Side-by-Side in the Land of Giants: 
A study of space, contact and civility in Belfast

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Abstract

In Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement brought with it a great deal of attention and initiatives to construct and increase intergroup contact and shared spaces in an effort to reconcile divided nationalist/Catholic and unionist/Protestant communities. In the time following this peace agreement, the Belfast Giants ice hockey team was established, and in their 16 years as a team they have become one of the most attended spectator activities in Belfast, trending away from the tribalism, single-space, single-class, and single-gender dynamics of modern sport in Northern Ireland. This thesis research followed the supporters of the Belfast Giants throughout the 2015-2016 ice hockey season to better understand the encounters across historical divisions that are occurring in the Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) Arena.

The research of this PhD thesis is directed by the concepts of social capital, intergroup contact, and civility. These concepts, when placed within the context of divided society, contribute to the thesis’ guiding analytical framework, which offers thematic guideposts in areas of prejudice and anxiety, tolerance and trust, space and identity. Influenced by in-depth qualitative research that seeks to access local voices, this research takes the conceptual and analytical guidance into the stands of the SSE Arena. In this way, the unique ‘side-by-side’ methodology, which involved conducting interviews with the person in the seat to my left or right at Belfast Giants ice hockey games while immersing myself in the supporter community, emerged as not only a contribution to unearthing new voices in this oft-studied region, but also as an innovative contribution to qualitative methodological literatures.

Beyond the methodological contribution, this thesis makes two further contributions to existing academic literatures on post-peace agreement relationships. The first of these is through the clear relationship between identity and space that are evident in its findings. Between the poles of conflict and reconciliation are the complex and simple interactions, which when placed in the SSE Arena at a Belfast Giants game illustrate the multi-layered and fluid nature of identity. The thesis finds the hockey arena is a space where a shared identity, ‘the hockey family’, materialises and includes nationalist and unionist populations. This shared identity is deeply connected to a physical place and activity that are situated outside the all-encompassing nature of division in present-day Belfast. However, within the unusual setting of an ice hockey arena in Northern Ireland there emerges ordinariness in encounter across historical cleavage, and from these mundane interactions comes the final contribution – ‘side-by-sidedness’. Influenced by supporters’ willingness to sit side-by-side those on the opposite side of a historical division who they may not be willing to live beside, this theme is framed as a lightened encounter that challenges assumptions inherent in post-peace agreement settings. The research findings frame the SSE Arena as a site of sanctuary from polarised sectarian identities and activities, as well as a site of resistance from overarching peace agendas that push shared space and seek reconciliation. Side-by-sidedness exists in the everyday between these two poles. In highlighting this space between, this theme challenges the assumptions of ‘face-to-faceness’ that are inherent across the three concepts informing this thesis and through utilising notions of everyday peace and everyday division to include the relational, the spatial and the metaphorical, this thesis’ meta-theme frames a new way of ‘getting on with’ it in the shadows of conflict.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Acknowledgments

This PhD thesis has tested my attempt at living a life that appreciates the journey and not just the destination. Along the pathway I have been aided, assisted, propped up, and carried by a number of wonderful people, and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge some of these amazing people here.

This project would not have been possible without access granted by the Belfast Giants organisation, and more importantly, the welcome of ‘the hockey family’. You took me in with all my questions and requests and made me feel like I belonged. Wherever my journey leads from here I will always be a fan of the fans of the Belfast Giants. Go Giants!

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Being the son of two teachers, I do not have to look far for encouragement in my seemingly never-ending formal education. There were times along this PhD journey I wondered if I had taken my educational path further than I should have, let alone across the planet, yet the support of my family – Frieda, Randy, Chris, Campbell, Heidi, Jamie, and my brothers and sisters-in-law – has been unwavering and ever-present, and for that I am grateful.

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To those who have made Manchester such a meaningful place, (and there are many of you) from the gracious staff members and colleagues of HCRI who I count as friends and the magnificent Sarah, Peter, Luke, Rachel, Jasmin and Birte. Danke schön.

To my partner on the winding road through life, Rebecca, you have made this thesis possible. Moving across an ocean to begin a new adventure based on a short and idealistic research proposal is something most people would shake their head at. Yet, with each chapter of this research you showed me what love and support look and feel like. Although a short paragraph of recognition on page 7 of a thesis is not capable of expressing my heartfelt gratitude for the steadiness that you have provided me, please know that I am in awe of you.

And finally, to Leif, who is only joining in at the end of this particular journey – you are awesome.

On with the journey.
Note on the Author

Eric Lepp is currently working as a Senior Tutor at the University of Manchester, teaching at the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute. He has a B.A. in Social Development Studies (University of Waterloo, Canada), a B.S.W. - Social Work (University of Waterloo, Canada) and an M.A. in International Peace Studies (University of Notre Dame, USA). His current learning interests include spaces of encounter and coexistence, peace education, adaptable methodologies, identity and conflict, and resistance to power.
Chapter 1
Introduction

She is handsome, she is pretty
She is the belle of Belfast city

The words ring out as we all stand cheering, yelling, whooping, and singing along. The Belle of Belfast (Irish Rovers folk tune) and Song 2 (by Blur) mashup that plays after every Belfast goal is always welcome to the ears in the SSE Arena. Jonathan Boxill has just scored a goal against the Sheffield Steelers, a longstanding rival in an ever-changing league, the lead has reached 4-1, and with only 10 minutes left to play it feels like the Giants are all but ensured a victory.

After the singing, cheering and awkward high fives that come with any home team goal we all make our way back to our seated positions. We re-navigate our armrests and the mood has noticeably lightened into an ‘almost-arrogance’, as if to forget a couple of hours ago we were nervously discussing our chances with a tinge of doubt. Perhaps, at this early stage in the season we have yet to fully trust this year’s team that is in front of us.

The arena is only getting settled from the goal when the team captain Adam Keefe finds himself in a full-on fight with Zach Fitzgerald, a Steeler Defenceman. The gloves are dropped and a few bare-knuckle punches are thrown and we are all on our feet again letting ‘Keefer’ know we appreciate his efforts, even though Fitzgerald clearly got the best of him. The crowd noise of a fight is even louder than a goal; particularly drawing my attention is the polite middle-aged woman I am seated beside, who I am pretty sure I heard yell ‘Kick his Ass!’ in her strong Northern Irish lilt.

The arena is buzzing as the final seconds count down; for some the evening has just begun – the hockey game kicking off a Saturday night of partying – and for others the final buzzer draws to close fun with family or friends.

The thousands of teal and white jerseys snake their way through the concourse and spill out of the Odyssey Complex into the Titanic Quarter crossing Sydenham Road to the carpark. From the front of the arena the split that exemplifies the living arrangements of Belfast becomes plainly visible. The red taillights show two distinct streams – some merging east onto the M3 and others merging west over the Lagan Bridge to homes in other areas of the city. We have all come together, sitting side-by-side, cheering and chanting for goals and fights, but at the end of the night we all return to our separate corners and in Belfast this often means being back in the security of our single-identity neighbourhoods.

Field Journal
24 October 2015
Giants 4 – Sheffield 1
This opening account, taken from my reflections of a game with fellow supporters of the Belfast Giants ice hockey club, illustrates what it feels like to participate in an evening at the Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) Arena. As the major city in the north of Ireland, and the civic and parliamentary centre of Northern Ireland, Belfast has long played a central role in the centuries-long conflict in the area. Yet in the winter of 2015/2016 I found myself in the stands of the SSE Arena amongst my fellow Giants fans, who despite the unavoidable legacy of division in present-day Belfast, come together to sit side-by-side and watch ice hockey games. Through this unique case study, and employing a conceptual framework based in understanding interactions and social group constructions in divided society, this thesis makes an original and timely academic contribution to deeper understanding of transformative processes of the everyday.

**Framing the research**

In seeking to better understand how people who live on opposite sides of a violent conflict navigate sharing space with one another on a horizontal level, I immersed myself within the supporter community of the Belfast Giants ice hockey team. I spent a full ice hockey season in Belfast attending games and conducting primary interviews with the fans sitting next to me throughout the game, as well as interviewing organisations and community members from both sides of the unionist-nationalist¹ divide. The wider social and political backdrop of Northern Ireland presents a region that has been vastly affected by the long conflict and division; the comprehensiveness of ethno-sectarianism² spans generations, social classes, genders and geographies, and into the everyday lives of those living in Belfast. The ice hockey supporters of Northern Ireland thus present a gathering of people who cross these cleavages of division and

¹ Throughout the thesis I will employ the term unionist to describe the population, traditionally Protestant, who believe that Northern Ireland is rightfully a member state of the United Kingdom and I will use the term nationalist to describe the traditionally Catholic community that believed Northern Ireland belongs within the Republic of Ireland. In my writing of this thesis the terms unionist and nationalist are utilised as a means of describing wider political aims in conflict in Northern Ireland, and to avoid casting a religious narrative in this conflict. However, the interviews and texts will also use the terms Protestant, unionist and loyalist or Catholic, nationalist, republican in their descriptions. It is also important to note that although the terms and unionist and nationalist are used to describe significant populations, these are very diverse groups and should not be interpreted as two monolithic entities.

² One further note on terminology: the term ‘ethno-sectarian’ is used throughout this thesis to describe the conflict. This is done for the same reasons as using nationalist and unionist above - consistency. The term sectarian is utilised to encompass the distinctly different interests between the conflicting groups. The conflict has also been written about and identified as ‘ethno-nationalist’ and ‘ethno-religious’.
choose to share a part of their identities with one another as they sit side-by-side in the SSE Arena, home of the Belfast Giants. This ‘hockey family’ that surrounds the Giants offers a case study of those who have been deeply affected by the cleavages of conflict and yet exhibit a willingness to share encounter, experience, and/or a piece of their identity with those towards whom they are expected to harbour animosity. While focus in critical academic literature tends to highlight breakdowns and failures in post-peace agreement settings (Call, 2012; Westendorf, 2015), this act of coming together across historical division draws attention, and offers a specific contribution, to knowledge around places in which peaceful interaction and encounter are asking place in often ordinary ways.

This thesis investigation falls under the inter- and transdisciplinary umbrella of peace and conflict research. Early peace study was approached from a number of academic and practically-focused angles, with a shared sentiment that the role of academic production was inherently connected to normative goals – having a desire to effect and contribute towards positive social change – a movement reinforced by Galtung’s (1985) belief that peace research had a role in “the reduction of violence of all kinds” (141) and Wallensteen’s (2011) recognition that such studies are “drawn from Utopian ideas” where core motivations innately understand that “the world has to be improved – no matter how we describe it today – as the present condition of our planet is far from most meaningful definitions of peace” (14). In more recent years the study of peace and conflict has taken a more fixed disciplinary position within the academe, connecting to the traditional disciplines of politics and international relations – generating some disagreement amongst peace and conflict scholars with an interest in advocacy, practical applications, and co-producing alternative solutions to (violent) conflict (Barash and Webel, 2014). A shift that corresponds with a changing wider academic setting, where raised output expectations, limited funding, increasingly risk-averse ethical guidelines which keep researchers out of conflict zones, and an institutional culture of silencing voices willing to speak out against injustice have combined to generate an environment of less impactful research/advocacy possibilities. This thesis, written outside of wider funding expectations and under supervision of two academics who have encouraged taking the time and opportunity of this PhD to cultivate humble intellectual curiosity, retains a sense of interdisciplinarity influenced by the early intentions of peace and conflict study.
Any notion of ‘utopian ideas’ remains difficult to fully grasp in Northern Ireland, 20 years after the Good Friday Agreement was reached between unionist and nationalist political groups and confirmed by a referendum on both sides of the border. Although post-peace agreement Belfast looks vastly different than it did at the height of conflict – improved largely by the fact that neither nationalist nor unionist factions have articulated any desire to continue armed struggle against the other – the protracted conflict, known as the Troubles, has left a legacy of lived division where formal resolution to conflict in Northern Ireland has not been accompanied by any sense of meaningful reconciliation (Ross, 2004). At the centre of the conflict is the status of Northern Ireland as a member-state of the United Kingdom. ³ The predominantly Protestant unionist population generally consider themselves British and desire a Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom, while the predominantly Catholic nationalist population generally consider themselves Irish, and aspire to have a united Ireland (English, 1999). The Good Friday Agreement did not alter the aspirations of either community, rather it recognised the legitimacy of claims on both sides of a deep divide.

The continued segregation that holistically permeates the everyday lives between these communities is where this thesis finds its starting point. The term ‘community’ is employed across this thesis in several ways; however, it is primarily used in differentiating the two significant groups within Northern Ireland, where there is commonly an ‘us’ and ‘them’ narrative between nationalist and unionist beliefs and ideology. Such use aligns with the work of Gillian Rose (1997), whose work around community arts highlights challenges to using the term community, citing debates around the monolithic identifications it can construct. However, she chose to use the term to “produce a boundary between members and non-members” (4). Within this thesis community is deployed in a similar manner in that it offers an opportunity to highlight a group identity. The continued existence of identifiably differing communities is supported by factors like voting patterns and educational segregation (McDowell and Braniff, 2014), as well as the construction of ‘Peace Walls’ in post-peace agreement Belfast (Diez and Hayward, 2008). Segregation along ethno-sectarian lines in present-day Belfast is a defining fixture of social networks within the city (Garry and McNicholl, 2015; McGlynn, Tonge and McAuley, 2014). There are

³ The United Kingdom at present consists of Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.
initiatives and activities that cross community boundaries – the Belfast Giants are one of these – yet the concept of shared space and shared identity has yet to be normalised in Northern Ireland. The Giants supporters demonstrate an overlapping of identities across existing divided communities to create a new shared community – something Selway (2011) recognises as largely missing in Northern Ireland and certainly missing in academic research.

Although sport has been identified as a potential bridge across divided communities, the sporting landscape of Northern Ireland often highlights the disengagement between communities; traditional Irish sports such as hurling and Gaelic football are single-identity spaces of the nationalist community, while football/soccer is strongly embraced as unionists, despite both communities’ involvement. The Irish Premier League teams have sectarian and geographic divides that dictate the unwelcome nature of the sport across the two communities. Rugby and golf would seemingly offer an exception to the rule, being played and supported by both sides; however, being largely middle-class enterprises, they have not impacted patterns of social division.

In the period directly following the Good Friday Agreement, the region’s Millennium Funds – money raised through the UK national lottery system to celebrate the new millennium – were used to build the Odyssey Complex. The SSE Arena, a central part of the Odyssey Complex, is the region’s largest multipurpose arena – hosting concerts, boxing matches, and ice hockey games of the Belfast Giants 32 times a year. This complex is in the Titanic Quarter, a purposefully constructed space on the old shipbuilding grounds of East Belfast. This space, although historically identified as a majority unionist section of the city, is widely recognised as a place for everyone – the partitions of Belfast are not evident in the Titanic Quarter or the Odyssey Complex. The house rules of the hockey arena reinforce this directive of welcome by including clauses such as the restriction of sporting colours except for ice hockey jerseys (SSE Arena, 2016). The hockey arena is further de-politicised: every other arena in the Elite Ice Hockey League (EIHL) plays the national anthem prior to games, with the exception of the Giants, where playing God Save the Queen, with its allegiance to the United Kingdom, would alienate a significant portion of the fan base. It is within this

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4 In England – God Save the Queen / In Wales - Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau / In Scotland – Flower of Scotland
constructed framework and setting that the Belfast Giants have thrived in post-peace agreement Belfast.

The SSE Arena and the Belfast Giants sit within the divisive and segregated history of the region, and yet as an unorthodox sport and spectator experience they also sit outside of the history and narrative of division. The team has shown itself to be resilient and popular: the fan base averages over 4,500 spectators per game (IIHF, 2017). The choice to attend and become involved in the Giants supporter community connects to Friere’s (1996) framing of human agency and its potential for social change, intertwining with the understanding that humans cannot be confined by the current state of things. The act of sitting side-by-side the fans of the Belfast Giants lends itself to a better understanding of how this setting contributes to and produces a wider social network and shared identity in a city where it cannot be assumed that the physical act of sitting beside someone from across an historical ethno-sectarian cleavage would be welcomed. The experiences of togetherness and separateness in this divided society are difficult to explain, thus experiencing myself the setting and fans of the SSE Arena offers an opportunity to develop an informed explanation within this social group. The study of Giants supporters within the context of the divided society in which they live is guided by Lederach’s (2005) conceptualisation of the moral imagination, defined as such:

“…the moral imagination requires the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies; the ability to sustain a paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity; the fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act; and the acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence.” (5)

**Defining the research questions**

Whilst the thesis has continuously evolved, the thematic interests have remained grounded in seeking to better understand the way that people engage difference and ‘get on with it’ in post-peace agreement settings. This overarching aim concerns how people interact and negotiate one another across division following the signing of a peace agreement. In doing so, this thesis is constructed around two guiding research questions:

- What levels of interaction and communication are occurring across historical division within the SSE Arena during Belfast Giants games?
• Does what is occurring at Belfast Giants games across historical division have a wider impact in Belfast?

These questions were designed intentionally to have rather wide possibilities. The core aim of these research questions was to investigate two distinct aspects of the ice hockey supporter experience – what occurs within the SSE Arena and how this can be interpreted when placed against the larger backdrop of historical division evident in Belfast. The wide possibilities of these research questions offer an opportunity for themes or narratives to emerge within the research community, while also offering a multi-level analysis of how people do or do not mix in present day Belfast.

**Outlining the thesis**

The following thesis is constructed of eleven chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 offers an historical and contextual overview of Northern Ireland, which outlines the long history of division beginning with the Ulster plantations in the north of Ireland to a focus on patterns of segregation that impact the daily lives of present-day residents of Belfast. In constructing an understanding of the research context, this chapter also gives an overview of the Belfast Giants and their home, the SSE Arena.

The following three chapters comprise a conceptual foundation for the research of this thesis. There are many studies, theories and literatures which seek to offer explanation of social interaction and understanding between humans, particularly those in conflict with one another; however, in an effort to situate this academic study, this thesis focuses on three primary literatures connected by this desire to better understand social encounters and constructions. These literatures – social capital, intergroup contact and civility – are utilised over Chapters 3, 4 and 5 to connect the thesis to relevant academic literature, taking into account rigorous social science research that has an offering to this thesis. They offer a critical overview of each of these literatures, engaging historical development, emergent themes, and usage in divided society. These three concepts are central to the construction of a pre-fieldwork structure for the thesis, with each literature having a track record of applicability in peace and conflict research, particularly through the varied degrees of response they offer towards encouraging tolerance and coexistence across division.
Chapter 6 then provides an analytical framework, which builds on the concepts of the three previous chapters and draws them together within the understanding of the context of the study. With each of the literatures covered in the previous three chapters highlighting greater possibility for interaction and encounter between individuals, examining these theories within the context of Northern Ireland has much to offer the reimagining of relationships. In doing so, this chapter draws out six thematic guideposts – prejudice, tolerance, anxiety, trust, identity and space – that offer support for navigating the research questions throughout the field work of this thesis.

The first quarter of this PhD – including context, concept and analytical framework – provides the platform on which I conducted field research; however, I went into my research with the intention of allowing the findings to be led by the people in the research community. Thus, though this platform remains deeply influential throughout the thesis, particularly in drawing out the meta-theme of side-by-sidedness (discussed in Chapter 10), the research population and the honesty of the data collection drew out research themes that lessened the prominence of these original concepts. The inductive nature of this study means that the findings chapters (Chapters 8, 9 and 10) are not structured around directly testing the theories or conceptual underpinnings of social capital, the contact hypothesis or civility, rather they are influenced by the thematic guideposts outlined in the analytical framework.

The methodology (Chapter 7) showcases and contextualises the way in which the thesis research was carried out in Belfast in 2015-2016. This chapter presents a theoretical, systemic and researcher analysis of the methods applied to my research in Northern Ireland. Central to this thesis is the employment of an innovative, in-depth qualitative approach to the primary interviews conducted within the arena, whereby I interview the individuals in the seats beside me throughout the duration of an ice hockey game. The side-by-side nature of this research approach lends itself to a casual and candid opportunity for discussion and questions on a horizontal level. It is through the interactions of this setting that deeper understanding of lived experience and the shared space of the SSE Arena are drawn into focus. The methodology chapter discusses this unique approach, drawing particular focus to my ability to navigate the relationships and fandom of ice hockey, highlighting my positionality as a Canadian academic researcher within a sporting context with which I am familiar. In fitting with a
participant observation approach, I spent the duration of the 2015-16 ice hockey season (September to March) living in Belfast, attending games and carrying out my research.

The following two chapters, entitled ‘The Hockey Family’ and ‘Kingdom of the Giants’, present a shift into the research findings for the thesis. Chapter 8 is the presentation of individual and shared – yet often divergent – beliefs and histories coming together to create a heterogeneous group of ice hockey fans. This chapter, ‘The Hockey Family’, focuses on the hockey supporters as a unique social group. In doing so, it explores who is in attendance at games, what has drawn them into the building for that game or for the many games that they attend, how they identify themselves, and what such identification means. The relationships that occur between supporters of the Giants, as well as the relationship of the supporters with the club, are examined. What emerges is a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the crowd, the role of the team and the sport, and the interpersonal engagement that is possible as fans of the same team.

Chapter 9, ‘Kingdom of the Giants’, gives an overarching focus on the meaning of being a Giants supporter and the value of the activity occurring in the hockey arena by consistently situating it against the backdrop of wider Belfast. Organised around an understanding of this social group, this chapter takes a wider look at the meaning of this social group and the boundaries that are established by the space in which this group interacts. Built on the previous chapter’s presentation of the diversity and accessibility of the hockey family, Chapter 9 moves beyond the social group to explore the Giants phenomenon and the SSE Arena as a sanctuary and as a site of resistance. In this regard, the hockey arena offers a normalised space where expectations of both division and peace are challenged by the ‘getting on with it’ that is occurring.

Chapter 10, ‘Side-by-Sidedness’, highlights the dominant theme from the research, that of being side-by-side in space, identity, encounter, and history when choosing to be a Giants supporter in the SSE Arena. The meta-theme of ‘side-by-sidedness’ ties all of the previous chapters together. The research findings expose tensions and unexpected harmonies of being and living alongside difference in Belfast. Investigated under the theories of the literature review – social capital, intergroup contact, and civility – an assumption of ‘face-to-faceness’ becomes inherent; however, side-by-sidedness offers challenges to the nature of these interactions. What develops through this analysis is the
notion that a willingness to sit side-by-side across historical division has a part to play in the change processes that are inherent in moving out of deep division. The versatility of the term, side-by-side, is then utilised to engage the whole of the thesis, being seen through the research motivations, the physical, the methodological, as well as the relational constructions of this project. Side-by-siredness is where this thesis offers its key contributions, as it provides a different way of engaging everyday peace and everyday division by including the relational, the spatial and the metaphorical.

The final chapter of this thesis offers a conclusion to the research, reiterating the key contributions of the findings chapters and offering possibilities for further research moving forward. The first of three key contributions is found in the innovative methodological approach. The act of interviewing the person to my left or right at a horizontal level challenges common academic social science methods, which are recognised for their formality and power differential. The second contribution utilises the guideposts of the analytical framework to focus in on the relationship between space and identity. The fluidity and multi-layered social identities that came out of research in the SSE Arena challenge binary categorisations of ‘us’ and ‘them’. The final contribution revisits side-by-siredness, challenging expectations of division and peace, by focusing on the everyday, normalised interaction of sharing an interest. In doing so, this contribution illustrates the physical and metaphorical nature of encounter that is embedded in the relationships constructed around Belfast’s ice hockey team.

As a complete offering this PhD thesis seeks to provide an informed and nuanced understanding of a complex social group that defies the influences of division in present and past Northern Ireland. From this research project, the findings reveal a normalisation in the encounters that occur within the hockey arena, highlighting that settings free from expectation enable a re-imagining of relational boundaries, making room for being side-by-side.
Chapter 2

Contextualising the Research Space:
Northern Ireland, Belfast and the SSE Arena

Introduction

The Belfast Giants offer a case study to examine shared space in large part because they have gained considerable and sustained popularity across divided groups since their first season in 2000. The context of Belfast offers an historically divided society that, 20 years post-peace agreement, is still challenged in living together. The Giants organisation and the sport they play seemingly have a history disconnected from the intolerances and prejudices that permeate everyday Belfast. In the curiosity of wondering how these two elements come together – a shared space within a divided setting – this chapter develops the necessary understanding of Northern Ireland, Belfast, and ice hockey in the region, in order to approach this phenomenon.

