THE MANY FORMS AND MEANINGS OF (PEACE) WALLS IN CONTEMPORARY NORTHERN IRELAND

People have demarcated and bounded space for myriad reasons for millennia. They have dug ditches, used materials to create linear *limes* and built fences and walls to protect, separate, control, promote feelings of safety and / or promote difference. While this special edition is concerned with the impacts, roles, and intentions of walls in particular it is important to recognize that there are many ways to materialize separation and to attempt to do so is not a modern invention (although recent proliferation has accelerated and globalized to a degree that it is important to critically examine them now [see Oxley-Rice], especially given the prominence of Trump's proposed wall). Examining the history of wall building reveals how walls have both participated in, and have been altered by, cultural and technological change as they have been articulated as an answer to a variety of societal ills. It has been argued that longstanding, monumental walls act as enduring markers, materializing where identities clash and nations meet (Dey 1–2). However, not all walls are the same—not all walls are ideological—and in this respect it is important to gain an understanding of not only how modern wall building both reflects and differs from basic and long-standing human wants for security and belonging but also to consider how ideological walls operate at both a macro and micro level.

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I have recently argued, with my colleague Randy McGuire, that ideological walls—i.e. those built with the intention to materialize power, domination, and protection to those inside (and conversely communicating insecurity, fear, and isolation) (following Marcuse 43)—are significant in how they are being imagined, materialized and used in the contemporary world (see McAtackney and McGuire). At the most basic level, the high visibility and solid physicality of walls has tangible effects on how people can negotiate and experience their surroundings. They direct and enable—or curtail and prevent—depending on which side of the wall you are on and with ideological walls there is always *the other side* of the wall. Ideological walls are built with the intention to separate and in doing so they project both belonging and exclusion. Ideological walls are built with specific intentions. They are constructed to limit agency by directing movement to interfaces where people can be monitored, surveyed, and even prevented from crossing if they are not the right type of people. In that respect, they are discriminatory. The recourse to wall building by Donald Trump, but also on a global scale, implies that walls are a modern necessity and a future-orientated answer to new problems of mass movement, but materialized divisions are an age-old answer to insecurity and fear (see Mieder)

Moving beyond walls as intentions, they are not straightforward as a material reality. They enable agency that the builders do not imagine and can communicate meanings that they did not intend. Walls materialize a challenge: those who wish to transgress continually create new ways to subvert the purposes of walls (see McWilliams on the Berlin Wall). Walls become the very canvasses to advertise protest against their existence (see McAtackney "Peace Maintenance" on Belfast's peace walls) and myriad interactions with walls can subvert and even undermine the builder's intentions. Walls are inherently mutable and ambiguous in their use and meaning. They are not the static obstacles that they are envisioned to be. In this respect they are simultaneously "face" and "barrier" (Baker), in that they try to control movement but they are usually not completely able to do so and while they are materialized as monumental structures they communicate meanings that are constantly in flux and uncontrollable. Taken together

their materiality and meanings are significant: the transgression of walls becomes all the more powerful because of the symbolic loads that they bear. Their symbolic significance has been clear in Trump's rhetoric around his much publicized wall in which he has described a wall as "better than fencing and it's much more powerful" (see "Donald Trump's Mexico Wall"). However, while we currently focus on walls that materialize where borders are placed, where 'peoples' meet and with the intention to stop the mass-movement of large-scale "imagined communities" (Anderson) they also proliferate at the local level to separate in terms of socio-economic, ethnic, and religious differences. It is from the level of the micro scale that this article will focus.

WHY WALLS IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

While the focus of many wall studies is on the monumental and spectacular—and in particular, in terms of scale, on those walls that separate nation states—there are many types of walls that are proliferating and are catalyzed by, and in turn catalyze, more wallbuilding. The focus of this chapter will be so-called 'peace walls' in Northern Ireland. Peace walls are walls that have been located between working-class, urban areas in Northern Ireland with the intention of ensuring 'peace' through material separation of ghettoized ethnic communities, which are broadly conceived as being catholic / nationalist / republican on one side and protestant / unionist / loyalist on the other. They are a phenomenon that developed and grew alongside the recent ethnic conflict in Northern Ireland, parochially called 'the Troubles.' This is a conflict which is considered to have spanned a 30 year period from c. 968–c. 1998 (see Edwards and McGrattan) and is often presumed to be an anomaly in the Global North; a colonial remnant that has a lineage back to the plantations of Ulster in the early 17th century. However, the increasing use of walls to separate the haves from the have-nots as cities grow (see Oxley-Rice) has many points of connection with the seemingly historically-situated walls of Belfast. The enduring narrative of Northern Ireland is as a 'problem' that is unexplainable, illogical, and therefore unresolvable (see Vaughn-Williams), however, when one explores materialized segregation the issues of who lives alongside these walls ties

