Struggling lives and symbolic boundaries
Violence, young people and trauma in post-conflict Belfast

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Abstract: In Belfast, despite everyone knowing the conventional date that put an end to the Northern Irish conflict, commonly known as The Troubles, many people still suffer from its legacies to this day. In this article, I consider both post-conflict dynamics and contemporary issues in Belfast, focusing in particular on young people. Through a qualitative methodology, and drawing on anthropological concepts such as structural violence, I provide some reflections on the relationship between violence and trauma in this context through the analysis of the ethnographic data collected in a youth centre. This intervention is intended as a potential contribution to the broader literature on the anthropology of trauma and the ethnographies of violence, and on the debate on the transmission of mental distress from one generation to another.

Keywords: Structural violence; Young people; Cultural trauma; Post-conflict; Belfast.

Introduction

In this article, I will build on the insights gained from my research in Belfast[1]. Most of the data was collected, through a qualitative methodology, over a year of ethnography in a youth centre in 2018/2019 in the Lower Falls, West Belfast. Prior to that, I had spent three months of research in North Belfast in 2016. In this article, I reflect on the relationship between violence and trauma and the role they have on young people's lives in the context of a segregated Nationalist area in the Lower Falls. This area, which is located near the Cupar Way, one of the longest peace wall in Belfast, was one of the most affected by the past conflict, and it is considered a "deprived area" by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2017).

It is worth stressing the inherent challenges and debates surrounding the idea of trauma. The word itself represents a vague and abstract concept; therefore, the theoretical discussions have the tendency to narrow down to one of its possible meanings in order to focus on specific situations. In this article, trauma is defined as any psychological suffering that disturbs and distances within and from one own's everyday life; in particular, when related to certain past events or present violent dynamics, such as paramilitary activities or drug abuse. Indeed, wellness is not just the absence of diseases. Thus, trauma is not just connected to clinically diagnosed disorders, but is something related to the historical and social context in which individuals live[2].

For the purpose of this article, I will be using the terms Catholics and Protestants, but I am fully aware of the multi-layered dimensions associated with these identities: it is important to mention that such binary contra-

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2. Among others, see for instance Young 1995; McNally 2014; Broch-Due and Bertelsen 2016.

position, usually used in written documents, is somewhat naïve[3]. In Northern Ireland, the ethno-nationalist conflict known as The Troubles (1969-1998)[4] involved different armed and non-armed groups, and still today there is a multi-faceted landscape of different social actors at play.

It is important to focus on young people[5] in order to recognise that there is a generational gap, one that anthropology can help recognise: investigating, questioning and showing flaws contributes to understanding how and where to improve a particular situation. If we recognise that trauma today among the younger generations is related to contemporary issues, such as violence, domestic and state abuse and drug and alcohol abuse, we realise that these are only indirectly connected to the past conflict; rather, they are due to residential segregation, structural violence, lack of opportunities (difficult access to education and employment), everyday violence, deprivation and inequalities. The emphasis that older generations still put on the past conflict shifts the attention from what the problems are today; the focus should instead be on providing familial support, mental health services, and resources in general. That is not happening at the moment, and there is still massive social inequality in Belfast, crucially so in segregated areas.

Violence, trauma and Northern Ireland: the theoretical context

Many anthropological studies draw upon the analysis of the social body and how it embeds and is influenced by the broader and structural context. Fassin (2003: S4) stresses this argument using the expression "the embodiment of inequality", "in an attempt to conceive how history becomes physical reality". In fact, embodied inequalities and narratives of suffering

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3. For an understanding on the complexities of the Irish and British, Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist, Unionist and Loyalist identities in Northern Ireland, and their inter-connections, see for instance Nic Craith 2002.

4. The conflict is commonly considered starting in 1969: accordingly, in the late 60', Northern Ireland was the theatre of clashes between protesters from the Civil Rights Movement and the Royal Ulster Constabulary; major incidents happened (*e.g.* in Bombay Street) where violence escalated; also, the peace walls were built across the territory. The Troubles is usually considered to have ended in 1998 with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, or Belfast Agreement.