In contextualising Belfast and the SSE Arena as primary field sites, this chapter utilises three sections that lean on one another in positioning the research. The first section provides a contextual history of Northern Ireland, albeit in an extremely condensed manner. The primary focus is the long history of conflict, illustrating that this deep division has permeated the everyday lives of those living in Northern Ireland across generations. The second section focuses on Belfast, highlighting the integration and movement, or lack thereof, between ethno-sectarian communities within the city. This section highlights the encounters and relationships that are and are not politically and socially encouraged in the context of a divided society. This leads to the final section, which offers an overview of the SSE Arena, the history of ice hockey in Belfast and the establishment of the Belfast Giants. The conclusion of this chapter draws these three elements (Northern Ireland, Belfast, and the Belfast Giants) together.
Northern Ireland: An historical overview

This section of the chapter provides an historical overview which underlines the entrenched cleavages of Ireland/Northern Ireland. In doing so, three stages of history are discussed. The first spans the Ulster Plantation in the late 16th century to Partition in 1921. The second is the era known as the Troubles that took place in the latter half of the 20th century, and the final subsection contextualises Northern Ireland following the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and beyond.

Plantation to Partition

“Without the colonial plantation of Ulster in the seventeenth century, and its legacy, Northern Ireland would not exist.”

O’Leary and McGarry, 1997: 55

Historical overviews of the Northern Irish context tend to focus on the Troubles, the period of conflict that spanned from the late 1960s to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. However, the Troubles do not stand alone as an isolated period of conflict in the north of Ireland. This subsection develops understanding of the divisiveness in Ireland from the 1600s to Irish independence in 1921. There is a complex history during this period, thus a disclaimer is required: this is a brief account of significant events and themes that emerge from this period of more than 300 years and is by no means a comprehensive historical account.

The Ulster plantation, as highlighted in the O’Leary and McGarry quote, is broadly seen as the historical event that has left cleavages between Irish-Catholic-Nationalist-Republican and British-Protestant-Unionist populations that remain to this day. In the early 1600s, a primarily Scottish population (known as Ulster-Scots) were granted land in the north of Ireland by the British monarchy on the condition they act to protect the land and guard against native resistance (Mulholland, 2002). The condition of this arrangement was to “build a society based on Protestantism, English law, and (in contrast to Gaelic pastoralism) settled agriculture” (Mulholland, 2002: 3). It has been

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5 The Good Friday Agreement is also referred to as the Belfast Agreement.
6 Irish-Catholic-Nationalist-Republican – These words are often used interchangeably in the context of Northern Ireland. I will use the term ‘nationalist’ as I believe this best represents the goals of this community and avoids religious implications.
7 British-Protestant-Unionist – Similar to the footnote above, each of these terms is used; I will be using the term ‘unionist’.

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suggested that under this arrangement “in the towns, the two communities tended to live apart; …in the country (so far as it was affected by the Plantations) the Irish tended to be excluded from the good valley land and banished to the mountains” (Barritt and Carter, 1962: 53). The plantation structure was a considerable success; Cairns and Darby (1998) note that “by the 18th century they [the settlers] occupied 95% of the land, which they had confiscated from the natives, and came to form a majority in Ulster in contrast to a Catholic majority in the South of Ireland” (755).

The shifting populations and corresponding tactics of dominion over the island of Ireland prior to independence in the south requires highlighting to better understand the seesaw of control and rebellion associated with Northern Ireland. History shows shifting allegiances with the English monarchy – from the Catholic support of King James II to Protestant support for his son-in-law King William III who had James deposed in 1690 at the Battle of Boyne (Darby, 1976). King William, known colloquially as William of Orange, remains a central figure in the Protestant identity of Northern Ireland. In the years of Protestant monarchy, the rule of Ireland has been varied, with attempts at direct rule as well as home rule. What emerges from historical accounts, be they unionist or nationalist, is a polarised island of Ireland between Catholic and Protestant identities.

There were violent confrontations throughout the 19th century, often in rural communities; Darby (1995a: 14) notes that “no generation since the Plantation of Ulster has escaped its heritage of violence”.

The great famine that afflicted Ireland from 1845 to 1852 saw a decrease in the population of Ireland, with over one million famine-related deaths (starvation, typhus, dysentery, cholera etc.), and over one million people leaving the island through emigration (O’Leary and McGarry, 1997). The greatest losses occurred in the south Ulster counties of Cavan, Fermanagh and Monaghan; however, the impact of this tragedy saw no boundaries in community, with a “searing impact on traditionally prosperous parts of eastern Ulster” (BBC News, 2015). Also, large scale emigration that corresponded with the famine resulted in an extensive diaspora community (particularly in the United States) that continues to have a hand in Irish politics (Dixon,

8 Two such skirmishes were the Battle of Garvagh in 1813 or Dolly’s Brae in 1849.
9 The province of Ulster has six counties in Northern Ireland (Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone) and three in the Republic of Ireland (Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan).
It warrants noting that despite widespread losses the famine did not dampen sectarianism.

In the years following the famine a contentious form of cultural identity emerged across unionist culture that remains controversial and provocative to this day: parading. Bryan (2000) describes this form of demonstration, primarily enacted around the 12th of July anniversary of the Battle of Boyne, as having a long history; however, prior to the famine this was an act of the lower classes in rural settings generally looked down upon and made illegal by the Ulster elites and politicians. This law was challenged in 1867 by William Johnston, a unionist who had previously and unsuccessfully run for political office, who organised a march and was jailed for illegal assembly. The response saw him become a popular political figure amongst the Protestant working classes (Bryan, 2000). Shortly following this, the political establishment in Westminster repealed the Party Processions Act, and the act of parading on the 12th of July has intertwined itself with unionist culture since (Mulholland, 2002).

Figure 1: The Somme Garden of Reflection – Shankill Road, Belfast (Extramural Activity, 2012)
The First World War represents a significant period in modern Irish history, leading up to the partition and independence of the Republic of Ireland. In the midst of disagreement in Westminster around the ‘Irish Question’, both the unionist and nationalist populations joined the war for Britain in WWI. Notably the Ulster 36th Division’s heavy losses and efforts in the Battle of the Somme entrenched the event into the narrative that ties Ulster to the Union and remains seen on many memorials/murals in unionist areas of Belfast; one such example is the Somme Garden of Reflection on Shankill Road shown in Figure 1. At Easter in 1916 a group of Irish nationalists declared an Irish Republic, and their subsequent execution was met with a show of sympathy and wider demand for independence (Dixon, 2001). The ‘War of Independence’ was fought from 1919-1921, with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) seeking to move the British state out of Ireland. In 1920 the British partitioned Ireland, utilising the borders seen in the map of Ireland/Northern Ireland in Figure 2, to create

![Figure 2: Map of Ireland / Northern Ireland](image-url)
what would become a constitutional dominion known then as the Irish Free State and now as the Republic of Ireland, while Northern Ireland was ruled from Stormont (Bardon, 2001). Tensions and violence in Northern Ireland remained where unionist and nationalist populations were living side-by-side in a situation that “magnified uncertainty and unrest” (Bardon, 2001: 484). The early Stormont years were highlighted by exclusionary practices, in what Tonge (1998) describes as confirming “the notion of an ‘Orange state’” (18), with this structure and system of governance discriminating against the nationalist/Catholic participation in the areas of elections, employment and housing. The unbalanced practices and policies of these Stormont years (1921-1968) only served to further entrench division between communities.

The Troubles
The Troubles were a time of violent struggle, driven by a nationalist population that desired to secure a united Ireland and a unionist population that wished to remain within the United Kingdom. The Troubles began in the late 1960s when the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was formed, modelled after civil rights campaigns in the United States, and began protesting in an effort to remove discrimination, from the allocation of jobs and housing to electoral abuses (Darby, 1995b). This civil rights campaign was successful, albeit over a longer period of time than the actors involved had hoped, and in reaching for these goals the civil unrest reached a level beyond the scope of local administration, thus in 1969 the British government sent in military troops to restore order (Darby, 1995b). This action from Westminster was borne out of the nationalist community changing tactics – previously they had made their grievances known to the Irish government in Dublin or the diaspora community in the United States; however, this movement occurred within the Northern Irish/UK system and “made it more difficult for them to be ignored” (O’Leary and McGarry, 1997: 172). The responses to, support of, and actions by the British Army triggered almost 30 years of violent conflict across Northern Ireland and the border region, with atrocities committed across communities. The Troubles produced a narrative of fear and division within the region that permeated the everyday and remains evident today – and as such is central to understanding the context for this thesis.

The IRA had been active and consistent in resistance to the British union since the Easter Uprising, having a core ideology that Northern Ireland was an illegitimate state. In 1969, at a time of fighting in the streets of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry, the IRA
split, with the Provisional IRA being created over issues of “legitimacy, ideology, and militarism” (English, 2012: 107). The leftist policies that the IRA had shifted towards were constructed on the understanding that strife within the working classes of both communities only served to support the interest of capital (McKittrick and McVea, 2001). The Provisional IRA\textsuperscript{10} took a different tactic, with its leadership and focus determined to engage in an armed campaign against British occupation in Northern Ireland (English, 2012). The actions of the Provisional IRA came to dominate the Republican narrative of the next 30 years in Northern Ireland.

The British military deployed by Westminster in 1969 was initially welcomed by the nationalist community because the fighting between ethno-sectarian communities was resulting in extensive property damage and loss of life in Catholic-dominant neighbourhoods like the ‘Bogside’ in Derry and the Divis Flats in Belfast (McKittrick and McVea, 2001). However, the relationship between Catholic populations and the military quickly soured when curfews were instituted in 1969, and further with the introduction of internment in 1971, which allowed for “the arrest and imprisonment of persons suspected of terrorist offenses without the formalities of a trial” (MacDonald, 1986: 88). The result of this policy was several people in the Catholic community imprisoned with little information and understanding. The response from the IRA points to a common theme in the history of conflict in Northern Ireland: grievance served only to strengthen the response of the aggrieved.

What came in the aftermath of a march against internment in Derry on 30 January 1972 drew a great deal of attention, becoming commonly known as ‘Bloody Sunday’.\textsuperscript{11} This day of protest ended with 13 unarmed protesters dead at the hands of the military – such an event highlights the triadic nature of this conflict. The British state, the military and police forces were, and remain, a fully embedded actor in the division, violence and governance in the north of Ireland. The lore of Bloody Sunday is recognised by McGrattan (2013) as central to the construction of a nationalist narrative that points to “callousness, self-sacrifice, and, ultimately, retribution and redemption” (64), while also

\textsuperscript{10} From here on the reference to the IRA is the Provisional IRA.

\textsuperscript{11} ‘Bloody Sunday’ was further popularised by the well-known U2 song ‘Sunday Bloody Sunday’ released in 1983.
noting that the IRA responded to this event violently with life-taking attacks in Claudy and Belfast.\footnote{See: Claudy Bombing or the ‘Bloody Friday’ Bombing (Belfast).}

The escalation in violence and displacement in the late 1960s and early 1970s forced the British government to change the status quo in Northern Ireland, and in March of 1972 they announced the suspension of government at Stormont, assuming direct rule. This governing format would last until 1998 (McKittrick and McVea, 2001). In this new political landscape, the IRA saw British weakness and the unionists worried that this was a step towards Irish unification. The result was an increase in membership to paramilitary groups including the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Voluntary Force (UVF) (MacDonald, 1986). The IRA changed their approach to enhance guerrilla warfare tactics.\footnote{Known as the ‘long war’, the strategy documented in the IRA ‘Green Book’ training manual sought “A war of attrition against enemy personnel…” (O’Brien, 1993: 23).} What followed was years of back and forth between paramilitary groups and the British state, which deeply affected lives in both communities. The nationalism that drove both communities generated an all-embracing force that dictated and influenced all aspects of life, not just the political, throughout the North of Ireland. Any sense of victimhood was seemingly challenged by immediate seeking of vengeance by paramilitary groups – violence begetting more violence. Overall, the Troubles caused the deaths of approximately 3,600 people (2,000 civilians) and injured approximately 30,000 according to official records (Cairns and Darby, 1998).

If the late 1960s and early 1970s were a period of loss of control and collapse in Northern Ireland, the period from 1972 to the mid-1980s represents a deadlock, with Britain “searching for a way out of international and domestic embarrassment” (O’Leary and McGarry, 1996: 214). It was in this era that chronologies of the Troubles (of which there are many) highlight the efforts the British government made in seeking a political solution to the conflict, particularly through the 1973/74 Sunningdale Agreement (McGrattan, 2010), which although failed, gave hope in Anglo-Irish political circles that negotiations were possible. However, it was learning to negotiate with paramilitary groups that would prove necessary; Hayes (2002) recognised that such lessons were learned, most importantly that “any proposed agreement must be able to command widespread support in both parts of the community” (97). The two-week
general strike led by the Ulster Workers’ Council that sent Northern Ireland back to direct rule from Westminster for a quarter of a century underlines this lesson, later seen in the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Good Friday Agreement.

An overview of the Troubles would be incomplete without mention of the hunger strikes of 1980-81 that took place in Long Kesh Prison. The hunger strikes were undertaken by republican prisoners interned in the prison for a variety of gun and terror-related offences. Led by MP Bobby Sands, whose death has earned him great reverence in the nationalist movement, the hunger strikes were situated in the “conviction that they [Republican prisoners] were Prisoners of War (POWs) held by an occupying foreign government” (Walker, 2006: 13). The events of the hunger strikes, and in particular the deaths of 10 prisoners, drew attention to the political scope of the conflict and the “possibility of a non-violent future for the movement” (Walker, 2006: 13). The deaths increased political engagement, highlighted by separating interests of Sinn Féin and the actions of the IRA.

The shift from violence in the streets which occurred throughout the Troubles to the peace agreement in 1998 includes several notable movements that brought the necessary parties to the negotiating table, and ultimately resulted in an agreement ratified by referendum. The failures of the Sunningdale Agreement resulted in the continued Direct Rule in Northern Ireland; however, the negotiations would continue, and in 1985 the Irish-Anglo Agreement was authorised (Owen, 1994). This agreement gave the government of Ireland in Dublin an advisory role in the British governing of Northern Ireland. Although the agreement was hotly debated, it changed very little in the everyday interactions occurring throughout Northern Ireland in 1985; however, the agreement is lauded for having brought the governing bodies of Britain and Ireland together. For the first time it became accepted that Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom as long as a majority of the inhabitants supported this – a central element of the eventual Good Friday Agreement (Darby, 2003).

The early to mid-1990s were a time of increased negotiation as well as a shift to larger and more prolific bombs used by the IRA. It was in this period that IRA attacks rose in England, including the 1996 bomb detonations in London’s Canary Wharf, and a few months later in the city centre of Manchester – not far from where I sit writing this PhD.

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14 Long Kesh Prison is also known as ‘The Maze’. 
Violence also continued in Northern Ireland, where the Drumcree conflict erupted over unionist marches through the nationalist Garvaghy Road in Portadown (Dixon, 2001). Drumcree set about a period of intense clashes between communities in July 1996 with the British military again notable in the midst of a Northern Irish crisis (Dixon, 2001). However, despite the setbacks in the streets, the back-channel negotiations between the British government and the IRA and Sinn Féin were resilient in an effort to move the conflict towards a negotiated end (McInnes and Kennedy-Pipe, 2001). Such efforts were supported by the Irish diaspora in the United States, gaining the interest and support of the Bill Clinton White House (Darby, 2003).

The Good Friday Agreement was endorsed by a referendum on both sides of the border in May 1998. The agreement was reached across political parties, including Sinn Féin who gained their seat at the negotiating table through IRA ceasefires in 1994 and again in 1997 (Darby, 2003). The referendum results highlighted significant support from those who identified with the nationalist population and was split amongst the unionists, with 71% of the total population voting for the Agreement (Darby, 2003). At the heart of this Agreement is an Executive Committee – a power-sharing government with representation from ‘unionist’, ‘nationalist’ and ‘other’ communities, based on the consociational model of democracy presented by Arend Lijphart (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2017). In this model Lijphart (1968; 1977) argues that it is very important that a minority be included in governing. This majority-minority inclusion is constructed on the understanding that where there is no chance of being a part of the majority or the governing process, the result would be alienation and acting in/fighting for self-interests in other areas (Lijphart, 1999) – much like the urban landscape utilised throughout the Troubles. Within this framework the traditionally nationalist parties, such as Sinn Fein, are included in and essential to governing in Northern Ireland, where a mandatory consolidation is designed to ensure participation across division. The Good Friday Agreement is widely lauded amongst peace negotiators as a success, bringing stability to a region in conflict, while simultaneously being disparaged by many who live in Northern Ireland, as there has been no movement toward a middle ground, with both sides still believing the other is in the wrong (Maguire and Kilpatrick, 2013).
**Post-Good Friday Agreement**

With the implementation of this agreement came a great deal of funding, attention, programming, and research with an interest in the ‘post-conflict’ reconstruction of Northern Ireland. The bulk of financial support for these initiatives came from the EU PEACE programme, with over EUR 1.3 billion spent to date (European Parliament, 2017). This funding has been spread across a range of institutions, organisations, and projects, to pursue the EU programme’s two main priorities: ‘reconcile communities and contribute to peace’ (European Parliament, 2017). The policies and community work following Northern Ireland’s peace agreement have come under a community-relations-centred agenda, which has “aimed to tackle the problems of sectarianism and division through the promotion of greater inter-ethnic contact” (Hughes et al., 2011: 968). Despite this peace-focused agenda, the legacy of divided living remains in present day. Miles Hewstone and his colleagues (2006) highlight the vast programming that promotes intergroup contact between unionist and nationalist communities targeting intolerance and sectarianism. These initiatives have largely been aimed at those who live in single-space communities. However, single-space neighbourhoods remain the norm as recent statistics show that integration and shared identity remain a challenge.

The 2016 elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly exemplify that parties continue to be elected along community lines (Russell, 2016), and the education system displays a further example of segregation, with 93% of children attending schools based on their ethno-sectarian background (Hughes and Loader, 2015). The fragility of both unionist and nationalist communities is never far from the surface, a trait of a conflict that had no clear victor, loser, or sense of justice. One such example of this fragility, and grievance, can be seen in the unionist response to the decision to fly the Union Jack outside of Belfast City Hall only on state occasions rather than every day. This decision made in 2013 continues to elicit an emotional response from many today (Melaugh, 2013).

Beyond the group and societal struggles of navigating life following violent conflict are the personal struggles of those who have lived through it. A high rate of suicide is one damning statistic that highlights the legacy of the generations of conflict in Northern Ireland, as well as the unsettled and fragile psyche of the present population. In 2016 the Irish News reported that the death toll of people directly killed by the violence of the Troubles is suspected to be around 3,600, and in the period since the Good Friday Agreement there had been a recorded 3,859 deaths by suicide (Hughes, 2016). In their
A 2014 study, O’Neill and her colleagues (2014) discuss the role of conflict-related trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and its connection to self-harm. The results highlight that Northern Ireland remains deeply troubled by the Troubles. What is notable in this study is a higher likelihood of dying following a first suicide attempt, a statistic that has a correlation with exposure to “pain, violence, and/or death” (O’Neill et al., 2014: 4). Tomlinson (2012) underlines that social changes, like those that are a result of war, bring with them challenges across the spectrum – from witnesses to perpetrators. Overall, the Troubles represent a 30-year violent conflict with a seemingly low death toll; however, Northern Ireland is a relatively small country of 1.8 million people (NISRA, 2017). The number of conflict-related deaths and injuries have been felt across the region, where seemingly everyone knows someone in their family or circle of friends, colleagues, and neighbours who was harmed through this period of conflict (Moloney, 2007).

What the above trends highlight is that at political/programmatic, social and personal levels there is a great deal occurring in Northern Ireland in response to the peace agreement. From a governance perspective, electoral politics exemplify the segregation of lived Northern Ireland in local and national elections. Ironically, community relations initiatives intending to bring people together through sport, arts, music, etc. are often run from within the civil service of a disparate government. From an outsider perspective, this can offer some confusion; however, the narrative of shared space and inclusivity has been well adopted publicly despite the actions, expectations, and voting patterns of those maintaining division.

Post-Troubles Northern Ireland remains a complicated place. The two communities are not, and have never been, completely exclusive. There exists a range of identities and social hierarchies within each of the communities. Initiatives and movements that transcend the segregation and legacy of division exist but are comparatively weak compared to the divisive structures already in place. Within the context of the long history of division presented thus far, the last 20 years has been quite stable. When opportunity has arisen for tensions to re-ignite violent conflict in the streets, the consensus across political and social levels has generally chosen another path. The thin veneer of peace in post-Troubles Northern Ireland highlights the progress that has been made. However, segregation along ethno-sectarian lines remains a defining societal feature of Northern Ireland (McGlynn, Tonge and McAuley, 2014). The conflict
continues to bear down on everyday life and divisions of the past remain in the present and continue to be a fixture, be it in cultural, economic, social, political, or educational realms. The depth and continuity of ethno-sectarian division in Northern Ireland is a core point to this contextual overview, as this thesis, focused on contemporary Belfast, engages the lived experiences of those attending Belfast Giants games.

Belfast

The historical overview presented in this chapter offers a wider understanding of the region. Given that the research is conducted within the city of Belfast, this section offers a brief contextual understanding of this city.

Belfast’s location on the River Lagan and natural access to the Irish Sea created a city that acts as a hub for the region. Belfast is the centre of Northern Ireland’s administration, industry, trade, as well as financial and commercial interests. The growth of the city began in the early 1800s as a place with optimal conditions for linen production (Aiken and Royle, 2013). Mulholland (2002) notes that the mechanisation of labour and the centralising of the linen trade to Belfast created a workforce with strong engineering skills, and when shipbuilding changed from wood to iron in the 1850s, the setting was an ideal host to this industry. The nineteenth century saw Belfast become globally recognised as a port city with linen, ropeworks, tobacco and a formidable shipyard (Maguire, 1993). The strong industry of Belfast corresponded with a time of rapid population growth, “from a town of 53,000 inhabitants in 1831 to a city of 349,000 by 1901” (Connolly, 2013). Much of this growth was migrants, both Catholic and Protestant, coming to the city from rural Ulster (Mulholland, 2002). The movement of Catholics into Belfast created tensions in this predominantly Protestant city, which Maguire (1993) notes “were to prove in every way sharper, more persistent and more divisive than anywhere else” (31).

The Troubles saw Belfast as a battleground for conflict and violence – the number of deaths illustrated in Mesev, Shirlow and Downs’ illustration (Figure 3) highlight the cityscape as a place of violent conflict. The hostility that existed in the streets and neighbourhoods of Belfast presented an advantageous environment for guerrilla violence throughout the conflict, with civilians suffering the greatest casualties within the city – more than any paramilitary group, the police or the British military (Mesev,
Shirlow and Downs, 2009). The nature of the Troubles, with violence taking place within the city, strengthened the resolve and desire for segregated living arrangements, as well as increased the tensions of interface areas\(^{15}\) (Cunningham and Gregory, 2014). These conditions affected the way inhabitants navigated their way through the city, including where one worked, shopped, and also what leisure and sporting activities one participated in. The long and drawn out nature of the conflict within the city generated a normalisation of division that transcended to both communities.

![Figure 3: Conflict related deaths in the Belfast urban area 1966-2007 (Mesey, Shirlow and Downs, 2009)](image)

In broad terms the city has traditionally seen the nationalists live in the west, the unionists in the east, the northern sections of the city feature single-identity enclaves living in uneasy proximity to one another, and the more affluent mixed neighbourhoods, such as Stranmillis, in the southern area of the city. The city has been made and remade through violent acts against one another and through distinct avoidance of the other community. Figure 4 and 5 offer a visual representation of the separation that has

\(^{15}\) Interface areas are generally regarded to be the area where single-space communities connect, often along the peace walls.
historically been and remains one of the defining attributes of post-peace agreement Belfast. The construction of ‘Peace Walls’, which aim to divide working class areas, increased over the last two decades (Diez and Hayward, 2008). A walk through the city is met with territorial markings such as flags, murals, and kerb paintings, offering visible evidence as to which community occupies the majority of any given neighbourhood. In contrast, the intergroup contact approach occurring in post-peace agreement Northern Ireland finds a focus in both the planning and growth of shared spaces that are constructed with the aim of encouraging engagement, altering patterns of interaction, and transforming social processes to include the other (Komarova, 2008). The development towards sharing space in the city’s consciousness and planning has resulted in an academic approach that is focusing on the ‘emerging narrative of Belfast as a “shared city”’ (Komarova and O’Dowd, 2016: 265). The city centre of Belfast has, for the most part, become a shared space, gentrified for the sake of consumerism. The glass-domed Victoria Square shopping centre has become a landmark in the middle of the city; shared by everyone, it is only steps from sites of violence that took place during the Troubles.16 It is against this backdrop, where Belfast has developed spaces committed to being shared, as well as those that seek to entrench historical divisions, that this thesis finds a home for its research questions.