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into the use of socio-economic walls located throughout the Global North. The peace walls in Belfast have a dual contemporary purpose as well as reflect the historical nature of conflict and should be read as a cautionary tale of the repercussions of attempting to materialize pre-existing divisions in cities.

Figure 1. Solid peace wall on the Falls Road side, West Belfast (L McAtackney, 2011)

Peace walls are famously the only security infrastructure associated with the Troubles that not only continued into the peace process but have grown in scale, size, and number in the post-conflict context (see Jarman & O'Halloran; Community Relations Council). Peace walls first took permanent, material form during the early days of the Troubles in 1969 after confrontations in West Belfast resulted in an unofficial barricade—which were traditionally erected during the escalation of civil unrest in the city—being replaced with a more permanent feature (Leonard 227). Therefore, it can be argued that the creation of the first peace walls reflected official acceptance of not only a physical reality but of an ongoing desire to create barriers between the communities when relationships were at a low. What was not considered at the time was that the moving from temporary barriers to "walls of corrugated sheets of iron bolted to metal posts sunk in concrete" (Mulholland 73) marked a watershed moment when static walls rather than de facto barriers were used to more permanently separate and divide (even though they are officially categorized as temporary constructions). Materially, they are difficult to define due to their erection by a number of different bodies (including the city council, the housing executive, and the environment agency), in different places over many decades. It has been argued that most examples of peace walls have a "distinctive physical appearance" (Jarman and O'Halloran 5). However, there is a noticeable variation in materials, design, and construction in reality. Some peace-lines are solid constructions that completely visually obscure the neighboring areas [see Figure 1] but the majority have different horizontal planes of materials that have built up over time and become increasingly transparent at the top. These usually start with brick bases that continue into metal fencing or transparent partitions as they move towards the top [see Figure 2]. Some peace walls are simply metal fences or seemingly decorative, boundary walls. Their different material forms highlight that they are not homogenous but rather their materiality reflects numerous agencies reacting to a variety of circumstances that can reflect temporal preferences, political climate, class, geography, and demographics but also institutional frameworks and the impact of change [see Figure 3].

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Figure 2. Peace wall with various degrees of transparent materials on the upper planes at Shankill Road side, West Belfast (L McAtackney, 2011)

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Figure 3. The peace wall at Falls Road / Shankill Road showing the joins where different phases of peace walls meet.

Divisions based on socio-economic models are common to many modern cities (Boal 30) and have proliferated in Global North countries in recent decades, including through the creation of gated communities to keep living spaces of the rich inaccessible to the poor (see Blakeley & Synder; Dinzey-Flores; Low). Factors that mark Belfast as peculiar include ethnic and sectarian aspects, the scale of the materialization of divisions and how that material form has evolved spatially and temporally. Using Belfast, the largest city in the province, as a case-study, this article argues that peace walls are multi-faceted and reflect global as well as local processes, but what it will reflect most on are the unforeseen repercussions of their enduring placement. They are not simply contemporary material partitions that serve as a crude means of 'keeping the peace' between antagonistic near neighbors. They are also not just materializing longstanding divisions based in entrenched historical identities and entwined religious and political affiliations that belong in the 17th century. These walls are spatially significant in dividing communities that were most impacted by the conflict at the time. Their placement strongly intersects with class and they reflect the class-based nature of not only the Troubles but the enduring divisions of the post-conflict state of Northern Ireland as being essentially a working-class experience (see Whyte). Peace walls are complicated and evolving material forms and the impact of their enduring nature is significant to examine in a world that is only now engaging with the political nature of contemporary wall building due to the very public intentions of Donald Trump. The walls of Belfast have longevity. They take a wide variety of forms that can incorporate the aesthetic, the transparent, and the moveable, and despite their seemingly static nature, their meanings have changed. This mutability is important—they can recede into a heavily graffitied backdrop at times of calm with the knowledge they can be reactivated when cyclical conflict demands—but they also can have an impact on memory and identity, which potentially has repercussions beyond their shadows.