5. For the scope of this article, I refer to young people in terms of biological age (<35) to highlight the differences between those who lived through the conflict and those who are affected by its legacy. I am aware that youth is a complex category, and there are many debates around the concept. Notwithstanding these debates, defining here young people in terms of their biological age can help in addressing relevant arguments on youth and violence in relation to the Northern Irish context, where youth is sometimes considered creator of "antisocial behaviour".

can reveal those hidden structural conditions that exist beyond the individual and can affect entire social groups. The concept of structural violence has been used, firstly, by Galtung (1969) and, later, by Farmer (2004), who successfully used this theoretical idea to investigate the diffusion of AIDS and the consequences of political violence in Haiti. Structural violence refers to those individuals and/or social groups who, because they live within a certain socioeconomic and political context, cannot easily access specific resources (*e.g.* education) and are prevented by structural factors from having the same life opportunities as other individuals who live in different contexts. Jenkins' (1983) Northern Irish report of working-class youth and "ordinary kids" comes to mind, especially about their different involvement with crime and the law, based on socio-economic status. Thanks to Farmer and Jenkins, the reader is left with an empathetic understanding of how structural violence is dangerous and unfair. The crucial role that the ethnographer (or the sociologist) may have in the recognition and identification of such social dynamics is clear, helping in analysing certain social, political, historical and economic factors that may affect specific groups of individuals that share a particular living condition or status (*e.g.* in terms of disease, gender, class, poverty or unemployment). In fact, anthropological studies like these allow the interpretation of social suffering under the awareness of broader and global forces, such as culture, history, and political economy. I borrow the idea of structural violence as well as the theorisation of everyday violence conceptualised by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) and Kleinman (2000) as starting points to reflect on how structural conditions affect particular areas and social groups in Northern Ireland, in relation to the diffusion of mental suffering. At the same time, I follow Beneduce's (2016: 10) idea of "ethnographies of violence" while approaching the themes addressed in this manuscript, thus focusing on the specific contexts in which violence is produced and reflecting on the local effects it generates. Similarly to how Fassin and Rechtman (2007) caution against the universalisation and the consequent banalisation of trauma, one should heed Taliani's (2011: 141-142) warning: rather than generalising trauma and violence, it is important to listen to the individuals and their "stories within History".

Within the Northern Irish context, studies on trauma look at suicide (Tomlinson 2012) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Ferry *et al.* 2008) rates, both extremely high, and others reflect on the usage of antidepressant medications at interface areas – where communities with different backgrounds border each other – (French 2009; Maguire, French,

O'Reilly 2011). Moreover, Ferry *et al.* (2010) point out that Northern Ireland registers the highest prevalence of PTSD in the world. Tomlinson's (2012: 1) analysis about legacies of conflict among young people and the concept of "trauma narrative" describes how "the whole society has been traumatised, brutalisation is common, resistance to change engrained, and depression and anxiety are widespread". There have been some studies that tried to measure the impact of residential segregation on the diffusion of mental disorders. Among others, French (2009: 892) registers that, when individuals living in a community with a specific background are entirely separated, and surrounded by different communities at an interface, they will record a high index of mental suffering (*e.g.* anxiety and depression) – as measured through the recorded usage of antidepressants. An example of this is the Shankill Road, a Protestant enclave in predominantly Catholic West Belfast. In contrast, an area containing residents from only one community and surrounded by areas with a similar community profile will present a low index of mental disorders. This data probably underestimates the reality of the situation, considering that the usage of antidepressants cannot be properly recorded (*e.g.* due to the presence of a black market on the streets); nevertheless, these observations give important insights into the level of fear and stress felt where different communities border each other, and where conflict-related deaths are recorded (Shirlow, Murtagh, 2006). Notably, some interface areas are recognised as neutral (Mitchell, Kelly 2010). For instance, Duncairn Gardens, which divides the Catholic New Lodge and the Protestant Tiger's Bay, is not identified with one specific community's identity. However, even though Duncairn Gardens is intended to act as a shared space, it actually acts as a "continuation of the peace walls": gates are closed on weekends and "there is a great chance of rioting" (*ibidem*: 15); the place itself becomes part of the trauma and the violence.

