatedness of social identities and interface barriers

The border demarcation and management processes discussed above indicate that there is an intrinsic relationship between interface barriers (as physically defined spatial borders) and sectarian division in Northern Ireland, where the latter is marked by strong boundaries between two competing identities comprised of multiple social categories which are often reified under one "badge of difference" (Moxon-Browne 1991:23 in McKeown 2013:4). Decades of conflict resulted in a legacy of polarisation and segregation between these Catholic and Protestant communities and a divided Northern Irish society (Byrne et al. 2006:10). Focus in this paragraph is on how this intrinsic relationship between social identity boundaries and concrete spatial borders is perceived and experienced by residents living in interface areas in contemporary North and West Belfast according to different bodies working with these communities.

As paragraph 4.3 already suggested, throughout the Troubles, interface barriers provided a sense of protection for a lot of people when violence and tensions were high and enabled people to reside with others who were considered to be their own.[67] As a result, these politically charged interface barriers provided communities with a mechanism for identifying 'friendly territory'. These increased levels of insecurity and interface barriers moreover reduced the opportunity for contact between the two main communities, in this way encouraging further geographical separation and "heightening the importance of the interface as an indicator of difference" (Byrne et al. 2006:10; Donnan & Jarman [forthcoming]:8). Interface barriers thus maintained and further strengthened social identity boundaries and a sense of territorial belonging which resulted in a fixed imaginative geography along sectarian fault lines in some parts of Belfast (Hamilton et al. 2008:10; McAtackney 2011:82-83; Nagle 2009:326). It is because of this that the (perceived) level of congruency between spatial demarcation and social

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[66] Interviews Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 27-03-2015.
[67] Interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.

identity boundaries along sectarian fault lines is still in place today in the inner city working class communities of North and West Belfast and thus remain, for the large part, in between the two main ethno-national communities.[68]

Spatial identification

As has been stated above, many people do not notice interface barriers as their continuing existence ensured that they have now become a normal part of their built environment. This explains why it is not believed that interface communities identify themselves with these physical structures.[69] However, they do play a role in social identity construction processes. As Dr Jonny Byrne explains, everything is defined through space and territory in Belfast, so too the nature of how communities exist here. Interface barriers, then, effectively mark or demarcate that territory and are thus a tool in how to understand space in these areas of Belfast.[70] Or in other words, they can tell people where they and function almost like a warning. Self-identification with territories is thus strongly present in communities living in the inner working class interface areas of North and West Belfast. This territorial identification can take place at different levels: from the national level down to very small localities. As Rab McCallum (NBIN) explains, you could bring this down to "Irish" or "British" and at times "Belfast". However, this often happens at the level of the neighbourhood, e.g. "Ardoyne" or "the Shankill", or even a particular part of that area.[71] This shows that the way residents in these parts of Belfast identify with a territory can differ at times, going back to the understanding of social identities as multiple, contextual and changeable (Demmers 2012:21).

Additional to interface barriers as visible geographical lines that demarcate territories, then, are a range of other local social practices that serve as informal markers to identify the space claimed by one of the main ethno-national communities. These include the painting of kerb stones, murals, the flying of flags and, during the fieldwork period for this research, also electoral posters (Byrne et al. 2006:10; Leonard & McKnight 2011:571). According to a former resident of Tigers Bay, North Belfast, where these type of markers dominate the neighbourhood, this is done by a handful of people who try to control the area but is not actually desired by the vast majority of people living here. This is because territorial markings are considered to degrade the community in a way as they create a no-go area for some people within society and

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[68] Interviews Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) - 18-05-2015, John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015, Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015, Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[69] Interview Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015.
[70] Interviews Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.
[71] Interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.

therefore holds off businesses to set up here. Strong territorial markers, like interface barriers, can thus indeed be perceived as aspects of wider social issues besides just security issues.[72]

Figure 5.6: Interface barrier at North Queen Street at the interface on Duncairn Gardens, North Belfast. Brick wall with three levels of mesh fencing above in front of a row of houses. Owned by DOJ, built in 2001. Here the interface is also demarcated by two informal markers: the Union Jack on the side of Protestant Tigers Bay and a Sinn Féin election poster on the Catholic New Lodge. – Photo taken by author on 11-05-2015.

Figure 5.7: Entrance to Tigers Bay seen from the Limestone Road, North Belfast, with clear territorial markers. – Photo taken by author on 11-05-2015.

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[72] Interview Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) – 18-05-2015.

<u>Social identities and the functions of interface barriers</u>

Over the years, the function of interface barriers has also changed. Besides the intended function to prevent violence and provide a degree of security for the communities living besides them, they also clearly demarcate the separation line between predominantly Catholic and predominantly Protestant areas. This highlights and reinforces a sense of territorial difference between a predominantly Protestant community on one side and a predominantly Catholic community on the other.[73] The barriers have thus become tools to identify the "other" in space which, ironically, has turned them into magnets for trouble and violence in the sense that, if someone throws a brick over the barrier they can be pretty certain this will not hit someone from their own community and vice versa. Important to take into account is thus that interface areas are often the site of violence, but not necessarily the source of it.[74]

This intrinsic relation to social identity boundaries has also led to another interesting development in how these barriers (and their functions) are perceived nowadays. The changing demographics in Belfast discussed above, i.e. the "greening up" of the city, has caused for the two ethno-national communities to look differently at interface barriers. A significant finding in the 'Attitudes to Peace Walls' report was that, for those living in areas where there are interface barriers, Protestants clearly felt that the barriers allowed them to celebrate their culture freely and that they protected their sense of identity, which were sentiments not reflected so strongly in the Catholic community as can be seen in Figure 5.8 (Byrne et al. 2012:13-14).[75] Particularly in North Belfast, there has always been a growing Catholic population where more and more streets previously classified as Protestant are now Catholic. As a result, the Protestant communities in these area feel threatened, both physically as well as culturally, by this growing Catholic community which are perceived to take over "their" territory and therefore break down the sense of unity that exists within the Protestant community.[76] Whereas the Protestant community thus perceives interface barriers as a means to protect their sense of identity and (territorial) belonging, for the increasing Catholic community, on the other hand, these physical barriers inhibit their development.[77] This because, in general, people on the Protestant community would rather see a house derelict than see a Catholic living in it due to this strong sense of threat.[78] Interface barriers thus serve multiple functions for different people.

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[73] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[74] Interviews Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015.
[75] Interview Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015
[76] Interviews Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015, Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015.
[77] Interview Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015. This development is also recognised by the Department of Justice (Interview John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015).
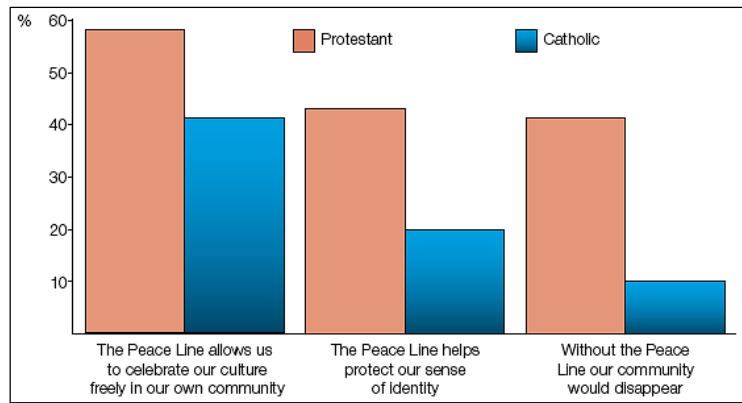[78] Interview Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015.

Figure 5.8: 'Peace lines residents views on the impact of peace lines by religion (strongly agree/agree)'
- (Byrne et al. 2012:14).

<u>Fixed imaginative geography</u>

People in Belfast are very conscious about the use of space in terms of which direction they will go or which roads they access.[79] It is local knowledge that informs people in North and West Belfast where they feel they can go or not, even without a territorial marker or physical barrier. These more cognitive borders, or interfaces, are thus constructed in people's minds while interface barriers are believed to be the most visible manifestation of the walls in people's minds.[80] Due to the fact that interface barriers are fixed geographical borders, they maintain and strengthen the practice of designating in one's mind a space which is considered "ours" and a space beyond that which is "theirs".[81] A research into the attitudes of young people towards interface barriers also underpinned this notion as it proved that young people indeed often "constructed their sense of place in terms of relationships between the two communities so that their discursive spaces were punctuated with notions of "here and there", "our side and their side" and "us and them"" (Leonard & McKnight 2011:578). So, interface barriers in North and West Belfast determine the nature of territorially defined group belonging, affiliation and membership, and institutionalise the processes of inclusion and exclusion (Newman 2006a:147). This, on the one hand, increases a sense of solidarity within each grouping and a positive sense of territoriality, but on the other hand also causes a greater social distance and alienation from the "other" (Byrne et al. 2006:10; Leonard & McKnight 2011:578). Here, the tension between (spatial) nearness and (social) distance of interface areas thus becomes clear (Simmel 1909/1997 in Van Houtum & Strüver 2002:143).