Before exploring the material forms of walls there is a need to engage with the terminology of division in Northern Ireland. Although 'peace walls' is in some respects preferable to its most used alternative–the more ephemeral 'peace lines'–the use of 'peace' in conjunction with 'walls' is still problematic. Of course, the use of material barriers to prevent violent conflict has significant distance from most conceptions of 'peace' and the positivity of this term belies the problematic nature of walls used in this way. Also, as noted above, many of the walls used to divide antagonistic communities are monumental in the real sense of the word–towering over their surroundings–but they do not all have the same presence or are entirely opaque. Furthermore, the use of 'peace lines' also has some relevance as barriers in a long-divided city like Belfast are often psychic as well as physical and divisions are not simply mirrored in monumental constructions. Dividing walls are infrequently complete, and most have doorways or openings (official or unofficial) that allow movement–albeit controlled–at particular points but one has to have insider knowledge to know what is acceptable and what is transgressing in terms of crossing from one side to another. In this respect, they do not affect everyone who physically experiences them equally. One has to come from the communities who live alongside them to know what the rules are to abide by or defy. This ambiguity means that although walls may have gateways, people who live alongside them do not often cross them. Due to their longevity, this means that generations have grown up with what Bryonie Reid has called, "a psychology of spatial confinement" (489).

While much attention has been placed on spectacular events around them–the "burning buses" rather than "building bridges" phenomenon associated with media interest (Douglas 1998: 171)–close examination of the material surrounding walls as well as the materials of the walls themselves shows there are more insidious and, in the context of post-conflict Northern Ireland, more problematic impacts in the long-term maintenance of walls. While they are intended to prevent flashpoint violence, for the majority of the time they act to prohibit more normative interactions that one would expect between neighboring communities. This in turn

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inhibits the development of knowledge, understanding, and empathy between near neighbors, particularly as they try to make sense of their experiences of conflict as the state strives for "reconciliation and rapprochement" in the post-conflict context (Belfast Agreement 2–3). At an experiential level, peace walls literally visually block the experiences of similarly disadvantaged and conflict-torn communities from each other and they ensure that a disconnect is perpetuated between those who have been most adversely affected by the Troubles, albeit on opposite sides. This means that effectively, peace walls act to maintain and even strengthen segregation into a post-conflict context, especially given the lack of official engagement with their existence and lack of strategic policy to take them down (Community Relations Council). A major repercussion of this lack of insight into the experiences between near neighbors is physical and psychological isolation. Materially ghettoizing communities ensures that self-curated and one-sided projections of experiences of the conflict (most frequently found in murals and memorials) remain uncritiqued as they materialize on or alongside these walls. The bottom-up, unofficial memorials that have appeared within these communities in the post-conflict period tend to have very particular and skewed views of the past that, alongside the 'othering' of the community hidden from view, which allows misrepresentations of the past to be propagated within. These community memorials that reside alongside peace walls are an important means of 'reading' how communities engage with, and reproduce, their understandings of their identity and community—and who is included within it—on *their side* of the peace wall.

COMMUNITY MEMORIALS IN EAST AND WEST BELFAST

Unofficial community memorials commemorating the Troubles have proliferated in the shadows of peace walls in post-conflict Belfast. These memorials are designed and placed by the local communities, or more precisely those who hold power within them, and are most frequently found in working-class, urban areas of Northern Ireland. They can occur throughout the communities but as they are often placed in spatially meaningful places they are often found alongside or within visual access to peace walls simply