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16 The Abercorn Bomb or Donegall Street Bombing are two significant detonations in this specific area.
Figure 4: Ethno-sectarian segregation in Belfast – 1981
McCaffery (2017)

Figure 5: Ethno-sectarian segregation in Belfast – 2011
McCaffery (2017)
The SSE Arena, Ice hockey and the Belfast Giants

It has been 20 years since the Good Friday Agreement, and in this time a great deal has happened with regards to conflict, division and peacebuilding. Although it would be misleading to suggest that Northern Ireland has moved beyond the legacy of division, it would also be unfair to highlight only the division. John Whyte (1991), an influential academic on the topic of Northern Ireland, noted, “The sharpness of divide varies from one place to another. The mix of religious, economic, political, and psychological factors which underpins it varies from one place to another” (111) – a sentiment that remains in present day. As this PhD is constructed around questions of shared space and encounter across historical division, this section of the chapter introduces the chosen space of this thesis inquiry – the SSE Arena and the Belfast Giants ice hockey team. The Giants represent an unorthodox phenomenon in post-Troubles Belfast. As ice hockey is a sport with no significant history in the region, the organisation operates with a freedom distinct from other similar spectator sports, such as football, cricket, rugby, or Gaelic athletics, which are encumbered by historical positionality. This detachment from the political, social, and sectarian baggage that is attached to much of Belfast’s everyday life provides a unique setting for my research focused on alternative space for interactions with the ‘other’.

The SSE Arena

In the period directly following the Good Friday Agreement, the region’s Millennium Funds – money raised through the UK national lottery system to celebrate the new millennium – were used to build the Odyssey Complex.17 The Odyssey consists of three main sections. The first of these is the W5, the region’s science and discovery centre and a popular place for educational and family outings. The second section of the Odyssey Complex is the Odyssey Pavilion, which includes a cinema, bowling alley, as well as restaurants, pubs, and nightclubs. The third section, and focus of this thesis, is the SSE Arena – originally called the Odyssey Arena, with naming rights purchased in the summer of 2015.

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17 Shirlow (2006) uses the Odyssey development to highlight that, “The key ideological message driven by both the Irish and British states is that peace dividends are to be achieved through conventional economics” (101).
The SSE Arena opened in December 2000 to much fanfare. It was the first, and remains the only, facility of its kind in the region; with a capacity of 10,800 for concerts and 7000+ for ice hockey games, the venue has hosted over 9 million people since its opening and over 2000 performances (The Odyssey Trust, 2018a). At present, the entire Odyssey complex is owned and managed by the Odyssey Trust, which was “set up to ensure that this millennium project continues to function as a landmark development within Northern Ireland” (The Odyssey Trust, 2018b). The Odyssey Complex is notably located in the Titanic Quarter (the area of the city highlighted in Figure 6), which was planned and designed for utilisation by both unionist and nationalist communities (Etchart, 2008). The Titanic Quarter offers a public-private partnership in its development that has sought from the outset to be constructed as a shared space. This area of the city has been constructed with a sanitised cross-communal narrative around the construction of the Titanic and the wider shipbuilding history of Belfast (Neill, 2006). Such a manufactured history offers an example of “a new brand emerging on the horizon” being enacted in the post-peace agreement cityscape (Neill, 2006: 114). The Titanic Quarter and the shared space it represents in many ways defies its location and history in East Belfast, typically identified as a majority Protestant section of the city. It does this by being developed in what can best be described as a post-industrial wasteland; as can be seen in Figure 7, there are a lack of residential streets in the surrounding area, meaning this was not a particularly claimed area in a city where segregation is strongly tied to where one lives – nobody lived in the shipyards. Although these types of development and gentrification projects are oft-critiqued for being neutral, bland, and lacking connection to the community18 the Titanic Quarter and the Odyssey Complex offer appeal because of their construction around a historical narrative that is built on the past success of shipbuilding (Muir, 2014a; O’Dowd and Komarova, 2013). This position is highlighted by Murtagh (2011), who stated “For a city whose recent imagery has been built on violence, peace lines and fear the formation of low risk, glitzy and speculator investment has been a vital strategy in place marketing” (215).

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18 Heathcott (2015) highlights “…the power of the redevelopment script to control the narrative of change, overwhelm already unstable social networks, and scour cultural landscapes of their material attachments and vernacular meaning” (97).
The construction of the Odyssey Complex in 2000 corresponds with a wider movement in the context of sport fandom within the United Kingdom. Garry Crawford (2002) highlights a rise in interest in ice hockey corresponding with construction of new multipurpose leisure facilities in numerous UK cities. Crawford’s research following the Manchester Storm ice hockey team at the height of the sport’s popularity in the UK highlights that the facilities align with trends in sport consumption away from outdoor, male-dominant spaces (Crawford and Gosling, 2004). Within Belfast the changes to this North American-style of entertainment was not free from pushback, despite the wider popularity of these facilities and sport in this time period. According to sports journalist Stuart McKinley (2015), the utilisation of Millennium Funds was at the centre of this dissent. The SSE Arena was constructed at a time when Northern Ireland’s football stadiums, a much higher profile sport, sat in a state of disrepair. Many traditional sports fans resented the construction of a multi-use entertainment arena because Scotland and Wales used their funding to build stadiums for football and rugby (McKinley, 2015). The animosity towards the construction of the arena is in many ways representative of Aughey’s (2005) observation that there is a resentment emerging by those who have struggled through the Troubles and feel left behind by rapid change. However, at the time of research the arena was 15 years-old and has proven its versatility; in my

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19 The Millennium Commission, which oversaw the Millenium Funds, was chaired by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.
experience it is widely accepted as a key facility for the region across ethno-sectarian community lines in large part because of its willingness to host diverse acts and events throughout the year.

Ice Hockey in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland

The history of ice hockey in Northern Ireland does not begin in 2000 with the establishment of the Belfast Giants. At a participatory level, ice hockey has never gathered more than a niche interest in the UK or Ireland. The climate rarely allows it to be played on a natural outdoor surface as on the frozen lakes and ponds of Canada, Sweden and Russia. Ice hockey is a sport very much tied to specific facilities, and in Hassan’s (2004) historical overview of ice hockey in Belfast he notes that the sport gained a greater profile following the British team’s bronze medal in the Chamonix 1924 Olympic games. In the years that followed this feat, ice rinks were being constructed in major British cities, with five completed in the winter of 1929/30 (Drackett, 1987). The British team won the gold medal in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, highlighting that the sport had a brief period of success in the region. In Northern Ireland ice hockey facilities were introduced at the Kings Hall Pavilion from 1939 to 1969, and in 1986 a more permanent facility, the Dundonald International Ice Bowl, opened in East Belfast (Hassan, 2004). The first game in the Kings Pavilion in December 1939, described by local press as “the fastest game in the world”, featured a match between two teams based in Wembley (London) and is said to have been attended by more than 4,500 spectators (Coleraine Times, 2014; Hassan, 2004).

Within the context of divided Northern Ireland, the sport’s initial connections to English teams and the involvement of Canadians employed in Belfast’s industrial sector suggest a link with unionist/British communities (Hassan, 2004). Despite these ties to Britain, which included playing ‘God Save the Queen’ before games, there were players from the nationalist community, and Hassan notes “ice hockey never suffered from the type of sectarianism often associated with other sports of that time” (81). The thirty years of ice hockey at Kings Hall Pavilion are highlighted by the formation of ice hockey leagues and clubs, a good many of which were tied directly to company sponsorship of large industries working in Belfast in this era. There are local historical accounts, which
highlight significant players and matches;\textsuperscript{20} however, what is notable for this thesis is that during this time a small number of the spectator sport landscape in Belfast became interested in ice hockey. Ice hockey at Kings Pavilion ended when the British Army transformed the facility into an army base when they were deployed in 1969 at the beginning of the Troubles (Hassan, 2004).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.jpg}
\caption{Short and Harland Raiders ice hockey team}
\end{figure}

The Dundonald International Ice Bowl, advertised as “Northern Ireland’s ONLY public Olympic size ice rink”, is the facility for participating in ice hockey in Northern Ireland (Dundonald International Ice Bowl, 2018). Since its opening it has been a site of organised ice hockey competition at multiple levels – from children to adults, men and women. Rob Stewart (2016), Director of the Junior Giants ice hockey programme, noted that there were 152 players in the ice hockey development programme overseen by the Giants, including 28 girls. The ice hockey community in Northern Ireland is

\textsuperscript{20} Drackett (1987) and Harris (1986) provide excellent accounts.
informed and connected through a Facebook group called ‘The History of Hockey in Northern Ireland’. It is this site where the picture in Figure 7 was found (originally from the Belfast Newsletter). This group keeps ice hockey players and supporters abreast of ice hockey’s history in the region, but also the current successes of teams based in Belfast and local players who are playing abroad. Such resources highlight that although ice hockey has not been a consistent option in the sporting world of Belfast, it is one that has developed a community around it at multiple times in the last 100 years.

The rise in popularity of multipurpose facilities in cities across the UK in the early-1990s generated a boom for the sport. Returning to Crawford and Gosling’s (2004) writing about fans of the Manchester Storm ice hockey club, they report regular crowds of 10,000+ supporters to games in Manchester Arena – numbers that are remarkable and many more than seen at present in the EIHL. There are several reasons for the renewed interest in the sport in the mid-90s, in particular the rise in female fans (Crawford and Gosling, 2004) as well as the trends in consumerism of sport. This period is described by Richard Guilanotti (2002) as one of ‘hypercommodification’ in sport. In this description Guilanotti (2002) highlights the rise of capitalist profit-seeking avenues for brand construction through increased sources, noting the power of TV, satellite, internet, and transnational sport equipment companies in generating interest from regional to global. Although the EIHL has not entered the upper echelons of ice hockey leagues globally, it has continued to carve out a genuine market in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England.

**The Belfast Giants**

The Good Friday Agreement, the completion of the SSE Arena, and increased interest in ice hockey in the United Kingdom were key ingredients in the establishment of the Belfast Giants. The Giants, Northern Ireland’s (and the whole of Ireland’s) only professional ice hockey team, competes in the EIHL with teams from Wales, Scotland and England. Established in 2000 by a Canadian businessman, Bob Zeller, the team is currently owned by the Odyssey Trust. Designed to appeal across historical division, the team has a number of significant attributes that highlight their positionality within the landscape of sporting events in the city. Each arena in the EIHL plays the national anthem prior to games, with the exception of the Giants; and the colour scheme of the team, which is primarily teal, has no history or place against the backdrop of Irish tri-
colours, red-hands of Ulster, or Union Jacks, which are so prevalent in single-identity neighbourhoods. The early marketing slogans of the team included ‘Game for All, Game for Everyone’ and ‘In the Land of Giants Everyone is Equal’. As these slogans show, for better or worse, the team aligned itself to the idea of a post-peace agreement identity. This was on display when American President Bill Clinton (2000) gave a keynote address in the (then) Odyssey Arena shortly after it opened on 13 December, saying:

I also can't help noting that this magnificent new arena is new since I was last here in ’98, a new team, a new sport, a new facility, a new Northern Ireland. I want to thank the Belfast Giants for letting us use the arena tonight. I understand they don't treat their opponents as kindly as me, and I thank them for that. Thank you.

There are challenges that arise when top-down support is given in post-peace agreement settings, especially in a setting where power structures are mistrusted by both communities. Political statements which align hockey fans with ethno-sectarian identities are not part of the Belfast Giants experience, and this itself is political. Endorsements, like Clinton’s, offered an early challenge for creating a community around the team, particularly with no history or local talent for the fanbase to identify with. These early disconnects between the organisation and the wider community were highlighted by Bairner (2006), when he noted,

“…the Odyssey is far more welcoming than Belfast’s older sporting sites. But its welcome is conditional and the Arena itself offers as its main sporting attraction an activity – hockey –which has no organic relationship with the city and the overwhelming majority of its people.” (172)

Responding to the challenges presented by the team’s lack of ‘organic relationship’ has been an important part of the Belfast Giants’ history. As this research is being conducted 15 years after their establishment, it is clear the organisation has managed to carve out a niche market. Averaging over 4,500 fans per game and hosting 32 home games each season are statistics indicative of the team’s success in generating an approachable brand in post-peace agreement Belfast. Steve Thornton (2015), head of hockey operations, discussed avoiding direct competition with Ulster Rugby or the nearby Glentoran Football Club, but rather finding comparison with entertainment like
‘Strictly Come Dancing’ or a night at the cinema. The makeup of the crowd, particularly the number of children present, demonstrates the success of this sporting-entertainment model. It also warrants inclusion in an overview of the team that from a competitive angle the team has been quite successful since its establishment. This winning tradition has seen the team win each of the three major trophies in their sport – the Elite League Championship, the Playoff Championship, and the Challenge Cup (Belfast Giants, 2018).

With regards to the core questions of this thesis, and as will be discussed through the following chapters, the Belfast Giants have been successful in drawing supporters from both nationalist and unionist populations. Robert Fitzpatrick (2015), CEO of the Odyssey Trust, highlights this draw of both communities as being at the core of the Belfast Giants’ existence, noting that without cross-community support the team would not be viable. At the time of writing, the Belfast Giants have completed their 17th season with steady ownership and attendance – a sign that they are not on the thin ice once suggested.22

Conclusion
This chapter situates the research of this thesis by offering a brief contextual overview of where it took place. From the historical overview of division affecting Northern Ireland and Belfast, to the emergence of the Belfast Giants following the Good Friday Agreement, two conclusions emerge from this chapter that situate it within the wider structure of the research questions being explored in this PhD.

The first conclusion is that this brief historical engagement with Northern Ireland and Belfast demonstrates that the complexities of decades of division did not come to a halt with the signing of a peace accord. The legacy of violent conflict is very much a part of the everyday lived lives of those who call Belfast home. The territorial markings that are drawn on gable ends or seen through the construction of ‘peace walls’ extend beyond the physical, having become engrained in the people who live within these territories, and it is this level of saturation that this chapter seeks to highlight in contextualising this thesis research. The words of Rosemary Harris (1972) in her pre-

21 Strictly Come Dancing is a British celebrity dancing television programme that also has a touring production.
22 Alan Bairner titled a 2003 article about the Giants as ‘On Thin Ice’.
Troubles ethnography *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster* retain their merit, when she noted “All social relationships are pervaded by a consciousness of the religious dichotomy” (xi). This context chapter which discusses the challenges of building a more integrated version of ‘peacetime’ Belfast aligns with the following chapters, which highlight the theoretical challenges of constructing community within divided society.

It remains an anomaly in Belfast to intentionally gather across community lines, and yet with the Giants this is the norm, a sentiment described by Robert Fitzpatrick (2015), CEO of the Odyssey Trust:

> We are a divided society. If anyone tells you anything different tell me how? We are a divided society. And unfortunately sport has not, up until now, had the ability to bridge that gap. And I will argue now that whilst the Giants don’t have all the answers they are the closest thing we have to being a sporting experience first-hand where I care who you are because you are a Giant. I think that’s the closest thing Northern Ireland society or Irish society has, because remarkably what we found out is that people come up from the south to watch Giants games. And they are blown away by the notion that you can’t wear that jersey in here you’ve got to put a Giants top on because we are all Giants here.

This quote underlines the second point made in this chapter, that the Belfast Giants have emerged as a fairly unorthodox activity in a fairly unorthodox setting. This unconventionality situates this shared space outside the realm of the historical conflict and thus warrants further exploration within the research of this thesis. To become a fan of this niche sport and to construct a part of your identity with attachment to this activity is to willingly be identified with the other, or even suspend the notion of the other. Such shared identity brings about the following chapter which constructs a conceptual understanding of social capital. This concept helps to understand the benefits and changes that are possible through being a member of a distinct social group, and it is the exceptionalism of the specific social group of Giants supporters that this thesis seeks to investigate and learn from within the complicated setting of present-day Belfast.
Chapter 3

Social Capital

Introduction

The social capital-focused writings that I have surveyed in the construction of this chapter highlight that this concept is one which seeks to give name to the networks of human relationships that make life better for those within the network, as well as offering wider benefits to the society in which they take place. In this vein, social capital is portrayed as an idealistic aim, yet one that is difficult to quantify, presenting something of a ‘you know it when you see it’ target. This concept has large amounts of academic literature in both support and in critical opposition, and so it is worth noting that within this thesis, social capital offers part of the conceptual foundation for examining a group – the supporters of the Belfast Giants. This group is being studied primarily because they seemingly defy the political and social expectations of division that surround them. As this chapter will illustrate, a developed understanding of social capital is befitting of an opportunity to research relationships without preoccupation with states and formal institutions, leaving room to question whether sitting in the SSE Arena for ice hockey games contributes to a constructive and beneficial network of relationships that has a positive impact in wider society.

This chapter examines social capital in three distinct parts; the first widely observes the comprehensive conceptual understanding of what social capital is, engaging its position(s) and growth through the social sciences, and arriving at an understanding of the concept of social capital for the purposes of this study. The second section presents an historical overview and traces the conceptual development to present, recognising the vast orientations and interpretations of the concept, and reviewing the contributions of notable scholars. The third section probes deeper into social capital as a concept, examining the ideas of bridging and bonding social capital, networks and trust. To support the thesis’ aims, these ideas are examined within the context of divided and conflict-affected societies.
What is Social Capital?

I do not refer to real estate, or to personal property or to cold cash, but rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of people, namely, goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit...

Hanifan, 1916: 130

The concept of social capital has received a great deal of attention, gaining thematic and conceptual exploration throughout the social sciences and development practice. Through wide-ranging research, literature and practice social capital has become both a broad concept as well as a specific programmatic aim; however, a review of social capital literature reveals that there is not a commonly agreed upon definition. Robison, Schmid and Siles (2002) note that any particular definition chosen for a study on social capital is dependent on the discipline and level of investigation. It is therefore difficult to identify a singular definition that is comprehensive enough to cover the evolution and full scope of modern social capital; rather, there are a great variety of definitions that fit under an over-arching idea of what social capital is.

In economics “the term ‘capital’ originally meant an accumulated sum of money, which could be invested in the hope of a profitable return in the future” (Field, 2003: 12). If adopting this definition of the term capital literally, then the term social capital implies that, like other forms of capital (financial, physical, human, etc.), there is profit to be made in the social relationships that surround individuals and groups (Coleman, 1988).

In this line of thought the profit understood to come from social networks and connections – the social capital – is recognised as having a range of great benefits, experienced by individuals and groups to communities and states (Edwards, 2006).

Since the 1990s, social capital has evolved and branched into a wide range of academic fields. The concept has been ‘exported’ from the field of sociology, particularly into economic and development literature (Portes, 2000). This growth has created varying interpretations of social capital between the sociological and economic realms. In a general sense, sociologists trend away from the individualistic emphasis, focusing on the social benefits of a group, believing individual behaviours are influenced by societal norms and expectations while also being open to the affective and social dimensions of human relations. Economists, on the other hand, traditionally view individual decisions as rational and maximising, as though motivated by personal gain (Aghajanian, 2012).

In a similar fashion, Adler and Kwon (2002) identify two distinct threads of
understanding social capital – one that focuses on the relations an actor maintains with other actors, and the other focusing on the structures of relations between actors within a collective. What these understandings illustrate is that definitions of social capital continue to be created, built upon, dissected, reconstructed, and reinterpreted. The study of social capital has come to include not only the disciplines of sociology and economics but has become interdisciplinary, and can be found in the fields of development, public policy and politics, among others. There is also a connection to intuition that Woolcock (2001a) notes as central to social capital, stating “…it is the basic intuition, not the precise words or formal definition, that travels best across time, space and circumstance” (76). The recognition that social capital can mean so many things serves only to reinforce both its support and critique.

This thesis connects to a more sociological understanding of what social capital is, for the purpose of enabling conceptual understanding while also leaving the freedom for the complexities of interaction in spaces of conflict, like Belfast. Two significant interpretations are utilised as a guide: the first is Robert Putnam’s (1993) early recognition that social capital “refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (167). The second interpretation views social capital as “the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actors’ social relations” (Adler and Kwon, 2002: 23). Admittedly, there is simplicity to these definitions of social capital, which gives space for the interdisciplinarity of this thesis to engage with, investigate and critically utilise social capital to understand the encounters and social identities that may or may not be constructed across the complexities of conflict in Northern Ireland.

A (Brief) History of Social Capital

The lack of one clear definition may seem problematic, particularly as a core literature for my own PhD thesis; however, social capital pulls from the works of a great number of influential scholars, whether they spoke to social capital directly or influenced the concept through their research and philosophical understandings of healthy social interactions. This section thus constructs a brief history of social capital and its emergence in the social sciences; in developing this understanding, this thesis connects to a well-known concept that, much like peace and conflict study, spans across
academic disciplines. Notably, a review of social capital’s development demonstrates its conceptual importance in academic, policy and practical settings relevant to this thesis – particularly with reference to divided societies such as Belfast.

**Historical Development**

The definitions of social capital identified above are founded on core elements of relationships, networks and community. Although the term ‘social capital’ is a relatively modern construction, the concept is not new; there are elements of modern social capital that can be found in the writings of many classic scholars. The following highlights three of these scholars presented in chronological fashion.

Alexis de Tocqueville, a renowned French sociologist and political theorist, wrote about active civic participation as the foundation to strong American democracy. As a European, Tocqueville travelled through America in 1831, and his reflections in *Democracy in America* strongly recognise that associational life – reliance on social networks – played a very important role in the social order of America’s new open democratic system (de Tocqueville, 1956). His writings, particularly the idea that engagement in civic activity was a core contributor to a healthy democratic society, greatly shaped the formation of modern social capital as interpreted by prominent social capital theorist Robert Putnam. In 1887, Ferdinand Tönnies, a German sociologist, influentially identified *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in his work on social networks (Tönnies, 1957). Gemeinschaft translated to English means community; however, the German word encompasses a broader meaning, which includes moral unity, intimacy and kinship (Ferlander, 2003). Gesellschaft translates to society, referring to larger-scale relationships that are non-kinship based and weaker in nature. Tönnies (1957) describes, “In the Gesellschaft…everybody is by himself and isolated, and there exists a condition of tension against others” (65). In these two concepts described by Tönnies there is a differentiation in social networks, and such framing is valuable from a theoretical perspective for examining social organisation; however, Tönnies (1957) acknowledged that in reality lived lives and social networks are more often than not entangled with one another.

A few years later, Émile Durkheim reflected on the shift in social structures that occurred from what he termed *mechanical solidarity* to *organic solidarity*. Mechanical solidarity referred to the fixed social classes that were enmeshed in the lord and peasant
societies of the day, whereas organic solidarity occurred in the urban, industrial
societies of the 19th century, where the lines between social classes were not so distinct
(Durkeheim, 1933). The shifting dynamics of power across and between social classes
at the time of Durkheim’s contributions is significant in highlighting the value of social
networks in changing and challenging the status quo. In a similar manner to de
Tocqueville and Tönnies, adding depth to the understanding of social networks was
important in the construction of modern theoretical understandings of social capital.
Durkheim’s additions of class and power bring about interesting questions and
contentions that continue to present day; particularly when social capital is seen as
something possessed and utilised by submersion in public activity, questions arise
around the distribution and maintenance of power in modern societies (Kushner and
Sterk, 2005). Such an understanding offers a sense that social capital can be used to
better access across social power, class, or economic inequality – a focus in social
capital not necessarily shared by Putnam (Baum, 2000).

These three scholars do not represent a comprehensive historical overview of the full
development of social capital, rather they have been utilised here to highlight the early
recognition of the value inherent in strong social networks. It is worth noting that these
observations come from a certain perspective with the three scholars fulfilling academic
demographics of the day as western, white men with the privilege to write and
philosophise on the value of social networks and wider relationships. From this
empowered and liberal positionality, although it is worth highlighting de Tocqueville
was a proponent of democracy and Durkheim’s work is tied to communism and
socialism (Giddens, 1982), each of these men saw the world as improved by strong
horizontal social networks. It was this understanding that carried forward into the
modern conceptual development of social capital.