Growing up in a traumatic environment, symbols of trauma and violence are embedded into the body from the society. I follow the lines drawn by other scholars both on the embodiment (Lock, Scheper-Hughes 1987; Csordas 1994; Pizza 2011), and on the transmission of trauma from one generation to another, and how it indirectly and implicitly affects the child (Irish Peace Centres 2010; McNally 2014; O'Neill 2015). For instance, an individual with PTSD develops a psychological connection between a feeling of sufferance, such as panic and fear, with a specific traumatic experience, such as the suicide of a loved one. Once this event is remembered, it lives again, evoking that condition of sufferance with it. With reference to the concept of embodiment, mind and body interact and influence each other.

Individuals cannot separate emotions from traumatic events, so an individual with PTSD cannot avoid embedding into his/her body some feelings of fear, panic and anxiety when he/she remembers a traumatic event. Psychological studies attempting to treat PTSD symptoms showed some positive results; some aimed to separate the memory of the traumatic event from the emotion evoked (LeDoux 1996). It may, however, be useless if complementary efforts to change the historical and political context are not made; accordingly, the social environment may contribute to the spread of traumatic experiences among the population.

A fair amount of literature points out the fear in which people live on an everyday basis. Lysaght (2005) shows how the fear of violent attacks is part of daily practices of negotiations in the city of Belfast; Roche (2008: 74) notes how young individuals experience a strong feeling of seclusion and this has an "impact on all sorts of life activities". What is needed, though, is to investigate the broader context framing young people's fear and trauma, *i.e.* exposure to severe violence. This is also suggested by Lysaght and Basten (2003: 2), who highlight how the overall literature on the Northern Irish context deals with specific situations, and "tend[s] to ignore the wider societal implications of fear of sectarian attacks". Regarding sectarian attacks, one element that brings out young people's fears is the paramilitaries' control of local areas. Hansson (2005) focuses on young people and how paramilitary organisations have a great impact on their mental wellbeing. Seeking to uncover the reasons behind the use of violence in segregated and interface areas, he interviews some young individuals about their experiences with paramilitaries. He finds that Protestant and Catholic paramilitary groups employ "rough justice" against young people in instances of what they consider "antisocial behaviour" (even on the very young, such as 12 years old) and exercise their local power through punishments such as beatings, shootings and exiling. For instance, sometimes paramilitaries will do a "pick and mix", which means that "whoever is there gets it" (*ibidem*: 88). This creates an atmosphere of fear among young people, and any form of protest is extremely risky and severely punished. Even if some young people consider the presence of paramilitaries in the area positively – to protect the neighbourhood from outsiders –, the majority thinks that they are "responsible for much of the violence at the interfaces and they therefore helped create the sense of insecurity they claimed to be protecting the area from" (*ibidem*: 90). These theoretical debates all point out that even if The Troubles are supposed to be over, trauma is widespread, especially in segregated areas.

Belfast boundaries: the ethnographic field

The spatial composition of Belfast, presenting high levels of residential segregation (Shuttleworth, Lloyd 2009), reveals an inner complexity. The narratives collected among the population cannot be separated neither from the physical place nor from the still-present violence, even though this does not obstruct the recognition of broader patterns that can be common in economically deprived areas. The physical place in which a community lives is involved in the definition of local identities. Some parts of the city have a predominance of Catholics or Protestants, and quite often there are sort-of enclaves, separated by interface areas; some of them are segregated by physical walls (peace walls), with gates that, today, are open most of the time, and by symbolic ones (*i.e.* the roads themselves work as an imaginary delimitation between different areas).

