

Defying State Amnesia and Memory Wars: Non-Sectarian Memory Activism in Beirut and Belfast City Centres

Abstract

In divided societies that endure intrastate violence, ethnonational groups harness memory to support claims for territorial sovereignty and victimhood. Yet, in peace processes, rather than seek to deal with the legacy of the past, the state often enacts a culture of amnesia to support the logic of political transition, while at the communal level the rival ethnic groups proliferate commemorative practices as part of memory wars. These twin forces – amnesia and ethnicized memory – are also often embedded into postconflict urban reconstruction, particularly the city centres of the municipal capitals. In this paper, I explore how non-sectarian movements imprint memory into city centre space to challenge the paradoxical forces of forgetting and ethnic communal remembrance. Towards this, I explore the memorywork of non-sectarian groups whose politics transcend established ethnic cleavages, such as trade unionists, movements resisting the privatization of public space and activists mobilizing to protect public services. In this paper I draw on a range of theoretical frameworks, including reflective nostalgia and ghosts and hauntings. Using fieldwork data, I look at non-sectarian memorywork in Beirut and Belfast city centres. These city centres generate contrasting uses and meanings for the local population.

Introduction

While ethnonational conflict cannot simply be attributed to ancient hatreds, ethnic groups construct memory to advance divisive contemporary political projects. Nora's (1989) *lieu de mémoire* – memory space – is violently apposite to intrastate conflict where contested claims to territorial sovereignty are supported by remembrance practices. Ethnonationalists perform memory to invoke *prior tempore, potior iure* – the claim that they are the true tenants of the sacred homeland. They mark public space to commemorate historical traumatic events that constantly remind members to remain vigilant of their victimhood status and that violent defence of the ethnic community remains always necessary. Given this nexus between remembrance, space and conflict in divided societies, policymakers and scholars stress the need for peacebuilding to address memory. As McDowell and Braniff (2014, p.1) argue, 'in the context of conflict resolution, remembrance is a crucial element of the healing process'.

Despite the significance of space and memory to reconciliation, its potential is frustrated in the postconflict period. At the level of the state, a policy of forgetting is commonly imposed as part of the logic of political transition, while ethnicized memory wars proliferate at the community scale. In this paper I take an alternative perspective by analysing how marginalized groups in divided societies imprint memory into public space to challenge the paradoxical forces of amnesia and ethnic communal remembrance. Towards this, I explore the memorywork of non-sectarian groups whose politics and membership cross-established ethnic cleavages. These groups range from trade unionists, movements resisting the privatization of public space, and activists mobilizing to protect public services.

I argue that these non-sectarian movements use memory to advance peacebuilding in complex ways that are not always classified as traditional forms of conflict resolution. They engage in activities, for instance, to promote equality for women, to demand better terms for workers, for better public services, and to resist private interests gentrifying urban spaces. In calling for these changes, these movements strive to disrupt the grammar that supports sectarianism in the divided society (Nagle, 2016a).

The construction and performance of memory is fundamental to the politics of these groups. These movements harness the power of memory, haunting, ghosts and history to foster peacebuilding and to demand access to public services and rights in the present. On the one hand, these movements contest amnesiac narratives promoted by state actors and their neoliberal partners which obscure the present reality of increasing sectarian and socioeconomic inequality. On the other hand, they challenge communal remembrance narratives that frame the divided society as places replete with unchanging narratives of ethnic separation. These non-sectarian movements do this by revealing hidden, marginalized and complex histories of momentary and sustained peaceful interaction and solidarity between groups. Their activism reveals alternative pasts and they open up the possibility for future forms of progressive political community. These movements invest key public spaces and sites with particular memories.

I draw on a range of theoretical frameworks to examine non-sectarian memory and space. To help distinguish non-sectarian memory from ethnicized memory and amnesia I apply Svetlana Boym's (2001) helpful distinction between *restorative* and *reflective* nostalgia, which are not absolute types, but rather tendencies of giving meaning to a longing for the past. In addition, I turn to the literature on ghosts and

haunting (Edensor, 2005; Gordon, 1997; Vanolo, 2017), memories that expose ‘what’s been suppressed or concealed is very much alive and present, messing ... with those always incomplete forms of ... repression ceaselessly directed towards us’ (Gordon, 1997, p.2).

In this paper I examine non-sectarian memory in divided cities that have experienced protracted ethnic/ethnonational violence. More specifically, I look at non-sectarian memorywork in the city centre spaces of these divided cities. These city centres contain the main political, economic and cultural institutions of the state. These spaces ‘are not just reflections or traces of political power: they are often instruments and sources of political power’ (Friedland & Hecht, 1998, p.147). For this reason, they are ‘battlegrounds of national memory’ (Nagel, 2002) as contending ethnonational groups and political elites compete to control these spaces. At the same time, city centres are civic, cosmopolitan spaces where individuals can coalesce to constitute new forms of community that transcend ethnic cleavages.

Two city centres – Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland, and Beirut, the capital of Lebanon – provide important case studies for comparative research to illuminate these dynamics. While these two spaces endured ‘ethnic’ violence, the two city centres symbolize contrasting collective memories for its inhabitants. Beirut’s city centre – known as the ‘bourj’ – is fondly remembered as the ‘heart of Beirut’ (Khalaf, 2006), a place that functioned prior to the civil war as a rare shared civic space in a segregated city. The rival ethnonational groups, alternatively, often remember Belfast city centre as a space historically subject to ethnicized contestation (Nagle, 2009a). Both city centres have undergone forms of regeneration and gentrification as part of their respective peace processes with urban destruction transformed into the new chic. In Beirut, the effect of this process is an amnesiac

space that not only effaces all reference to the civil war but also obscures the city centre's vital role as a shared space. In Belfast, the regeneration of the city centre reflects the 'accommodationist' logic of the peace process – it has become a 'shared space' which is supposed to peacefully accommodate both ethnonational groups' identities. In exploring non-sectarian memories, I look at how Lebanese movements challenge the dangerous process of amnesia. In Northern Ireland, I examine the use of memory by non-sectarian movements to provide progressive alternatives to ethnic accommodationism and forgetting.

This article features extensive ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Belfast and Beirut. Belfast and Beirut provide important case-studies for comparative research on violently divided cities. Multiple, interlocking forms of sectarian division characterize these cities: the respective groups often possess distinct media outlets, schools and political parties to ensure that elections resemble *de facto* ethnic censuses. This division is reinforced by residential segregation so that levels of intergroup distrust are strong. Yet, the divided city does not completely foreclose non-ethnic forms of identity and political mobilization. In these places there is also a significant section of the population defying easy assimilation into homogeneous ethnic categories. While the divided society is a generator of conflict, it is also a dynamic environment where hostile ethnic identities and politics are challenged and even transformed.