**Modern Conceptual Development**

Lyda Judson Hanifan (1916) is often credited as being the first person to use the term
social capital in his guide for rural schoolteachers (Putnam, 2000). In this publication,
he described the concept of social capital as concerning the “good will, fellowship,
sympathy, and social intercourse” among individuals and groups (Hanifan, 1920: 78).
Underlying his contributions was a foundational assumption that a community with high
social capital had positive effects on its members, and it is this idea that highlights the
modern conceptual development of social capital. Within this development, the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Putnam and James Coleman are briefly engaged before examining both the rise and critiques of the modern conceptual understanding of social capital.

Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, wrote about social capital with a particular interest in social class. Marxist notions of class influenced Bourdieu’s thinking, and his scholarship reveals an interest in the shifting of classes. He believed that “economic capital is at the root of all forms of capital” (Bourdieu, 1986: 252). To Bourdieu, when economic capital was united with other forms of capital (human, cultural or social), inequality was a recurrent result (Field, 2003: 15). Bourdieu believed that at, its essence, social capital acted as a gatekeeper to entering the upper echelons of society, ensuring that those who did not belong were unable to enter the social circles of the powerful. In his account there is little doubt that social capital has a part to play in the perpetuation of inequality, in particular economic inequality, and thus reinforces the hierarchies of capitalist society. Networks as a means to mobility was also a common theme with James Coleman, an American sociologist. In his view networks were invested in as a means of reaping a return or reward (Field, 2003). He was a believer that human social interaction was a form of exchange, and that people invested as a means of gaining a return; a connection that very much aligns with rational choice theory – that when faced with a decision, humans will always choose the path that serves their own personal interests (Coleman, 1988).

This interpretation of social capital is quite different than that of Robert Putnam, an American political scientist, who brought the concept of social capital to previously unseen levels of popularity in academia, policy, development settings, and media with his seminal books, Making Democracy Work (1993) and Bowling Alone (2000). Putnam’s vision for social capital offered a more pluralist focus, placing emphasis on trust, norms and networks and their capacity to contribute to economic and democratic development (Brehm and Rahn, 1997). Putnam shifted the discussion from an understanding of social capital as a “morally and ethically neutral resource” to one that included a “moral and ethical value” (Edwards and Foley, 1998: 131). In Bowling Alone, Putnam (2000) expressed his belief that the downward trend of civic and social engagement by individuals and groups in American communities was a threat to modern democratic America.
These three different ideas and engagement with social capital contribute to the evolution of a concept of social capital, but they do so in isolation, without reference to one another’s contributions or connecting with one another. An illustrative example is the absence of Bourdieu’s philosophies in the studies of Coleman and Putnam, an omission that may be attributed to the cultural and language differences between Bourdieu and the others (Portes, 1998). While in his earlier works Putnam briefly acknowledged Coleman’s contributions to the research, by and large the three scholars take differing philosophies and visions of social capital, generating a somewhat disconnected and disjointed theoretical framework from the onset. This has had lasting impact on the development of social capital, creating similar yet differing conceptualisations of what the term actually describes. Despite the fundamental differences, it is Putnam who is tied most strongly to the concept of social capital.

In the late twentieth century social capital became a buzzword. Putnam’s notions of collectivism strengthening the individual and democracy were positive liberal ideals that aided the concept of social capital in becoming popular in policy and practical settings, even making an appearance in Bill Clinton’s 1995 State of the Union address (Field, 2003). Social capital has also become an aim of ‘practice’, with the World Bank instituting a space for social capital into their research, practice and policy-related objectives. Senior economist Christiaan Grootaert (1997) referred to social capital within World Bank development programming as ‘the missing link’. The addition of social networks aligned with the shift in development discourse at the World Bank towards a more ‘local’, ‘bottom-up’, community-driven approach to development (Department of Social Development, 2014). In the years since social capital’s rise in popularity, the concept remains utilised and relevant in many academic studies (Google Scholar shows 61,500 articles ‘since 2017’), policy realms (Patel, 2016), and programming, where governments and councils seek social capital in their neighbourhood planning (Office for National Statistics, 2017).

An understanding of the critiques of social capital is important, and there is no shortage from sociologists and economists alike. In surveying the wide literature that covers social capital, the ethnocentrism of the research from de Tocqueville’s observations of early America to Putnam’s envisioning of bowling together offers an overarching end goal of white-picket- fence America, where it is a norm to ask your neighbour for a cup of sugar to bake fresh apple pies. And yet in spite of this the concept has been mobilised
and transferred across cultures, as well as practical and academic spheres. At the heart of many critiques is seemingly an issue with the reach that social capital achieved in a short period of time with “…an unlimited scope of application both in terms of what it is and in what effects it has” (Fine, 2001: 97); as well as Grootaert’s (1997) view of the concept as penultimate, noted in his belief that social capital is the “glue that holds societies together” (iii). John Harriss (2002) noted that the inclusion of social capital at the World Bank led to the “domestication – through the kind of dumbing down that has gone on – of critical social science” (82). This is supported by Alejandro Portes, who has long been a critic of the conceptual makeup and placement of social capital in the social sciences. Portes’ scholarship advocates for careful and considerate study of social capital, recognising that the growth of the concept has plagued it with “a great deal of confusion concerning the actual meaning of social capital and growing controversy about its alleged effects” (Portes, 2000: 1). Further critique has spanned beyond its academic placement and credibility; Portes challenges the idea that social capital is a singularly positive concept, believing that if it could be attributed to strengthening relationships, the space existed for these relationships to have negative consequences, noting that “sociability cuts both ways” (Portes, 1998: 18). This concern is founded on an understanding that social capital has grown to be inclusive of almost any social interaction, diluting the term to be almost meaningless (Meagher, 2006). A survey of literature shows an abundance and breadth of social capital research that has expanded, whilst being countered by a growing sense within some academic circles that social capital study has overstayed its welcome.

This historical overview illustrates that social capital has emerged from an evolution in thinking and exploring ways that social interaction and social networks contribute towards positive personal, group and political benefits. Across the expanse of this concept, and relevant to the purposes of this thesis, is a recognition that people in networks of relationships can benefit from being active in these relationships. Such an understanding is central to the question of whether the supporters of the Belfast Giants have a social network – and whether there are benefits to such networks both for the individuals within the supporter community, but also in challenging fractured relationships and systems beyond the arena. These questions are highlighted in Chapter 8, The Hockey Family, which explores the complexity of group identity in Northern Ireland and supporting the Giants.
Social Capital and Divided Society

Where the previous sections have provided a context for what social capital is and presented a roadmap of how social capital has conceptually evolved, this subsection supports the thesis in examining central themes within social capital relevant to research on deeply divided, conflict-affected situations. With the understanding that social capital is relationally driven, it makes sense to examine this concept in situations where conflict has radically altered relationships within neighbourhoods, communities, ethnic groups and states. As Mary Kaldor (1999) points out, one of the gravest costs of ‘new wars’ is the damage to social networks and local communities at the hands of identity politics. This recognition, as well as an underlying belief, described by Chapman (2009) that “a vibrant civic culture is an important ingredient for such varied goals as economic development, democratization, and post-conflict reconciliation” (155), are core to an investigation of the relational centre of social capital. Social capital has become a programmatic aim in post-conflict reconstruction efforts, including in Northern Ireland, and in these efforts has become a widely used literature in the study of peace and conflict. However, the concept suffers from some simple binaries; it is viewed as positive or negative, in-group or out-group, rather than exploring the nuances of fracture and cohesion in social networks. In probing social capital in the context of deeply divided societies, three core themes emerge from Putnam’s work and are used to frame this investigation: *Bridging and Bonding*, *Networks* and *Trust*.

*Bridging and Bonding (and Linking)*

The relational nature of social capital is often broken down into two distinct categories, *bridging* and *bonding*. Putnam used these terms to distinguish social bonds that occurred between and within groups. According to Putnam, bridging social capital comes out of the interaction and connectedness that occurs between different groups or networks, whereas bonding social capital comes out of the interaction and connectedness that occurs within homogenous groups or networks (Putnam, 2000).

The initial connections between conflict research and social capital research identified that bridging social capital helped prevent conflict, under the hypothesis that if divergent groups interacted with one another, society would be made stronger and less hampered by conflict (Aghajanian, 2012). In this sense, bonding social capital may be seen to have positive effects for those in the in-group; however, the stronger those in-
group bonds, the more isolated the group becomes – and the existence of such strong independent groups that may not readily engage with others can have negative consequences for the broader society. Coletta and Cullen (2000) recognise that bonding social capital was strengthened within groups during the Rwandan genocide. They observed that social capital “increased within families fighting for survival” and that “exclusionary social capital emerged within Hutu extremism, with very negative ramifications for those excluded” (18). This recognition that bonding forms of social capital run high in times of devastating conflict is supported by Chapman’s (2009) notion that conflict is more likely to take a violent form amongst organised groups that are insulated from broader society (160).

There is value in identifying these forms of social capital – bridging and bonding – however, they also present a simplistic binary of ingroup/outgroup and shared group (Patulny and Svendsen, 2007). Understandings of social capital and the complexities of peace and conflict have evolved beyond generalisations of bridging as the positive form of social capital and bonding the negative. Social capital research has generated lines of questioning that go beyond the assumptions outlined by the early social capital and conflict theorists of the late nineties and early twenty-first century, particularly around the uniqueness of every post-conflict environment and the demand that each situation be treated independently. Susan Allen Nan (2009) offers an illustrative example of this practice:

“Short of making a definitive conclusion that exclusive networks are the causes of conflicts, and inclusive networks the causes of conflict resolution, the question of causality must be acknowledged. Perhaps it is not exclusive networks that fuel conflict, but rather conflict that gives rise to exclusive networks.” (181)

Expanding social capital to include both bridging and bonding provides a better framework for understanding ways that social capital affects the larger and smaller social systems within which it operates. Michael Woolcock, an influential development strategist within the World Bank, went beyond bridging and bonding, which he considered to represent horizontal ties between people and/or groups (2001a). He viewed vertical ties as linking people with those who hold positions of political or financial power (Woolcock and Sweetser, 2002). Linking to resources beyond those immediately available within the group or community was deemed an essential part of the development discourse. Woolcock and the World Bank believed linking was a key
element in the employment of social capital-centred programming, as it was the platform from which people could leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions outside their communities (Field, 2003). The development practice belief in the benefit of opening and fostering vertical and horizontal ties is challenged in the constantly shifting landscapes of power that are prevalent in conflict-affected societies. Through his investigation of social capital as a catalyst for peace in Cyprus, Raymond Saner (2009) concludes, “the result of all foreign interventions has been the same. Horizontal social capital is being lost, vertical power by new ethnic leaders gets to be consolidated, attempts to reach out to non-nationalist and non-aligned countries is contained, and the country remains split” (15). These observations by Saner highlight conflict’s capacity for fluctuating, weakening and closing social networks.

**Networks and Groups**

American comedian Groucho Marx is commonly quoted as saying, “I don’t care to belong to any club that will have me as a member”. Though tongue in cheek, Marx expresses that if groups are made up of people similar to himself, there is a fear of what such association would do to his reputation. Group membership often involves linking people with similar backgrounds, beliefs or common traits. An Alejandro Portes (1998) edited volume examining ethnicity, networks and entrepreneurship within the paradigm of immigration issues recognises the advantages and disadvantages of group or network association. Broadly, this collection exposed that social capital is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can provide members of a group with what Woolcock (2001b) refers to as “the familiar menu of benefits” (195), which includes the positive benefits associated with the saying ‘it is not what you know but who you know’. However, conversely, these same ties can serve to exclude members from similar benefits. Networks connect people, but they also have an ability to keep other networks and groups from forming. Johan Galtung (1969) used the idea of structural violence to draw attention to the notion that there are structures, networks and systems that contribute to certain groups, communities and cultures not being able to reach their full peace-filled potential. This idea of structural violence offers an understanding that networks of people play a role in propping up oppressive systems and maintaining inequality, and Portes (1998) recognises that these oppressive networks can have the same high levels of social capital driving their success as networks that are recognised for their positive impact.
In divided societies, the pros and cons of group membership are exacerbated by the lack of movement between groups and networks, and individuals become increasingly categorised into groups that they may not have chosen; conflict has a way of “silencing… divergent opinions” and increasing “adherence to group symbols, and intolerance for out-groups and dissenters” (Kunovich and Hodson, 1999: 648). By creating an environment that accentuates differences and is satisfied by classifying people into broad groups and categories based on small variances, conflict contributes to what Freud (1921) termed as the ‘narcissism of minor differences’ (121). In short, people are drawn together by what they are not, even if the differences between them are seemingly surface-level and inconsequential. Michael Ignatieff (1997) illustrated this idea when he asked a young Serbian what made him so different from his Croatian counterparts. The reply exemplified how simple classifications can be: the Serbian smoked Serbian cigarettes and the Croatian smoked Croatian cigarettes (36). This soldier’s low form of defining and categorising his enemy highlights how in times of conflict and struggle things become much more black and white, and people are either in a group or outside of it – often along ethnic, cultural or religious lines – but often exemplified through minor distinctions like choice of cigarette brand. In times of discord the space for networks and interaction with people outside of these groupings becomes challenging, whereas in times of relative peace and unity there exists a greater space for networks to flourish where membership is voluntary, such as through political beliefs, sports clubs, and civic organisations.

The generation and preservation of exclusive social networks in divided communities presents a challenge, in particular to bridging social capital. According to Putnam, increased diversity also plays a role in threatening positive social capital. In E Pluribus Unum, Putnam (2007) noted that “the more ethnically diverse people we live around, the less we trust them” (147). Through his calculations, he postulated that “diversity seems to trigger not in-group/out-group division, but anomie or social isolation” (149). This interpretation offers clear challenges for divided societies, firstly by undermining the value of single identity social capital. In writing about Northern Ireland, Mac Ginty (2011) warns against the thinking that the only good interactions are those that are intergroup, noting “Participation in intra-group activities in deeply divided society does not necessarily denote intolerance” (186). A second challenge to this idea that diversity hurts social capital is found in Hughes, Campbell and Jenkins’ (2010) exploration of
networks and relationships in neighbourhoods around Northern Ireland. Their analysis found that if people were identified beyond ethnic identifications – in the case of Northern Ireland, ‘Protestant’ and ‘Catholic’ – and rather were identified along non-ethnic lines, in categories like female, mother, carer, or friend, they noted that then, “trust is implicit” (980). In the context of Northern Ireland, these authors discover that “rather than being an obstacle to increased inter-ethnic contact, lower trust and social withdrawal may actually be a necessary consequence of it” (983). In this way, Putnam and Hughes et al. reflect that diversity does affect the strength of community, particularly when social capital is viewed as integral to civic participation. However, this weakened social capital may very well aid in preventing conflict recurrence. Networks, whether closed along cultural, ethnic or religious lines, or diverse and open, have an important role in the construction of social capital, as well as the type of social capital that is produced.

**Trust**

The Northern Ireland contextual overview highlights that there is a triadic nature to the longstanding division – unionists, nationalists, and the state, illustrating that trust is in short supply. It is an obvious point that trust is often absent from conflict situations, and yet trust is central to effective networks of relationships. This theme, trust, is also one of the thematic guideposts highlighted in the analytical framework (Chapter 6). In using social capital as a guiding concept for exploring the network of relationships built around the Belfast Giants, it becomes evident that the research community spans across a historical lack of trust, thus a deeper understanding of the role of trust in divided societies is important for this thesis.

Putnam (1993) refers to trust as “an essential component of social capital” (170). Although arguably not a divided society in the same way that Northern Ireland is, Putnam’s work utilises American civic life. In the late 1990s he investigated trust by analysing responses to the simple question: “Generally speaking would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful?” (137). Through the responses gathered, he determined that within America there was a general decline in trust occurring between people. The survey results were at the receiving end of criticism, with a general opinion that his question was “not a robust enough variable to measure trust” (Aghajanian, 2012: 8). Putnam extracted further data to support his findings, including benchmarking the trends in unlisted phone numbers and tracking the
decline in hitchhiking habits amongst Americans (Putnam, 2000). Noted social capital critic Ben Fine (2001) has referred to Putnam’s evidence as “selective and his inferences flawed” (90). Despite these evaluations questioning the sturdiness of his research methods, Putnam’s hypothesis that “trust lubricates cooperation” (1993: 171) is a proposition supported across a wide scan of social capital literature and is also one that is increasingly challenged by divided living.

There are distinct challenges in examining a subjective and situationally-specific topic like trust. Francis Fukuyama (1995) recognises Coleman’s conceptual understanding in the construction of social capital that humans will almost always act in their own interests; however, he understands that people “are educated to follow their society’s moral rules by simple habituation – in family life, from their friends and neighbours, or in school” (35). This statement supports the notion that networks of trust are built for more than personal gain and are influenced by their social environment to interact and construct a wide network of relationships. In situations of conflict, the social environment of the individual and the effect on their ability to trust is impeded by the myths, propaganda, and ‘othering’ of conflict. This can therefore act as a disabling mechanism to creating relationships outside of one’s social group. In surveying different levels of trust, it must be noted that global cosmopolitanism has generated necessary, and in fact inevitable, interactions between individuals, groups, and states from different cultures. Piotr Sztompka (1999) contributes that this international interdependency rooted in migration and travel has increased the social significance of trust in those from other social, cultural or ethnic groups.

Trust is a core ingredient for bonding and bridging social capital, and as well can be found in both conflicting and peaceful relations. In their comparative study of violent conflict and social capital in Cambodia and Rwanda, Coletta and Cullen (2000) recognise that bonding intergroup trust between Hutus and Tutsis during the 1994 Rwanda genocide could not bear the weight of pressure once members became violent. The trust between these two groups had been deeply affected by many factors, including years of colonial favouritism and extreme poverty. As social capital researchers have continued to seek and refine better ways to quantify social capital, it becomes further evident that trust, or the absence of trust, is a precondition of all social capital. Conflict, whether intragroup or intergroup, creates an obstacle for trust, making trust an integral component of any study on social capital, and yet Cox (2009) highlights “the efficacy of
some groups to initiate and perpetuate violence is also strengthened by networks of trust and engagement” (2). In essence, conflict and division can exist with or without trust between individuals and groups; however, social capital cannot exist without trust. This perspective aligns with the conflict transformation approach highlighted by Paffenholz (2009), who views the building of trust as a step in the rebuilding of destroyed relationships between conflicting parties – a step integral to solving underlying causes of conflict.

The themes of bridging and bonding, networks and trust identified here assist in framing social capital, particularly within the context and challenge of divided society. The role that conflict has in diminishing positive contributions of social capital, particularly through isolating social spheres and diminishing trust between individuals and groups, is recognisable and requires deeper understanding in this thesis which seeks to examine shared identity and engagement across social groups in Belfast.

**Conclusion: Social Capital Considered**

As the first of three chapters which offer the conceptual framing of this thesis, social capital aids in understanding the social network/group, in particular highlighting attributes of a healthy social group. Conceptually, as social capital has evolved from Durkheim to Putnam to the World Bank, evolution has also occurred in the ways in which the concept is being studied and implemented into different spectrums of practice. This thesis seeks to continue on this trajectory, to utilise social capital so that it can aid in understanding a community that crosses a historical divide. Peace and conflict study is often distinguished from other academic disciplines by the prescriptive nature of its study; at its foundation is the understanding that systems of oppression and violent conflict are harmful to the collaborative and peaceful possibilities of human interaction. At foundational levels, the understanding that unity is better than division aligns with social capital’s original positive philosophy – particularly Putnam’s (1993) belief that when individuals and communities work together in a reciprocal fashion it creates a social capital that enables them to handle issues and resolve conflicts in an easier, collective, and healthier fashion. Supporting the investigation of this thesis are ingredients to social capital – in particular trust, networks, and intra- and inter-group relationships – which are integral concepts in the construction of the analytical
framework presented in Chapter 6. Of particular interest is how, within the context of Belfast, these ingredients reinforce ‘bonding’ in the name of nationalism or unionism. Through focus on the supporters of the Giants, questions around the space and group identity shift to whether ‘bridging’ across significant cleavages is occurring in the form of this shared social group.

In March of 2015, at the end of the 2014-2015 hockey season, I went to Belfast on a preliminary visit. The first observation from my notes was that there were a large number of Giants jerseys and team-supporting apparel being worn by spectators, as well as a myriad of advertising initiatives marketing participation in a number of team-related community-based activities. Prior to any significant fieldwork, these observations suggested that for a large number of spectators, the Giants represent more than a one-off quirky sporting entertainment experience: who buys a £50 shirt for one game? If people are investing their time and passion into the Giants fan community, what sort of social capital is being generated through this social network? The way that networks interact, particularly bridging and bonding, are key concepts from social capital literatures. These terms allow a shift in the “focus of analysis from the behaviour of individual agents to the pattern of relations between agents, social units and institutions” (Cherti, 2008: 289). Questioning whether the fan experience contributes to lowering levels of prejudice that exist between nationalist and unionist members of the fan base is core to this research. What does this look like in action? Will I recognise what this looks like when I see it? Is it reserved to small individual connections between groups, or is there a wider group dimension taking place within the hockey arena? Field (2003) recognises that relational connections (bridging, bonding and linking) should not be seen as binary, rather that these exist concurrently along lines of “more or less” (23). In conducting this research which seeks to understand how this group operates across division within wider divided surroundings, the nuances of being somewhere between the established categories of social capital require careful consideration. This fluidity significantly influences the operationalisation of this concept in the analytical framework, which takes an approach of being guided by the concepts core to social capital through informed research instead of utilising them in a tick-box exercise.
Chapter 4

Intergroup Contact Theory

Introduction

Intergroup contact, particularly Allport’s contact hypothesis, is befitting of this thesis because at the heart of this theory is an understanding that different groups can come together and build relationships even in situations of deep division. The context of present day Belfast offers a setting of everyday lived division, highlighted in the second chapter’s conceptual overview, which noted the prevalence of segregation in education and living arrangements. Such separation aids in the creation of homogenous networks, as noted in the discussion of bonding social capital. The result of such partition is that the spaces where intergroup contact is experienced are charged with anxiety (Hewstone and Hughes, 2015). The intergroup contact literature confronts difference and response to difference, and has proven itself of value through numerous case studies focused on identifying the conditions for more successful interaction across cleavages. This concept and its track record is therefore valuable to this thesis as the study of the Giants supporters is constructing understanding of the different social groups and identities that share in the activity of watching ice hockey in Belfast.

In developing comprehension of this concept the chapter is divided into two sections. The first of these sections situates the contact hypothesis, providing an historical overview and overarching understanding of the concept for the purposes of this thesis. The second section examines the role and potential for the contact hypothesis in divided societies. In doing so it highlights four significant themes that come out of the expansive literature and have relevance to this thesis – anxiety, friendship, education and encounter.

Understanding the Contact Hypothesis

*The trend of evidence clearly indicates that white people who live side by side with Negroes of the same general economic class in public housing projects are on the whole more friendly, less fearful, and less stereotyped in their views than white people who live in segregated arrangements.*

Gordon Allport, 1954: 272
There has long been an understanding within social psychology that contact, encounter and the opportunity for individuals to build relationships with members of another group reduces intergroup preconceptions and biases (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). It is this idea that has fostered intergroup contact theory and the contact hypothesis.

Concentrating on what exactly happens to individuals during instances of contact for a positive change to take place, the contact hypothesis holds at its core the belief that intergroup contact can reduce prejudice if certain conditions are present (Allport, 1954). Allport’s hypothesis suggests that positive changes in relationships occur because, “…prejudice can be reduced as one learns more about a category of people” (Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes, 2005: 93). This hypothesis has been recognised as one of the most significant and lasting contributions to social psychology in the last 50 years (Dovidio, Glick and Rudman, 2005: preface).

In 1954, Gordon Allport introduced the contact hypothesis as a means of examining and reducing racial segregation in the United States; since this time the theory has been utilised, explored, and expanded upon to examine many different social categorisations, intergroup biases and stereotypes (Dovidio, Gaertner and Kawakami, 2003). The contact hypothesis has been credited in many case studies for dispelling myths and lowering levels of prejudice in various ingroups and outgroups, such as towards victims of AIDS (Werth and Lord, 1992) and gay men (Vonofakou, Hewstone and Voci, 2007). The contact hypothesis has also cast great influence in programming and policy-making circles. Organisations like Seeds of Peace, who bring young people into contact with their ‘historic enemies’, are designed on the premise that intergroup contact is an effective means of breaking down conflict (Seeds of Peace, 2015). In policy, contact has been used as a means of improving social relations, like its inclusion in shared education programming in Northern Ireland (Blaylock and Hughes, 2013).