In Belfast, the space, sometimes contested and shaped by different symbols, to the extent that some scholars refer to the Northern Irish environment as a symbolic landscape (Bryan, Stevenson 2009), is used to build commemorative gardens and memorials, or to prepare celebrations (*e.g.* parades), considered very important in remembering the loss of familiars, friends and community members. The simple act of walking through certain streets may become a very emotional experience and those are the moments when the heterogeneity of the city comes together to remember the lost loved ones. In this regard, Komarova and Svašek (2018: 3) aptly recognise that people in Northern Ireland are "caught up in a diversity of spatial experiences that cannot be understood through the prism of political agency alone". Everyday life becomes a negotiation between space and identity to define places as safe or unsafe (Lysaght, Basten 2003): mental maps (Jarman, Bell 2012) separating familiar and unfamiliar places in relation to identity-related divisions; the unfamiliar evokes feelings of fear and anxiety. Individuals may employ several strategies: they avoid walking through areas where groups with a different background live, and if they have to cross some neighbourhoods or interfaces in which they feel unsafe, they avoid wearing clothes with symbols associated with their own area. I experienced something similar myself when I avoided wearing t-shirts with the Union Jack or the Irish flag. During my fieldwork, in line with the above-mentioned scholars, I observed how these mental maps are shared with and embodied by the younger generations. This argument works as a starting point to analyse how the younger generations locate themselves in this social environment, and it represents a type of discourse in which anthropology can have a privileged look and seed the germ for future changes.

Most of the information I gathered here comes from my doctoral research. In 2018, I started my fieldwork in the Gillian Youth Centre in a Nationalist working-class area in the Lower Falls, West Belfast, where I spent one year participating in various activities and groups. The activities are intended for young people (<18), but lately, the social workers[6] have started two support groups for mothers: the "Wee Mamas" (18-35 years old) and the "Big Mamas" (35+ years old). Nevertheless, young people's well-being remains at the core of this centre: the activities are many and various and range between individual tutoring, group activities and cross-community projects with a youth centre in the Greater Shankill, the Unionist area on the other side of the wall. The group I followed the most is intended for 14-17 years old, but I engaged with both social workers and young people, especially during evenings when the centre is open for walk-ins. The majority of the data collected comes from two research methods: open-ended interviews with social workers and fieldnotes taken during the group activities as part of my participant observation; fieldnotes have been gathered avoiding direct interviews with minors in order to respect the ethical boundaries previously defined during the planning of my doctoral project. Notwithstanding such ethical distance, formal interviews with social workers have proven to be extremely insightful; at the same time, the informal engagement I had with young people and their parents within the centre gave depth to the themes that came out from the interviews, mixing personal emotions and observations with the participants' points of view. I spent months as an observer in this place, where young people and mothers[7] gather in search of support. Focusing on young people and their everyday experiences, I aim to unravel different perspectives from those who lived the conflict and those who did not, at least not directly.

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6. I refer to both voluntary and paid youth workers. Most of the social workers in the Gillian youth centre have a Nationalist background; a few of them are from the Lower Falls.

7. The absence of the fathers within the activities of the centre is notable and finds its roots in the role that they have within the families; this will not be detailed in the context of this article.

FIG. 1: *Opening Hours*. 13 April 2019, Lower Falls. Photo by Matteo Bina.

The role of structural and everyday violence on young people's lives

As Bourdieu (1977) states, habits and routines that are part of the general social structure shape people's life in a nonconscious way. That is, Bourdieu's analysis of the everyday practices suggests that these are influenced by some environmental and structural conditions; these are able to function as invisible patterns for ways of doing things (Grenfell 2008: 44). The ethno-nationalist-related strategies of segregation that parents transmit to their children – spatial practices such as separation between safe and unsafe areas, lessons about wearing particular clothes in some places, mental maps and general warnings about the other side –, represent the implications of being part of a particular group and growing up in a particular area. This also means that one person's everyday life may include feelings of unfamiliarity when going to other areas, and potential fear and danger in one's own place.