Moreover, even though the barriers provide interface communities with some degree of security from (real or perceived) threats of violence, their construction also ensured that

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[79] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[80] Interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[81] Interviews Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) - 18-05-2015.

anybody on the other side of that barrier was deemed a risk. The continuing presence of interface barriers today therefore perpetuates the idea that the "other" is different and still poses a (physical and/or cultural) threat and that the barriers are there for a reason: to protect the "us" from "them". The physical barriers thus create and strengthen negative perceptions of the "other" community.[82] Furthermore, since interface barriers are often the site of sectarian violence, the barrier itself has "become the malevolent face of the other community" (Nagle 2009:340). The fact that interface barriers not only reduce the possibility for (positive) intercommunal contact but in some cases also ensure that the "other community" is out of sight and out of mind, thus, do little to counter those negative perceptions (Boal 2002:693).[83] So, while the barriers are up, there will always be people suspicious of those on the other side of it. Physical barriers, in this way, also become mental barriers as they perpetuate the fear of the different "other".[84]

All in all, these concrete territorial lines of demarcation thus not only fix cognitive geographical borders, but also continue to reinforce social division by reifying antagonistic identity boundaries and perpetuating negative intergroup perceptions and function as a means to stimulate the designating and claiming of some spaces in Belfast to either the Catholic or the Protestant community; in this way freezing the (imaginative) geography and demography of the city along sectarian fault lines (Bollens 2000 in Boal 2002:693; Community Relations Council (CRC) 2008:3).[85] Today, interface barriers are thus symbolic of fractured relations in Northern Ireland and are considered to be the most visible evidence of sectarian division (Nolan 2014:67).[86] Their continued existence is "evidence that relationships are not yet 'normal' or equal, but continue to be characterised by insecurity, threat and anxiety" (CRC 2008:3). So, even though an uneasy peace is maintained in the short term, they hamper attempts to reintegrate the divided Northern Irish society which is why it is acknowledged that people "cannot seriously speak of a 'peace process' if people are obliged to live in fear of what might happen to them if they were not physically divided from the neighbouring community" (CRC 2008:4; McAtackney 2011:95). This, thus, underpins the necessity of taking physically defined spatial borders into account in reconciliation processes which the next chapter will scrutinise in the case of North and West Belfast.

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[82] Interviews Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.
[83] Interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[84] Interviews Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015, Suzanne Lavery (SLIG) – 08-05-2015.
[85] Interview Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.
[86] Interviews Dympna McGlade (CRC) – 14-05-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.

Figure 6.1: Stormont Parliament Buildings – Photo taken by author, 01-03-2013

6. Towards a "Shared Future": Softening, deconstructing and overcoming borders

6.1. Approaches to softening and reconstructing borders in Belfast

The continuing presence of interface barriers in Belfast and their reifying effects on social division and antagonistic identity boundaries prove that the notion of "good fences make good neighbours" does not uphold here and, moreover, underlines that they stand in the way of a truly shared future when viewed from the relationship-oriented definition of reconciliation mentioned above. Even though these barriers might reflect the disposition of some who wish to maintain and perpetuate the difference between the two main ethno-national communities in Belfast, attitudes are starting to change in relation to this. Key findings from the 'Attitudes to Peace Walls' report suggest that a majority of people in Northern Ireland would like to see these 'peace walls' removed now or in the near future. Numbers differ, though, between the general population (76 per cent) and residents living in near proximity of an interface barrier (58 per cent). The latter group also expressed a higher sense of necessity of the walls due to the potential of violence (69 per cent), indicating that there still is a certain reluctance for removal due to security fears (Byrne et al. 2012:27-28). This discrepancy shows that interface barriers do have an effect on people's mind and their daily life, especially when living right beside one. It can function as a safety blanket as, even though serious attacks might not have taken place for years, the memory of previous attacks is still engrained in people's mind-sets and people would thus feel insecure without the barriers.[87] Some local residents would therefore tend to see arguments for taking interface barriers down as something forced upon them by people who don't live in these areas and view this from an aesthetic perspective rather than from a social insecurity perspective.[88] Still, a majority of people would like the barriers to come down, now or in the (near) future (Byrne et al. 2012).[89]

However, even though the context for the initial emergence for interface barriers no longer exists in Northern Ireland, especially since the stabilisation of the political situation around 2005[90] and the onset of a peace process, it "remains much more difficult to transform or reduce an interface barrier than it is to put one up" despite a general willingness for their

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[87] Interview Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) – 18-05-2015.
[88] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[89] Interview Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) – 18-05-2015.
[90] Consultations by the Belfast Interface Project (BIP) suggested that there now is a significantly reduced threat of violence and that most of the main combatants are no longer active. Source: Interview Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015.

removal (Bell & Young 2013:1). As has been stated above, official interface barriers in Northern Ireland were constructed by the British Army and the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) without any consideration for possible demolition in the future or an exit strategy. The further fortification and concretisation of these first temporary structures already suggested that the barriers were there for the long haul (CRC 2009:38 in McAtackney 2011:84-85).[91] In a way, interface barriers thus "define a certain element of Belfast but also perhaps more increasingly the past of Belfast" rather than the current situation.[92] Despite this lack of knowledge on how to deconstruct interface barriers, changes in social and political conditions in Northern Ireland have resulted in increasing attempts to change the permeability of borders in order to improve community relations and promote reconciliation (Byrne 2011:9; Newman 2006a:149; OFMDFM 2013:63-64; Wastl-Walter 2011:33). This chapter will scrutinise processes of altering interface barriers in relation to a relationship-oriented understanding of reconciliation currently undertaken in North and West Belfast.

Governmental commitment

Up until approximately 2011 there was no real policy around interface barriers in Northern Ireland[93] even though the Institute for Conflict Research (ICR) and the Community Relations Council (CRC) already started conversations on the need to rethink policies on (de-)constructing interface barriers in 2007, around the time the last official barrier was constructed by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO).[94] It was in 2013, fifteen years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, that this started to change[95] as new impetus was given to the idea to deconstruct interface barriers when a political party published a document[96] in which it suggested a 30 per cent cut in interface barriers within fifteen years. Even though these targets were perceived as ambitious, a couple of months later an even more ambitious goal was published by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) in their 'Together: Building a United Community' strategy (TBUC) where a commitment was included to "create a 10-year programme to reduce, and remove by 2023, all interface barriers" (OFMDFM 2013:6; Nolan 2014:67-68). A main aspect of this commitment was that the changes to interface barriers can only be achieved with the engagement, consent and support of

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[91] Interview Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015.
[92] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[93] Interview John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015.
[94] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[95] Interview Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015.
[96] This was the document 'For Everyone' published by the Alliance Party (Nolan 2014:67).

the communities who live in areas with interface barriers (Nolan 2014:68).[97] The government's aim to be achieved with this commitment is to facilitate reconciliation, improve community relations and to build a shared and safe society (OFMDFM 2013:63-64).[98] A 'shared society', in this sense, can be explained as the situation where people feel free to access space without the (perceived) threat of violence.[99]

These plans have been received with mixed feelings and, in general, are considered aspirational. On the one hand, they show the intention and political commitment to this process while the deadline provides a goal to work towards and makes sure people can be held accountable for this process. On the other hand, the set time frame of ten years is not considered feasible, particularly considering that no major barriers have been changed two years in this process. This is contributed to a lack of resources, an uncertainty about whether there is indeed enough political will to see this through and whether the security situation is sufficiently robust to deal with these changes.[100] Some community workers therefore questioned whether setting dates was a smart decision, most notably because this has instilled a lot of fear in residents living in interface areas. Moreover, setting deadlines seems to undermine the statement that this process of reducing and eventually removing interface barriers needs to take place with the consent and at the pace of the communities living besides the barriers.[101]

Importantly, this governmental plan poses various problems which can be traced back to the lack of terminological clarity surrounding interface barriers. Especially from a policy perspective, the statement to "remove all interface barriers" is a very loaded one. First of all, it is not clear which interface barriers are included in this "all", particularly when considering the different criteria that are being used interchangeably to define a "peace wall/line" (i.e. ownership, function, location and physicality). In an interview with John Chittick from the Department of Justice (DOJ), though, he clarified this to some extent by stating that this governmental programme to remove structures by 2023 is, by and large, looking at physical structures owned by the DOJ and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).[102] Second, there is no indication in the TBUC strategy about what "remove" actually means. Is this the complete removal of a barrier, transforming them in other ways, or perhaps opening them by

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[97] Interview Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015.
[98] Interview John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015.
[99] Interview Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.
[100] Interviews Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015, Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) - 18-05-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.
[101] Interviews Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015, Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) - 18-05-2015, Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015, Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[102] Interviews Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015.

putting in a gate? Without clarity about these concepts, it thus (almost) becomes an impossible task to realise from a policy point of view.[103]