The positive support and broad use of the contact hypothesis does not mean that it is accepted without question. One of the earliest contact researchers, Robin Williams (1947), warned of the “need for research to keep close to real life situations” (116), as generating positive contact that sits outside the possibilities of the everyday would harm its reproduction and practical value. Despite this early warning, the contact hypothesis is critiqued for its limited scope and study results that have occurred in overly controlled settings (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2005). There also exist critiques that “contact researchers have underestimated the resilience of segregation…” (Dixon and
Durrheim, 2003: 2) and that intergroup contact may not actually reduce prejudice even under ideal circumstances. However, 60 years after its emergence, the contact hypothesis remains a legitimate, respected and commonly used theoretical framework that has spread beyond the disciplinary boundaries of social psychology.

The Evolution of the Contact Hypothesis

A broad review of literature on intergroup contact gives credit for its foundational contributions to Allport and his contact hypothesis. Allport’s original works on prejudice have been widely examined, critiqued and utilised in a vast number of case studies. According to a landmark 2006 meta-analysis conducted by Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp, over 515 studies have contributed to the ongoing academic dialogue on the contact hypothesis. This theory, with its focus on prejudice reduction, has grown in size and scope, becoming central to better understanding conflict and intergroup behaviour. The following overview of the contact hypothesis thus serves to locate this thesis within a body of literature that has been widely researched.

Before the ‘Hypothesis’

The focus on contact and interaction between ingroups and outgroups prior to Gordon Allport’s introduction of the contact hypothesis concentrated primarily on the differences between groups, and the way these differences affected interaction. Rather than examining how contact between differing groups could reduce prejudice, early theorists focused on conflict that could arise as a result of intergroup relations (Bartos and Wehr, 2002). One prominent theorist, Karl Marx, expressed in his social conflict theory that society was in a constant state of change, driven by power imbalances along class lines (Marx and Engels, 2010). Marx and Engels understood that competition over resources was a characteristic of human relationships, believing that this competition would override any cooperation that resulted from intergroup contact (Marx and Engels, 2010). Opinions like those of Marx, which view intergroup contact as perpetuating or producing further conflict through class, economic relations and power, generated multiple conflict theories (Hewstone and Greenland, 2000). Two such theories are Realistic Group Conflict Theory, which states that whenever two groups seek the same limited resource conflict results (Jackson, 1993), and Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel (Tajfel and Turner, 2004), highlighting that an individual’s social identity is
tied to group membership, which results in categorisations of ‘us’ and ‘them’. At a simplistic level, these theories feed larger historical narratives of colonialism and homogeneity, which see value in segregation, a winner takes all approach, and a wider scepticism towards living together across social classes, racial groups, or sexual orientation. Identity and resource conflict, particularly seen in the Ulster Plantations, are evident throughout the Irish/Northern Irish history presented in Chapter 2; thus, this thesis employs the contact hypothesis to better understand how groups can engage in and better their intergroup relations.

**Allport’s Contact Hypothesis**

In the mid-twentieth century, during the era of racial segregation in the United States, academics began seeking new ways to examine intergroup dynamics. In his 1947 book, *The Reductions of Intergroup Tensions*, Robin Williams recognised that “intergroup contact would reduce prejudice when two groups (a) share similar tasks and status and (b) are involved in personal activities that promote meaningful interpersonal interactions” (Utsey, Ponterotto and Porter, 2008: 342). Williams’ contribution was one that inspired further research on intergroup relations, such as Deutsch and Collins’ (1951) comparative examination of intergroup relations in segregated and desegregated housing projects in New York. The findings of this study supported Williams’ initial research, noting that contact reduced prejudice amongst both black and white residents. Williams’ conclusions, as well as the New York studies by Deutsch and Collins, altered the dialogue around intergroup tensions, and laid the groundwork for Gordon Allport’s influential work. In 1954, he published his text, *The Nature of Prejudice*, in which he hypothesised that under specific conditions contact between different groups carries with it the potential to reduce prejudice.

Racial segregation of that time and the ‘Jim Crow Laws’ in the United States influenced Allport’s research. Allport lived in an era and social setting that saw African Americans and Caucasians in America experiencing high levels of conflict and prejudice, accompanied by low levels of contact. In an effort to understand the division between these groups, Allport (1954) studied those who lived in close contact with one another. He came to recognise that it was not simply the close physical proximity that led to reduced prejudice, but rather the bonds created through regular engagement with the other:
“It is not the mere fact of living together that is decisive. It is the forms of resulting communication that matter. Whether Negro and white neighbours are jointly active in community enterprises is what counts.” (Allport, 1954: 272)

Through his examination of those who lived with greater interaction with outgroups, Allport (1954) determined that contact between members of different groups had the potential to reduce prejudice; however, he also recognised that not all contact is necessarily effective in this pursuit. In the construction of his contact hypothesis, Allport introduced four key conditions he believed must be present in intergroup contact for reduction in prejudice to take place: equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by social and institutional authorities (Allport, 1954). The following offers an exploration of these conditions, introduced by Allport and reinforced by the myriad of further research that followed.

**Equal Status**

Allport held that equal status between the participants of intergroup contact was a necessity for positive changes to occur from their encounter. This condition of the contact hypothesis has been widely supported, although the term ‘equal status’ has not been easily defined and has thus been used in many different ways. Some theorists are of the view that groups should have equal status coming into contact with one another (Riordan, 1978; Pettigrew, 1998), while other research has shown that equal status within the contact situation is a catalyst to supporting positive intergroup relations (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2005). Further research recognises that neither of these forms of equal status are important if there is a perception of equal status amongst both groups in the contact setting (Cohen and Lotan, 1995). Defining equal status is further challenged by the regularity with which the contact hypothesis has an ability to manipulate and facilitate interactions; in doing so, the notion of power is flattened in a way that everyday interaction does not adhere to. One such example is seen within a legal framework, where equal status may be perceived in contact situations; however, the state-recognised status between, for example, citizen and asylum seeker is anything but equal (Darling, 2009).

Despite the challenges surrounding how equal status is defined in settings of intergroup contact, the opposite circumstance – that is, situations where those in contact are of
unequal status – has found increased prejudice and reinforcement of stereotypes, thus offering support for Allport’s condition of equal status (Jackman and Crane, 1986).

Intergroup Cooperation

Allport recognised that intergroup cooperation was imperative to a reduction in prejudice, and that competition between groups would often inflate prejudice and generate further discord between groups. He believed that, “It is the cooperative striving for the goal that engenders solidarity” (1954: 276).

The strongest support for intergroup cooperation was exemplified in the oft-cited Robbers Cave Experiment conducted by Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues (1961). This study of intergroup interaction took place at a children’s summer camp, where two groups of similar 11-year old boys, known as the Eagles and the Rattlers, were prompted through three stages of activity to understand their interactions. The first stage had both groups separately build strong ingroup bonds through a variety of summer camp activities. In the second stage, the boys realised that there was another group at the camp, as the Eagles and Rattlers were intentionally made aware of each other’s presence. It was at this stage, through a series of competitive activities, such as tug-of-war, that conflict between the two groups occurred. The third stage aimed to resolve the intergroup conflict. This first attempt at positive intergroup interaction was through non-competitive activities, such as working together to fix a problem in the camp’s water supply. The non-competitive activities increased cohesion and lessened the conflict between the two groups (Sherif et al., 1961). The findings of this landmark study provide clear evidence for Allport’s notion that cooperative intergroup contact produces greater positive results than contact centred on competition.

Common Goals

A third essential condition of Allport’s hypothesis was that contact must occur with a common goal between groups. Allport (1954) describes what happened when segregated US Army platoons were pushed by battle to desegregate. He notes that, “…it brought the two races into close contact on an equal footing in a common project (of life and death importance)” (Allport, 1954: 277). It bears noting that the life and death element in this case offers an extreme example; however, a survey of white soldiers following desegregation in the army showed those who had served with African
American soldiers had favourable opinions of association with African Americans when compared to their colleagues who had remained in segregated platoons (Allport, 1954). The condition of a common goal is supported by the less intense Robbers Cave experiment described above. The shift from conflict to cooperation between the two groups of boys occurred once there was a common goal (fixing the camp water supply), which necessitated intergroup teamwork to achieve (Sherif et al., 1961).

**Supported Contact – Authorities, Laws or Customs**

Allport believed that intergroup contact would lower levels of prejudice if the contact was supported in the broader societal context, and he recognised that an overarching form of authority had power in defining social norms (Pettigrew, 1998). He understood that institutions, which often hold such authority, had a great effect on the desire and ability of one group to have meaningful contact with another, noting, “prejudiced people are more devoted to institutions than are the unprejudiced” (404). When institutions or community leaders endorse intergroup contact, contact becomes normalised in the daily lives of ingroups and outgroups (Allport, 1954).

Reinforcing Allport’s assertion that support contributes to the normalisation of interaction patterns, several studies focusing on institutions exemplify that prejudice is reduced when intergroup contact is supported and encouraged. Focusing on the school environment, Patchen (1982) observed that majority white students often adopt positive interracial/intergroup attitudes if their teacher displays these views. Landis, Hope and Day (1984) found that desegregation in the military was only taken seriously once there was full institutional support. These examples underscore Allport’s condition that positive intergroup contact must be supported – whether by authoritative governing structures, laws, local leaders or social customs and values that culturally reinforce group practices.

According to Allport’s hypothesis, all four conditions must be present in order for intergroup contact to reduce prejudice, a sentiment generally supported by the 2006 meta-analysis of the contact hypothesis conducted by Pettigrew and Tropp. This meta-analysis found that studies which attempted to structure situations to meet Allport’s four conditions had greater effect than studies that did not meet the criteria – thus lending support to Allport’s hypothesis (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006).
**Following on Allport’s Hypothesis**

In the years since Gordon Allport published his seminal text, his contact hypothesis has grown “into a full-blown theory of considerable complexity” (Pettigrew et al., 2011: 272). Furthering the expansion of intergroup contact study from Allport’s original hypothesis has been significant shifts in global and political arrangements. The continued growth in urbanisation and globalisation is bringing people into contact with one another who previously would not have crossed paths; further, advancements in technology and communication have altered and challenged intergroup contact since the days of American racial segregation. With increased interconnectedness and networks of interactions the binary of individuals and groups belonging to ingroups or outgroups leaves ample space for support, critique and suggestions for advancement.

Focusing on critique, in their study on intergroup contact and intergroup conflict Hewstone and his colleagues (2014) highlight five key issues with the current studies and limitations in the contact hypothesis research, particularly in peace and conflict research. The first of these is a need for longitudinal research; at present most studies rely on cross-sectional research using small samples to inform larger groups. The second issue is that research requires further clarity around what the effects of contact are – in particular whether contact has a long-term impact on behaviour. The third critique is the inclusion of multilevel analysis. The role of power is misrepresented in the contact hypothesis. A scan of the many case studies demonstrates that contact can work at the local level (Green and Seher, 2003); however, there is little representation in these studies about whether it can affect the wider context of power and influence impacting relationships in divided settings. The fourth critique returns in many ways to the early works on ingroups and outgroups; Hewstone and colleagues (2014) call for constructing deeper understanding of the “negative factors operating in some contact situations” (48). The empirical research on the contact hypothesis ties to a certain level of liberal optimism that warrants challenge in difficult and complex circumstances. Their final suggestion has specific ties to the research presented in their paper, calling for the field to take a comparative turn. In doing so, they suggest research that utilises ‘previolence’ contact patterns with ‘postviolence’ perceptions between groups. Such critiques give a picture of where current gaps emerge within the wider research of the contact hypothesis, while also understanding that the contact hypothesis remains a useful concept.
It also warrants acknowledgement that the wider concept of contact has changed in the years since the Jim Crow Laws of America. One challenge to Allport’s contact hypothesis has been that the increase and intensity of mobile phone and internet use has changed the way contact and communication are taking place. Online contact has the ability to alter several factors that Allport saw as essential to positive contact; for example, in 1954 the idea that contact could occur and span great distances without those in contact leaving the comfort of their homes would have been a very foreign concept (Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna, 2006). Contact without leaving home lowers some of the challenges that exist in meeting with outgroup members in-person. Further, online communication challenges the conditions of equal status, as Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna (2006) recognise, “On the Internet no one knows that I am wearing a diamond necklace or have teeth missing” (829). As technology continues to change and advance communications, it has also affected the way humans from ingroups and outgroups are in contact with one another, a point that I will return to in Chapter 8 when discussing the role of online communications in the Belfast Giants supporter groups. The indirect communication of the internet and activity of social media platforms has opened opportunity for both increased positive interaction as well as increased prejudice, a phenomenon that warrants continued examination, which must evolve as advancements in communication technology and platforms occur.

Just as challenges have arisen to Allport’s contact hypothesis over the last 60 years, a number of theoretical extensions have evolved from it as well, taking the core conceptual framework of intergroup contact and utilising it for different purposes. These extensions are wide-ranging, from Imagined Intergroup Contact, an approach that sees value in imagining contact with members of an outgroup as a means of reducing prejudice (Crisp et al., 2008), to the school of thought that believes positive portrayal of outgroups in television programming can contribute to lower rates of prejudice (Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes, 2005).

There has been intense growth in the study of intergroup contact since the early research of Williams and Allport, who were responding to an era marked by segregation and division with a paradigm shift of contact from conflict to cooperation. Their examinations of prejudice have generated an assumption that if humans are given the space and opportunity to construct meaningful relationships, they will do so. This belief remains intact even if the groups are vastly different. Although many studies have
suggested additional conditions in an attempt to further generate the ideal environment for positive intergroup contact, Pettigrew has noted that these additions have “overburdened the hypothesis with too many facilitating, but not essential, conditions” (1998: 65). However, the recognition in Pettigrew and Tropp’s (2006) meta-analysis confirms that Allport’s original 1954 contact hypothesis has continued to find support in the social psychology community. This historical overview from the early works of integrated housing to the growing forums of interaction, both real and virtual, demonstrates the value of investigating and employing the contact hypothesis for the purposes of this study and this thesis accepts that the contact hypothesis has been tried and tested, and remains centrally situated in the studies examining spaces of encounter where ingroups and outgroups interact.

**The Contact Hypothesis and Divided Society**

The challenges that conflict present to intergroup contact are undeniable. Conflict often prevents any form of contact from occurring, particularly between the conflicting groups; without the opportunity or space for contact to occur, the contact hypothesis is irrelevant. With its historical roots coming out of the age of American segregation, the contact hypothesis was proposed and designed to bring communities in conflict together. In exploring the literatures and case studies of the contact hypothesis, this section examines four common attributes that have an impact on intergroup contact – anxiety, friendship, education, and the ways in which encounter occurs. Each of these factors has been highlighted in particular because of the role, or potential role, that they play in reducing prejudice in divided society. These four attributes influence and contribute to the analytical framework, which highlights prejudice and anxiety as two of the six thematic guideposts for the field research.

**Anxiety**

In his discussion of prejudice, Allport (1954) recognised, “the human mind must think with the aid of categories,” identifying such categorisation as, “the basis for normal prejudgement. We cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends on it” (20). These categorisations, which can lead to prejudice, are constructed through the attitudes and prior experiences of individuals and their peers. Interacting with those that are different, depending on the category of the person or the group they belong to, can
result in anxiety; when experiences or other influences lead to a negative categorisation of a person or group, anxiety will increase. “Intergroup anxiety refers to feelings of apprehension and awkwardness when envisaging or being in a contact situation with outgroup members, perhaps because rejection, embarrassment, or misunderstanding are expected” (Binder et al, 2009: 845). The higher the intergroup anxiety, the greater this acts as an impediment to quality, positive intergroup contact (Pettigrew, 1998).

In any situation “anxiety disorders are excessively fearful, anxious or avoidant of perceived threats in the environment” (Craske and Stein, 2016: 3048). In divided societies, where prejudice levels between ingroups and outgroups are high, particularly if conflict is active or has recently taken place, there are raised levels of anxiety in situations of contact and interaction between groups. However, Jens Binder (2009) and his colleagues have observed that once contact takes place, initial anxieties can be alleviated by positive interactions and experiences. Lowering anxiety has been shown to generate further contact and reduce prejudice (Stephan and Stephan, 1985). Contact thus has the potential to be a catalyst for breaking cycles of conflict and generating cycles of positive interaction.

In seeking to further alter or end cycles of continuous conflict, Allport’s condition of contact that is endorsed or supported by an authoritative structure (cultural, governing, etc.) becomes increasingly essential. In situations where there is division between ingroup and outgroup, the construction of relationships with ‘the other’ is frowned upon by societal structures; this contact without support provides increased levels of anxiety. Support, however, can have many interpretations. In larger conflict settings, where the global community becomes involved through sanctions or United Nations activity, contact may become endorsed internationally but may not reach the local populations. One such example is the international support and sanctions placed on South Africa in an effort to break the cycle of apartheid. In peace literature and practice, there has been a shift over the last 20 years to greater effort, resources and value being placed on ‘local’ person-to-person peacebuilding (Mac Ginty, 2011). By localising ownership of peace initiatives through ‘bottom-up’ approaches, an increase in the voice of local populations has occurred. In settings where this local shift has been realised, the support for contact between conflicting groups carries greater weight at levels of interpersonal interaction. The movement to greater local control of peacebuilding efforts suggests that endorsement from local level community leaders and authority figures has a greater
effect in reducing the anxiety of contact with outgroups than the support of far-away international policymakers.

The conditions of the contact hypothesis can serve to bring individuals together across divided lines by fostering intergroup interactions that are positive and anxiety reducing, thus interrupting the cyclical nature of conflict that is perpetuated by prejudice.

**Friendship**

In his discussion on reconciliatory processes, Lederach (1997) asserts that, “…relationship is the basis of both the conflict and its long-term solution” (26). The contact hypothesis presumes that under the right conditions people will find common ground once they get to know one another. In this way, positive intergroup contact facilitates the shift from relationships being the source of the problem, to being part of the solution, by providing a space where the process and changes in relationship toward understanding can occur. Gaertner and Dovidio (2000) recognise such positive contact as offering the potential to shift group perception from two groups to one.

The contact hypothesis emerges from a widely held understanding that people’s attitudes towards ‘the other’ change with exposure and interaction. Even Pettigrew (1998), despite his critique that too many social psychology studies on contact recommend additional conditions to Allport’s original four, suggests that a fifth condition be added. He concedes that, “the contact situation must provide the participants with the opportunity to become friends” (76). Pettigrew (1998) believed that building a friendship with a member of a different group facilitated the acceptance of not only members of one outgroup, but outgroups of many types. It has been noted that, “intergroup contact has positive consequences not only for the participants but also for non-participants whose friends and acquaintances had such contact” (Pettigrew et al., 2007: 422). Research thus supports the seemingly obvious, that when friendship occurs prejudice is broadly reduced; however, in situations where prejudice is high, such as conflict zones, there are lower levels of intergroup friendship (Binder et al, 2009).

The study of friendship and the value of intergroup contact; however, is accompanied by several concerns. The first concern is the question of how researchers and their participants define friendship (Davies et al., 2011). ‘Friendship’ is a broadly defined
term, which carries differing meanings based on a multitude of factors, including cultural and social understandings. The second concern is the lack of clarity explaining how friendship, a micro-level interaction, affects macro-level peace processes. As Steinberg (2013) notes, “There are fundamental and inherent problems in transforming micro-level changes in perceptions, attitudes, and policy positions towards the conflict, to the extent that they occur, into macro-level political changes” (44). This contention, although based on observations of larger scale conflicts, challenges the assumption that interpersonal friendships have a role in diminishing division between groups. This notion finds further support in Matejskova and Leitner’s (2011) eastern Berlin study focused on the integration of Russian Aussiedler immigrants and local Germans, which challenged any ‘scaling up’ that would come from intergroup friendships, noting, “In the end the positive values gained through an encounter with an immigrant become attached to that individual subject who becomes ‘like us’ whereas the group category remains largely negatively connoted” (734).

The third concern is the way in which friendships stemming from intergroup contact are studied and observed. Most studies examining the effects of intergroup contact use results taken from the majority group; for example, the studies of segregation in America focused on white attitudes towards African-Americans (Deutsch and Collins, 1951; Allport, 1954). Pettigrew and Tropp’s 2006 meta-analysis located just 33 out of over 500 studies that included both a majority and minority perspective (Binder et al., 2009). Therefore, relationship construction in divided society has been examined from a primarily one-dimensional perspective, and the effects of friendships within the minority group have been widely overlooked.

In their review of friendship and intergroup attitudes, Kristin Davies and her colleagues (2011) acknowledge that intergroup friendships, while positive in nature, take a good deal of time and effort to construct. In times of conflict, the ever-changing political, cultural and social climate creates added barriers to this process. This process may also be hindered by individuals who stand to lose (money, position, etc.) from a unified and peaceful environment. Despite the seemingly long odds, there are many stories and experiences from conflict situations demonstrating that friendships between members of divided groups are being formed and have considerable effect on building inclusive community (Ramovic, 2017).
An investigation of the role that education plays in intergroup contact reveals two differing schools of thought. The first view recognises education as a mirror of society, reflecting the divisions and social categorisations that exist in the broader social fabric. This view is supported by segregated education that presents curriculums and histories supporting and upholding ingroup and outgroup prejudice (Hayes, McAllister and Dowds, 2007). The second view contends that education creates a space in society that can act as an agent for social change. This opinion turns to the American Supreme Court decision Brown vs. Board of Education for support; this 1954 ruling which recognised that ‘separate is not equal’ acted as a catalyst for the modern civil rights movement. In doing so this ruling inspired education reform and offered the legal framework to challenge segregation in America more broadly (Smithsonian, 2018).

In practice, intergroup contact has become increasingly used in educational policies in places where there are groups divided by conflict; the education setting is viewed as a space where conflicting groups are integrated in the hopes of reducing outgroup prejudice. In their examination of segregated and integrated education in Northern Ireland, Hayes, McAllister and Dowds (2007) note that, “attendance at an Integrated (both formal and informal) school has long-term benefits in weakening sectarian political outlooks and promoting a center and common ground in Northern Ireland politics…” (476). The practice of integrated education, however, is not without challenge; Ulrike Niens (2009) notes that divided groups are being brought together in integrated schools, yet educators are offered “little guidance on the development of effective educational policies that may promote positive attitudes at the societal and institutional level…” (153).

In taking a holistic view of education beyond the classroom, Helen Wilson (2013) expands the sphere of education to the playgrounds and spaces where parents and caregivers encounter one another. She recognises that these regular and routine encounters contain potential for positive interaction, as participants are “driven by pragmatic concerns with producing a more positive environment for their own children” (643). This sentiment serves as a reminder that education extends beyond the classroom; within a conflict transformation perspective, education is recognised as occurring in both formal and informal settings (Schell-Faucon, 2001). This conflict transformation
approach offers strong support for learning about different racial, ethnic and cultural groups as a means of lowering prejudice as well as learning about one’s self and one’s role in conflict situations. Allport (1954) noted, “Contacts that bring knowledge and acquaintance are likely to engender sounder beliefs concerning minority groups, and for this reason contribute to the reduction of prejudice” (268).

However, it can be argued that changes within a micro setting do not necessarily represent nor extend to the broader society. For example, although integrated schools are often seen to generate positive intergroup contact, there are two concerns with the effects that a contact-based micro-community can have on minority members. The first of these, recognised by Saguy and her colleagues (2009), warns that hope and expectation can be distorted by the harmony constructed in a micro-community, which does not transfer from one social setting to another. The second concern recognises that the equal footing offered through integrated education can aid in creating a sense of group relative deprivation, described as the “sense that your ingroup is being unjustly deprived…when contact provides the opportunity for minorities to learn what the majority possesses that is denied them” (Pettigrew et al., 2011: 278). While debate exists surrounding education and intergroup contact between conflicting groups, it is clear that education provides an important sphere where the impacts of contact can be studied and experienced.