Observations, formal and informal engagements with social workers, parents and young people in the Gillian youth centre made me reflect that there are different discourses on mental suffering, and these are intertwined with others that I argue involve structural (*e.g.* economic and social poverty, lack of opportunities) and everyday violence (*e.g.* paramilitary activities and

drug abuse). It is impossible to provide an in-depth analysis of all these issues in this article. Accordingly, I will focus on the role that the intersection of these different factors has on young people's lives.

The separation between those who are considered young people and those who are adults, albeit blurred and vague, is imposed from the adult world itself: young people, engaging in what is called "antisocial behaviour", risk beatings and shootings by paramilitaries anytime they go against their "rules". Antisocial behaviour is a term often used by adults *upon* young people, both informally and formally – *e.g.* there are public signs saying, "antisocial behaviour will not be tolerated". The use of this term is in practice often associated with the youth. The boundaries of what is antisocial behaviour, and what is not, are not well-defined, and vary between different social actors. It is said in colloquial discourses that paramilitaries use this term to explain why they are punishing a young person: mostly, punishments are connected to drugs that, ironically, the paramilitaries themselves trafficked. With the ongoing presence of paramilitary groups in local areas, who hold the control of drug trafficking, there are often clashes between them and young people; often parents are asked to negotiate with paramilitaries to reduce their punishments. It may happen that the social workers in the Gillian youth centre work as mediators between parents and representants of armed groups.

From the social workers' point of view, as well as according to health professionals who also participated in the investigation, drug abuse does not have a recreational connotation, but it represents a coping mechanism. The focus on drugs is particularly important: even young people who are <10 years old may engage with such substances[8]. The major impact that it can have on their brain in such a developing psychological stage is straightforward and it is one of the main reasons why both social workers and health professionals have major worries for their mental health. Jarman *et al.* (2002) mentioned in their study the hostility that young people feel towards statutory bodies, such as social services and schools, and state that this anger probably has a role in the diffusion of drugs. While I agree, as they state, that many factors – not only experimentation and youth culture – create a "link between socio-economic circumstances and those most at risk of experiencing drug-related difficulties" (*ibidem*: 160), the diffusion of drugs in the Lower Falls has more structural connotations as well.

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8. I am not referring here to illegal drugs only, but to prescription drugs as well. Prescription drug abuse opens a different argument connected to trauma and the delivery of mental health services in Belfast that unfortunately I cannot properly exhaust here.

Such structural connotations include both sectarianism and socio-economic status. Paramilitarism itself is a legacy of sectarianism and the conflict: its legitimacy has both historical and political roots[9]; it continues to have a strong presence in working-class areas due to structural deprivation in the form of both economic and social poverty. Contrariwise, middle and upper-class areas do not present intense paramilitary activity. Socio-economic distress in the Lower Falls has to be contextualised as well[10]: families struggle with poverty, employment is hindered by various factors, such as social marginalisation, and some cannot work due to mental health issues. Some are relying on governmental benefits, but current reviews of the mental health system starting in 2019 (NIAO 2019) include a re-assessment with harder criteria for those who are entitled to disability benefits[11].

Overall, because of the high level of sectarianism and violence, *e.g.* due to paramilitary activities, still recorded in segregated and interface areas, all the people I interviewed still talk of an "ongoing" conflict; discourses mix connections with the past conflict and still-contemporary problems that highly affect the population, such as suicide and drug abuse. The past conflict is intended as a "lived experience" for various individuals. In certain areas, the past trauma is the present: "The conflict here has lasted for 100 years" (Youth worker 2018). It is connected to a socio-economic status: working class-areas are significantly more affected than middle-class ones. It is no coincidence that, historically, The Troubles affected those areas the most.

The recognition of trauma in young people from social workers and health professionals, I argue, is located in the intertwined combination of these many factors. This opens the discourse on the transmission of trauma among generations; events such as the suicide of a loved one, or a familiar who has been badly injured by paramilitary violence, or being injured by a para-military himself, produce negativity in the whole family. If these can be considered as indirect consequences of The Troubles on young people, at the same time, experiencing these events has a direct and explicit effect on the child: young people do not seem to consider themselves as traumatised, but

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9. A detailed account of paramilitarism in Belfast goes beyond the scope of this article. However, it is important to mention that in the Lower Falls there is an historical relationship with paramilitarism due to The Troubles and an historical mistrust toward the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which was strongly associated with Unionism during the conflict.