Approaches towards altering interface barriers

The approach taken on by the Department of Justice to work towards the 2023 target of removing all interface barriers, is one where statutory agencies work together with community organisations. An important external body which is involved in this process, is the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) who fund eight local programmes, six of which are in Belfast, under the so-called Peace Walls Programme (PWP).[104] The IFI, as an independent organisation established by the British and Irish governments, aims to complement the plans of the Northern Irish government and is concerned with starting conversations about the future of interface barriers and trying to create the conditions where they are no longer required, or in other words normalising the situation.[105] Through their programmes, the IFI functions as the link between local communities and relevant statutory agencies like the DOJ, OFMDFM and the NIHE. Unlike what the name suggests, the PWP addresses a wide variety of physical structures which are not just walls (e.g. also fences or gates) and are not only owned by the DOJ.[106]

Noteworthy is that the PWP is considered to be more of a people-based programme as it is aimed to try and build up relationships between interface communities who may have not socialised with each other for about twenty or thirty years and in this way build up confidence at a people-level in order for the government to reduce or transform the physical barriers.[107] The approach of the IFI, thus, consists out of two stages: first, addressing the mental barriers of people within the community, and second, the actual removal or transformation of a physical barrier by the relevant statutory agency who has responsibility over it. This goes hand in hand with an often heard statement in Northern Ireland, namely that "mental barriers need to be broken down before the physical ones can". Mental barriers, here, are not to be confused with the cognitive or imagined geographical borders discussed above, but refer to psychological barriers in terms of feelings of fear, threat and concerns about security that come into play when possibilities are explored to remove or alter an interface barrier. This goes back to the existing discourse around interface barriers that they are (still) there to protect the "us" from "them" and, in this way, perpetuate feelings of (physical and cultural) threat from the other community

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[103] Interviews Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015.
[104] Interview John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015.
[105] Interviews Brian Davidson (IFI) – 10-04-2015, Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015. Note: Gordon Walker used to work for the IFI.
[106] Interview Brian Davidson (IFI) – 10-04-2015.
[107] Interviews Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015, Brian Davidson (IFI) – 10-04-2015

as it is easier to hate things you have no understanding about.[108] While the barriers remain in place, there will thus always be some people suspect of the "other" side.[109] So, the PWP is really about building intercommunal relationships and getting to know people from the "other" community.[110]

Here, several of the reconciliation strategies discussed in chapter three can be recognised. It is acknowledged that interface barriers limit intergroup contact and enhance fears about the "other" which are thus aimed to be addressed by building up confidence and relationships between the two main competing identities in Belfast in order for them to get to know each other more. Theoretically, this would then result in the softening of mental barriers, i.e. fears about the "other", and social identity boundaries which, in turn, changes people's perceptions that physical barriers are no longer necessary. In other words, the "right conditions" are aimed to be created for people to feel safe enough for the actual removal or transformation of interface barriers.[111] Not only does this comply with the contact-hypothesis stating that "the more contact there is between conflict parties, the more scope there is for resolution" (Hewstone and Brown 1986 in Ramsbotham et al. 2011:248), an element of social learning is thus also incorporated to stimulate the process of identity negotiation. This because the two main competing identity groups living besides interface barriers are engaged in a process where the nature of their relations with the "other" is reconsidered allowing for the (re)creation of more positive relations and systems of interaction (Aiken 2010:168-169; Kelman 2006:23). In other words, the social constructs of "self" and "other" are aimed to be redefined by reimagining the "other" as less antagonistic and identity boundaries as less fixed in order to stimulate conflict resolution (Ramsbotham et al. 2011:248; Van Houtum & Strüver 2002:142).

Besides reimagining these social identity boundaries, there are also attempts undertaken at a micro-level to reimagine interface barriers. By stimulating a process where local residents imagine a future where a particular barrier is no longer there, for instance with the use of visual tools, it is aimed to overcome mental barriers and to eventually transform interface barriers.[112] This indicates that the intrinsic relationship between social identity boundaries and (physically defined) geographical borders that have been intertwined throughout their construction and reification processes are also addressed simultaneously in the process of aiming to overcome

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[108] Interviews Brian Davidson (IFI) – 10-04-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015.
[109] Interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[110] Interview Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015.
[111] Interviews Brian Davidson (IFI) – 10-04-2015, Suzanne Lavery (SLIG) – 08-05-2015, Dympna McGlade (CRC) – 14-05-2015.
[112] Interviews Dympna McGlade (CRC) – 14-05-2015, Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.

or transform both strong identity boundaries and cemented geographical borders. Significant in this process to promote reconciliation, then, is the role of 'imagination' which bridges both anthropological and geographical understandings of borders. The next paragraph will further scrutinise how this process takes place on the ground.

6.2. Altering interface barriers in contemporary North and West Belfast

As explained in the methodology, multiple local organisations in North and West Belfast working with interface communities are taken into account in this study, most of which are funded under the IFI's Peace Walls Programme. Despite the multitude of organisations, several general statements can be made about how the process of transforming interface barriers takes place on the ground. First of all, it is important to underpin that, even though people speak about the removal of barriers, this can also mean the transformation of interface barriers in various ways.[113] Moreover, it is deemed necessary to take on a case-specific approach due to the diverse settings in which interface barriers are located[114] and the many different types of barriers that exist, although the different programmes under the IFI do work with identified clusters of interface barriers (IFI 2014:13). Just as with trying to create a single border theory, the fluid and changeable nature of (the context of) interface barriers makes it impossible to create a single deconstruction and/or reconstruction approach which is applicable to all types of barriers. Nevertheless, there are some guiding principles that work across the city which are centred on creating the confidence within interface communities and trying to create a momentum for change so that other communities are also more inclined to consider change.[115]

The above already indicated that there is a general view that the right conditions need to be created for communities to feel safe enough to alter barriers, which is done through building up relationships and changing the conversation around interface barriers.[116] This can be aided for instance by installing other measurements that provide a sense of security of a barrier, for instance by replacing bars in front of a window with thicker glass.[117] This thus needs to be a bottom-up process that takes place at the pace of the communities, which is also the

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[113] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[114] For instance when looking at the difference between the patchwork quilt of Protestant and Catholic communities North Belfast and the Protestant enclave of Suffolk in West Belfast.
[115] Interviews Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[116] Interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[117] Interview Seamus Corr (BMSSP) – 22-04-2015.

intention of the government in their commitment in the TBUC strategy.[118] Moreover, it is acknowledged that this can be a long, slow process. By no means do these organisations believe that there will be a similar situation like the Berlin Wall where a barrier will be taken down at once.[119] It can take several years to actually get to that stage where a barrier might be removed, for instance due to a lack of resources, but most notably because there is a lot of consultation involved. Local organisations working on this process will often do consultations with the involved communities in order to get an idea which barriers have the potential to be altered or to see how people feel about a proposed change to a barrier. However, when it is established that there is some potential for change, the relevant statutory agency or governmental department will have to go back and consult more widely, which can result in a consultation fatigue.[120] One of the reasons why these consultations take a long time can, again, be attributed to the lack of clarity on a concept, namely 'community consent'. It not certain what the threshold is for when a proposed change can actually be carried out; whether this is a certain percentage of the communities that needs to be in favour of a proposal or if the consent of community representatives might be enough.[121]

This was for instance the case with a security barrier[122] owned by the DOJ on Newington Street in North Belfast which took several years to be removed.[123] Unlike the Berlin Wall, incremental steps are undertaken in Belfast towards the ultimate removal of a barrier, which starts with addressing the barriers where community organisations feel there is a potential for change and are thus generally speaking the less contentious barriers. The security barrier eventually removed at Newington Street was considered to be an "easy" interface barrier, in the sense that it had become redundant as a security barrier over the years as tensions in the area had reduced significantly and population changes meant it was not really an interface barrier anymore.[124] However, when funds were in place to remove the gates and residents agreed with this process, the road services were involved because it concerned a traffic issue and had to do

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[118] Interviews Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, Dympna McGlade (CRC) – 14-05-2015, Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015.

[119] Interviews Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015, Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015, John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015.

[120] Interviews Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015, Suzanne Lavery (SLIG) – 08-05-2015, Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015, Brian Davidson (IFI) – 10-04-2015.

[121] Interviews Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.

[122] The barrier was constructed because the area knew a history of people being shot out of cars and functioned as a measure to prevent traffic from coming through. It did not close off the entire street as pedestrians could still walk around it. Source: interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.

[123] Even though the security barrier owned by the DOJ did not function as a barrier to separate Catholic and Protestant communities, it is still considered to be an interface barrier. See: Claire Graham, 'North Belfast: Interface barrier removed at Newington Street', *BBC News NI*, published on: 26-11-2014, consulted on: 29-03-2015. Source: http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-30210613.