The movements examined in this paper were selected since they not only self-identify as non-sectarian; they also represent a spectrum of non-ethnic issues, ranging from labour movements, activists concerned with protecting city spaces from postwar privatization, and movements demanding better public services. Although these movements do not necessarily align on any particular ideology, in their respective

cities they do often form networks and alliances given their shared commitment to providing pluralistic and progressive forms of mobilization that eschew and contest antagonistic sectarian identity politics. Thus, struggles for decent public goods and spaces, against corruption also represent battle lines against the hegemony of sectarianism.

In Beirut and Belfast I conducted ethnographic research with a range of non-sectarian movements: LGBT, feminist, environmentalist movements and campaigners protecting public spaces, buildings and goods. My research with movements in these two cities encompassed interviews with activists, participant observation at events and the collection of materials, pamphlets and public policy documents. Non-sectarian activists, especially individuals seen to transgress communal boundaries, can encounter threats from within and outside of their perceived ethnic group and may even be labelled as communal 'traitors'. My research, accordingly, required caution when approaching and interviewing non-sectarian activists and, for this reason, activists featured in this article remain anonymous.

Belfast research has been on-going since 2007 and includes interviews (n=30). For Lebanon, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted during five distinct fieldwork phases (September 2012, July 2014, June 2015, January 2016, October 2017), each of which lasted from one week to a month and included 40 interviews with activists. Data capture and analysis used a constructivist epistemology and an interpretive framework. In the constructivist epistemology, the object of qualitative research is to understand that knowledge is gained through the social constructions of the individuals we research. The interpretative framework does not outline testable hypotheses, but instead focuses on understanding the social context in which individuals make sense of their subjective reality and attach meaning to it.

Space, Memory, Conflict and Peace

Territory and space in divided societies derive paramount importance for ethnonationalist groups (Gaffikin, Mceldowney, & Sterrett, 2010). Groups construct ethnic identities by endowing place with ‘symbolic properties [that] contribute to a sense of ownership among its members’ (McDowell, Braniff, & Hughes, 2017, p.194). Ethnonationalist groups’ ‘willingness to fight for territory’, therefore, is less to do with the material value of the land than with the ‘symbolic role it plays in constituting people's identities and providing a sense of security and belonging’ (Gebrewold, 2009, p.16).

The performance of memory is vital to the project of cultivating an emotive attachment to a specific territory among group members. As Hoelscher and Alderman note (2004, p.347), ‘the preservation of recollections rests on their anchorage in space’. Memory is attached to spaces that are both concrete – such as memorials and buildings – and non-concrete and performative – such as parades and rituals. It is in this way that ‘memory crystallizes and secretes itself’ (Nora, 1989, p.7). In divided societies there is an over-production of ‘place memory’, in which groups construct memory in and through space to ensure the generation of inter and intracommunal violent conflict. Groups ethnicize urban space: symbolic devices like murals, flags, and commemorative street parades are markers of ethnonational identities and territorial belonging. These spaces allow groups to ‘assert control over geographic areas and support ideas of enclosed or sealed places’ (Graham and Nash, 2006, p.258), which have the correlative effect of restricting alternative ways of being.

Peacebuilding, therefore, requires a social imaginaire that connects this relationship intertwining space with memory (Megoran, 2011). In regards to space,

the political economy of postwar urban reconstruction is imbued by elites with the symbolism of rebuilding peace and the healing of ‘fissured social tensions on a material environment’ (Switzer & McDowell, 2009, p.341). Yet, while the formal reconstruction process rebuilds destroyed cityscapes, these spaces are programmed more to induce political forgetting than remembrance as an essential feature of reconciliation. A central reason for this is the character of urban reconstruction in postconflict divided city centres. The rebuilding process reproduces urban cloning, an identikit regeneration model used in many postindustrial cities around the world regardless of whether ethnic conflict has occurred. This model of reconstructing city centres is designed to expedite foreign direct investment, gentrification and privatization or – for more critical voices – a mode of neoliberal expropriation which masks continuing public disinvestment and economic inequality (Vanolo, 2017).

As part of the construction of the ‘entrepreneurial city’, city centres are subjected to branding strategies geared at ameliorating the city’s tarnished image, which will supposedly improve the municipality’s position in the market. While the branding process is designed to stimulate inward investment and tourism, it also derives a wider purpose of ‘civic boosterism’: fostering strong civic identities, loyalties and social cohesion among the city’s inhabitants. The composition of elite driven branding strategies render a schematized, labelled, univocal and linear narrative of the city centre which tames and romanticizes the disorderliness of the lived city (Till, 2012, p.5). Rebranded cities are thus labelled, for example, the ‘city of love’ or the ‘innovative city’ (Vanolo, 2017).

Such rebranding, while it may promote nostalgic visions of local heritage and identity, also conceals and forgets more problematic histories of violence and inequality. This dynamic of forgetting is acutely embedded into the branding

narratives of the divided city during the peace process. In rebranding the rebuilt city centre as a 'shared city' that looks towards the future rather than the past to foster reconciliation, the recent history of ethnic violence and conflict is ignored, which has the correlative effect of hindering peacebuilding. In Foote's (1997) schemata of how societies mark sites that have experienced tragedy, rather than deploy 'sanctification' – the process of making a place sacred through the construction of durable commemorative markers – the postconflict reconstructed city centre more typically entails 'obliteration' – the active effacement of the tragedy. Whereas sanctification is spurred by the wish to remember an event, obliteration stems from the desire to forget. In divided societies, the stimulus for amnesia broadly coincides with the interests of political and economic elites. For political elites, the material form of amnesia entrenched in postwar urban reconstruction intersects with their hope that society will forget the leading role that these elites played in perpetuating violence and instead see them as drivers of economic progress and security. The process of amnesia may also reflect a lack of consensus among the main groups regarding the memory of the ethnic conflict, which is seen as too divisive to broach.

Yet, attempts to write amnesia into the rebranded city centre are never as complete as its architects may hope. Groups may seek to mark these spaces with ethnicized commemorative parades. Individual citizens, furthermore, carry with them cognitive memory maps of the conflict that cannot simply be elided by the reconstruction process (Switzer & McDowell, 2009). In addition, old buildings, which developers have not been able to eradicate, remain as haunted ruins and painful reminders of the violence that occurred in these sites.

A number of scholars have summoned up the figure of the ghost and 'hauntology' as a way of paradoxically illuminating the role of absences and invisible

presences in the political space, particularly in redeveloped cities (Edensor, 2005; Gordon, 1997; Vanolo, 2017). Ghosts represent complex forms of memory that resist blank slate ideologies and modes of political amnesia imposed by planners. Ghosts are also figures – individuals and groups – that are not supposed to be visible in particular spaces. They have supposedly been socially cleansed from the city centre. Since they expose hidden narratives and injustices, ghosts can also point the way to alternative political projects.