10. Albeit not exhaustively.

11. Regarding the effects of neoliberal policies on access to healthcare, see Sakellariou and Rotarou 2017.

they are living in what adults consider a traumatised environment, in particular the lived everyday violence due to the massive presence of paramilitaries in segregated areas. The direct experience of The Troubles is affecting the older generations – and, in this regard, PTSD and suicide rates are indicative (Ferry *et al.* 2010: 30; NISRA 2016).

Generational rebellion

A traumatic environment does not influence only those who directly experience trauma during the past conflict. Today, trauma still affects young people's lives, increasing the already-high probability of mental suffering, such as suicide, depression, drug abuse and diagnoses of PTSD, which are recognised by psychologists and social workers as having different causes, such as the so-called sectarian attacks[12]. In some areas of Belfast, young individuals have to deal with more than they should. Moreover, family members belonging to older generations often have a traumatic past and no coping mechanisms. In this section, I will focus on both trauma, considered as mental suffering passed from one generation to another, and the active role that young people have in this complex context. To do so, I will refer to both observations and informal engagements with mothers and especially their sons and daughters.

In this sense, it is important to mention what some mothers participating in the Big Mamas group feel, which is a sense of lack of coping mechanisms, which they consider as expressed through anxiety and mental suffering. The group work is also intended to support and help them with that; they mentioned how such lack of coping mechanisms had somehow an influence on their parental skills and therefore on their teenage sons and daughters – the same young people I met at the youth centre.

There is a difference among generations on how the past conflict is considered: some participants in the Big Mamas group would feel its influence on their lives, as they have lived and experienced it; some participants in the Wee Mamas mentioned a connection with the past conflict, but it would not be the first thing coming to mind; overall, young people tend to defy the adults' political and ethnic divisions. Talking informally with young people in the Gillian youth centre during the group activities, I realised quickly that the past conflict is not their major concern. Young people today, or at least not most of them, are not involved in political-related activities. They do not care about the political situation. Daniel, one social worker who also teaches in an integrated school, stated

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12. Sectarian attacks refer to physical violence that have a sectarian motivation.

that they "just want to have fun". Few young people are likely to get actively involved in the political and ethno-nationalist contraposition that was at the basis of The Troubles. Most young people, Daniel continues, "do not know so much about them [The Troubles], except for a general contraposition between Catholics and Protestants".

At the same time, young people may engage in verbal contestations towards the adult world and show aggressive behaviour. Some youth workers highlighted how young people feel that everything "is against them in the world"[13]. Pizza (2011: 61) considers the personal identity as "not universal, never stabilised or crystallised in a definitive manner, except in a historical-political invention, as it happens often with national identities and feelings of belonging"[14]. In the case of young people in Belfast, it is in that "historical-political invention" that a young individual's identity shows its dynamism. Young people's social body creates contradictions, rebels against "the police, the paramilitaries and adults in general". Young people's practices contrast and display an identity that is not passive; they reinvent and create tactics in a dynamic way. Different forms of contestations are displayed in segregated areas: not only through young people rebelling against paramilitaries' control of the area, but also against State institutions (*e.g.* police), which they feel are against them. They rebel against the social services, which they feel are against them because they come to take them away from their parents. Finally, they rebel against the geographical organization of the city itself, against the political and ethnic division of the areas. The mental map (Jarman, Bell 2012) embedded from their families is contested. As Mitchell and Kelly (2010: 7) point out, everyday practices are emblematic to understand "the manner in which (in)visible boundaries are erected and transgressed" in order to change and mitigate the ongoing conditions of sufferance that young people live in segregated and interface areas.