[124] Interviews Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015, Brian Davidson (IFI) – 10-04-2015, Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015, John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015.

consultations themselves. Due to the fact that the fund was time-bound, the plan was taken off the table. Then, a staged process took place where it was first agreed to open the barrier at certain times of the day which eventually led to the barrier being permanently opened. Nevertheless, since residents did not want the street to turn into a one-way system, the consultation process on how to change the barrier started all over again which, at that time, thus did not concern issues on sectarianism anymore. This example underlines that it is extremely difficult to achieve change, even when it concerns less contentious barriers and there is support of the community for removal.[125]

Regeneration

Up until this point, only a few interface barriers have been completely removed, but what happens is that processes of transformation are occurring around these barriers.[126] Another significant aspect of the process of altering interface barriers in Belfast, then, is that focus is not just on the interface barriers themselves. Instead, it is deemed paramount that this process is understood as being part of a more holistic approach towards larger social, economic and physical regeneration of these parts of the city.[127] The importance of this goes back to the difference between interface barriers and interfaces, or "physical space" and "contested space" to quote Dr Jonny Byrne. This because there are often derelict spaces close to interface barriers.[128] So, if you just remove a physical barrier, you are left with "contested space" that still marks the interface, or cognitive geographical border, between two predominantly Protestant and Catholic areas. This proves that, even when the physical attributes of a spatial border are removed, this does not mean that the border no longer has any impact on the daily lives of those living beside it (Wastl-Walter 2011:41). The process of transforming or deconstructing barriers is thus not about "checking boxes of a list", but instead is about what you put in place or do to the environment to ensure that the area remains safe and becomes more sufficient and beneficial to the communities living there.[129] This underlines again that segregation is something bigger than just the physicality of interface barriers as the problems of segregation and sectarianism are not resolved by simply removing a barrier.[130] In addition, this underpins the train of thought that a mere geographical approach to interface barriers is

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[125] Interviews Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015, Brian Davidson (IFI) – 10-04-2015, Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[126] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[127] Interviews John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Brian Davidson (IFI) – 10-04-2015, Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015.
[128] Interview Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015.
[129] Interviews Seamus Corr (BMSSP) – 22-04-2015, Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[130] Interviews Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015.

insufficient to promote reconciliation, but requires a broader approach that includes anthropological perspectives in order to adequately address the intrinsically linked relationship between interface barriers and social identity boundaries.

One clear example that shows this perspective, is the interface barrier running through Alexandra Park in North Belfast which was ironically constructed one day after the IRA ceasefires in September 1994.[131] This public park became the scene of a number of sectarian incidents and vicious fighting that led to the construction of a 120 metres long and 3.5 metres high corrugated iron fence which basically cut the park into two: a Protestant and a Catholic side. Even though the physical structure is still in place today, a gate was installed in 2011 which is now opened at specific times throughout the week.

Figure 6.2: Opened gate at Alexandra Park, North Belfast. – Photo taken by author on 06-05-2015.

The remarkable aspect of this development was that this decision came about through discussions on how to improve the park and was not driven by talks on (how to alter) the interface barrier itself. A Steering Group was established consisting out of several community organisations, such as the North Belfast Interface Network (NBIN), and the PSNI to look into ways to reduce anti-social behaviour in the park and to encourage residents to start using the space again (Bell & Young 2013:22).[132] As Ciáran Shannon from Duncairn Community Partnership (DCP) explains, the idea to put in a fence was almost like a throw-away comment someone made during a meeting while no real arguments against it were brought up. After a process of approximately three years in which consultations also took place, the DOJ came in and installed the gate since they were responsible for the barrier.[133] Even though the process to

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[131] For a detailed description of how the process of putting in a gate took place, see: Bell, J. and Young, J. (2013), *A Model of Consultation? Transformation and Regeneration at the Interface*. Institute for Conflict Research. Belfast, United Kingdom: Community Relations Council.

[132] Interviews Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015.

[133] Interviews Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015.

achieve this was difficult, according to Rab McCallum (NBIN) who was involved in this, it can still be perceived as an "easy", less contentious, interface barrier due to the fact that it is situated in a park where it poses no direct residential threats.[134]

Employed methods to transform interface barriers: A review

Besides the two examples mentioned above, a variety of other methods to transform or reconstruct interface barriers are implemented on the ground in North and West Belfast. This can be linked back to the various types of interface barriers that exist and the changeable contexts in which they are situated that necessitates a case-specific approach. Alongside the opening up of a gate, other incremental steps that are implemented to de- and/or reconstruct interface barriers are by lowering them or make them more see-through. These are attempts to reimagine an interface barrier by making them a bit more transparent which enables people to see people on the other side of it. Even though some residents are still fearful to make a barrier see-through, by increasing the visibility of the "other", fears of the unknown as well as negative perceptions about the "other" are challenged which can thus positively change systems of interaction between the two antagonistic identity groups (Aiken 2010:168-169; Kelman 2006:23).[135]

Figure 6.3: Interface barrier on Duncairn Gardens, North City Business Centre (New Lodge), built in the 1970s by the NIO (BIP 2012:61). Part above the brick wall used to be a green steel sheet, which was taken down, but after a number of burglaries a meshed fence was put up.[136] – Photo taken by author on 07-05-2015.

As stated above, when people speak about "removing interface barriers" this does not always mean the actual removal of a physical structure but can also be transformations in the name of

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[134] Interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[135] Interviews Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Suzanne Lavery (SLIG) – 08-05-2015.
[136] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.

regenerating an interface area. Some developments that take place in these areas are not meant to function as an interface barrier, but do create a buffer zone between predominantly Catholic and Protestant communities. An example of this is the development of the business centre at Duncairn Gardens in Figure 6.3 which ensures that the two main communities do not live right beside one another.[137] Linked to this is the transformation of particular buildings or contested spaces into shared spaces in North and West Belfast. Even though this study would not recognise these as actual interface barriers due to the fact that they are not specifically intended to separate the two main ethno-national communities in Belfast, they are taken into account in processes of transforming interface barriers and the areas in which they are located which is why they are discussed here.

One example hereof under the IFI's Peace Walls Programme is the building in which the Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG) is situated. During the Troubles sectarian tensions and violence were high at the interface between the predominantly Catholic community in Lenadoon and the small Protestant enclave of Suffolk in West Belfast. The building located on this interface was characterised by dereliction when the NIHE, who owned the building, wanted to demolish it and replace it with a big interface barrier. In order to avoid a barrier being built which would most likely be permanent, the building was redeveloped into a social enterprise building where, among others, SLIG, a day care centre and several shops are established that provide services to both communities.[138] So, instead of the two communities directly facing each other, a more useful buffer than a wall was developed at the interface that is now considered a shared space.[139] However, even though this might be a profitable development for the communities living beside it, I would argue that, to a certain degree, the building still functions as a separation barrier. The building, which has two doorways from both interface communities[140], as well as the adjacent Kells Avenue interface gate close at certain times during the day which more or less locks Suffolk residents into their estate.[141] This development has the potential to ensure a long-term, more sustainable environment where the communities live together, but still live apart.[142] It is therefore questionable whether this is a step towards the eventual normalisation of the situation where there is no need for fixed geographical separation barriers or whether this actually normalises the presence of these fixed

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[137] Interviews Ciáran. Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[138] Interestingly, the profits from the rent goes back into the two communities. Interview Suzanne Lavery (SLIG) – 08-05-2015.
[139] Interviews Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015, Suzanne Lavery (SLIG) – 08-05-2015.
[140] Suzanne Lavery from SLIG would argue that these are just a front and a back door, especially after the back entrance from the Suffolk enclave transformed from a prison-like tunnel of palisade fencing into a more welcoming entrance to Suffolk residents. Source interview Suzanne Lavery (SLIG) – 08-05-2015.
[141] Interview Suzanne Lavery (SLIG) – 08-05-2015.
[142] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.

borders. Or in other words, whether or not this, to a certain degree, still keeps perpetuating the idea that the "other" is indeed different and therefore might stand in the way of true reconciliation.

Figure 6.4: Back door entrance to SLIG building looking out at the Suffolk enclave, West Belfast. – Photo taken by author on 08-05-2015.