**Types of Encounter**

In times of conflict, words like segregation, sectarianism, and apartheid are used to describe the division that takes place between people. Lines of division alter spaces of encounter and present limitations to the contact that takes place. Allport’s conditions offer guidelines to optimum contact situations and settings; however, interaction does not happen in a vacuum, and contact cannot be completely controlled – particularly in areas of division and conflict. Contact is affected by elements that are beyond Allport’s optimal conditions; thus casual, everyday contact warrants examination for its role and value in the reduction of prejudice. In divisive situations casual contact may represent the only encounter that occurs between groups, particularly in situations where organised contact is discouraged or even forbidden. Building on the idea of friendship discussed previously, there may not be room in a conflict situation for friendship to be fostered; however, casual contact may still occur.
In his early study on contact and ethnic relations, Yehuda Amir (1969) upheld that casual contact did not necessarily engineer a shift towards positive attitudes. Citing that countries with greater Jewish populations had higher rates of prejudice and anti-Semitism, he suspected that casual contact had the ability to produce higher levels of prejudice. However, in their study on anti-Muslim attitudes in the Netherlands, Michael Savelkoul and his colleagues (2011) found the opposite. Areas populated with high numbers of Muslims, and thus with more contact occurring between Muslim and non-Muslim populations, were found to have lower levels of prejudice; the further Muslims became integrated into everyday activities and interactions, the less of a perceived threat they became. The differing results point towards a need for clearer understanding of the context, precipitants, and/or conditions which enable interaction, a notion that Wilson (2017) highlights in her writing on encounter:

“Encounters are events of relation and are thus unavoidably risky and unpredictable. As such, a heightened sensitivity to conceptualizations of encounter should necessarily accept that ambiguity is not only a core feature of encounters, but is what makes encounters of analytical interest. In making this claim, I suggest that any conceptualization must accept the impossibility of fully ‘capturing’ encounters, their potentials and taking-place. Encounters are mediated, affective, emotive and sensuous, they are about animation, joy and fear, and both the opening up and closing down of affective capacity.” (464-465)

Allport’s contact hypothesis suggests that if the key conditions are followed, reduction of prejudice will occur; however, there is a lack of clarity as to how positive contact will spread from individual interaction to larger intergroup attitudinal change. What Wilson suggests is a need to develop case studies that are sensitive to the context-specific nature of contact, a view that sees value in encounter without necessarily theorising or tying the encounter to larger group agendas and dynamics.

The framing of the contact hypothesis in divided societies through the examination of anxiety, friendship, education, and types of encounters exhibits that positive intergroup interaction extends beyond, and is less prescriptive, than Allport’s contact hypothesis suggests. However, Allport’s hypothesis and its conditions have proven to be of great value as a starting point to understanding contact in divided societies. Where this theory falls short, particularly within conflict settings, is around the notions of power and ‘scaling up’. The contact hypothesis has proven itself to be effective within a myriad of case studies at local and specific levels; however, what it has failed to do consistently is
affect wider contexts of division, not greatly impacting the power that seemingly
determines who wins, loses, integrates, segregates, etc. (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux,
2005). This critique has a singular focus on effecting wider systemic change, which
overlooks the value of improved interactions in the everyday.

Conclusion: Conflict Hypothesis Considered
Driven by the inequality and segregation that was occurring around him, Gordon
Allport viewed prejudice as “a fundamentally irrational hatred, born of ignorance and
the ego-defensive manoeuvres of people with weak personality structures” (Dovidio,
Glick and Rudman, 2005: 1-2). This foundational and opinionated understanding only
strengthens this concept’s use in this thesis, where the primary research is conducted in
a city still intensely defined by identity traits of whom one is and who one is not. My
research interest in understanding the depth of encounter and the level of relationships
that are occurring between individuals and across groups within the hockey arena finds
a home with the contact hypothesis’ response to prejudice, anxiety, mistrust and
identity. These themes offer conceptual structure for examining contact within the SSE
Arena and are revisited as central components to the analytical framework.

Attending an ice hockey game is not an activity that an individual typically does with
the purpose of making friends, or even with the intention of constructing new
relationships; rather it is an activity that one attends with their friends or family.
Although inter-communal friendship in Belfast is not the rarity it once was,23 and
despite the definition of friendship being open to considerable interpretation, the
question arises of whether the Giants offer a space of contact that contributes to the
construction of deepened relationships across division. Or, are the interactions between
those attending ice hockey games merely surface level, without significant meaning
whatsoever? Central to such questions is the physical nature of being a spectator at ice
hockey games; the physical setup plays an important role in the investigation of
relationship construction and contact within this setting. The side-by-sidedness of
watching hockey together is highlighted in the methodological approach of interviewing
those in the seats beside me, and even more so in the meta-theme of this thesis

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23 This is highlighted by “a drop in the proportion of YLT [Young Life and Times] respondents saying
that they did not have any friends from the other main religious community, from 33 per cent in 2003 to
22 per cent in 2011” (Devine and Robinson, 2012).
discussed in Chapter 10, ‘Side-by-sidedness’. Sitting side-by-side a person provides sight lines that do not necessitate face-to-face interactions; this can enable contact to remain at a very surface level despite close proximity and shared space. An important question in the case study asks whether the simple act of sharing space with individuals from across division is a sign of progress for many in Belfast. In doing so, the contact hypothesis provides a malleable, versatile and yet well-developed theory to cultivate an understanding of what positive intergroup relations look like and how they are constructed so that these can be asked about, experienced and observed in fieldwork.
Chapter 5

Civility

_Civility refers to tacit rules governing social behaviors regulating social interaction._
Moser and Corroyer, 2001: 612

_Civility is a quality that combines being well mannered, that is, using appropriate courtesy with being considerate, that is staying open to the views and feelings of others._
Perlman, 2012: 206

The two quotes above frame civility as a way of being with others in the public sphere, an important concept in this thesis, where the primary focus is on the public and cross-community interactions in the shared space of the SSE Arena. Northern Ireland offers a research context where civility has been, and in some settings is still, challenged. Throughout the historical overview presented in Chapter 2, the conflict manifested itself through everyday settings, most dramatically in the violent bombings of public settings meant to intimidate civic life. The violent struggles on the streets of Belfast have ceased, yet civility at present is always shifting, dependent on the space of interaction and who is involved. The dynamic nature of civility and its changing characteristics are supported by interdisciplinary academic coverage which is used most commonly to add depth and understanding to studies of human interaction.

This chapter engages the concept of civility in three main sections. The first offers a brief conceptual history of civility, highlighting the works of Simmel, Elias, and Erving Goffman, whose writings on identity, social encounter, and space are found throughout this thesis. The second section unpacks civility and is broken down into four sections – the _development of civility, categorising civility, civility in action, and civility in the city._ The final section narrows down the concept to discuss the challenges and manifestations of civility in divided society.
A Brief Conceptual History of Civility

The Latin word *civis*, at the root of civility and other related terms (such as civic, civilised, and civilisation) is defined as *citizen* (The Latin Dictionary, 2010). A feature associated with the citizen is their submission to the rules and structures of the state and its systems of control; citizenry to state-rule comes with issues in the north of Ireland. However, in his historical overview of the concept of civility, Nehring (2011) recognises that civility was long understood as “a process rather than a state of affairs” (313). In this way, the process of being made a citizen – civilising – connects to narratives of conquest and submission, with colonisation and religious crusading offering two primary (and extreme) examples. Although this method of civilising by Western/European conquerors dominates human history, including in the Ulster Plantations, and continues today through structurally violent political and economic arrangements, this thesis does not directly tackle these issues. The use of civility in this chapter is used instead to develop an understanding of behaviour between people in public, as highlighted in the two opening quotes of this chapter. In the examination of social capital, the works of Robert Putnam provided a starting point for theoretical discussion, just as Gordon Allport provided for the contact hypothesis; however, civility cannot be traced to one such pioneer – philosophers, writers and academics have long been drawn to understanding how people relate to and behave with one another. This section therefore briefly identifies a few early writers who are widely acknowledged for drawing attention to this theme, before using the following sections to focus more directly on contemporary study of civility.

The academic contributions to the topic of civility correspond with modernity and the growth of urban life, and the expansion of relationships and populations, once confined to smaller regional areas but growing to include a broader range of more diverse interactions. This shift generated commentary from several classical philosophers and thinkers of significance who were intrigued with the idea of living together and the order that such living arrangements warranted. Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, and Adam Smith have been recognised for early examinations of the role of civility in maintaining a level of public engagement and sociability that separated humanity from its barbaric pasts (Boyd, 2006). Georg Simmel made several early philosophical contributions to discussion and engagement with the growth of shared environments. His essay, *The Stranger*, acts as a commentary on the shift from a world in which there
is a “wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow” to one in which there is a “person who comes today and stays to morrow” (Simmel, 1950: 1). Simmel thus examines the infusion of difference in community, generating a discussion of civility driven by personal and communal identity, commonality, as well as accepting difference, a notion that is central to several studies concerned with the anxieties associated with modernity (Hier, 2003). German sociologist Norbert Elias’ (2000) acclaimed text, *The Civilizing Process*, observes and analyses the construction of civility (as considered typical of western civilisations) from habits and behaviours to structures of governing and class systems. In the evolutionary process towards modern civility, Elias (2000) surmises:

“It can never be said with certainty that the people of a society are civilized. But on the basis of systematic investigations referring to demonstrable evidence, it can be said with a high degree of certainty that some groups of people have become more civilized, without necessarily implying that it is better or worse, has a positive or negative value, to become more civilized.” (456)

Erving Goffman (1956) through his text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, outlined a wide variety of roles that individuals play and the way that they might switch between these roles depending on the space, audience or roles being played around them. His imagery and descriptions likened real-life interactions in public and private spheres to putting on a theatrical production. His discussion of the many and varied roles each individual plays, dependent on situation, setting, and company, has contributed to academic discourse on the dynamic nature of the way humans interact with one another.

This brief tracing of early contributions identifies some renowned thinkers and their ideas around civility, two of which warrant highlighting for this thesis. The first is an emphasis on public space as the site of the civil. The interactions these scholars studied, whether dealing with difference, creating a system of order and governance, or exploring the construction of social roles, were focused on wider interaction beyond the home. This focus on civility as enacted in the public sphere is supported by Arkes (1974), who notes “Civility is fundamentally about the moral and cultural codes that guide people with regard to how to behave ‘properly’ in public” (cited in Callahan, 2011: 12). The second theme that comes out of the way these works are used and cited is the wide range of internal and external factors that influence notions of civility; these range from micro-level personal worldviews and opinions to macro-level influences such as modernity, power, class, race and social status. Acknowledging the role of the
public and the many influences that shape what civility looks like offers an important reminder to this thesis’ investigation. The conflicting and tangled single and shared public spaces in post-peace agreement Belfast contribute to a case study where differing influences and pressures are embedded in constructing civility and the roles that an individual plays.

**Unpacking Civility**

As highlighted through the brief conceptual history above, civility is an interdisciplinary concept that spreads throughout studies of human interaction. The versatility and regular use of the term are not particularly helpful as an analytical tool; as such this section unpacks the concept in four interrelated subsections to develop a directed understanding of civility for the purposes of this thesis. The first of these offerings outlines the conceptual development of civility, in showcasing the mutual recognition of acknowledgement that is embedded in civil public acts. The second subsection, categorising civility, draws out multiple uses and understandings that are connected to this wide-ranging concept. The third subsection is a discussion of civility in action, highlighting Whitman’s (2000) notions of acknowledgement and respect in the acts of civility. The final subsection centres on civility and the city; as this study focuses on the urban setting of Belfast, an appreciation of the city and its role as a site of civility and incivility is important. These offerings are unpacked to influence and frame the public interactions and navigating of intergroup contact in the shared space of the SSE Arena, where civility occurs in the seats and aisles, concourses and ticket lines. Such understanding is important in a conflict setting where civility has not traditionally been assumed.

**The Development of Civility**

Three views warrant consideration when seeking to better understand how civility is developed. The first of these views sees civility as taught. American university president Rita Bornstein (2010) presents an argument that civility needs to be taught in the classroom and modelled in formal education settings. She asserts that civility is best exemplified through civil interactions and dialogue, and that these characteristics are not represented in society at large; thus, civility is learned in the classroom. A second school of thought, which does not necessarily contradict the view of civility as taught,
sees civility as demanded by those with power over a population. This is addressed by Callahan (2011) in his management/human resource focused research. He acknowledges that civility and incivility are both “rules of behaviour in a given collective” (13). In describing the origins of these rules, Callahan cites Bourdieu (1986), who as noted previously in this literature review, believed that those with greater capital establish the rules – including those that guide civility. In this way, the rules of social engagement are seen to be formed and steered by a ruling elite.

However, the influence of a powerful few to construct the underlying social guidelines of many – that is, the constructing of civility – is debated in the third view, which sees civility, at least in its everyday sense, as constructed at the local, person-to-person level. This is displayed in Jennifer Lee’s (2006) ethnographic examination of Korean and Jewish merchants in predominantly African-American neighbourhoods in the US. Through this study, she acknowledges that journalists often draw conclusions in cases where large-scale racial tensions violently pierce the social surface of civility; however, she notes that a working civility is, for the most part, constructed and negotiated at a local level in these interactions. The exchanges that occur in shared spaces are undoubtedly under the influence of larger social, racial and political environments, yet the exchanges of people in their day-to-day spaces construct a civil understanding of how their interactions will occur.

The range of influential factors informing civility demonstrates that there are differing opinions to the way civility is constructed. However, it is my opinion that these three factors all have something to offer the development of civility – institutions, power and people are all present in constructing civic/public spaces. Sennett (2003) presents a more holistic understanding in his recognition that “treating people with respect cannot occur simply by commanding it should happen. Mutual recognition has to be negotiated; this negotiation engages the complexities of personal character as much as social structure” (260, as cited by Fyfe et al., 2006: 859). Sennett’s sentiments imply and assume a connection between civility and respect, representing a navigated experience that at minimum takes into consideration the actions of others, the lessons learned through schooling, the influence of social structures and the impact of local interaction and personal experiences. It is across through this link with respect that Belfast offers an interesting setting to examine civility, as each of these developing
factors encounters pushback through historical divisions that have supported civility within groups, and incivility across groups.

Categorising Civility

A conceptual understanding of civility is further developed by breaking down the concept into foundational categories. A number of scholars have deconstructed civility for greater clarity of a term that encompasses many meanings, and have attached a number of sub-definitions to the various forms that civility can take.

In an effort to unpack civility, Fyfe, Bannister and Kearns (2006) present a resourceful distinction between what they term ‘proximate’ and ‘diffuse’ civility. Proximate civility they recognise “as ‘politeness’ or the absence of ‘rudeness’ in our interactions with others” (855). In contrast, the broader focus of diffuse civility has a “regard for the effects of our actions on others and to care for the spaces(s) we share with others, whether we are present in those spaces at the same time as others” (855). In a similar fashion, political scientist Richard Boyd (2006) also deconstructs civility into two distinct categories, which he terms as ‘formal’ and ‘substantive’ civilities. The criteria for ‘formal’ civility is akin to the ‘proximate’ civility presented by Fyfe et al.; however, Boyd’s second categorisation of ‘substantive’ civility takes a different path. Boyd sees substantive civility as a much more political construction, which is “evident in formulations like ‘civil rights’ or ‘civil disobedience’ where the word ‘civil’ refers to the condition of being a member of a political community” (864). Boyd introduces a different dimension in his categorisations, which leaves space for the political sphere and the rights and demands on individuals to act civilly. The starting point of this thesis includes an expectation of baseline civility, interpreting this level of interaction as a foundation on which more meaningful and measured interactions may occur. However, in divided societies, such as Northern Ireland, the act of treating ‘the other’ with the politeness and recognition inherent in ‘formal’ and ‘proximate’ civility is an act that carries with it deep social and political meaning.

Civility in Action

Unpacking civility thus far has established that there are varying opinions on how civility is constructed and categorised; to provide further insight into understanding the concept, the actions that constitute civility are explored. An overview of the actions of
civility lead to the work of Whitman, who identifies two forms of civility. These forms, the ‘outward show of respect’ and the ‘sincere acknowledgement of the equality of others’, stem from his comparative study of civility in the western states of France, Germany and America (2000). Exploring these two ideas provide a deepened understanding of the actions that comprise the civility that occurs in daily interactions, including ideas of chivalry and politeness, codes of conduct that contribute to an orderly society, as well as larger academic literatures of pluralism and tolerance of difference.

Returning again to the concept of respect, the first of Whitman’s forms of civility and arguably the most recognisable action of civility, is the outward show of respect, a concept that resonates throughout civility-oriented literature. Acts of politeness are married to civility through the occurrence and reciprocation of positive public interactions between individuals and groups. In their study on civility in French urban settings, psychologists Gabriel Moser and Denis Corroyer (2001) connect public acts of politeness with the theory of social modelling. Social modelling, proposed by Albert Bandura (1977), recognises that humans learn through observation, and link their behaviours and consequences, meaning positively rewarded actions are generally repeated (McLeod, 2011). Moser and Corroyer’s study focused on the chivalrous act of holding open a door for someone in a public space; they found that if someone holds the door for one person, that person is more likely to hold the door for the next person (2001). These observations, combined with Bandura’s assertion that people generally make decisions based on a calculated response, offer a reminder of the old saying ‘respect is a two-way street’.

However, these observed and socially learned actions of politeness that demonstrate civility are not necessarily founded on actual respect. Whitman (2000) uses the terminology of Erving Goffman in describing that, “The world of the show of respect…is a world purely of ceremony, not of substance” (1291). Such a school of thought is supported by Gill Valentine (2008), who recognises the vast differences between public acts and private views. Such an analysis suggests civility is merely actions completed through habit without requiring respect of another, a challenge to the previously noted assumption which viewed civility as offering a foundation upon which deeper relations can be constructed. If civility is simply an act of convenience or expectation consisting of behaviours which do not necessarily reflect or align with an
individual’s personal beliefs, opinions or respect for other people, can it be viewed as an action of social change?

The second form of civility highlighted by Whitman offers something to this question – *the sincere acknowledgment of the equality of others*. Such a classification identifies that within civility is the inherent capacity for more than thinly veneered public acts of kindness (2000). This suggests that the way human beings behave towards one another is more intentional than merely socially acceptable actions in a given time or space. Richard Boyd (2006) offers support to this idea, recognising civility as “an active and informative moral relationship between persons” (875). This understanding connects to the notion of pluralism, and the acceptance that there are multiple and diverse approaches, rather than a singular approach, to any given encounter. This worldview allows an individual’s actions of politeness and interaction to be recognised beyond the socially prescribed motivation noted previously, and acknowledges that no matter the location, cultural, racial or social context of interaction, civility presents an outlet to affirm the rights, existence and humanity of the people encountered in the public realm.

Whitman states, “While the outward show of respect aims to create or affirm a ritual relationship of respect between two individuals, *the sincere acknowledgment of the equality of others* aims to create or affirm a deeper dignitary structure for society at large” (1291). Both approaches provide motivation for civil actions in the public sphere. Within the context of this thesis, questions arise around whether the actions of civility in the public space of an ice hockey game – be they ritualised, habitual, socialised or acknowledging and/or respectful of difference – are more peaceful than civil interaction elsewhere in the city.

**Civility and the City**

At the forefront of the modern discussion on urban civility is sociologist Richard Sennett, who, through multiple publications over the last 45 years, has been furthering current discourse with his commentary that challenges the role of families, segregated ethnic groups and interaction in the public and private lives of urban citizens (van Leeuwen, 2014). Sennett (1974) recognises civility as the actions that take place while playing the role that one plays in the public sphere: “Civility is treating others as though they were strangers and forging a social bond upon that social distance” (264). This social distance where Sennett proposes civility occurs should not be quickly deemed
negative, as he describes the public realm as a place of opportunity. Sennett (2018) further notes that many have moved to urban settings, drawn to the “…chance to lighten the pressures for conformity of fitting into a fixed role in the social order; anonymity and impersonality provide a milieu for more individual development” (586). Sennett’s contribution to understanding the many complexities of city-life and the diversity therein, as well as the human response to these complexities, has and continues to challenge conceptions of urban civility.

The topic of urban anonymity is recognised further in George Kelling and James Wilson’s (1982) influential article published in *The Atlantic*. Their ‘Broken Windows Theory’ hypothesises that if one broken window is left unmended, the surrounding windows will soon be broken as well. The authors build on Simmel’s earlier notion of anonymity of urban life, noting further vandalism occurs because leaving one broken window exemplifies a lack of caring or concern for property. This theory has drawn the attention of academics and policymakers with an interest in crime reduction strategies on the premise that, “…vandalism can occur anywhere once communal barriers – the sense of mutual regard and the obligations of civility – are lowered by actions that seem to signal that “no one cares”” (Kelling and Wilson, 1982). The broken windows theory connects to the civility highlighted in this thesis through the challenges it identifies to maintaining order and function in urban neighbourhoods and the significance of the material environment where law and order might take on non-traditional Western forms. Wilson and Kelling’s recommendations for safer communities have at their core the understanding that order in the urban setting is aided by accountability in the relationships maintained between the individuals, groups and their environment – a factor challenged by historical division in Belfast.

In the last 15 years, as publications and interest in urban spaces of interaction and encounter have increased, various dynamics and theoretical conceptions have become recognised through the works of several scholars. Ash Amin’s (2002) ethnographic research following the complex disturbances and riots which occurred in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford examined the way multicultural groups live together with a focus that privileges “everyday enactment as the central site of identity and attitude formation” (967). Amin’s contribution to the dialogue on civility lies in his observations of the state of everyday encounters and collective cultures that emerge in the urban setting, supporting his assertion that “urbanism highlights the challenges of negotiating
class, gender and ethnic or racial differences placed in close proximity, with the spatiality of the city playing a distinctive role in the negotiation of multiplicity and difference” (2006: 1012). Gill Valentine also offers a good deal to civility through her study on geographies of encounter. Her 2008 comparative study of UK communities examined themes of urban etiquette and tolerance of difference, and, as mentioned previously, engaged the concept of public actions and private views. Through her interviews, Valentine recognised that “…encounters in contemporary public space are regulated by codes of so-called ‘political correctness’ to such an extent that they feel obliged to curb the public expression of their personal prejudices and negative feelings” (329). Such an observation aligns with Goffman’s concept of different roles in different company. Greater understanding of these roles and codes of conducts have spurred further research and study on encounter, tolerance and the intersectionality of identities with the purposeful intent of encouraging “ways in which everyday practices of civility might transform prejudiced values and facilitate liberal values to be put into practice” (Valentine, 2008: 330).

Bart van Leeuwen’s recent publications and analysis of diverse, anonymous and safe cities have added to the literature on urban civility. His investigations of citizenship and civility in the urban setting clarify and question cosmopolitan and agonistic citizenship, helping him introduce his conception of ‘side-by-side’ civility (2014; 2015). In this contribution, van Leeuwen builds on the space Amin leaves for ‘civility of indifference’ and introduces side-by-side civility as “a kind of benign neglect of difference, a casual way of dealing with diversity, also in direct interactions with others” (2015: 11). Such an interpretation makes an offering to tolerance, a theme discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, by highlighting the importance of improvisation and cursoriness that has value in engaging with those who have differing views and expectations of one another. This navigation with perceived and substantive historical difference is central to this thesis’ line of questioning.

The authors highlighted across the four subsections above are by no means a complete list. There are a great number of academics who engage with civility in their studies

24 van Leeuwen (2015) highlights: “the agonistic point is to make explicit the implicit antagonism that comes with a diversity of identities, the fact that these identities all imply some ‘constitutive outside’ which creates a certain latent tension. This looming hostility needs to be ‘channelled’ into the open in order to avoid violent conflict, almost like scream therapy” (798). His side-by-side civility offers a tempering of such explicitness in difference in response to this antagonism.
focusing on the way that humans interact. For the purposes of this thesis, those selected and discussed exemplify the thematic diversity of civility and the manner in which it underlies many public human interactions. Richard Boyd (2006) recognises the difficulty in zooming in too far on civility, referring to it as a “…nebulous moral quality” which is “…most conspicuous in its absence” (863). Despite this assertion, several academics have found methods and means to demonstrate and study civility. With regards to the core research interest of this thesis, these authors present understandings and interpretations of social rules that guide interaction, the challenges of living with difference, the examination of the multiple roles played by individuals and groups in different social settings, and the differences between private views and public actions.

Civility as a somewhat vague yet observable trait, which as highlighted by Boyd is easiest seen in its absence, impacts methodology and field research. In understanding the subtle yet defined differences of public interaction occurring across division between the SSE Arena and wider Belfast, civility and the nuances of respect and acknowledgment are influential. This unpacking of civility provides understanding towards my research objectives through highlighting notions of prejudice, anxiety and tolerance which are drawn out as thematic guideposts in the analytical framework (Chapter 6).