De Certeau (1988: 98) states that the "spatial order organises an ensemble of possibility (*e.g.* by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (*e.g.* by a wall that prevents one from going further)". At the same time, Leonard, McKnight and Spyrou (2011) state how spatial practices organise and decide

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13. One difficulty for the researcher here is that of toxic masculinity, which is an obstacle to the understanding of young males' feelings: this is currently the focus of some recent investigations. Pioneers on the topic in Northern Ireland are Harland (2008: 6), who highlights that "young men demonstrate their masculinity by being dismissive of their emotional pain", and Hutchinson (2009: 2) who states: "Boys find it far harder than girls to talk about their emotions and to express feelings of helplessness and despair".
14. Translated from Italian.

which places are safe or dangerous, especially in the case of peace walls. Some young people physically cross the peace lines, transform and abandon the spatial order, using spatial elements to act against power and constrictions; crossing the peace line can be considered as a tactic of resistance, referring to De Certeau's theory, among young people's everyday practices. However, this happens with a youth worker working as a mediator; young people from segregated Catholic and Protestant areas only properly meet during third-level education – if they get the chance and join a university. At the same time, they cross the symbolic boundaries of their own area to meet at crossroads with people from other close neighbourhoods[15].

Considering that young people do not necessarily care about the past conflict, their major problems are not related to having or not having interactions with either Protestants or Catholics. In the social space, such as in the – still very few – mixed schools, they interact very well with young people that have different backgrounds. The interviews show how interactions between young people with different backgrounds have a positive outcome on their mental health. When children see that they are not so different, they understand how easy it is to interact with the other side, playing and staying together. The group work, facilitated by some of the youth workers interviewed, showed no conflict between young people with different backgrounds; youth workers offered them a place where they do not have to follow division rules. As one interviewee pointed out, the problem is "when they come back in their segregated areas"; where trauma and violence shape their everyday lives. It is indicative of how easy young people's interactions are in the social space of the institutes: "It really is just bringing people together for a couple of hours taking away the trip" (Youth worker 2016).

If on the one side young people contest the mental transmission of moral values acquired by society, their inner group and families, their interactions outside their group are controlled. Crossing the peace lines takes the form of formal meetings: the so-called cross-community projects are intended and organised to improve interactions between different areas. The Gillian youth centre, as with many other youth centres and as decided by the Education Authority (EA)[16], uses part of its funding to finance such groups in partnership with a Protestant youth centre on the other side of the Cupar Way. Such meetings are controlled in the sense that youth workers accompany young people in and out of the gates, to ensure their safety. These are positively

15. Even on the Nationalist side of the Cupar Way, as well as on the Unionist side, there are different Nationalist (or Unionist) areas.
16. Most policies involving young people are delivered through this public body.

aimed to overcome the past and present segregation in Belfast; however, young people in that area still go back to being separated and have their friends within that same area. It would be important to develop this contra-diction between integrated versus non-integrated settings and explore its implication in future articles; here, instead, I use it for a final reflection, in connection with the arguments analysed in the previous section.

In fact, not only do young people's major concerns not involve sectarianism, but there is also concern among the social workers on how activities that tackle sectarianism are delivered. Bill, a youth worker I met at the Gillian Youth Centre, said:

> Me: Do you think that [cross community projects] are having benefits?.
> B: I don't know. [...] Within these communities it's done... not well, because I think very often what happen is that they avoid issues that make them different and they focus on the issues that make them similar [...]. It's silly things like you can't wear cultural symbols like football tops or sporting stuff....
> Me: So they simply avoid talking about....
> B: Yes, because they are afraid to double generate conflict, as opposed to say... ok. let's have a discussion about our differences, it's not because people are afraid that people get hurt or they open a can of worms they can't get back in, because they can... the community relation programme tends to focus around activities: we get these kids together to do bowling, a joint activity [...] as opposed to deal with issues.