Another employed method which poses even more questions as to whether it actually is a step towards a shared future from the perspective of the relationship-oriented definition of reconciliation, is the painting and putting up of murals on interface barriers. In some cases where there is no will amongst residents to change an interface barrier, attempt are undertaken to soften the physical barrier to a point where it no longer looks like a barrier in order to change people's mind-sets and to change the conversation around them.[143] This is done by either painting them or putting up artwork (e.g. Disney murals) to make them less ugly or trying to disguise the fact that there is a barrier at all. An example of the latter is a large barrier in West Belfast which is aimed to be painted green as to make it go with the background of Black Mountain.[144]

However, by making barriers more aesthetically pleasing or less visible, you risk that people start to find these barriers acceptable and thus also more normal and permanent, which makes it even more difficult to remove the barrier. It can be argued, thus, that these measures do not challenge negative perceptions about the "other" or improve intercommunal contact and/or relations and therefore do not promote reconciliation. This already proved to be the case with the transformation of the appearance of several barriers back in the 1980s as explained in

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[143] Interview Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) – 18-05-2015.
[144] Interviews Seamus Corr (BMSSP) – 22-04-2015, Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) – 18-05-2015.

paragraph 4.3 and is also the reason why some organisations, such as the NBIN, would not get involved in these types of projects.[145] This is also acknowledged by Dr Jonny Byrne who states that these types of transformations makes people complacent and therefore legitimises the separation. Since this would not create a momentum for their removal, he is in favour of an approach where a barrier is removed immediately instead of by taking gradual steps towards it.[146]

Figure 6.5: Sliabh Dubh Mural, West Belfast – Source: Black Mountain Shared Space Project.[147]

6.3. Perceived effects and obstacles of altering interface barriers

The previous paragraph proved that the deconstruction and/or reconstruction processes of interface barriers in North and West Belfast can take place in many different shapes and forms, which precludes making any generalised statements about the effects of these transformations. Opinions even vary about the impact of installing a gate in the interface barrier running through Alexandra Park in 2011. For some, including the DOJ and Joe O'Donnell from Belfast Interface Project (BIP), this is considered a success story as the gate significantly improved the mobility of local residents in North Belfast and resulted in a widened usage of the public park.[148] Others perceive it more as a symbolic change due to the fact that the barrier was opened with wider regeneration issues in mind and its location makes it a less contentious barrier. According to Rab McCallum from North Belfast Interface Network (NBIN), the transformation did not have

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[145] Interview Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[146] Interview Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.
[147] Black Mountain Shared Space Project (BMSSP), Source: http://www.blackmountainsharedspace.com/?page_id=231#, last updated on: 01-08-2015, consulted on: 01-08-2015.
[148] Interviews John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015, Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015.

a significant impact as it did not send a clear message that Belfast is indeed in a period of change.[149] Despite these varying opinions it can be argued that this development did provide a basis for the potential of more intergroup contact which provides more scope for conflict resolution (Hewstone and Brown 1986 in Ramsbotham et al. 2011:248). Moreover, the opening up of the barrier resulted into a sense that interface barriers do not have to be a permanent feature of Belfast and that changes to move forward could indeed be made.[150]

Furthermore, important to take into account when analysing the effects of transforming interface barriers (and the surrounding environment) in Belfast is that this process has been taking place just a couple of years while only a few less significant barriers have been addressed yet.[151] This makes it impossible to determine what the long-term effects will be of various undertaken methods to alter interface barriers on social relations between the two main competing identity groups. It is still uncertain whether these are indeed incremental steps towards the ultimate removal of interface barriers or perhaps actually steps that make the barriers even more permanent, which most likely will lead to the further maintenance and cementing of strong identity boundaries. In other words, even though the general approach towards the issue of interface barriers takes the intrinsic relationship between these geographical barriers and social identity boundaries into account, it might be too early to say how certain methods of unmaking or transforming interface barriers currently undertaken contribute to promoting reconciliation, if at all. In addition, it needs to be underscored that it is difficult to measure success in the absence of violence.[152] The fact that nothing happened after the opening up of the gate in Alexandra Park is seen as an indicator that behaviour in this area has normalised. Dr Jonny Byrne therefore stresses the necessity to clarify what the vision of a shared future actually is when it comes to removing interface barriers as complete normalisation and the absence of incidents, both negative and positive, may indicate a success in the peace process.[153]

<u>Setbacks and obstacles</u>

Despite the difficulty to measure the (positive) effects of transformations to interface barriers on the ground, the setbacks and obstacles towards this process are more easily identified. As Dr Neil Jarman explains, the removal of barriers is for a large part premised on sustainable security

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[149] Interviews Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015, Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[150] Interviews Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015.
[151] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[152] Interview Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015.
[153] Interview Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.

and the sense that, in order to feel safe enough to start conversations about this process, no sectarian incidents have to take place.[154] Ironically, it is the mental barriers and feelings of unsafety which are aimed to be addressed in processes of altering interface barriers which also pose one of the biggest obstacles. This is due to the fact that feelings of fear and insecurity in relation to the "other" are so ingrained in people's mind-sets that many are still under the impression that danger is imminent and violence can occur any time. As a result, this reinforces the sense that interface barriers are still necessary to protect the "us" from "them".[155] The problem in Belfast, most notably the inner city working class areas, is that there has not yet been a considerable length of time where the situation was sufficiently peaceful.[156] Ongoing disputes, such as annual marches and parades, and occasional sectarian violence causes for setbacks in work done on the ground in relation to interface barriers and community relations.[157] The recent flag protests in particular caused for a deterioration in community relations and undermined for some people in interface areas that sense of security deemed necessary to have discussions on changing the physical appearance of interface barriers (Nolan et al. 2014:11).[158] Findings from the 2014 Young Life and Times survey support this development as a vast majority of the respondents agreed that interface barriers are still necessary due to the potential for violence, as can be seen in Figure 6.6.
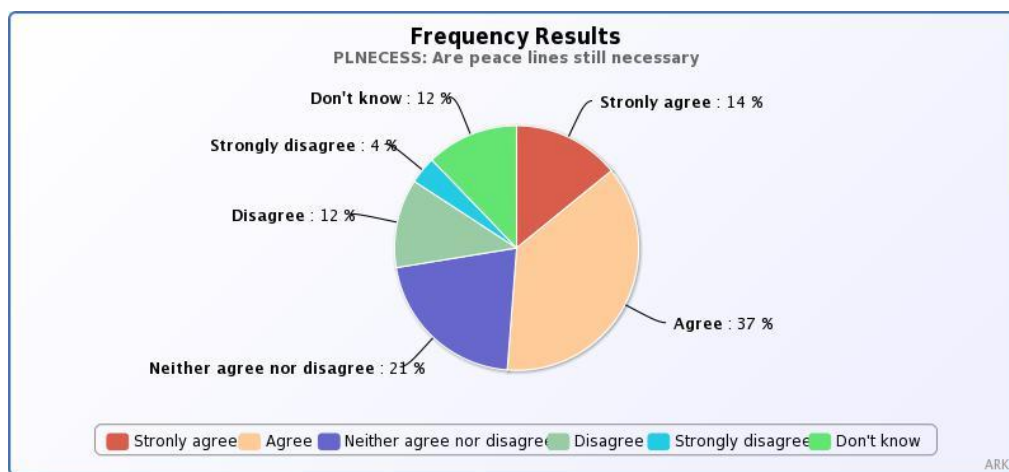

Figure 6.6: Results YLT survey (2014) – Source: ARK.[159]

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[154] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[155] Interviews Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015, Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[156] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[157] Dympna McGlade from the Community Relations Council (CRC) stresses that this is realistic in any long-term peace process as situation on the ground can change in one particular incident or political statement which triggers sectarian attitudes. Interviews Dympna McGlade (CRC) – 14-05-2015, Brian Davidson (IFI) – 10-04-2015.
[158] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[159] Young Life and Times as a constituent part of ARK. Source:
http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2014/Cross_Community_Contact/PLNECESS.html, published on 06-05-2015, consulted on 31-07-2015.

Other perceived obstacles for the process of deconstructing and/or reconstructing interface barriers, are the practical problems around funding and austerity which affect the peace building infrastructure on the ground, a lack of political commitment despite the TBUC strategy, and fears that the PSNI might not be able to manage the situation sufficiently if something might happen at an interface where a physical structure has been removed.[160] One significant obstacle mentioned by many informants which obstructs the process of improving intercommunal relations and the removal of interface barriers, was the increasing presence over the last years of (former) paramilitaries, or so-called "dissident elements".[161] When the peace process came along in Northern Ireland, some paramilitaries on both the Loyalist and Republican side wanted to continue their criminal activities and therefore oppose any development associated with promoting peace. Despite the fact that these small groups of people have little support from the local communities, they rule with fear in order to control the community by using violent tactics of the past and therefore seriously hamper the work done by community organisations in these areas.[162] Nevertheless, despite a certain pessimism around removing and/or transforming interface barriers due to these obstacles and setbacks, there still exists a general willingness to remove them now or in the near future as portrayed in Figure 6.7 (Byrne et al. 2012:20, 27-28; Nolan 2013:81-82).[163]
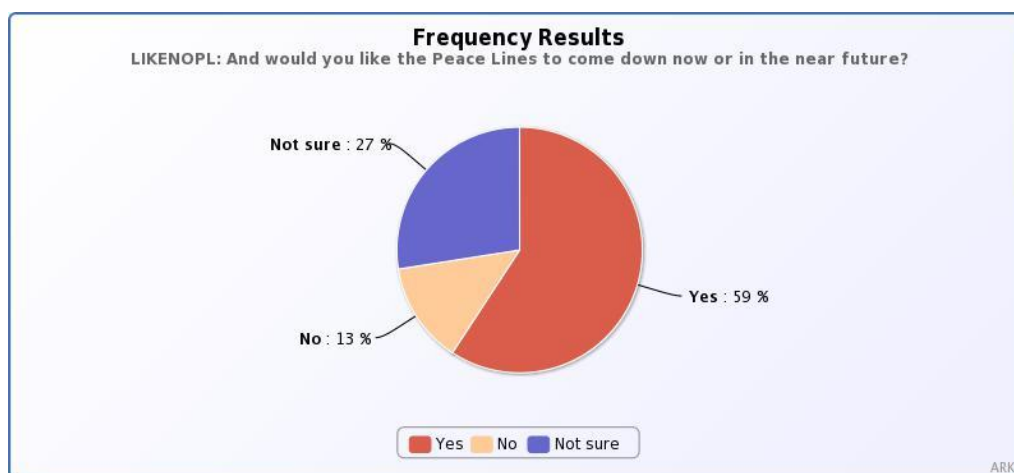