Ghosts and haunted places contain a number of characteristics that problematize and contradict the rebranding narratives of city centres in divided cities. Ghosts interrupt the linear flow of history inscribed in branding exercises. Ghosts belong to a past which is absent in the present, but they also manifest their presence in the here-and-now. By simultaneously materializing and vanishing, ghosts subvert the flow of time. Since ghosts belong to specific locations, they stimulate multiple and complex emotions in those who encounter them. They are subjective and relational entities: different subjects may approach and may have very different ideas and understandings of ghosts. Ghosts, thus, destabilize conventional dichotomies opposing the living and the dead, the material and the immaterial, the real and the unreal (Vanolo, 2017).

Beirut City Centre: The Construction of Nostalgia and Amnesia in the Bourj

Starting in 1975 and ending in 1990, the Lebanese civil war left 170,000 dead (Trablousi, 2007). Although the civil war is simplistically framed as religious – between Christian and Muslim sects – it was complex and involved a succession of conflicts and interventions (Picard, 2002). The war involved ‘mass displacement, wide-scale killing, rape, torture, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearances’

(International Centre for Transitional Justice, 2014, p.1). The warlords tried to destroy 'all memories of coexistence and common interests between the Lebanese'

(Traboulsi, 2007, p.38) as 'strategies of accommodation and avoidance were replaced by strategies of confrontation and radicalization' (Picard, 2002, p.153).

Rather than engender reconciliation, the postwar era has seen the entrenchment of sectarianism in political and social life. In particular, the deployment of an ethnic quota system for political positions and public jobs perpetuate sectarianism as the foundation of society. Welfare services – especially healthcare and education – are placed under the control of many sectarian parties which they use to maintain clientelistic relationships with communal members. Thus, the sectarian system, incentivizes 'sectarian identities and loyalties at the expense of trans-sectarian national ones' (Salloukh et al., 2015, p.14). At the same time, since the end of the war various 'sectarian militias reorganized and rearmed themselves, and urban space was physically and symbolically divided into exclusive sectarian ghettos' (Salloukh et al., 2015, p.29). For example, the proportion of Muslims living in East Beirut declined from 40 per cent to 5 per cent by the late 1980s (Khalaf, 2012, p.85).

During the civil war, the rival militias vied to control the city centre district, which came to represent that 'Green Line' – a buffer zone – separating Christian and Muslim Beirut. Despite the violence in the city centre, in Beirut's collective memory the city centre represented the 'bourj' ('the district'). Before the civil war the city centre 'served as a vibrant and cosmopolitan melting pot of diverse groups and socio-cultural transformations' (Khalaf, 2012, p.90). In a state historically fragmented by sectarianism, the city centre symbolised a public sphere marked by pluralism and tolerance; it is remembered for its openness and fluidity and a capacity to accommodate multiple identities. As Makarem (2010) notes, the city centre could do

this because of its messiness – it hosted official state and municipal bureaucracies, cafes, popular markets and theatres, as well less reputable venues such as bars and gambling houses. As a civil society activist from a non-sectarian group remembered:

The city centre was a place where you could not go to and stay entrenched in your provincial identity. It was a place where people needed to adjust to the fact that they are there with others who don't have the same colloquial perspective, who don't have the same belief, but they needed to interact with (interview, June 2015).

For many Beirutis the postwar rebuilding of the city centre needed to help heal the wounds of the war (Khalaf, 2006). The rebuilding of Beirut city was central to peacebuilding as it had the potential to foster a rare shared public sphere in a society in which public and urban space is increasingly sectarianized or privatized. As Khalaf (2006, p.1) argues, 'the heart of the city was poised to re-invent itself as an open space in which diverse groups can celebrate their differences without indifference to each other'. This hope was frustrated: the postwar reconstruction of the city centre rendered the space amnesiac, with no reference to the history of sectarian violence, and exclusivist by *de facto* limiting public access. The rebuilding of Beirut's city centre is best described as 'the forgetful landscape', a 'concerted effort to bury and to deny the country's more recent past' (Nagel, 2002, p.724).

The *exclusivist* and *amnesiac* reconstructed city centre is fundamentally entwined with the logic of the peace process. The signature of the 1989 peace agreement – 'no victor, no vanquished' – stated that no group could dominant the others (Nagle, 2016b). To create the new postwar order, 'a strategy of oblivion was imposed in order to let the social system in place prevail' (Haugbolle, 2010, p.70). In 1991 the warlords passed amnesty Law 84, which selectively exonerated 'political

crimes' committed during the civil war (Picard, 2002, p.165). The amnesty allowed a number of warlords to become political leaders without fear of being prosecuted for war crimes. As one social movement activist for dealing with the past explained:

When you know very well that all of the big projects undertaken in this country were just strengthening the rule of those former warlords who whitewashed their records thanks to Taef. You cannot tell me that with these people who promoted the religion of amnesia you can really build peace? (Personal communication, June 2015)

The impulse for 'collective amnesia' (Khalaf, 2012, p.78) became sewn into the fabric of the reconstruction of Beirut city centre. Law 117 deliberately passed to enable reconstruction initiated the regeneration of Beirut city centre in 1991. Under Law 117 a real estate company, Solidere – owned by the then Lebanese Prime Minister – was granted special powers of compulsory purchase and regulatory authority by the government to redevelop what it termed 'Beirut Central District' in the name of public interest. Property rights held by more than 120,000 in the area were transferred to Solidere (Leenders, 2012, p.183). Solidere have redeveloped 200 hectares of land valued at nearly one quarter of Lebanon's GDP (Solidere 2011, p.7).

The regeneration of the city centre initially replaced the historical market area with a \$300 million shopping mall, followed by banking area and then encompassed the waterfront, which contains many affluent gated residential communities. Solidere presented the reconstructed city centre as a symbol of postwar Lebanon's aspiration to overcome its divisions and to rebuild a peaceful state (Makdisi, 1997). Solidere saw its mission as 'a therapeutic role by founding the city on a sort of salvation-like amnesia that would protect it from the old ghosts which caused its destruction' (Haugbolle, 2010, p.86). According to its masterplan, 'Solidere is vested with a ...

historical mission: restoring life to this vital part of the country, an important political and symbolic dimension' that sustains national reconciliation and peacebuilding (Solidere, 2015).

While Approximately 30% of buildings in the historic downtown area were destroyed in the civil war, Solidere demolished 80% of those that survived. Solidere operated a 'tabula rasa' approach to the district that had the correlative effect of erasing what was considered as troubling memories of the city's recent violent past. As noted by Makarem (2012), the reconstructed city centre is 'void of any war-memorials, war-museums or adequate public spaces for national mourning and remembrance'.