because the spaces were zones of conflict that precipitated their erection. This phenomenon has been relatively under-researched in the context of the peace process (although see McDowell, "Commemorating"; Graham & Whelan; Viggiani). However, it is clear that the proliferation of memorials follows global as well as local trends in communities attempting to materialize memory. Erika Doss, writing about the contemporary United States, has noted how memorialization is increasingly being used to remember a wide variety of people, events, and occasions as a means of claiming political space as well as more personal connections to events considered worthy of remembering. She argues these memorials are important because of the potential for multiplicity of meanings and their ability to "evoke memories, sustain thoughts, constitute political conditions and conjure states of being" (Doss 71). This ability to "conjure states of being" is particularly evident in Northern Ireland as these community memorials clearly act as means of filling an official memory vacuum as more normative mechanisms of heritage creation associated with identity and memory—e.g. museums and heritage centers—continue to avoid contentious issues of "dealing with the past" (following the official decision to not include this issue in the Belfast Agreement, see McGrattan). Many of these unofficial community memorials are placed against peace walls or alongside them, both tacitly confirming their presence and reasons for existence. These community memorials may claim to represent the community experience of the Troubles but they are not attempting to articulate a broad or representative history of the conflict, sanitized for a post-conflict society as one would expect to find in a museum. Rather they aim to present very localized, very skewed, and often one-sided readings of the past. In doing this they are actively facilitated by the walls they reference, which demarcate and contain their community from *the other side.*

A close examination of community memorialization practices in contemporary Belfast reveals that complex and entangled narratives of place, identity, and conflict continue to exist twenty years post-conflict. This reality evidently relates to changing dynamics within those communities, including tensions within, as well as beyond, the walls that separate them from their

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unseen neighbors. For example, the myriad elements contributing to place identity in East Belfast is particularly varied, as evidenced in a recent report on the role of curbstones, flags, and emblems in placemaking and how they are read by the wider public (Bryan et al.). The focus of the report explores the impact of a variety of flags (national, paramilitary, and sectional) as well as painted kerbstones (which are red, white, and blue for 'British' areas, replicating the colors of the Union flag) as well as explicitly paramilitary wall murals, which are particularly prominent in loyalist areas of East Belfast due to ongoing power struggles between various loyalist paramilitary factions within the community. However, the report does not venture into exploring the other manifestations of place identity that proliferate in varying degrees of visibility in the area that are not so explicitly paramilitary but are still problematic. Thus, the report does not consider how community memorials and council-funded public art initiatives interact with the more evidently negative aspects of materialized identity. A number of these memorials are placed against peace walls with brick structures and metal railings that allow visual access to the structure, but not physical interaction. They are exclusive spaces that only commemorate a handful of named men, generally only those who died from a particular group as active combatants. I have argued elsewhere (McAtackney "Differential Deindustrialization") that taken in totality, community memorials are an important aspect of the landscape of identity in working-class, urban areas of Northern Ireland as they are often strategically placed close to peace walls and are significant in mirroring the building materials and monumentality of the peace wall. Most importantly, the peace wall acts as not just a physical barrier but also a conceptual backdrop to reinforce meaning [see Figure 4].

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Figure 4. Image placed on peace wall at Bombay Street, Falls Road side, West Belfast, in 2011 which references the historic built environment of Bombay Street before peace walls were erected (the backdrop image of the streetscape had faded by 2013 and was replaced in 2014) (L. McAtackney 2012)

A more broadly-based investigation of the various forms that create place identity in East Belfast reveals the importance of memorials in being able to proliferate alongside other forms of memory making that are specific to that quarter of the city and are contained within it due to the role of peace walls. In this context, community memorials to the Troubles in East Belfast are almost always related to what Sara McDowell has called "dead men," which means that the plaques present the public memory of the conflict as being solely about (male) combatants who died in violent circumstances to the exclusion of non-combatants, especially women and children as those who also experience conflict ("Commemorating") The androcentric nature of community memory in East Belfast is only reinforced by official heritage agencies who have chosen to focus on celebrating industrialization (East Belfast was the traditional shipbuilding and engineering area of the city) as well as the experiences of World War I (significant numbers of men from the area died at the Battle of Somme in 1916), without

considering how representations of both these experiences are read in their environment as reaffirming the overwhelming male nature of public space in the community. While official reports and government initiatives concentrate on countering various forms of paramilitary wall murals and flags being placed by enduring paramilitary groups to project power *within* their walled communities, there is a lack of consideration as to the intersections of various forms of place identity and why these one-dimensional and negative place identities have been able to develop unchallenged.