Figure 6.7: Results YLT survey (2014) – Source: ARK.[164]

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[160] Interviews Suzanne Lavery (SLIG) – 08-05-2015, Interview Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) – 18-05-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Dympna McGlade (CRC) – 14-05-2015.
[161] See also: 'Paramilitary attack rising "worrying"', *Belfast Telegraph*. Published on 13-05-2015, consulted on 26-06-2015. Source: http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/paramilitary-attack-rise-worrying-31218874.html.
[162] Interviews Suzanne Lavery (SLIG) – 08-05-2015, Dympna McGlade (CRC) – 14-05-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015, Interview Leanne (former resident Tigers Bay and community worker) – 18-05-2015.
[163] Interviews Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.
[164] Young Life and Times as a constituent part of ARK. Source: http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2014/Community_Relations/LIKENOPL.html, published on 06-05-2015, consulted on 31-07-2015.

Spatial reconciliation

All in all, Belfast remains a divided city up until this day even though processes take place that aim to encourage reconciliation and a shared future where conflictual and fractured relations are aimed to be restored so that people learn to live non-violently with differences (Bloomfield 2006:7-8). An interesting critique, though, on these processes to unmake and/or reconstruct interface barriers comes from Mark Hackett from the Forum for Alternative Belfast (FAB), a not-for-profit organisation that campaigns for a better and more equitable built environment in Belfast.[165] He states that, in the case of Belfast, not enough consideration is put into thoughts on how to achieve spatial reconciliation.[166]

This study has demonstrated that there is an intrinsic link between the bordering processes of (physically defined) geographical borders and social identity boundaries along sectarian fault lines. However, according to Mark Hackett, too much emphasis is put on what he calls are "old barriers" that reflect issues from the 1970s and have become an anachronism. Throughout this research it already became clear that the social category of 'class' often played a role in processes of constructing and hardening spatial borders and social identity boundaries. Not only are most interface barriers situated in working class communities, the concepts of PUL and CNR also incorporates class as a defining category of difference reified under one overarching term. For FAB, it is these social class divisions that provide the bigger pattern of segregation in Belfast as it is believed that the social and economic interfaces are the most relevant issues impacting on daily life in the city nowadays. This because the affluent inner city centre, which is considered to be a shared space, is actually a central zone of which the surrounding poorer neighbourhoods are wholly cut off from by roads and blighted land as a result of city planning. In other words, another relationship between social and spatial borders is identified here that create different patterns of segregation. So, unless dealt with properly, it has the potential to perpetuate the notion of Belfast as a divided city, albeit along different fault lines than sectarianism.[167] In order to truly move from a divided past into a shared future in Belfast where geographical borders do not maintain and strengthen social identity boundaries, it thus might be beneficial to not only promote reconciliation understood from a relationship-oriented definition, but also include a wider perspective on spatial reconciliation when trying to unmake or overcome borders.

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[165] Forum for Alternative Belfast (FAB). Source: http://www.forumbelfast.org/about-fab.php, last updated on: 02-08-2015, consulted on: 02-08-2015.
[166] Interview Mark Hackett (FAB) – 12-05-2015.
[167] Idem.

Figure 7: A decorative brick and metal structure that replaced a pair of low-level security gates and permanently closes off the junction between Henry Street and York Street to vehicle traffic in North Belfast (BIP 2012:59). – Photo taken by author on 11-05-2015.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Various contentious and conflict-related issues have been dealt with since the onset of the peace process after the intrastate conflict in Northern Ireland euphemistically termed as the Troubles (1969-1998) (Byrne et al. 2012:4; UCDP (Date of retrieval: 2015/07/14)). Nevertheless, seventeen years after the signing of the Good Friday Peace Agreement, Northern Ireland is still considered to be a deeply divided society between national and socio-religious identities often referred to in the narrative of the Protestant and Catholic communities (Schubotz & Devine 2014:1). Segregation along these sectarian fault lines remain a reality in many aspects of daily life, in particular the residential segregation in the inner city areas of capital Belfast where the two majority ethnic communities are physically divided from one another by means of so-called interface areas (Hughes et al. 2007:35; 2008:522; Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:4; Schubotz & Devine 2014:1). This type of segregation was further exacerbated by the construction of interface barriers from 1969 onwards that turned some of these cognitive geographical borders that demarcate the area between predominantly Catholic and Protestant communities into physical manifestations of social division. Even though intended as temporary constructions to address intercommunal violence, the amount of structures quickly rose throughout and after the conflict while increasingly getting a more permanent character. For this reason, interface barriers remain a prominent aspect of certain parts of Belfast today (Boulton 2014:102-103; Gormley-Heenan & Byrne 2012:4; McAtackney 2011:81, 86; Morrissey & Gaffikin 2006:880; McKeown 2013:11; Nolan 2014:67).

Despite the fact that it is academically acknowledged that maintaining physical barriers can have "major repercussions on attempts to reintegrate divided societies", limited knowledge exists on the required processes to deconstruct them when the context for their initial emergence no longer exists and a willingness for their removal has arisen (Byrne 2011:9; McAtackney 2011:95). Already back in 1971 did a report by the Joint Working Party warn for the possible negative long-term effects these physical structures could have on local residents where an abnormal situation could become normal (Byrne 2011:34-35). However, the increasingly permanent and more aesthetically pleasing character of these structures indicates that the erection of interface barriers was planned "without any consideration for possible demolition in the future" (CRC 2009:38 in McAtackney 2011:84-85). Even though no real policy on interface barriers existed up until 2011, a governmental commitment was incorporated in 2013 to reduce and remove all interface barriers by 2023 in order to facilitate reconciliation, improve community relations and to build a united and shared society (OFMDFM 2013:6, 63-64; Nolan

2014:67-68).[168] So, not only are social relationships incorporated in the reconciliation process of Northern Ireland, physically defined geographical borders have also started to be addressed.

In order to contribute to academic understandings of borders in general, this study has scrutinised bordering processes in the case of both interface barriers and identity boundaries along sectarian fault lines in North and West Belfast. This has been done from a contemporary border studies perspectives and by combining anthropological understandings of social identity boundaries and traditional understandings of geographical borders. Moreover, to gain insights into the process of removing and/or transforming interface barriers to promote reconciliation and address the existing theoretical lacuna on how to unmake physical barriers, this study has scrutinised the interrelatedness of these social and spatial bordering processes and analysed the role of 'imagination' herein. Since borders are complex and dynamic phenomena that can manifest themselves in a variety of ways (either material or non-material), it is argued that they can only be understood in their context as this affects the way walls are perceived and experienced (Brown 2012:75; Van Houtum & Strüver 2002:142; Wastl-Walter 2011:1-2). Hence, the interlinked social and spatial border demarcation and management processes in Belfast have been analysed in a broader socio-historical time frame.

Importantly, the Troubles were not the beginning of conflict in the region but rather one of the most recent outpourings of violence that emerged from a complex history tracing back to the twelfth century when England first colonised Ireland (Boulton 2014:101-102). It is at this point in time that the first patterns of division between the two competing social identity groups were demarcated and categories of difference were constructed which are still recognisable in contemporary Belfast and include the social categories of 'religion' and 'political ideology' or 'nationality' (McKeown 2013:3; Nolan 2013:13). Even though these conflicting social identity groups are comprised of several interlinked social categories, today they are often referred to solely with 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' even though religion itself is considered one of the least important categories herein. These two terms are thus as much ethnic and political as they are religious and can best be seen as badges of difference that symbolise deeper attachments to national "roots" (Cairns & Darby 1998:755; Moxon-Browne 1991:23 in McKeown 2013:4).

As this study has shown, sectarian division was accompanied with spatial segregation in Belfast from the beginning of British settlement. Both social identity boundaries and geographical borders have been further maintained and reified by several factors, most notably the decades of violence in the region which are still commemorated today (Hamilton et al.

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[168] Interview John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015.

2008:10). The numerous incidents of intercommunal conflict was followed by the displacement of Catholic and Protestant families as they sought security in their own communities which created so-called interface zones and institutionalised the categories of difference between "us-them" and "inclusion-exclusion" (Boal 2002 in Byrne 2011:24-25). These cognitive spatial borders based on knowledge of local geography where further cemented with the construction of interface barriers as a way to prevent intercommunal violence and instil a sense of safety (Boulton 2014:103). As a result, the opportunity for intercommunal contact was reduced which led to the heightened importance of the interface barriers as an indicator of difference. So, interface barriers are not only indicators of pre-existing segregation, they also strengthen social identity boundaries which has resulted in a fixed sectarian imaginative geography of some parts of Belfast (Boal 2002:693; Donnan & Jarman [forthcoming]:8; McAtackney 2011:82-83).