For critics, the amnesiac city centre derives a 'detrimental impact on reconciliation and reintegration' (Makarem, 2012), since it reinforces the logic of political forgetting about the civil war. As one social movement activist noted: 'the downtown is the core of the reconstruction ideology – that we don't need to look at the past. Yes, it is part of the amnesia'. The culture of silence, therefore, risks that violence is 'more likely to be repeated' (Khalaf, 2012, p.77). The reconstruction of the city centre further obscures and even reinforces the contemporary process of postwar ethnic segmentation and territorialisation of the city by constricting public space that could be used as vital meeting point for citizens to meet and interact.

Nostalgia, haunted ruins and ghosts

In a provocative thesis, Svetlana Boym (2001) distinguishes between two types of nostalgia: *restorative* and *reflective*. *Restorative* nostalgia signifies a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment and thus emphasizes *nostos* and the absolute truth. Such memory focuses on fixity, homogeneity and does not broach

ambiguity and ambivalence. *Reflective* nostalgia, alternatively, ‘dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity’ (Boym, 2011, p.14). *Reflective nostalgia* encourages fluidity, the imperfect process of remembrance, and it lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history.

Restorative nostalgia captures the logic and affect of the regenerated city centre. Solidere’s restorative nostalgia, however, does not strive to restore the inclusive bourj; instead, its intention was to re-create a fantasized depiction of a pre-war past, ‘to the happy Lebanon of the “good old days”’ (Makdisi, 1997, p.687). Solidere’s slogan: Beirut – ‘An Ancient City for the Future’ – sought to ‘create a new collective memory’ (Nagel, 2002, p.717) for the nation by paradoxically looking back to Beirut’s mythical heritage as a peaceful and affluent trading centre in the Middle East. Yet, rather than this restorative nostalgia re-establishing the ‘bourj’, it acted to conceal it. As such, the reconstruction process represented ‘a concerted effort to wipe clean the surface of central Beirut; to purify it of all historical associations in the form of its buildings; to render it pure space, pure commodity, pure real estate’ (Makdisi, 1997, p.692). While the bourj is remembered as an ‘open space in which diverse groups can celebrate their differences without indifference to each other’ (Khalaf, 2006, p.1), the effect of the nostalgic revamp was to sanitize the space. Rather than the ‘gathering place of all Beirutis from all backgrounds, the city centre is now an exclusive space for “appropriate” people only’ (Makarem, 2012). At the same time, the reconstruction sought to forget and replace the troubling memories of the civil war with ‘safe’ memories that supposedly antedate conflict.

The logic of restorative nostalgia does not stand uncontested. Non-sectarian social movements generate alternative forms of memorywork that counter exclusion

and amnesia. These movements articulate forms of reflective nostalgia and haunting to not only make visible what has been obscured through the reconstruction process, but to also irradiate radical alternatives for understanding and using the city (Nagle, 2017). To further elaborate on reflective nostalgia, this mode of memory construction refuses to conform to singular narratives, but actively explores multiple and disordered ways of inhabiting places. Instead of returning to an imagined stasis and fixed point in time, reflective nostalgia indicates flexibility, imperfect memories and a willingness to cohabit with ghosts and haunted ruins.

An important example of a non-sectarian social movement that deploys reflective nostalgia and ghosts are activists that campaign to limit the privatization of public space and the expropriation of historic buildings in the city centre. There stand a number of historic buildings in the city centre which hosted violence during the civil war and which Solidere have been unable to gain property rights over. Notable is the 26-floor Holiday Inn which was a major battleground for militias during the conflict and which now symbolizes ‘a de facto monument to destruction in a country whose leaders strive to forget the Civil War’ (Stoughton, 2014). These haunted buildings loom as anomalous memories within the cult of amnesia and nostalgia that dominates the reconstructed city centre and their mere existence powerfully disavows the wish of elites to administer forgetting.

A particularly important haunted ruin is the Yellow House in Beirut city centre. The building’s location at the interface between west and east Beirut made it a focal point for snipers during the war. Riddled by bullet holes, in the 1990s property developers planned to demolish the building. After a long campaign, in 2003 activists successfully forced the municipal authorities to requisition the building to stop it from falling into the hands of developers.

Social movement activists seeking to protect the city's architectural heritage saved the house, which they plan to use as a 'Museum of Memory' for the city. The Yellow House has become a major site of memory for non-sectarian social movement actors demanding that the state begins a process of dealing with the legacy of the civil war. For activists, the house, which was completed in 1932, represents the material evocation of Beirut's recent history. While the building invokes an *avant-garde* fusion of architectural styles indicative of the city's rich multicultural influences, the innovative design of the building allowed for various meanings and uses. In its original design, the building was constructed to curve around a corner of a main city centre junction. All of the building's rooms look out across the city to give the viewer different vantage points. The building has a main cleavage that separates it into two wings, one looking at the Christian east of the city and the other peering at the Muslim west. The building's panoramic city views, however, made it ideal for snipers during the civil war. A leading activist in the campaign to preserve the house explained:

The building was a killing machine. The snipers used the transparency of the place, you could see into the street without drilling a hole in the wall ... How brilliant that sniper was and how brilliant that architect was and what this overlap meant in a city seemed so contradictory. A building that was originally designed to interact with the city – to open up the city – and then the ingenuity of a sniper who used exactly that visual access to kill people in the city, to cut the city in two, and instead of making people interact with the city, it was used for killing. It was the same building but used for two different things (interview, June 2015).

The building's architectural cleavage – unified by an arched balcony – symbolized an even deeper level of meaning for the city's contemporary history: the reproduction of

generational conflictual divisions and the citizenry's rather hypocritical desire for unity. An activist explained:

When you see the building from the outside, you see one building very well connected, but once you look at it from the inside you see that it has a very sharp cleavage, but at the same time, it's so flimsy. It's like the city that was always cut in two – be it the Christian East and Muslim West during the civil war, be it the people who are for or against reconstruction – it reflects these continuous divisions. But when you hear these factions, they always say they love each other, they want Lebanon to be one (interview, June 2015).

The architecture of building, its polysemic meanings and varied usages offered a dramatic setting for a museum of Beirut's divisive history. The museum's potential to support a broader project of peacebuilding is outlined in a pamphlet created by activists:

The acknowledgement of the whole past needs to be a principle entrenched within the collective consciousness of all communities. Making this reconciliation of the past visible, accessible and shared contributes to the process of social reconciliation (Beit Beirut, nd).