**Civility in Divided Societies**

As the multiple categorisations, definitions and conceptual understandings outlined in this section of the literature review exemplify, civility is a concept that can encompass a wide spectrum of forms; however, an obvious, yet critical point, is that civility between individuals and groups is challenged by division. These challenges have been briefly engaged in the previous discussion on civility; however, it warrants clear recognition that civil interaction is disturbed during conflict, which has a way of reinforcing and reaffirming stereotypes and distrust. Acts of incivility, particularly based on identity constructions (ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, etc.) breed segregation and the retreat from shared public space. The true measure of civility is not in the way people of the same group, socioeconomic status, or community interact, but rather the way interactions occur between and across each of these elements within the public realm. In instances of division, acts of civility carry more weight and meaning than those same
acts would within an ingroup, and as such, may be viewed as a necessary part of fostering acceptance and acknowledging rights in divided societies. This section focuses on three themes that serve to deconstruct and better comprehend civility in divided societies: whose civility, civil society and tolerance.

**Whose Civility?**

The simple question of ‘whose civility?’ has relevance across all social settings. The question can symbolise the power of civility, particularly in places where there is division between people of different beliefs, values and cultures. Just as the victor dictates the rules in government and law, so too do they construct the attitudes and actions that are to be followed by the masses. This returns to Bourdieu’s notion that those who control the capital control the wider narrative, a notion that finds support through a long history of power-over which sees civility defined through an often-Western understanding and imposition of what behaviours and interactions are expected from citizens. As power is a determinant over so many aspects of political and social life, its connection to the way people treat others is essential to understanding public interactions. The conflicts of Ireland as seen through response to the famine and the imposition of cultural celebrations, illustrate that power has played a significant role in imposing the ‘way of things’ in Northern Ireland. This thesis and its method of side-by-side interviewing approaches all parties on a horizontal level.

Returning to the discussion of politeness in civil interaction highlights the different expectations that emerge across various cultures and groups. These differences often lead individuals to perform social gaffes when in settings where the rules of civility are different. For example, actions that are acceptable and polite in the public sphere in Beijing may take a very different form than those deemed acceptable in Manchester. However, as globalisation is contributing to urban centres’ increasing diversity, urbanites are faced with challenges to their own approaches to civility, again raising the question of whose civility? What form does civility take when in a space like Manchester’s Chinatown? It could be argued that citizens will put up with, and be open to, the differences of a Chinatown within a multicultural British city, and it does not matter as much whose civility is dominant as long as there exists a respect for one another. However, there is an underlying point in shared interactions where different understandings of civility can lead to misunderstanding; one person’s politeness can be
interpreted by another as rudeness (Bailey, 1997). In conflict and homogenous cultural settings, attitudes towards difference change; as Ignatieff (1997) highlighted, minor differences become magnified and cause further division. When there are divisions, there occur claims for space where people understand the interactions around them. The result is often segregation and control over who is given agency in the public sphere – so that those who share the space know whose civility they are to adhere to. In this way, division between groups contributes to space that is owned and controlled, which allows the answer to the question of whose civility to always be answered with ‘ours’.

**A ‘Civil’ Society**

The actions and strengths of civil society are widely recognised as important factors in a healthy society, and civility is understood to be a key condition to civil society (Markus, 2001). Conflict analysis regularly prescribes supporting the growth and strengthening of civil society as a means of ending cycles of conflict within a community; however, divisions between key people, groups, and government negatively affect civility, and therefore present a challenge to developing an effective civil society. It can thus be suggested that the creation and encouragement of alternative spaces that foster civil interaction between people can aid in the development of a healthy civil society. Several academics lend support to this foundational role of civility. Andrew Fiala recognises that “Civility is a prerequisite of genuine dialogue” (2013: 109); Richard Boyd (2006) has noted that acting civilly towards others is, “…functionally necessary as the minimal condition for social and political life…” (865); and Bruce Perlman (2012) suggests that “Considering the behavior of others is a key to effective and ongoing public and political discourse at all levels” (207). This support for civility suggests that perhaps the focus on building civil society in post-conflict settings would be well-served to acknowledge and incorporate the simpler starting point of constructing shared civility.

**Tolerance**

Different approaches, categorisations and understandings present civility as a spectrum that has multiple interpretations; however, across this spectrum is a common connection to tolerance. As noted by Wilson (2014), tolerance is “regarded as a virtue, a moral, a practice, a life skill, a tool, a responsibility, a relation, and a value and is considered to be both an outcome and a conditioning factor of social relations and encounter” (853).
A key question for the purposes of this study is: Can there be civility if there is no tolerance? Several academics support the notion that tolerance is an essential component to civility and that the two are interconnected. In their discussion on the role of social relations and networks, Lo and Otis (2003) note that, “Civility speaks to a morality for social engagement and a tolerance for difference and is valuable as such” (147). Even in her argument for decency, based on her belief that civility alone is not enough, Markus (2001) concedes that toleration of others is a baseline for civility, recognising that civility “involves toleration of views different from one’s own, a respect for the right of others to arrange their lives…” (1021). Such is the connection between these two terms and the expectations for the actions they produce that a basic Google search of the words ‘civility and tolerance’ results in statements from several American universities showing commitment to these qualities in the same breath: the promotion of “civil, respectful, and inclusive community, and to oppose acts of racism, religious intolerance, sexism, ageism, homophobia, harassment, discrimination against those with disabling conditions, or other forms of intolerance” (Sonoma State University, 2013). Such statements of allegiance to principles of civility and tolerance represent the interconnectedness of these themes.

Despite the strong connections recognised above, tolerance is not without question or critique. Valentine (2008) views tolerance as “a dangerous concept”, noting that, “It is a courtesy that a dominant or privileged group has the power to extend to, or withhold from, others” (329). Such an argument draws in power and offers connection to the realm of structural violence through the use of social and political frameworks determining the rights of many (Galtung, 1969). Support for this critique is seen in various political, legal and institutional decisions, from rulings on the acceptability of the hijab for Muslim women to recognising cultural ceremonies of indigenous populations. The fact that decisions such as these are essentially one group permitting another group to practice their beliefs greatly challenges the framework of tolerance by integrating a power-over approach.

Another critique of tolerance warns that tolerance does not imply acceptance. Preston King (1976) points out that “an objection…enters into any case of tolerance” (44, as cited in Leeuwen, 2014b: 11); this understanding sees the depth of acceptance inherent in tolerance as shallow. In divided societies where the volatility of relationships means hostility and conflict can be easily awakened, the idea of “teeth-gritting toleration”
(Leeuwen, 2015: 11) does not necessarily provide a stable enough foundation to prevent recurrence of violence or an escalation of tensions. However, if tolerance contributes to more civil interactions, which can then act as a platform for deeper engagement between divided societies, then it seems a worthwhile starting point.

One final critique of tolerance is evident in European policy and planning circles, where objectives towards tolerance have been viewed as “weakening collective identity by permitting beliefs and practices counter to national values” (Wilson, 2014: 854). This view presents a seemingly oxymoronic stance, which is exemplified by Wilson’s questioning how objectives such as respect and acceptance are achieved in divided societies without achieving tolerance first.

Though critiques exemplify that tolerance is challenged by the constructions of power, shallow levels of acceptance, and being passed over in the hopes of more gratifying results, it is also clear that tolerance matters to civility. Civility, like tolerance, is not selective; it is not complete when it is inclusive of certain populations and not others. Tolerance recognises difference and does not deny these differences the right to exist. Tolerance and civility play an important role in the relational process of challenging a social sphere that is defined by difference.

Groups and individuals who are not willing to engage with one another challenge civility. This challenge results in isolation, segregation and a weak civil society. Civility, although recognised in this thesis as a spectrum of actions and motivations, requires the efforts of all parties in a social system. There is no trick that changes contentious relationships, suddenly enabling them to have genuine dialogue based on respect and understanding of worldviews; rather civility in divided societies is built slowly, through interactions and encounters across spheres, from high-level politics to the neighbourhood pub. Roger Mac Ginty (2014) recognises this process in his discussion of everyday peace, noting that in order to navigate daily life in divided societies, individuals use “coping mechanisms such as the avoidance of contentious subjects in religiously or ethnically mixed company, or a constructive ambiguity whereby people conceal their identity or opinion lest they draw attention to themselves” (549). These mechanisms of avoidance and ambiguity, as well as the patience and tolerance inherent in civility, are much more difficult in divided society than acting in an intolerant, uncivil manner towards those with whom one disagrees. However, it is
through the hard work of establishing a workable (for all parties) civility that people are able to survive, get on with it and maybe even reach a level of acceptance.

**Conclusion: Civility Considered**

The concept of civility as presented in this chapter has a similarity to social capital in that there is sense of ‘you know it when you see it’ or ‘it is most obvious in its absence’. This type of ambiguity offers a challenge to arriving at one distinct definition. While it becomes clear that civility does not require that two people in an interaction like one another, what civility does require is recognition of ‘the other’ in an interaction – and in such recognition is a tolerance which acknowledges presence and lubricates smooth public interaction. In fact, in many cases incivility requires much more work than civility, as such actions create friction to navigate in interactions. However, as is evident across divided societies, making the point of showing intolerance, even when not in the best personal interest, plays an important part of showing identity in an entrenched group membership. In this way, civility represents a balancing act as both the easiest form of interaction, but also one that is not intuitive to the segregated or divisive structures and expectations within the region. This in-between, with its wide possibility of interactions, is of interest to this thesis, particularly in the findings chapters that explore how interactions in the SSE Arena differ from the historical interactions of the region. One such example is seen in Chapter 10, which discusses my experience at Windsor Park watching a football/soccer match between unionist-supported Linfield and nationalist-supported Cliftonville, where the rules for the crowd were remarkably similar to those outlined at a Giants game – yet the civility within that space contrasted sharply with that found in the hockey arena. In such observation, questions arise about whether tolerance runs deeper within the SSE Arena because the individuals one encounters are fellow hockey fans – or whether this is because the space is free from historical baggage.

In engaging these questions, the way in which people interact with one another in public is central; as such intergroup contact highlights that socio-emotional responses differ depending on the contact that occurs. Thematic guideposts highlighted in the analytical framework such as prejudice, trust, anxiety, and tolerance give civility an observable
quality. Civility may not register on a theoretical scale in the same sense as social capital or the contact hypothesis; rather civility acts as conceptual, philosophical, and as a performance which is enacted. In this thesis, civility offers something less aspirational than social capital and intergroup contact, which highlight the peace-filled potential of healthy relationships at interpersonal and intergroup levels; civility instead adds an element that is much more everyday in nature, and as such has value in framing how interactions are occurring in Belfast and the SSE Arena.
Chapter 6

Analytical Framework: From context and concept to the research

Introduction

To this point this thesis has presented an overview of Northern Ireland, Belfast and ice hockey in Chapter 2, with the subsequent three chapters drawing out conceptual contributions to the research. This chapter brings these first four together in an effort to operationalise the theoretical and academic work completed in Manchester to give direction and support for the research within Belfast. In doing so, a framework is put forward that outlines what will be studied and how it will be analytically situated (Miles and Huberman, 1984). This framework does not provide a script or specific plan for research, but rather lends itself to approaching this research in a grounded, yet informed manner. The purpose is to prepare for my fieldwork while giving the research population the agency to guide the research and present a deepened understanding of what is occurring within the SSE Arena. This is achieved through the identification and discussion of six themes that emerge out of the context and concepts of the previous chapters, with the intention of using them as guideposts through the research process. It is through these thematic guideposts that this chapter organises how an academic study focused on supporters of the Belfast Giants can utilise the theoretical foundations provided by social capital, intergroup contact and civility to generate a feasible, constructive and original study. These thematic guideposts presented in the chapter are: *prejudice, anxiety, trust, tolerance, identity and space*, as highlighted in the diagram below (Figure 8).
Guiding the Research: An Analytical Framework

This section investigates prejudice, anxiety, trust, tolerance, identity and space in an effort to frame my questions and approach my research. The three conceptual chapters highlighted several concept-specific themes; however, six stand out in holding value to the original research queries of this thesis and thus provide a set of guideposts for this analytical framework. This section of the chapter draws out these thematic guideposts; in doing so it warrants recognising that they intertwine and overlap with one another. More importantly, they are each characteristic of a divided society. The first four – prejudice, anxiety, trust and tolerance – connect to one another through social-emotional processes that encompass personal and interpersonal responses, with relational characteristics that motivate individuals and groups. This differs from identity and space, which take a more contextual approach.

Prejudice and Anxiety

Prejudice and anxiety are intertwined negative relational characteristics that have strong roots in a divided society, where ‘othering’ is normalised into everyday life. Anxiety rises when contact occurs between members of ingroups and outgroups as a result of
prejudice, rumour, media narratives, and negative constructions of ‘the other’. The context of Northern Ireland, with the long history of division and living in sectarian communities, illustrates an environment filled with the fostering and growth of deep-rooted prejudices, negative opinions and anxiety that arises from interacting with those that are on the other side. In doing so, the setting of this research highlights that prejudice and anxiety have an ability to be significant negative obstacles to engaging with and sharing space across cleavages.

The three conceptual chapters of this thesis highlight the power of prejudice and anxiety. Social capital identifies ‘bonding’ that can occur within one group, particularly that strong ingroup prejudices can foster and strengthen homogenous tendencies within a group. Simply put, when social networks are closed, prejudice towards difference rises and anxiety in interactions is the outcome (Binder et al., 2009). This discourages contact across groups as prejudice and anxiety can prevent willingness for initial contact to occur (Pettigrew, 1998). The role of education was highlighted in Chapter 4; in particular, its role in ‘learning’ as a means of conflict transformation is challenged by the divided education systems that foster prejudices and entrench division in Northern Ireland, as noted by Hayes, McAllister and Dowds (2007). The contact hypothesis is founded on the understanding that building relationships with people from different groups reduces prejudices and lowers anxiety (Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes, 2005), yet these negative traits diminish the likelihood of achieving Allport’s four conditions. This negativity around interaction directly affects civility. As Chapter 5 highlights, there are a number of factors that affect the way people interact in public, as well as what civility means to different people; however, at the core of the concept is a baseline value of respecting the existence of those one encounters in civil interaction. In interactions where there are entrenched levels of prejudice and anxiety, civility cannot always be assumed, which challenges the way people navigate or avoid interactions in shared spaces.

In recognising prejudice, as well as the levels of anxiety that come with prejudice, this thesis must include questions which seek to explore whether the Giants have carved out a space that reduces both prejudice and anxiety. Northern Ireland offers a conflict that has long been exemplified by closed social networks; thus, if the SSE Arena is a space of encounter for those who live in segregation, does attending an ice hockey game raise anxieties? Or does this space play a role in reducing anxieties by providing a non-
traditional and non-confrontational setting for intergroup interaction? How does the public performance enacted at Giants games challenge perceptions of ‘the other’? Do the Giants provide something on the surface that people can have in common so that they do not need to engage with their fears and anxieties? Such a line of questioning would offer an understanding of whether being a Giants supporter offers an educational tool that challenges the status quo. Research and questions around prejudice, which is a part of everyday life in Belfast, enables an understanding of whether these same prejudices are different inside and outside the SSE Arena.

**Tolerance and Trust**

The positive approach of this research which inherently values interaction across difference sees tolerance and trust as a desirable aim, in contrast to prejudice and anxiety. It also warrants recognition that trust cannot exist without tolerance; unlike prejudice and anxiety which have a reactionary relationship, these thematic guideposts have a more symbiotic relationship. By placing them against the context of the Belfast Giants, and more broadly within Northern Ireland, this thesis gains an understanding of whether tolerance to difference is more prevalent between ice hockey supporters than it is between people of Belfast outside the SSE Arena, and if so, why.

Tolerance and trust find conceptual support throughout the first chapters of this thesis. With tolerance there is particular support within the chapter on civility, where tolerance is highlighted as a ‘baseline’ for civil interactions (Markus, 2001), as well as being noted for not requiring full acceptance of ‘the other’ (van Leeuwen, 2015). The concept of civility ties to the notion of tolerance in large part because the respect, no matter how thinly-veiled, that lubricates smooth public interactions is quite often less work than begrudging efforts of incivility. It is easier to ride the metro or navigate the lunch line if we all follow basic rules of civility; in doing so, we outwardly tolerate difference. In turning to social capital literature, to join a social group and willingly be associated with and involved in a given network requires a higher baseline of tolerance than loosely interacting in public settings. However, tolerance of difference does not necessarily equate to trust in others. Putnam (1993) refers to trust as “an essential component of social capital” (170). Although those who dispute the simplicity of this claim are highlighted in Chapter 3, where trust comes through is in bonding and bridging social groups. In a divided society like Belfast, bonding groups have more trust than those
groups that bridge unionist-nationalist cleavages. This is what conflict does. However, bridging groups are synonymous with higher tolerances of ‘the other’ based on the willingness to be in contact with and share in a group identity. The Belfast Giants supporters are identifiably a bridging social group, thus understanding tolerance and trust within this dynamic group is central to this thesis.

In operationalising these themes into the research, it is notable that a scope of peace and conflict literature illustrates little mention of tolerance of one another as a goal; rather common goals in this discipline seem to be set higher, geared towards deeper forms of reconciliation (Lepp, 2018). However, tolerance suggests an ability to live with differences between individuals and groups. Tolerance between nationalist and unionist populations in Belfast is not a binary of the tolerant or the intolerant, but rather presents a wide range of responses, many of which are very personal. Tolerance levels can be affected by the company one is with, the space actions occur within and the level of prejudices that exist. Seemingly for many, being a spectator at an ice hockey game has provided a setting and level of interaction that those in attendance find easily tolerable. The level of tolerance within the arena is affected not only by the limited interactions between fans, but also by the rules and code of conduct outlined by the Giants; conversely, outside the arena tolerance is altered and challenged by less controlled interactions that may include more hostile parties. This research aims to explore both of these important spectrums of tolerance.

In a city where levels of distrust remain high, the Belfast Giants, supported by their strong attendance figures, have seemingly gained the trust of a significant number of people from across communities. The Giants have constructed a space where individuals will pay for a seat that may be inches from a person they may not trust or even desire to interact with outside of this setting – and to a certain degree there is no expectation to do so. On a micro level, I have some scepticism about how and if interpersonal trust is being gained by attending Giants games. The relationships where trust is being gained would seemingly be built through further activities supported by the Giants, such as fan groups, rather than through one-off attendance at a game. However, on a more macro level, in a city with a history of violence, the mixed population in attendance at Giants games exemplifies a certain level of trust from both communities that this is a safe space for everyone. In fact, my initial visit showed a great number of families in attendance, which demonstrates that it is not only a place
that people trust for themselves but also for their children. Belfast is not seemingly short of organisations and efforts seeking to generate intergroup contact; thus, the question arises: what have the Giants done that other much more intentional efforts for cross-communal interaction have not?

Identity and Space

The two thematic guideposts of identity and space offer something different than the previous four presented in this chapter, which drew attention to both negative impediments to sharing space (prejudice and anxiety), as well as the positives of normalising interaction across division (tolerance and trust). Identity and space are situated deep within the context where this research takes place; in Northern Ireland identity and space are bound to each other through the region’s history, politics and everyday practices of the present. No study of peace or conflict in Northern Ireland would be complete without acknowledgement and exploration of issues surrounding space and identity. In this setting they are often presented on a binary – Catholic/Protestant, our neighbourhood/your neighbourhood, Irish/British, etc. Within these two thematic guideposts exists the opportunity to explore these issues in an open manner and be led by the researched community about the grey areas in between the ‘us and them’ and the ‘ours and theirs’.

Identity and space weave implicitly through the concepts of social capital, intergroup contact and civility presented in the previous three chapters. The works of Tajfel and Turner (2004), noted in Chapter 4, highlight the relationship between group membership and social identity. This contribution spans to the networks and social groups central to both social capital and the contact hypothesis. As illustrated in the other thematic guideposts within this chapter (prejudice, anxiety, tolerance and trust), social capital is often the strongest amongst homogenous groups, characterised by exclusionary practices and beliefs (Putnam, 2000). This can take many forms, from race and religion to identifying with state or non-state ideologies – but it is a shared part of an individual’s identity that brings wider groups together. A central question to this thesis is how different and conflicting identities outside the SSE Arena might have an effect on relationships being constructed within the supporter group that surrounds the Belfast Giants. As a theory, the contact hypothesis outlines conditions that enable one group to recognise the value of another group, resulting in a shift of the rigid social
identity boundaries of ingroups and outgroups. Further, identity is drawn out of the
civility chapter, most notably in the way identity plays a role in how willing one is to
act civilly towards others (Simmel, 1950). Returning to space, Amin’s (2002) work on
the riots that took place in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in 2001 ties civility very
clearly to both space and identity; in examining multicultural groups living together he
notes that “everyday enactment” is “the central site of identity and attitude formation”
(967). Amin is illustrating that where, and how often, interaction occurs across groups
and identities has a primary role in how one acts towards others.

The chapter on context (Chapter 2) exposed the challenges that exist in sharing space in
Belfast; the conflict, when reduced to its most fundamental level, is about whose space
Northern Ireland is or is believed to be. In drawing the focus of the research to a space
that is seemingly welcoming across identities associated with historical division, this
thesis has identified the SSE Arena during Belfast Giants ice hockey games as a site
from which to examine and differentiate the interactions between the arena and the
broader city of Belfast. Underlying this enquiry is a foundation of questions about how
the unionist and nationalist populations gather and watch ice hockey, when there are
seemingly few things these populations choose to do together.

As an accompaniment to these thematic guideposts I prepared a table prior to the
research that I carried with me during my fieldwork as a means of reference for
operationalising the analytical framework. Figure 9 at the end of this chapter presents
this table. The value of this table, beyond offering reminders of the thematic guideposts
to my researcher-self, is in the right-hand column, which highlights a series of
observations and identifiers. As my understanding of my research community expanded
during the research process, I added entries to the far-right column. The following
chapter on methodology will highlight that the bulk of the research findings developed
out of the informal and candid side-by-side interviews of the SSE Arena; these
ultimately pointed me towards themes and discussions that, although influenced by the
guideposts in this table, were grounded in the responses, interactions and observations
of the Giants supporter community. Though including this rough guide in the thesis was
not its original intention, having these things to think about were influential to my
questions, observations and explorations, and thus warrant inclusion as this analytical
framework is constructed on guiding elements of the thesis research.
Furthermore, these thematic guideposts would be incomplete without acknowledging the power dynamics that exist in Belfast between ethno-sectarian communities, and how these potentially differ from the power structures within the SSE Arena. Central to this is a curiosity is whether the enveloping nature of identity, and responses to difference in identity inflect on what happens within the Giants’ supporter community. Are relationships between unionist and nationalist individuals and groups distinctive when influenced by the Giants? Are relationships transformed when they occur in a space that has no history in the conflict? Such questions develop further understanding about movement between spaces, and how such shifts change and shape the interactions central to this thesis.

**Concluding Reflections**

In drawing this analytical framework together prior to field research, the thematic guideposts identified illustrate this thesis’ interest in the cross-community nature of Belfast Giants supporters. The questions that weave through the framework are based in utilising the fieldwork to develop a grounded understanding of what the wider impact of such shared interest is. The Giants do not ask or demand that their supporters trust one another; rather they are asking them to support the team for the duration of a hockey game, regardless of the affiliation or background the other fans might hold. The Giants’ efforts are invested in creating a space for the spectators to enjoy hockey, the thought being that if you enjoy the game, you will come to more games – this is the product the Giants are selling. It may aid their product and their brand that their sport is unattached to the city’s history of violence and discrimination; however, what is plainly evident is that the Giants have constructed an atmosphere that individuals, families, fan clubs, charity initiatives, tourists, and hardcore ice hockey fans have found appealing across the unionist-nationalist divide.

This appeal remained evident throughout my research in Belfast; however, in returning to this analytical framework during the editing and construction of the full thesis, there are some clear gaps that I would like to acknowledge. In studying the supporters of the Belfast Giants, I decided on the three central concepts – social capital, intergroup contact and civility – because I had initially thought there was an opportunity to find a rare positive ‘bridging’ community that spanned across historical division. What I learned early in the research was that being an ice hockey fan is widely described by
supporters as unexceptional. Researching in a wider setting that is fatigued by conflict (hearing about conflict, research about conflict, and corresponding plans for ‘peace’) meant that if I wanted to listen to the voices of the people I was researching in an ice hockey arena, I should not bring up how they tolerate difference while they are watching hockey games. Rather, an approach that asked to share in their experience for the evening, highlighted in the following chapter on methodology, opened my research up to going where my fellow fans were willing or wanted to take me. In response to this, I have chosen to utilise the term ‘thematic guidepost’, trending away from an analytical framework that acts as a straitjacket and viewing the framework as an influence in the way the research is situated and presented. As such, the following findings chapters depict results that are not as neatly conceptually-situated as I had expected. The meta-theme of side-by-sidedness in Chapter 10 returns directly to the three literatures/concepts; however, in doing so the inductive nature of the study is underlined, questioning whether the findings aptly represent an overlap of the concepts as they are highlighted in the Venn diagram in Figure 8. The mundanity of sitting side-by-side as a form of encounter, and the shift from conflict to a willingness to be side-by-side, challenges some of the assumed change processes that are inherent in the concepts of social capital and intergroup contact.