This analysis thus proves that interface barriers and social identity boundaries in Belfast are intrinsically interrelated in both demarcation and border hardening processes. The continuing presence of interface barriers not only perpetuates social division and antagonistic identity boundaries, it now also functions as a magnet for violence as the "other" is easily identified.[169] It moreover bolsters the idea that the "other" on the other side of the barriers is indeed different and still poses a (physical and/or cultural) threat, strengthening the idea that the barriers are there to protect the "us" from "them". In other words, the physical barriers thus create and strengthen negative perceptions of the "other" community, indicating that the notion of "good fences make good neighbours" does not uphold in Belfast.[170] This underlines that interface barriers indeed stand in the way of reconciliation and therefore need to be included in the process of aiming to restore conflictual relations so that people learn to live non-violently with differences in order to truly move from a divided past to a shared future (Bloomfield 2006:8). Moreover, the context in which interface barriers are situated has changed since their initial emergence due to shifts in social and political conditions in Northern Ireland, which is why interface barriers increasingly define the past of Belfast rather than the current situation.[171] Along with a general willingness to remove these interface barriers, this has resulted in attempts to change the permeability of borders in order to improve community relations and promote reconciliation (Byrne 2011:9; Newman 2006a:149; OFMDFM 2013:63-64; Wastl-Walter 2011:33). Nevertheless, this unmaking of concrete spatial borders proves much more difficult than the construction of interface barriers (Bell & Young 2013:1).

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[169] Interview Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015.
[170] Interviews Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.
[171] Interview Dr Neil Jarman (ICR) – 07-05-2015.

The process of deconstructing interface barriers currently undertaken in North and West Belfast is not an unproblematic and straightforward process, not the least due to a lack of clarity around terminology (i.e. what constitutes an 'interface barrier' and what is meant with 'removal'). However, a general consensus amongst different bodies working on issues of community relations and interface barriers exists on the premise that this needs to be a bottom-up approach that takes place in cooperation with the relevant communities around a barrier.[172] In addition, the issue of interface barriers is generally understood as a component of larger regeneration processes as it is acknowledged that even without its physical attributes, a spatial border can still (negatively) impact those living beside it (Wastl-Walter 2011:41). Moreover, due to the plethora of existing types of interface barriers and the diverse settings in which they are situate, it is deemed futile to take on a single method to transform interface barriers and therefore requires a case-specific approach.[173] Even though this has led to a wide variety of ways to alter interface barriers on the ground, a general point of view that can be discerned is that the mental barriers of residents besides an interface barrier need to be removed before the physical barrier can. Mental barriers are associated with the framing of interface barriers in a security perspective as they refer to the psychological fears and feelings of threat from the "other" against which the interface barrier provides protection.[174] These mental barriers are aimed to be overcome not only by reimagining a situation where there is no concrete border, but more importantly by building up intercommunal relationships which promotes the reimagining of social identity boundaries as less antagonistic and more inclusive (i.e. identity negotiation). Theoretically, this should then lead to reduced feelings of necessity of an interface barrier.[175] Besides complying with the contact-hypothesis, this approach towards altering physical structures thus also takes into account an element of social learning, which are both strategies associated with reconciliation processes understood from a relationship-oriented definition. A key element herein, then, proves to be the role of imagination that bridges both reified identity boundaries and materialised geographical borders.

Importantly, it is questionable whether all undertaken approaches are indeed (incremental) steps towards the eventual deconstructing and/or reconstructing of interface barriers and social identity boundaries. Some employed methods in North and West Belfast, such as the softening of barriers by making them more aesthetically pleasing or less visible,

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[172] Interviews Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015, Dympna McGlade (CRC) – 14-05-2015, Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015.
[173] Interviews John Chittick (DOJ) – 06-05-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Brian Davidson (IFI) – 10-04-2015, Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015.
[174] Interviews Brian Davidson (IFI) – 10-04-2015, Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015.
[175] Interview Gordon Walker (Intercomm) – 06-05-2015.

give out the impression that the physically defined geographical borders which perpetuate social division are actually a normal part of the built environment. This would make it even more difficult to remove a barrier and could therefore be in fact hampering reconciliation. However, the fact that the process of transforming interface barriers in Belfast has only been taking place a couple of years while just a few symbolic barriers have actually been removed. This, as well as the wide variety of employed methods to transform interface barriers, impedes making any general statements at this point about the (long-term) effects of this on perceptions about the "other" and, effectively, reconciling competing identities. In addition, success of a transformation to a barrier can be difficult to measure in the absence of violence as this might indicate a normalisation of the situation and might already indicate a so-called "shared future".[176]

All in all, this study has shown that the border demarcation and management processes of social identity boundaries and concrete spatial borders in Belfast are intrinsically linked, which is why it is also essential to take this socio-spatial relationship into account when aiming to unmake reified borders that stand in the way of true reconciliation in a divided society such as Northern Ireland. Even though this is aimed to be done in the case of North and West Belfast, future research is needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the actual effects of the undertaken methods to de- and/or reconstruct interface barrier on promoting reconciliation in order to truly contribute to academic understandings of deconstructing physical lines of demarcation.

Recommendations and limitations

Even though it might be impossible and futile to create a single approach towards removing interface barriers due to their differing nature and changeable contexts in which they are situated, some recommendations can be made that might be beneficial to how this process takes place on the ground. First of all, it is important to create a clear definitional framework on relevant concepts such as 'interface barrier', 'removal' and 'consent' as without it this process becomes an almost impossible task to carry out, especially from a policy perspective.[177] Moreover, normal regulations that are in place to deal with issues on interface barriers can seriously hamper the process of transforming interface barriers and/or its wider surroundings. This because these regulations are not capable to immediately facilitate a proposed change when a willingness for it arises in interface communities. As a result, this can lead to the loss

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[176] Interview Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015.
[177] Interviews Dr Jonny Byrne – 30-04-2015, Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015.

of momentum as was the case with the Newington Street security barrier described above. It is therefore argued by some that, as these barriers were constructed under extraordinary circumstances, it is also necessary to use extraordinary measures to deconstruct them.[178] Additionally, in order for Belfast to truly move from a divided past to a shared future, it might be crucial to look into the critique provided by Mark Hackett from the Forum for Alternative Belfast. Instead of interfaces along sectarian fault lines, he considers social class divisions to create more relevant patterns of segregation in the city today and therefore stresses that more focus needs to be put on how to achieve broader spatial reconciliation.[179]

On a more theoretical note, the methodology already indicated that it was not managed to reach local residents of interface areas during the data collection phase who were not involved in community work, which is a limitation of this research. Much of the empirical data on the perceptions and experiences of residents in the inner city working class areas of North and West Belfast towards sectarianism, segregation and interface barriers was therefore based on indirect sources, such as secondary (quantitative) research and the local bodies and researchers working on these issues with local communities. Even though these informants still had an extensive knowledge about the situation on the ground through their work or due to the fact that they lived or had lived in areas where interface barriers are prominently present, their position as somewhat outside the local setting might have caused for a certain bias in the presented findings. Due to their work on community relations, reconciliation and addressing interface barriers, their perceptions on and experiences with the social phenomena researched here might differ from those people living in interface areas. So, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding on how social and spatial bordering processes take place on the ground and how people designate particular spaces in one's mind along sectarian fault lines, further qualitative research is required where local residents are included. Moreover, this perspective of local residents could also contribute to understandings on how to overcome or unmake (physically defined) geographical borders and strong identity boundaries that underpin sectarian division.

Furthermore, Belfast is not the only place in Northern Ireland with interface barriers or strong patterns of segregation, which the 'Beyond Belfast' report (Bell et al. 2010) shows, even though most of the existing (academic) literature has focused hereon. Since context can play a significant role on how borders are perceived and experienced, research outside of Belfast on these subjects might add new insights into the relationship between geographical and

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[178] Interviews Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Rab McCallum (NBIN) – 30-03-2015.
[179] Interview Mark Hackett (FAB) – 12-05-2015.

anthropological understandings of borders and in this way contribute to discussions on how to promote reconciliation throughout Northern Ireland.