For one activist, the museum's proposed role in reconciliation is not only 'a monument to the civil war; it's not a place with a timeline where you say this happened or that happened, because as you know until today you don't have any consensus of what happened'. Instead:

This place has a healing property because it is a beautiful building that has been destroyed. It is an ingenious building that has been abused and you can see how something really important becomes used or abused for no reason. When you are there you are just forced to question the

fact of why you go through a war; just starting the debate is enough. Until today we have many initiatives to examine the civil war but they are very limited and on a small scale and have never happened on a national scale ... We have fought to preserve the memory of the war (interview, June 2015).

Boym (2001, p.61) writes that 'Reflective nostalgia does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home ... the home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has been just renovated and gentrified beyond recognition'. Reflective nostalgia, rather than articulating an impulse for a lost utopia, explores the runes of the past to explore moments of ambivalence, plurality and complexity in social identity that contradict simplistic, homogenous and singular historical narratives. Reflective nostalgics 'perform a cultural exorcism, to shake up the historical myths revealing the mechanisms of seduction' (Boym 2001, p.72). Thus, in using the Yellow House as a means to interrogate Beirut's recent history, the objective is not to construct an artificial memory of the city as a place that was once peaceful and characterized by uniform interethnic tolerance and harmony. Instead, the Yellow House exposes a memory in which Beirut had the capacity to be both peaceful and conflictual, a city shaped simultaneously by multiple cultural influences and the potential of elites to instrumentalize ethnic identity in the service of sectarian political projects. Moreover, rather than seek a superficial consensus regarding the civil war, the Yellow House expedites a discussion about how dissensus continues to shape postwar politics.

The campaigners to preserve the Yellow House view the ruin as a site that permits potential for city's inhabitants to engage with the multiple factors that contributed to the civil war and, in so doing, to consider possibilities for future political action. The campaign to remember the war is also a fight against the expropriation of the city by private interests and former sectarian warlords.

I was fighting against the people who thought that it's not worth preserving. The struggle to try and get the museum built symbolizes post-war Beirut, the fight against amnesia, the fight to preserve memory against money, the fight for history and identity that we are still facing every single day because we have no government and no hope (interview, June 2015).

Public Space Memories

The process of postwar city centre privatization went beyond the expropriation of buildings to claim public spaces. Nearly Solidere and other developers have privatized 800,000 sq. m of the city centre's natural shoreline in the postwar era. In 2013, developers fenced off a public space along the coastline known as Dalieh. A campaigner to preserve public spaces explained to me that Dalieh attained 'sociocultural significance for the memory of the city and as one of the last natural open spaces that is not restricted' (Interview, January 2016). The shrinkage of city centre public space derives critical importance in a divided city like Beirut which has witnessed the postwar creation of more ethnically homogeneous spaces, which have the effect of maintaining the power of ethnic leaders (Khalaf, 2012).

In November 2013 activists launched the 'Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche'. Activists represented a loose gathering of 'individuals, environmental, cultural and civil groups who share a strong commitment to the preservation of Beirut's shared spaces, ecological and cultural diversity as the pillars of the city's liveability'. Many of the activists involved in the Dalieh campaign were heavily involved in the various campaigns against the privatization and/or destruction of historic buildings in the city centre in the aftermath of the civil war. Notably, the campaign featured a number of activist architects – many of whom had been involved

in the Yellow House – politically concerned with the deleterious effects of the reconstruction process.

In campaigning to preserve Dalieh as a public and shared space, campaigners view this activism contributing to peace since it facilitates not just intergroup contact, but also engagement of individuals across the sectarian divide. A non-sectarian activist explained to me:

The Lebanese need meeting points. Today, what did we do in order to create physical and social meeting points since 1990? Nothing! This kind of savage privatization of the public space is just contributing to keeping the entrenchment and engulfment of each community and each group (interview, June 2015).

Yet, the issue of how exactly shared public space contributes to peacebuilding is indeterminate. Amin (2002) warns us from expecting too much from public spaces – ‘places of transit’ offering little meaningful or durable contact between strangers. While it’s correct not to overstate the ameliorative properties of public space, such spaces do perform a vital function in divided societies. Space that encourages ‘chance encounter, happenstance, the accidental and contingent, and allows for exploration and discovery’ can, over time, facilitate more porous boundaries between groups (Gaffikin, Mceldowney, & Sterrett 2010, p.498). Such spaces of encounter, it is hoped, can even contribute to the process of eroding the ‘visceral fear of “the other” that feeds conflict and separatism’ (Gaffikin, Mceldowney, & Sterrett, 2010, p.497). More than sites of chance meeting, public space in divided cities can evolve into ‘dialogic space’: arenas for deliberate debate regarding how conflicts of different identities and interests can be resolved through identifying common political projects and values.

In the memory of the city, Dalieh is presented by activists as a space that refuses to be sectarianized or exclusive and is instead a place of pluralism, tolerance and encounter. In one sense, such narratives reproduce legitimate concerns that the privatization of space compromises and diminishes the public realm. In another sense, these representations risk reproducing nostalgic ‘paradise lost’ visions of public space that elide the fact that these spaces were never fully public and were almost always a particular locus of class interests (Iveson, 2007). Nevertheless, as Iverson (2007) argues, the language of retrieval is a useful fiction in setting an ideal of public space, around which a city politics of inclusion can develop. These imaginative stories ‘of public space as life enhancing, exciting, safe and inclusive ... can take us far in creating those spaces in just that way’ (Watson, 2006, p.7).

Thus, the social movement campaign asserts a memory of Dalieh as a place comprising various meanings for Beirutis. These memories act as plotlines through which the city can be reimagined as having public spaces that host multiple uses for its citizenry. The memorywork of the Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche stress the complex range of social groups that use this space. Activists note that Dalieh is used by fishermen and 10 families live on the shore; elderly swimmers access the sea to swim every day in the natural shallow pools; it is a place for lovers to surreptitiously meet and gay men to cruise; for families to picnic in the grassy hills; and a symbolic site for various ethnoreligious groups celebrating and commemorating religious events.

The project of reclaiming the city centre by non-sectarian movements also provides an immensely symbolic form of political contestation to challenge the logic and practices of postwar sectarian state. To expedite this political project, non-sectarian movements invest their activism with memorywork and reflective nostalgia.

In the summer of 2015 more than 20,000 tonnes of uncollected rubbish amassed in Beirut. The problem of uncollected rubbish occurred as a result of the multi-ethnic power sharing failing to agree to extend the contract of the private company responsible for disposing the city's trash. In response a new non-sectarian movement – You Stink – began a series of protests in Beirut city centre where they demanded the government's resignation. For You Stink's protestors, the issue of uncollected trash was symptomatic of the wider problems of dysfunctional, sectarian and corrupt governance. 150,000 Protestors – reported as 'people from across the sectarian and political spectrum' (Aljazeera, 2015) – were recorded at the city centre protests. You Stink quickly developed into a broad-based social movement that used the issue of trash to illuminate government paralysis and corruption and the success of the movement provided the impetus for activists to form Beirut's first major non-sectarian political party – Beirut Madinati (My Beirut).