What Bill says shows that, today, cross-community projects that tackle sectarianism do not seem able to have long-lasting effects. At the same time, intra-community interventions need to be improved. In this context, young people's position is complex: on the one side, many of those belonging to the younger generations are growing up resisting and contesting social and cultural values connected to the past conflict: they do not accept passively their social and cultural context. On the other side, practices of integration are imposed on them from above. There is a discrepancy between young people's everyday experiences and how youth programmes are designed at a policy level: most of the efforts to fulfil EA policies in tackling sectarianism weights on the shoulders of youth work alone, while education and residential areas are still segregated. At the same time, the youth centre has to deal with other issues, as young people have more pressing needs within their own area than tackling sectarianism. However, even though trauma and violence are connected to a different socio-economic status between poor and rich areas – with the former suffering much more structural and everyday violence, as also comparable with other working-class settings

elsewhere –, sectarianism remains the fundamental lens to use in Northern Ireland to look at all the above-mentioned issues. This shows the complexity of what it means to live in the segregated areas of Belfast.

Conclusion

Lefebvre (1974) gave a fundamental lesson on how individuals perceive the social space through its symbols and how the space is not only physical, but also socially reproduced and shared. In this article, the urban space of Belfast has been used to provide the context in which structural and everyday violence and trauma happen, or do not happen. The peace walls, as mentioned in the previous sections, have symbolic meanings; people have heterogeneous perspectives on them, as Leonard, McKnight and Spyrou suggest (2011), and points of view around the past conflict are different between generations, as this article pointed out. It is worth mentioning the parades[17] as well and how these are used to shape the urban space: in this regard, I refer to Bryan's (2000: 27) analysis of parades as rituals and acts of "resistance". Analysing marching in Northern Ireland from a historical perspective, Feldman (1991: 22) connects urban space and the violence of the past: accordingly, marching is a "practice of sectarian space with its own residual political meanings". In this sense, symbols of the past violence may be implicitly embedded and create representational spaces (*ivi*) related to trauma and to overall sufferance, albeit proving a direct connection between symbols of the past violence and trauma has not been the scope of this research. Accordingly, it has been argued how even those who do not directly experience trauma embed symbolic meanings of sufferance. The lack of structures and the disadvantaged socio-economic conditions in segregated areas can be seen in connection with the diffusion of trauma and mental illness. Accordingly, Maguire, French and O'Reilly (2011: 365) find that residents of economically disadvantaged areas are more likely to develop mental disorders in Northern Ireland.

In the article, I highlighted how challenging the social environment in segregated areas can be in Northern Ireland, especially for young people: I am referring to the role of paramilitaries, the lack of trust toward statutory bodies, and also the high level of mental suffering, *e.g.* suicide rates (Tomlinson 2012). Following the insights gained from my research, I reflected upon the relationship between some kinds of trauma and the

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17. Parades are intended to celebrate historical events, such as the commemoration of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne and the 1916 Easter Rising. For instance, see Bryan 2000 for a detailed account of the Orange parades.

ongoing structural and everyday violence in segregated areas in Belfast. The social environment presents ongoing situations of conflict, due to a mix of different factors, such as paramilitaries' activities (*i.e.* young people being punished for "antisocial behaviour" by paramilitaries).

Overall, I argue that young people's memory is not connected directly with the past, but it is constantly wrapped within the consequences of that past in a nonconscious way. However, contemporary factors have a role and need to be considered. If trauma is thus something that distances from one own's everyday life, it is worth at least questioning what happens in an environment where trauma is considered as part of the everyday life. Research about the transmission of trauma between generations contributes to the understanding of why trauma is widespread among young people, even though they did not experience the conflict. In case of a traumatic experience, children of those affected can be obsessed and unable to deal with what they are living, "due to a wider context of fear, repression and silence". It is thus necessary to pay attention to the risk of treating trauma "without reference to relevant social and political context" (McNally 2014: 5). Even though young people may not really connect their traumatic experiences to the ways they act in the physical world, their bodies experience that connection and reveal the conditions of the historical and political context in which they live. That is why everyday practices are explicative of the complex framework of young people's lives and why they can be used to understand the social world.

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