In contrast, an example from Nationalist, West Belfast shows there are other dynamics at play in the particular significance attached to the peace walls at Bombay Street, in the Clonard area. This particular peace wall is significant as it directly relates to events that occurred on that street on 14–15 Aug. 1969, which led to the burning of the predominantly Catholic street by a Protestant mob and the creation of the first semi-permanent peace walls in the city. Due to the specificity of the event that resulted in the creation of peace walls there are enduring feelings of victimhood and insecurity attached to these barriers as they were erected at times of civil unrest and these precedents are important. From one side, the neighboring Protestant communities and the security forces felt that their aggressive actions had prevented an armed uprising orchestrated by republican paramilitaries. On the other side, Catholic communities felt abandoned by the security forces to face rampaging Protestant vigilantes which resulted in many houses being burnt, people injured and one death (Mulholland 74). The burning of the area around Bombay Street was psychologically a momentous event for the Catholic community. It came to represent the realized threat of the Protestant mob, the long-repressed desire by Catholics for social justice, and, through the remobilization of the IRA in response, the resurrection of the use of physical force by nationalists (Coogan 88).

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Figure 5. The back yards of houses at Bombay Street, Falls Road side of the peace wall in West Belfast (L McAtackney 2014)

This is an important and loaded place, which continues to host an increasingly monumental peace wall that long ago replaced the bollards and razor wire originally situated to prevent violent interactions. The current peace wall is not only more meaningful to one side of the wall but it is also more present. The houses on the Catholic side of the wall are positioned right beside the wall [Figure 5] whereas the Protestant side of the wall has a road and dead space for a substantial distance before houses appears. These differences in proximity to the wall reflect the impact of stifling movement at fixed points for generations. On one side of the peace wall the community of the late 1960s has grown, whereas on the other side it has contracted. At this point in West Belfast, the peace wall snakes continuously between the two communities of the Falls (Catholic) and the Shankill (Protestant) for over 1.5 miles. One can walk alongside it at certain points, and cross it at others, but it also frequently disappears into recently constructed housing cul-de-sacs (including at Bombay Street, where traditional terraced houses were replaced by more conflict-averting defensive cul-de-sacs). Some green landscaping and grey abandoned zones occur alongside the peace walls but it mostly

physically divides very closely situated former neighbors that have moved closer to the wall on the Falls Road side and further from the wall on the Shankill side. The division created by peace walls was not neat and easily constructed and it did not appear overnight. However, it has been in place so long that it is difficult for the community to remember the times when they used to cross over into each other's communities. They have little idea of how they are differentially projecting their stories of the conflict onto the walls on either side [see Figure 6 for a view of Protestant, unionist identity on *the other side* of the wall].

Figure 6. Belfast City Council re-imaged mural placed on the Shankill Road side of the peace wall in West Belfast depicting aspects of Protestant, Loyalist culture while the names on the margins reference international precedents for segregation walls such as Berlin and Nicosia (L McAtackney 2014)

On entering Bombay Street, the memorialization of the peace walls is the main focus of the street through the brick structure of the "Clonard Martyrs' Memorial Garden." This structure is framed by a number of wall murals commemorating those from the locale who were killed during the Troubles (including one that

is attached to the peace wall). The memorial purports to remember the community but in reality it indicates that memory is selective and hierarchical. Those members of the community killed by their own side are absent and plaques are divided into civilians and active combatants. The narrative of the memorial situates the community on *this side* of the wall as unequivocal victims of aggression from the other community and the security forces by referencing what happened on the street in 1969. The origins of the garden tell a nuanced story of memory creation in post-conflict Belfast. It was created by the Greater Clonard ex-Prisoners Association in 2000, two years after the signing of the Belfast Agreement) and the associated plaques were added on 11 Mar. 2001. The perspective of the ex-prisoners is evident through "the Republican ex-prisoners of the Greater Clonard" being given most prominence in the memorial. This is confirmed in an associated pamphlet, which one can buy from a box within the memorial garden, as it includes such articles as "'C' Company, 2nd Battalion, Belfast Brigade Oglaigh na h-Eireann Roll of Honour." There is only one article that relates to non-combatants: "Lists of Civilians Murdered by Loyalists and Crown Forces."