After one protest in the city centre, the general manager of Solidere complained of demonstrators 'impeding the business of the commercial district in the Downtown'; he demanded the protestors vacate the city centre as they were 'cheapening' it by transforming it into a new 'Abu Rakhussa' (Daily Star, 2015). The epithet 'Abu Rakhussa' – which translates as 'father of the cheap' – was the colloquialism to describe the working-class souks and flea markets that characterized the city centre before the reconstruction. In response to Solidere's complaints, a You Stink activist stated: 'We want to hold accountable everyone who robbed this country ... and we want to reclaim Downtown Beirut for the people ... Al Bourj Square and the markets are coming back' (Daily Star, 2015). For one night, thousands of activists recreated Abu Rakhussa in the city centre by setting up stalls to sell cheap homemade

goods. The performance of nostalgia illuminated the contemporary exclusivity of the upscale stores that dominate the downtown district.

Belfast City Centre: Shared, Ethnicized Space and Titanic Town

The conflict in Northern Ireland, which started in 1969 and formally ended with the Belfast peace agreement in 1998, left 3532 people dead and 47,541 injured (Murtagh and Boland, 2017, p.8). The conflict is driven by rival claims to national self-determination with nationalists aspiring Irish unity and unionists seeking to maintain Northern Ireland's status within the UK. Thus, 'bi-polar, sectarian constructions of place and identity are principally at the root of the conflict in Northern Ireland' (Stainer, 2006, p.103). Belfast hosted significant violence with 1400 deaths and over 20,000 injured as a result of paramilitary and state violence (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006). Like Lebanon, the conflict hardened pre-existing territorial boundaries, especially in Belfast, where 99 physical barriers now separate groups (Murtagh and Boland, 2017, p.8). While a peace process occurred, today the city is "post-violent" rather than "post-conflict" with a toxic mix of territoriality, poverty, paramilitarism and intensifying segregation in the most disadvantaged housing estates' (Murtagh, 2017). Public spaces are 'subject to the practices and processes of territorial socialisation and used as a war by other means in postagreement struggles over identity, territory and belonging' (McDowell, Braniff, and Hughes, 2017, p.196).

In contrast to Beirut's cosmopolitan 'bourj', Belfast city centre evinces both an ambivalent and contested public memory. Like the bourj, Belfast city centre was historically an inclusive place where the citizenry could shop and socialize irrespective of ethnicity. Yet, at the same time, the city centre was essentially seen as a bastion of unionist political and cultural power. The city centre – which contained

the commercial, financial and political quarters of the city – was the main focus for unionist cultural events, such as commemorative parades. The city centre symbolised for Irish nationalists their exclusion from a unionist-dominated polity. A powerful way in which nationalists experienced marginalization from the city centre was by having their cultural and political events *de facto* banned from the city centre (Nagle, 2009a; McDowell, Braniff, and Hughes, 2017). During the conflict, the city centre ‘became something of a battlefield’ (Switzer & Hughes, 2009, p. 341) as militant organizations initiated bomb attacks on commercial targets resulting in the destruction of 300 retail outlets and over one quarter of the total retail floor space (Neill, 1995, p.54). Violence by all parties led to the deaths of 73 individuals. In response to the bombing campaign the security forces erected a ‘ring of steel’ around 41 streets of the city centre with armed checkpoints.

The reconstruction of Belfast city centre became inextricably bound up with the complex and even contradictory aims of the peace process. During the conflict, urban planning was a security issue that prioritized stability to contain rather than transform the city’s sectarian divisions. The protection of the status quo maintained a rigid and sterile territoriality of segregation. The developing peace process provided an opportunity for policymakers to support peacebuilding in the city by formulating programmes designed to promote greater integration between the respective communities. Under the rubric of a ‘Shared Future’ – a consultation process to address communal divisions, segregation, and sectarianism – policymakers have fashioned strategies to build new mixed religion social housing, remove physical barriers and create shared spaces. Yet, as Bollens (2018) argues, attempts to operationalize national political goals of peace are frustrated by the city’s sectarianized spatial and territorial realities comprising a mosaic of local histories,

geographies, and power relationships. These dynamics disrupt mandates established to advance sustainable reconciliation.

Such integrative aspirations were further compromised by the accommodative character of the peace process formalized in the Belfast peace agreement of 1998. A fundamental principle of the peace process rested on recognizing and accommodating the respective identities and rights of Irish nationalists and unionists (Nagle and Clancy, 2010). The concept ‘parity of esteem’ captured the premise that intergroup reconciliation can be achieved by encouraging members of the two groups to respect the validity of each other’s cultural practices. This logic also permeated public policy regarding the use of public space. Belfast’s municipal city council advanced the idea that the city centre is a ‘shared space’: a place in which nationalists and unionists have equal access for cultural and political performances. The city council’s policy on public space aims to ‘encourage a tolerant and fair society, where people are respected and their differences are celebrated’ (Belfast City Council, 2005, p.18).

Although the municipal authorities encourage the use of the city centre for cultural events that foster a wider sense of civic identity that transcends ethnic divisions, the space is also imagined in a way that essentially ensures that both groups’ – nationalists and unionists – identities are equally accommodated. The strategy for Belfast city centre is rooted in the logic that nationalist and unionist groups should respect intergroup diversity by accepting the right of each other to use public space. This largely refers to nationalist and unionist political and cultural events which are exclusive to their own constituency. Yet, rather than contribute to conflict resolution, the city centre has become a zero-sum space in which its usage by one ethnonational groups is experienced as a loss by the rival group. Thus, issues over

parades and the flying of flags, have become major points of violent contention in the city centre (McDowell, Braniff, & Hughes, 2017).

These ethnonationalist events are typically commemorative parades that use social memory to legitimate exclusivist political narratives. Irish nationalist and unionists remember talismanic dates from the past to imprint a quality of timelessness surrounding conflict thus rendering it impervious to contemporary efforts to craft political solutions. By focussing on traumatic memories, the rival groups proclaim victimhood to remind the ethnic community to never compromise, and that defensive action is always legitimate to ensure communal survival (Nagle, 2009b).

The city centre was further invested with peace process politics through the dynamics of regeneration and gentrification. Similar to Beirut, Belfast city centre has undergone extensive postconflict reconstruction. The city's leaders promote the regenerated city centre as representative of a late modern cosmopolitan city rather than one riven by sectarian violence and intolerance. This rebranding of the city centre reflected the peace process in complex ways. The British state were preoccupied, as a strategy to end violence, with building solidarity across middle-class lines, thereby firmly locating the conflict in lower-income groups. Through constructing class rather than ethnic solidarity, the aim was to shift the city's middle-class from local to global concerns, 'a shift that mirrors the city's overall economic transformation from traditional industrial production to flexible post-modern methods of accumulation' (Carter, 2003, p.256).