Towards a shared future

Despite the continuing presence of interface barriers in Belfast today which perpetuate social division and stand in the way of reconciliation, it needs to be underscored that reconciliation is a long-term relationship-building process (Bloomfield 2006:8). Despite occasional setbacks in this process such as the flag dispute of 2012 and ongoing contentious events such as parades, it is believed that Northern Ireland has made serious progress since the official end of the Troubles in 1998.[180] This is also underpinned by the fact that over the last couple of years the language around interface barriers has changed significantly. Whereas people would not have spoken about interface barriers at all five years ago out of fear of what could happen, there is now a serious conversation taking place about their removal which is accompanied by a governmental commitment and a general willingness towards this change. People are thus more open to the conversation today, which is perceived as progress.[181] Moreover, even though not all informants could envision a future where all interface barriers would be removed (especially not by 2023), a positive outlook for the future prevailed.[182]

"Reality can be beaten with enough imagination." – Mark Twain (1835-1910)

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[180] Interviews Seamus Corr (BMSSP) – 22-04-2015, Dympna McGlade (CRC) – 14-05-2015, Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Ciáran Shannon (DCP) – 06-05-2015.
[181] Interviews Dr Cathy Gormley-Heenan – 28-04-2015, Joe O'Donnell (BIP) – 26-03-2015.
[182] Interviews Seamus Corr (BMSSP) – 22-04-2015, Dympna McGlade (CRC) – 14-05-2015.

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Appendix I: Research questions

Puzzle statement:

How are the interrelated bordering processes of social identity boundaries and physically defined geographical borders addressed in reconciliation processes in post-peace agreement North and West Belfast, Northern Ireland?

Sub-questions:

1. How have sectarian social identities and interface barriers been historically constructed? – *Socio-historical context*

a. How has the sectarian divide between the two majority communities been socially and historically constructed?

b. How have processes of border demarcation and border management in the case of interface barriers taken place since the beginning of The Troubles?

    I. What is an interface barrier?

    II. Why and when were interface barriers set up?

    III. What functions do interface barriers serve? Has this changed over time?

    IV. Who manages interface barriers?

2. How are spatial borders and social identity boundaries perceived to be interrelated in contemporary post-peace agreement North and West Belfast, Northern Ireland, according to local bodies working with interface communities and physical barriers?
– *Perspective local bodies on current situation*

a. How are social sectarian boundaries defined in contemporary Belfast?

    I. Which *membership rules* that differentiate between people of the two sectarian communities are identified in contemporary Belfast?

    II. Which set(s) of characteristics are believed to define the *content* of the two sectarian communities in contemporary Belfast and how are these *socially valuated* in relation to the "other"?

b. What meanings, or *spatial imaginaries*, are assigned to the interface barriers by residents from both communities along the sectarian divide in North (and West) Belfast according to local organisations and researchers?

c. What is the perceived level of congruency between social identity boundaries and spatial demarcation by interface barriers in contemporary Belfast according to local bodies working with interface barriers and communities?

d. If so, in what ways are interface barriers perceived as part of the social identity of North (and West) Belfast residents on both sides of the sectarian divide?

e. If so, how are spaces/territories perceived to be part of the identity of both sectarian communities in North and West Belfast? (*Territorial identity*)

f. How do interface barriers affect the *imaginative geography* of North (and West) Belfast residents on both sides of the sectarian divide?

3. How does the planned and actual opening up of interface barriers affect social identity boundaries between the two sectarian communities in North and West Belfast?

– Reconciliation (opening up and/or softening of social boundaries and spatial/physical borders)

a. How do existing interface barriers affect inter-group relations, attitudes and behaviour according to different bodies working (indirectly) with both majority communities?

b. What does the government aim to accomplish with their plan to remove all interface barriers by 2023? And how has this plan been perceived by different bodies working (indirectly) with both majority communities and how are residents believed to receive these plans according to these bodies?

c. How has the process of recently opening up or softening of interface barriers in North and West Belfast developed?

d. How have social and spatial boundaries been affected by the opening up of interface boundaries in North and West Belfast according to local bodies working on the ground with interface barriers and communities?

    I. Do residents from both sides of the sectarian divide start crossing spatial boundaries (*geographical mobility*)?

    II. What is the perceived effect of this on intergroup relations according to (community) organisations and researchers involved in this process? If so, how has it stimulated processes of *identity negotiation*?

Appendix II: Overview bodies, organisations and institutions

- **174 Trust**

  The 174 Trust is a non-denominational Christian organisation that facilitates a variety of essential community projects in North Belfast. Located in the New Lodge community, the Trust offers opportunities and assistance to people of all ages. The 174 Trust is committed to a process of community development based on building relationships with local people, working together to identify and meet local needs.

  Source: http://www.thenewlodge.com/communityprojects/174trust.html, last updated on: 22-06-2015, viewed on: 22-06-2015.

  Informant: Rev. Bill Shaw - Director

- **Belfast Interface Project (BIP)**

  Belfast Interface Project is a membership organisation developing creative approaches to the regeneration of Belfast's interface or 'peaceline' areas.

  Source: http://www.belfastinterfaceproject.org/, last updated on: 22-06-2015, viewed on: 22-06-2015.

  Informant: Joe O'Donnell – Strategic Director

- **Community Relations Council (CRC)**

  Non-governmental public body. The Community Relations Council was formed in January 1990 as an independent company and registered charity. It originated in 1986 as a proposal of a research report commissioned by the NI Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights. The Community Relations Council was set up to promote better community relations between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and, equally, to promote recognition of cultural diversity.

  Source: http://www.community-relations.org.uk/about-us/, last updated on: 22-06-2015, viewed on: 22-06-2015.

  Informant: Dympna McGlade – Policy Director

- **Institute for Conflict Research (ICR)**

  The Institute for Conflict Research is an independent research organisation, based in Belfast, which specialises in working on issues related to conflict, human rights, social transformation and social justice.

  Source: http://conflictresearch.org.uk/, last updated on: 22-06-2015, viewed on: 22-06-2015.

  Informant: Neil Jarman – Director

- **Intercomm**

  Intercomm was founded as a direct response to grassroots community concerns about inter-community conflict and social deprivation. The core aim of Intercomm is to forge fruitful links between Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Unionist community groups through long term strategic development work, community inspired peace building initiatives, youth programmes and job creation programmes.

  Source: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Intercomm/101017939947986?sk=info&tab=overview, last updated on: 18-07-2015, viewed on: 18-07-2015.

  Informants: Gordon Walker

- **International Fund for Ireland (IFI)**
  The International Fund for Ireland is an independent international organisation which was established by the British and Irish Governments in 1986. In January 2012 the Fund announced financial assistance to deliver a range of confidence and relationship building measures within and between communities to create the conditions whereby residents would feel safe to commence discussions about the removal of Peace Walls. The Peace Walls Programme aims to deliver a coordinated and collaborative approach to dealing with the multitude of issues associated with the removal of Peace Walls. The programme is unique in that it co-ordinates proactive collaboration between communities, statutory agencies and funders. Eight different organisations are involved.

  Sources: http://www.internationalfundforireland.com/, last updated on: 22-06-2015, viewed on: 22-06-2015; http://www.internationalfundforireland.com/peace-walls-programme/102-what-we-do/peace-walls-programme-case-study/556-peace-walls-programme21, last updated on: 22-06-2015, viewed on: 22-06-2015.
  Informant: Brian Davidson

Organisations working in partnership with the IFI's Peace Walls Programme

- **Black Mountain Shared Space Project (BMSSP)**
  Black Mountain Shared Space Project works to improve both inter and intra-community relations in the Upper Springfield Road interface area. Works in partnership with the IFI's Peace Walls Programme.

  Source: https://www.facebook.com/blackmountainsharedspace/info?tab=page_info, last updated on: 22-06-2015, viewed on: 22-06-2015.
  Informant: Seamus Corr - Manager

- **Duncairn Community Partnership (DCP)**
  DCP is a partnership of seven community-based organisations in North Belfast funded through the International Fund for Irelands Peace walls Programme. The focus of the Duncairn Community Partnership Project is to build relationships and trust with a view to eventually reducing or restructuring a number of physical barriers in the area.

  Sources: https://www.linkedin.com/pub/ciaran-shannon/88/a74/1a5, viewed on 22-06-2015; http://www.internationalfundforireland.com/peace-walls-programme/556-peace-walls-programme, last updated on: 22-06-2015, viewed on: 22-06-2015.
  Informant: Ciáran Shannon – Manager of DCP and Head of Policy and Good Relations of Groundwork Northern Ireland.

- **North Belfast Interface Network (NBIN)**
  North Belfast Interface Network was set up by community groups in North Belfast and acts as a community resource to address community relations and interface issues. It was formed in 2002 and has been particularly active in reducing interface conflict. It primary focus is now on developing relations and trust between the two communities and helps create the conditions for the regeneration of interface communities.

  Source: http://www.ccrf.org.uk/CCRF/Good_Relations.html, last updated on: 01-06-2011, viewed on: 22-06-2015.
  Informant: Rab McCallum – Co-ordinator and involved with TASCIT under the IFI's peace walls programme

- **Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG)**
  Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG) is an award winning community development organisation based on the Suffolk Lenadoon interface in outer West Belfast. Regeneration and peace building are the cornerstones of what SLIG does. Works in partnership with the IFI's Peace Walls Programme.

  Source: http://www.slig.co.uk/, last updated on: 22-06-2015, viewed on: 22-06-2015.
  Informant: Suzanne Lavery – Peace Walls Programme Officer