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Figure 7. "Clonard Martyrs' Memorial on Bombay Street in West Belfast (L McAtackney 2011)

As is fitting for its location, the memorial is monumental as it nestles alongside the peace wall [Figure 7]. It is a permanent, tripartite structure with gates that can be locked but are frequently left open. The central area of the brick-built memorial holds a free-standing Celtic cross in the form of a common Irish gravestone type with the words "Clonard Martyrs" inscribed on it. The walls of the structure contain numerous plaques dedicated to "The people of the Greater Clonard" and "Republican Prisoners from the Greater Clonard Area," dating from various periods after the formation of the state of Northern Ireland in 1921 up to the early years after the Belfast Agreement. Of the seven plaques located throughout the garden only one is reserved for 'civilians,' whereas the other six specifically reference Republican paramilitary deaths from the 1920s onwards (cf to memorials in loyalist East Belfast, which tend to only commemorate [male] members of paramilitary groups). A number of flags flank the central and side compartments of the structure, including an Irish tricolor and a number of socialist flags. This memorial was created to be interacted with: as well as the gates generally remaining unlocked during the day there are a number of benches in the two side compartments and terracotta holders have been placed to hold debris. The area is clean, tidy, and well-cared-for and is a frequent visitor attraction for the various "black taxi tours" that have developed in the post-conflict context (see McDowell "Selling Conflict"). It is especially active during ex-prisoner commemorative events associated with republican anniversaries such as the anniversary of the Easter Rising or the deaths of republican hunger strikers. Geography is important—while it is located down a side street, the Clonard Martyrs' Memorial Garden was specifically sited because of the symbolism of Bombay Street and the continued existence of the peace walls. Its implicit claims of victimhood, representing the community, and condemnation of "loyalist death squads" from the other community are allowed to proliferate without dispute due to its conceptual as well as physical inaccessibility to those on the *other side* of the peace walls.

DISCUSSION

This article has attempted to do a number of things in its exploration of peace walls in contemporary Belfast. First, it has provided

a broader context to a place that is often considered an anomaly but may in fact may be an important case-study in revealing the long-term implications of using walls in an attempt to prevent the movement and interaction of people for ideological reasons. Second, it moves beyond exploring the material and spatial quality of peace walls to displaying the implications of containing communities behind walls and the impact this can have on materializations of public memory. Last, it has shown that when communities are isolated and physically separated, this circumstance can facilitate the creation of unhelpful and androcentric skewed narratives at best, and 'fake histories' at worst, to be propagated in memorialization practices with little to no contradiction.

While Northern Ireland is often considered a very singular case-study in the Global North, it does contain elements that are not unique to its locale and should be taken as warnings of what can happen when walls are used to oppress or block community interactions. Using the examples of place identity in East Belfast and Clonard Martyrs Memorial Garden in West Belfast, it is clear that in both cases there has been an unfettered ability to curate public memory that focuses on particular experiences of conflict as being naturalized around particular narratives. This means that in East Belfast place identity is unremittingly androcentric, both in who is remembered and how they are remembered, to the exclusion of women's experiences of conflict or peace. In West Belfast, Bombay Street is used to explicitly articulate narratives of victimhood that relate back to events that occurred that precipitated the creation of the peace wall at the very beginning of the conflict without any reflection as to what happened afterwards. Both of these narratives are unhelpful for different reasons but most particularly because they retain and reinforce segregation and have resulted in place identities that have remained unchallenged due to the materiality of peace walls, which allow them to be created, maintained, and uncritiqued by *the other side*.

This case-study potentially has wider implications. Living in a world where walls have increasingly been turned to as a first resort in order to deal with issues of security, especially given the pronouncements of Donald Trump, we can forget that ideological walls are not new and they are not all materially the same. Walls are articulated as being naturalized structures that date

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back through the mists of time and as markers of protection, they are positive constructions for those who wish to be secured from those outside (see Dey). The desire to build material barriers to protect those inside and prohibit the movement of those outside is not a new one, but one must question the role of walls if they are proliferating with this express intention. Following Marcuse, walls should only be built if their aim is to "welcome and shelter," but not to "exclude and oppress, or isolate and confine" (50). Negative walls will ultimately become a symbol for subversion—be that covertly, through bypassing them, or overtly, through using them as a canvas for protest. Ultimately, they will follow the fate of all such walls through history—they will fall. In the meantime, the Belfast case-study reveals that the impact of walls is not straightforward and is not always predictable. Walls not only curtail negative interactions but they prevent everyday interactions that can lead to allowing public memory to become excessively localized and exclusionary of not just *the other side* but also substantial groups within their own community.

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