From the 1990s onwards a number of new major infrastructure projects were established in Belfast city centre under the auspices of the Laganside Corporation, a public body set up to carry out the regeneration of the district. Between 1989 and 2007, approximately £1 billion was invested into the reconstruction, including the

building of a major mall and the commercial gentrification of Belfast's riverfront, the Laganside, in a model borrowed from London's Docklands. For a British politician, the creation of a commercially vibrant city centre would facilitate 'safe areas where both communities could mix and match' (Needham, 1998, p.168). The state thus hoped to 'build a shared sense of civic pride ... among people whose attitudes may well be mutually antagonistic ... radiating a sense of citizenship outward to a divided population' (Hadaway, 2001).

The regeneration process expanded by creating 'Cathedral', 'Laganside', and the 'Titanic Quarters', which are designated as 'character zones' supposed to stimulate 'cultural reanimation' and the 'local economy' (Belfast City Council, 2004). Although the Titanic Quarter lies at the edge of the city centre, it is a £7billion, 185-acre site located on former shipyards, which contains 180,000 square meters of leisure space, including a heritage centre. Opened in 2012, the Titanic Quarter is a slice of nostalgia, 'a reverie of the past' (Belfast Telegraph, 2009), intended to celebrate an era before the violent conflict when Belfast was an industrial powerhouse. Such forms of regeneration strive to make 'memory and identity as objects of public attention', seeking ways of constructing 'emotional attachment to places and periods from the past' as a means of building civic and community solidarities (Nash and Williams 2011, p.100).

Analogous to the critiques of Beirut city centre's reconstruction, scholars argue that the 'ethnocratic reconstruction' of Belfast city centre hides the on-going 'injustices of segregation and socio-spatial exclusion' (Shirlow, 2006, p.101) evident in the outlying working-class areas of the city. While the rebranded city centre is portrayed as a 'neutral, modernising place that has left its parochial sectarianism behind' (see Murtagh, 2008, p.3), a correlative process is occurring in the rest of the

city in which social and political life is increasingly subject to division on ethnic lines. In addition, the gentrification process is accused of generating ‘a degree of forgetting, at least in Belfast’s city centre’ (Switzer & McDowell, 2009). The new aesthetics ‘seek to induce historical amnesia’ (Neill, 1992, p.9). This wiping clean of the city centre’s past involves not only the removal of the scars of violence, but more fundamentally by the absence of visible memorials of the Troubles-related acts of violence that have occurred there (Switzer and McDowell, 2009).

Thus, a core contradiction lies at heart of the regeneration process: Belfast city centre has simultaneously been re-ethnicized and de-ethnicized, with both memory and nostalgia shaping these dynamics. On the one hand, during the peace process the city centre was made into a shared space that accommodated the politico-commemorative practices of both ethnonationalist groups: nationalists and unionists. On the other hand, the gentrification process sought to elide sectarianism and replace it with a globalized identity that is also, paradoxically, localized and nostalgic.

Yet, as in Beirut, the space of Belfast city centre provides an arena for non-sectarian movements to perform memorywork that generates alternatives to the divisive politics of ethnic remembrance and neoliberal amnesia. An important example of such a movement is the socialist May Day parade that takes place annually in Belfast city centre. The May Day parade is organized by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. A key aim of the movement is to make working class nationalists and unionists see their identity and interests as class based and unified rather than ethnic and competing. An organizer of the May Day parade explained:

I would see it as challenging the two-community [nationalist and unionist] idea. I think that what we have strived to do is to create a safe space for people of all religions and none to come together to mark their relationship as working people rather than as Catholics, as

Protestants, as atheists, whatever ... We have said 'it's a non-sectarian, non-denominational march' (interview, 2007).

Alongside mobilizing on local issues, the May Day event links to global labour movement, in which alliances outside nationally focussed trade unionism campaign against 'state deregulation, informalisation and flexibilisation, all in the context of neoliberal globalization' (Lier and Stokke, 2006, p.802). A leading activist described the range of issues that the movement seeks to highlight through the parade: 'economic justice and workplace justice as we move into a global market, globalized society, issues of global solidarity and justice and racism; issues of third-world debt, issues relating to child poverty, HIV AIDS'. This diversity is augmented by the array of participating groups: trade unions, but also anti-war groups, nationalist and unionist groupings, the Anti-Racist Network, the Anarchist Black Cross, Environmentalists, the Northern Irish Gay Rights Association, the Cuba Support Group Ireland, among many others. The march is described as: 'rejecting sectarianism and celebrating diversity in Northern Ireland. [It] is seen as one of the few marches in Northern Ireland which has been designed to embrace participation from people of different backgrounds' (Belfast Telegraph, 2003).

The annual May Day parade historically routes through Belfast city centre. In a society where ethnonational interests are dominant, the manifestation of the parade in this space represents the visibility of non-sectarian politics and identities in the public sphere. An organizer of May Day compared the parade to the act of 'coming out' for people who are non-sectarian and socialist:

What you do when you take part in that May Day parade is that you are expressing some notions of your identity, the people you feel solidarity to are based upon the class and also

importantly the common humanity, and I think that is quite important that it happens every year, especially in Belfast ... In Northern Ireland it takes a hell of a conscious choice to go out and say, 'right, this year is the one day I'm going out and I'm going to walk through the middle of the town'. In a way, one of the reasons I love marching in the parade is that you hold up traffic and say: 'actually, this is our town and our streets for this day' (interview, 2007).

The May Day parade deploys the power of memory, ghosts and reflective memory to challenge the understanding that politics and identity in the city are perpetually circumscribed by ethnic interests. The May Day organizers have used commemorative practices that emphasize memories to stimulate cross-community solidarity.

The 2007 May Day parade, for instance, was a commemoration to mark the 100th anniversary of Belfast's 1907 Dockers and Carters' strike. The strike of 1907 featured unskilled nationalist and unionist workers in the city uniting over trade union rights. The temporary formation of a united working class was notable in a city where the population and workforce were divided along sectarian lines. While the 1907 strike peaked with a march of over 250,000 to the city centre, the lockout ended in bitter and violent circumstances as sectarian sentiment was used by the state and employers to enforce divide and rule among the strikers.

The 2007 parade gathered in Custom House Square, a civic space in the city centre that was once dubbed 'Red Square' since it historically hosted radical events and union leaders addressed crowds in the square during the 1907 strike. A permanent statue of a strike leader has now been placed on the steps of Custom House, a figure of the speaker addressing the crowd. This memorial is significant in a city which has undergone an intensification of sectarian memoryscapes with more than 200

permanent murals, plaques and memorials constituted in Belfast alone since 1998 by the rival nationalist and unionist groups (McDowell, Braniff, & Hughes, 2017). The 2007 parade, which departed from Custom House, was led by children dressed as dockworkers from the strike era. The route of the 2007 May Day parade through the city centre, which also skirted outlying working-class districts, purposely copied the massed marches of 1907. When the 2007 march passed the bottom of the Shankill Road (a working-class unionist district) and the Falls Road (a working-class nationalist district) the organizers left a wreath to commemorate all workers killed in sectarian conflict since 1907. Such use of commemorative practice inscribed through the performance of street performance can provide alternative visions of history for present exigencies. A May Day organizer explained to me:

One of the lessons of 1907 that we're looking at now: Catholics and Protestants of the workplace are better off when they are not divided; that the boss class will always try and divide us along sectarian lines as they tried to do so in 1907; as an organization we can have a commitment to do anything it wants (interview, 2007).

Yet, while the May Day parade organizers use memory and nostalgia to disrupt and voice alternatives to narratives that portray Belfast as an interminably divided and sectarian city, the movement has often been unable to receive public funding from the city's 'Community Festivals Fund' since the funders believe that May Day does not qualify as a 'geographical community' in the same way that nationalist and unionist groups can claim. Such reified definitions of community largely conspire to ensure that ethnonational interests dominate. In response, the May Day organizers argue that although the workers' movement was not a 'geographic community', it is a 'community of interest' that is not bounded by specific spaces:

we argue we that we are united as a community by a common interest, common goals. Yes, we have differences, but we are united because we have these common ideas and ethos and principles (interview, 2007).

Analogous to the non-sectarian movements in Beirut, the May Day parade does not evoke nostalgia and remembrance to construct a simple representation of the past. Indeed, the objective of commemorating the 1907 Belfast strike is not to summon up a romanticized prelapsarian time when class rather than ethnic politics were the principle mode of organization and identity in the city. Instead, as Boym (2001, p.61) notes, 'reflection suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis'. Thus, the May Day commemoration stimulates a discussion about how and why non-sectarian political movements can emerge in a city characterized by ethnic violence; the long-term consequence of such activism; and, equally important, why class-based activism may fail, especially in the face of sectarian counter-mobilization. In other words, the MayDay commemoration of the 1907 strike accepts that Belfast is historically a divided city, it equally is also remembers a more nuanced situation in which cross-cleavage action can momentarily appear. It also realistically deals with the violent history of the city in which such cross-community politics have been ruthlessly targeted and defeated. It also encourages reflection among trade unionists and socialists to consider their own limitations and failure in successfully eradicating sectarianism in the city.

The May Day commemorative parade generates an awkward symmetry with the regenerated city centre. As noted earlier, the reconstruction process included the development of the Titanic Quarter, which features the Titanic heritage museum. The building of the Titanic in Belfast's shipyards began in 1908, the year following the

dockers' strike. While the Titanic museum is intended to attract international tourists captivated by the ill-fated ship, it also provides a contrasting form of nostalgia to the May Day parade. One exhibition, for example, called 'Boomtown Belfast' nostalgically ruminates on the period that the Titanic was built, highlighting that the city was an industrial and economic powerhouse of the British Empire (Neil, 2011). Yet, this memory elides the historical record of thousands of Catholic workers being expelled from the shipyards as sectarian violence coexisted with moments of class solidarity.

Conclusion

Beirut and Belfast provide means to understand both the consequences of postwar reconstruction of space and the dynamics of resistance and creativity engendered by social movement actors. One of the salient features of the rebuilding process is the programming of nostalgic amnesia into these city centres. This seemingly paradoxical nexus between nostalgia and amnesia is evident in the postconflict branding exercises of state and commercial enterprises in the two cities. Such nostalgia can be understood in terms of Boym's notion of 'restorative nostalgia', in which memory is constructed as unified, community affirming, unambiguous and its purpose is to point the way back to a lost mythical past. In so doing, the effect of restorative nostalgia is to generate reveries that efface these cities' recent and enduring violent histories and reinforce increasing sectarianism and socioeconomic disparities.

Yet attempts to instil restorative nostalgia are incomplete. Various non-sectarian movement actors deploy 'reflective nostalgia', forms of memory emphasizing uncertainty, hybridity, cosmopolitanism and complexity that challenge homogenous nationalist and neoliberal imaginaries. As I have highlighted in this

paper, such reflective nostalgia is the figure of the ghost, manifestations that disrupt ‘the reifications through which performances, narratives, and experiences of memory become fixed in space’ (Edensor, 2005, p.929). They are ‘haunting reminders’ of the violence and the complex social relations in which we live (Gordon, 1997, p.25). Non-sectarian movements which evoke ghostly presences and enter haunted buildings, I argue, not only unsettle restorative nostalgia/amnesia but also use memory to fashion new narratives of the city that can even support peacebuilding.

For peacebuilding to take root, Iveson (2007) calls for ‘new scripts’ to change the perception and social use of space in divided cities. Such a vision connects with Lefebvre’s (1991) demand that the most important thing is to multiply the readings of the city – to provide pluralistic narratives in which the city is a site of renewed centrality, a place of encounter and difference which licenses the full usage of spaces for all of the citizenry regardless of background. In order to change how spaces are made accessible to the citizenry in the future requires changing the memories associated with them in the present. The ‘right to represent the past ... can be considered a right-to-the-city’ (Till, 2012, p.8). The right-to-the-city, argued Lefebvre, required social movements to re-appropriate and re-program public space – to fight against ‘specialized space and a narrow localization of function’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p.382–383). One important way in which the social movements included in this paper contribute to this project of re-imagining the city is by impressing memories into city centre public space that illuminate complex, awkward and disordered histories of the city that defy sectarian and amnesiac visions.

While it’s imperative to rebuild spaces of sectarian violence into shared spaces, this requires a critical praxis that is not limited to accommodating shared consumers or the memorywork rival ethnic groups. Research on urban planning in

divided societies provides a number of important policies at the structural level (Bollens, 2018). At the same time, non-sectarian actors can engender new ways of understanding how these spaces can be used through memorywork. If judiciously mobilized, these memories can become ‘routes for forging new cosmopolitan identities and transcending loyalties and commitments’ (Khalaf, 2012, p.79).

Although it is important not to overemphasize the impact of non-sectarian actors, they can develop into powerful networks that sustain social and political transformation. Activists in Beirut have halted an estimated \$1bn of privatization projects and non-sectarian activists involved in women’s movements, public space and public services formed a new political party, Beirut Madinati, which gained over 30% of votes in the 2016 municipal elections. In Belfast, the non-sectarian socialist party, People Before Profit, won two seats in the Northern Ireland government in 2016. Rather than irrelevant political protagonists, such examples show the emerging power of these movements.

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