Underlying this research is, and always has been, an academic curiosity questioning the effect that cross-community activities and initiatives in places of division have in wider post-peace agreement settings. Within peace and conflict study, relationships are at the heart of reconstruction after violent conflict, particularly the belief that bringing together divided communities is key to lasting peace. This core principle can be seen within this study focused on the Belfast Giants and its evolving questions about whether the activities that surround this team have something to offer cross-community relations in a Belfast that remains divided. In doing so, it returns to Lederach’s moral imagination, querying whether the tolerance of sitting side-by-side at Giants games is just the purchasing of a product that entertains a wide audience, or if something bigger is occurring within the arena, such as a growing “capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies” (Lederach, 2005: 5).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Connection</th>
<th>Observations and Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prejudice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The human mind must think with the aid of categories...Once formed, categories are the basis for normal prejudgment. We cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends upon it.” (Allport 1954: 20) Belfast’s history of sectarianism and segregation encourage formed opinions about others before knowing them. Contact hypothesis’ core principle is that intergroup contact will reduce prejudice; examining whether this is effectively occurring at Giants games is central to this research.</td>
<td>• Discomfort with difference  • Closed groups  • Staying in a geographical area  • Colours, Tattoos, etc  • “us and them” language  • Exclusivity  • Sectarianism  • Homogenous  • Closed  • ‘We stick to ourselves.’  • Negativity about ‘the other’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anxiety</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Intergroup anxiety refers to feelings of apprehension and awkwardness when envisaging or being in a contact situation with outgroup members, perhaps because rejection, embarrassment, or misunderstanding are expected.” (Binder et al 2009: p.845) Segregation and prejudice, as evidenced in Belfast, generate high levels of intergroup anxiety. There is a strong association between intergroup contact and the lowering of anxiety that is generated by sectarianism and the Giants offer various levels of support for intergroup contact.</td>
<td>• Avoidance of uncontrollable interactions  • Nervous  • Uncomfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tolerance</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance is “regarded as a virtue, a moral, a practice, a life skill, a tool, a responsibility, a relation, and a value and is considered to be both an outcome and a conditioning factor of social relations and encounter” (Wilson 2014: 853) The research questions how and if the Giants have a role in an emerging Belfast where civility and tolerance are encouraged against a history of violence and conflict.</td>
<td>• Casual / Everyday Contact  • Rare Contact  • Private encounter  • Public encounter  • Comfort or discomfort with difference  • Inclusivity  • Reaching out  • Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The willingness and confidence in being able to depend and rely upon people from within or beyond sectarian groups. In the construction of social capital, “trust lubricates cooperation” (Putnam 1993: 171). In this way, examining levels of trust is important in gauging the norms of reciprocity and value held in the relationships affected by the Giants.</td>
<td>• Fluid movement through groups and spaces  • Comfort with difference  • Inclusive language “we”  • Friendship  • Acquaintance  • Enemy  • Indifference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity is a central motivator of continued conflict in Northern Ireland. In Belfast different characteristics of one’s identity dictate where one should be and how they should act in any given setting. This thesis seeks to understand how dualistic aspects of identity in Belfast are exercised and challenged within Giants games the SSE Arena. There is also an interest in learning more about how new identities, which include ‘the other’, emerge in settings of entrenched division.</td>
<td>• Clothing, Names, Tattoos, Flags, etc.  • Neighbourhoods where interactions occur  • ‘Us and them’ language  • Deferral of blame with regards to the conflict  • Avoiding and shifting identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Space</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This focuses on the interactions and activities occurring at public and private levels in the following places: SSE Arena Belfast Northern Ireland</td>
<td>• Consistency of interactions (inside/outside arena)  • Comfort level – with others, surroundings  • Openness to the unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 7

Methodology

Introduction

The methods highlighted in this chapter are fitting of the six thematic guideposts of the analytical framework in that they aim to offer an approach that is sensitive to the long-standing divisions of Northern Ireland and provide casual yet informed connection that lends itself to asking questions around anxiety, prejudice, tolerance, trust, identity and space.

The methodology of this thesis explains how the research was conducted and analysed, framing the findings of the following chapters. In doing so it presents a theoretical, systemic and researcher analysis of the methods applied that is made up of five sections, which intertwine to construct a wider picture of the unique way in which the primary interviews and participation in the research setting took place. The chapter begins with a wider overview of the research completed; this includes an outline of what research was conducted, and introduces the logistical manner in which the fieldwork was conducted. The second section of the chapter builds on these logistics, by reviewing and identifying the methodological practices, influences, and theories implemented in gathering data. The third section presents an overview of how the data was analysed by drawing out themes from interviews and observations. The fourth section offers a discussion of positionality, focusing on the researcher within the research. The final section includes discussion around the praxis of ethics and encounters that were negotiated throughout the research process.

Research Overview

The field work for this research was conducted from October 2015 to March 2016, corresponding with the ice hockey season of the Belfast Giants. Motivated by the core research questions of this thesis, which focus primarily on what was occurring in the SSE Arena at Belfast Giants games, this research had two principal field research sites: the SSE Arena and wider Belfast. These spaces were approached in different manners –
methodologically, academically, as well as from a personal researcher perspective. Overall, there has not been a great deal of academic study to draw on around the Belfast Giants or ice hockey as a shared space in divided society, which contributed to the need for substantial fieldwork for this study.\textsuperscript{25} The tepid academic interest in the Belfast Giants stands in stark contrast to the super-saturation of academic research centred around division in Belfast/Northern Ireland. It became integral to the design of the research project to gain voice from a unique and unheard group (Giants supporters), and to do so in a manner that did not contribute to the wider disruption of researchers seeking the same answers repeatedly from community organisations, institutions and academics (Neal et al., 2015).

In responding to this identified goal, I designed a two-pronged research approach, where the interviews conducted in the SSE Arena connected on an individual level with the person I was seated beside (to my left or my right) in the SSE Arena. The interviews in wider Belfast gave context to the arena setting, and in doing so remained fairly focused on the effects of shared spaces in present-day Belfast. Notably, with the complexities associated with conflict and violence in Northern Ireland, the purpose of the interviews was not to stir up personal or generational trauma. The ice hockey arena is a place people go to as an event of entertainment; there is enough written on these difficult topics to inform the research, thus it was not my intention to engage directly with themes that might induce traumatic memories. This section of the chapter lays out the logistics of the research completed, making way for the deeper contextual and theoretical discussion which emerges in the following sections.

\textit{The SSE Arena}

Throughout the Belfast Giants season I attended 22 of the 32 ice hockey games hosted in the SSE Arena. In an effort to embed myself and understand the community of ice hockey supporters, I began interviewing those with whom I watched hockey in the SSE Arena. In general, an ice hockey game is an evening’s activity, lasting approximately two and half hours, and is comprised of three separate periods of play, broken up by two intermissions. As such, the side-by-side interviews that I conducted within the SSE Arena lasted throughout the game. The informal approach of interviewing the stranger

\textsuperscript{25} The shared North/South Korea women’s hockey team in the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics offers a possibility for ice hockey players and supporters to be further examined within a shared setting.
seated beside me was informed by the questions I came with from the analytical framework, while importantly leaving the space for each interview to take a direction of its own. As will be described in greater depth throughout the findings chapters, conversation and questions were focused around whether there was any genuine interaction occurring across historical division between Giants supporters in the arena.

Figure 10: SSE Arena - Online Seat Selection
Ticketmaster (2016)

To ensure a random selection of interview participants, Figure 10 shows the online seat selection that is embedded in the purchasing process on the Ticketmaster website. On this website, I would purchase single tickets in different sections and rows of the arena prior to each game; this also allowed me to move around the arena in proximity to the ice, as well as to sit in different sections in an effort to complete interviews with multiple types of supporters – for example, not just casual fans or season ticket holders. With the dark dots highlighted in the seating chart representing the available seats, I would try and select a seat that was occupied on both my left and my right. The chart
outlining the seating arrangement gives an example of the close nature in which the seats are situated – this is given further visual in Figure 11, which displays the arena’s full seating arrangement at a typical Giants home game.

Figure 11: SSE Arena - Full Picture
(Cool FM, 2017)

There were two games where I did not follow this convention, and instead joined the fans in ‘Boomerang Corner’, a section of the arena that the most vocal, scarf-waving, drum-beating fans occupy (the focus in Figure 12). This group of fans is featured more prominently in the following findings chapters; however, it warrants mentioning that during these games I did not complete in-game interviews, as the logistics of conducting an interview whilst simultaneously chanting, singing and generally harassing the opposing team presented an unachievable act. Through these games I focused on the performative aspect of the ‘corner’, which on top of being a lot of fun, was inclusive of learning, observing, interacting, and building relationships with a range of supporters not necessarily present in the wider audience.

In seeking to construct an unobtrusive fieldwork strategy, I questioned the role that consent would play in the interviews and observations occurring in the SSE Arena. Notably, I received written permission to conduct interviews in the arena by Steve
Thornton, the Head of Hockey operations for the Belfast Giants, prior to conducting any research (Appendix 1). As a measure of consent, within the arena I decided on verbal consent for conducting the interviews. This freed me from the formalities of providing documentation and signature, as well as avoided adding a material element (paperwork, pens, notepads, recorders, etc.) that was non-native to the setting. When required, I always had these materials in my backpack, and the act of handing out participation information sheets and collecting consent forms was utilised if the person beside me required the support of legitimacy that these documents provided.

The interviews I conducted within the SSE Arena were unique each game; however, a routine emerged in engaging with the person beside me, gaining consent, and conducting the interview. In her work conducting walking interviews with Muslim women in Birmingham, Saskia Warren (2017) highlights that informing the success of this method, which is steeped in interpersonal sharing of experience, is the construction of trust between the researcher and the research participant – and in my research format this needed to be built fairly quickly. As noted previously, hockey is a game of three periods. In approaching my arena interviews, generally, the first period was utilised with introducing myself to the person, or people, who I was seated beside. This included
an explanation of who I was, what I was doing at the Giants game, and what I had been learning. In this conversation I identified myself as an outsider, stating who I was within the context of my PhD research, but I also found it very important to the dialogue that I corroborated myself as a ‘sort of insider’ by showing my knowledge of hockey and the Giants, as well as my allegiance to the team. Widely, people were responsive to my research, and late in the first period, or at the intermission between the first and second periods, I would clearly ask if they would be willing to answer questions for my PhD research. This was agreed to by each person that I shared the first period of company with. What I strived for in this process was generating an acknowledgment from the person beside me that our conversation had transitioned to active research, without disturbing the rapport achieved through the first period. In an attempt to maintain the vibe of the conversation, I continued with no pen, paper, or recording devices so as to minimise barriers to natural conversation.

During intermissions, most people leave their seats to use the washroom, get a snack or a drink, or have a cigarette. It was during these times I would take out my notebook and make notes about what had been discussed. These notes, often point form, offered “subtle and complex understandings of these others’ lives, routines, and meanings” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995: 13). Other notes were captured through a material that did not endanger the informality of the side-by-side interactions constructed in the SSE Arena: my mobile phone. At times during interviews or intermissions I wrote text messages to myself, to remind myself of conversation points for completing field journal entries after the game, when back at my computer. Figure 13 offers an example of these simple notes, utilised as an acceptable medium for note-taking based on the observation that in this setting it was not socially out of place. Following the hockey game, I would write

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example.png}
\caption{Text messages to myself}
\end{figure}
in-depth notes about each interview and observation, as a means of capturing the experience before time clouded my memory.

Outside the Arena: Research Beyond the SSE

Outside of the SSE Arena the research took a less participatory tone than the methods utilised within, whilst maintaining roots in observing lived experience. Beyond the SSE Arena I conducted interviews with community members, civic leaders, business people, local media, as well as staff and players from the Giants organisation. In general, these interviews were orchestrated by the contacts I made through relationships constructed with the Giants organisations and its supporters. For example, I interviewed team sponsors and asked why they were willing to attach their brand to the team; I interviewed local sports media that covered the team to ask how they fit in the sportscape of Belfast; I interviewed academics with a focus on conflict in Northern Ireland from both Ulster University and Queen’s University Belfast, to ask their thoughts on the Giants as shared space against the backdrop of division; and I interviewed team management and players to better understand their thoughts on what the Giants represented in wider Belfast. Broadly put, these interviews within Belfast gave the context for what I was researching within the SSE Arena.

The interviews conducted outside of the arena often took a more formal tone, as I received written consent, handed out research information paperwork and ran a voice recorder with a notebook in hand. These notes were later typed, and the interviews transcribed for easier analysis. Although rare, in situations where a person-to-person connection could not be made, there were questions asked and responded to via email.

Living in the city of Belfast throughout the fieldwork afforded me the opportunity for a great deal of observation that I would not have experienced had I based myself in Manchester during the hockey season. Further, choosing to use walking as my primary mode of transportation during my months in the city led me to visit areas of the city that I would not have visited by car or bus. Through following shortcuts to places across the city or taking the most direct walking route from one place to another, the opportunity to visualise the way people live emerges. In a city where residents navigate as much by avoidance as by directional sense so as not to encounter places of unwelcome, my positionality as an outsider afforded me the freedom to move seamlessly through single-
identity and shared spaces alike. In embracing the city and my movements through it, a great deal of knowledge and understanding emerged through observation.

Online I became an active member of all things Giants, as the Giants fan community is not confined to what occurs at the game before the final whistle, or even what happens in real time. There are wide-ranging social media outlets and activities around the team. One of the Facebook forums, of which I am a member, has more than 2100 members. The team was recently lauded as having a top-25 team in terms of digital reach among European hockey clubs (Result Sports, 2016). What this online presence contributed to was that a significant part of my daily routine was spent observing what was occurring in a variety of online spheres, from tweets to Facebook messages, to listening to the weekly fan podcast, A View from the Bridge. In these settings, I primarily ‘lurked’ rather than acted as a contributor; however, having observed communication patterns on these sites, a number of interviews and encounters central to my thesis research emerged from direct messaging within these platforms.

**Situating the Research**

The interdisciplinarity of this PhD study lends itself to multiple possible methodologies; with no standard methods defining ‘peace research’, this thesis follows a varied qualitative approach. The approach across this thesis was to design a methodology with an understanding that ‘the field’ is dynamic, and that shifting spaces and contexts are at the heart of this research enquiry. In doing so, it sought to shift, adapt and be responsive to the two key settings of research focus – the SSE Arena and wider Belfast. This section of the chapter presents the wider theoretical placement of the methodologies influencing this research. In doing so, it constructs a deepened understanding of the primary research undertaken in this thesis, giving defined focus to the experiences and narratives of individuals gathered through interviews while situated side-by-side within the SSE Arena through the shared experience of ice hockey games.

**Research Approach**

At a theoretical level the research methods of this thesis fall under the umbrella of an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, utilising a research approach that seeks to understand “the world of human experience” (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 36). Through reliance on “participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2003: 8) this
interpretivist approach aims to comprehend subjective knowledge (della Porta and Keating, 2008). This understanding of the subjective is born of the reflexivity at the heart of this research methodology. England (1994) recognises reflexivity as “self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher” (244). Such an understanding of reflexivity demands of the researcher to continuously question “attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions to strive to understand our complex roles in relation to others” (Bolton, 2010: 13). This thesis research is primarily drawn from a shared experience between the researcher and the researched while watching an ice hockey game, an experience that shares a very human and subjective element. In this way the research methodology is based on an understanding of reflexivity that “encompasses continual evaluation of subjective responses, intersubjective dynamics, and the research process itself” (Finlay, 2002). A classical scientific understanding that research of humans and their interactions could yield definite and objective truths from quantitative and qualitative investigations is lost in this research.

In many ways the research approach employed within the arena has been influenced by Mary B. Anderson’s (1999) ‘Do No Harm’ ethos, originally conceived on the ways in which development and aid inherently hold the possibilities for help and hindrance. This research is guided by the sensitivity to structures and dynamics of both peace and conflict, recognising that beyond intentionality there is need to enter the lives of other humans with awareness of insider-outsider dynamics (Anderson, 1999). At the forefront of such an approach is the challenge of completing research in a place as inundated with conflict researchers as Northern Ireland has been over the last 30 years (Whyte, 1991; Gilligan, 2016); there is no intention within this research of becoming an over-indulgent young scholar who awakens the echoes of the Troubles within people and communities in the name of complex, unattached research agendas.

‘Ethnographically-Inspired’

According to Morean (2007) and Whitehead (2005), research for this thesis which spanned the length of the hockey season – October to March – does not fulfil the requirements of an ethnography, which they agree is at least one year in the field. There is no rebuttal offered here to challenge this criteria; however, it warrants noting that this research finds a home as ‘ethnographically-inspired’. This side-by-side qualitative
approach finds a strong connection to reflexivity and relationship construction within
the research community, which Millar (2014) connects to consideration of “local
people’s perceptions and experiences of conflict, justice, security, development,
empowerment, dignity, opportunity and peace itself…” (16). Inherent in this study was
developing a deepened understanding of the complexity in relationships and spaces of
Belfast, in particular the SSE Arena, which necessitated an integration of the researcher
into the research space and activities. With the connection between the people and the
space at the centre of the research and methodology this qualitative approach seeks to
tread carefully, gain access, and respond to what was there for me without being an
imposition in a community that has faced a great deal of external pressures, intervention
and interest (McLaughlin and Baker, 2010; European Parliament, 2017). Furthermore,
the influence of ethnography as an established social science approach is strengthened
through the valuable contributions in peace and conflict settings in the works of Carolyn
Nordstrom, Atreyee Sen, and within the Northern Ireland context, Rosemary Harris and
Allen Feldman. It is my opinion that these authors give voice to their research
populations, which in turn offers more honest, impactful and readable research that does
not hide their own positionality and placement. Albeit aspirational, I seek to have my
research process reflect the sensitivity, clarity and effectiveness that these authors
exhibit.

**Participant Observation**

At a methodological-level, participant observation is “a method in which a researcher
takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as
one means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and culture”
(Dewalt and Dewalt, 2011: 1). Although originating in ethnographic research (Evans,
2012) the value of participant observation is recognised throughout qualitative research
(Bernard, 2006). The definitions and practices of participant observation are widely
used and have taken on many different forms and approaches, generally associated with
depth of interaction and length of immersion (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011).

The research questions at the core of this thesis demand an understanding that cannot be
completed without grasping the context of people in setting. The many participants in
the SSE Arena, clad in their teal jerseys, are not easily identifiable to the outsider (or the

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insider) as belonging to the simple categories of nationalist or unionist; nor does the presence of both of these parties alone mean that interaction is occurring. The depth of understanding, and thus the depth of the corresponding analysis, is dependent on being able to understand what is seen and what is assumed, and in this way my research in Belfast was dependent on both participation and observation.

The participation element is founded on the understanding that, “to learn about the complex dimensions of society and culture in action, the ethnographer almost necessarily has to become involved on a personal level to one degree or another” (Murchison, 2010: 85). It was as an active member of the crowd in the SSE Arena that contextualising the person, and myself as the researcher, in the space was able to occur. The SSE Arena during a hockey game offered this research the greatest opportunity to reach a level of full participation, as the dynamic nature of the audience left room for an outsider to be welcomed into the ranks of team supporter. It was only from within that questions about who else was participating, why they were participating, and what participation means could be asked.

In his ethnography on inner-city black life in Los Angeles, Vargas (2006) changes the two words and asserts that observant participation subtly challenges ideas of neutrality in the research practice. In changing the wording, a better representation and emphasis on the researcher as a participant in the ‘field’ emerges. Although my research is not overtly connected to strong political movements (such as opposing police abuse as in the case of Vargas’), it is strongly connected to my own moral principles, as noted in the analytical framework, and does not represent a disconnected ‘fly on the wall’ approach (Vargas, 2006: 18-19). Furthermore, through this lens of observant participation, the person whom I sat beside and engaged in conversation generally played host to my inquiring mind, answering questions on themes of identity, space and interaction.

My participation became an opening to bettering my observations, and the willingness of Giants supporters to share the space and their time with me enabled me to better observe and participate. Throughout this process I became a fan of the Belfast Giants and the Giants supporters. I found the further I bought into the role that was before me, the more genuinely I emotionally and financially (I now have several Giants-themed clothing items) invested in the experience, the more genuine the interactions became.
between me and other supporters. The game, the team, the atmosphere and the team cheers/chants became activities that I knew and actively participated in. However, participant observation necessitated I go beyond getting swept up in embedding myself in the interactions and networks as a participant; Zahle notes that the researcher must maintain their observational abilities, and “take notice of the individuals she studies as they act and interact with each other and their surroundings” (Zahle, 2012: 54). Within the SSE Arena, such observation was founded on immersion in the space, and reinforced by having the research community’s willingness to share their personal perspectives with the researcher in the seat beside them.

**Interviews**

Offering support to the primary method of gathering research, participant observation, was the conducting of interviews. As highlighted in the overview of the research, the interviews conducted within this study took different forms; as I prepared for fieldwork, Burgess’ (1982) notion that research occurs differently in different spaces influenced my planning. In conducting my research throughout the six months of fieldwork, I used different degrees of semi-structured interviews. These fell on a spectrum from ‘formally informal’, including recorders and field notebooks, to ‘informally informal’ interviews, negotiated as part of my daily life/research. The format of the interviews was thus dependent on the participant, space and motivation behind the interview. This section of the chapter highlights the ways in which interviews were carried out.

Informal interviews, defined by Haviland, Prins, Walrath, and McBride (2014) as “unstructured, open-ended conversation in everyday life” (358), were the primary form of gathering information and increasing my cultural, social and historical understanding of what is occurring within the SSE Arena and in wider Belfast. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) recognise that, “the informant may be more aware that s/he is explaining something to the researcher, training them in his/her culture” (139). Widely these interviews were used as a method of offering support to my overall research goals through enabling increased understanding and access, creating a foundation for strengthening my ability to reflexively navigate the social interactions occurring in everyday spaces, as well as informing my more formal interviews. On the ‘informally informal’ end of the scale, I inquisitively talked with anyone who would spend their time in discussion with me; these countless interviews were for the most part not formal
enough to produce consent and were primarily used in an effort to add depth and context to the observations and information I was being told around the realities of everyday Belfast.

At the more ‘formal’ end of the scale were interviews where consent was given, a recorder was run, and questions were structured. The reason I do not classify these as purely formal interviews is that such a designation implies “a structured question/answer session carefully notated as it occurs and based on prepared questions” (Haviland et al., 2014: 358). Early in my research and interview planning I expected that I would be asking identical questions to multiple parties – specifically to sponsors, Giants organisational staff, politicians, civil society groups, etc. – however, this method of research was very loosely adhered to in the field. Primarily my research fit into interviewees busy lives and schedules, often resulting in meeting over lunch or coffee break, challenging any notion of formalised questions and answers, instead transitioning into guided conversation, or semi-structured interviews, in order to be responsive to the answers I was receiving. These interviews included questions prepared in advance, which were fitted to the research participant; however, these were not rigidly applied or stuck to like a script. In many ways there was a formal sense of occasion for the interview, yet once they were enacted they became responsive, following threads of presented information.

In this way semi-structured interviews can be used to describe all 45 interviews I carried out across six months of fieldwork. Recognised by Dicocco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) as, “generally organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee/s” (315), the flexibility of the semi-structured interviews opened the door to digging much deeper at independent topics and themes that emerged from the guiding questions. The questions of the semi-structured interview had focus and were capable of reaching a much deeper level than the informally-informal interviews that occurred more loosely in corridors, taxicabs and coffee shops. The spectrum of semi-structured interviews was therefore effective in achieving the wider aims of deepened understanding of the what the Belfast Giants represent to those I interviewed.
**Email Correspondence**

There were a few occasions that interviews were not possible with those I wanted to meet; this occurred for a wide range of reasons from timing of travel schedules to health issues. In these cases, if the research participant was willing, I sent a list of questions via email and gave them opportunity to respond. The participants were made aware of my role and purpose through informed consent practices in my email correspondence. The employment of “clear detailed information about the research in which they are asked to participate and ensuring that they understand fully what participation would entail” (Meho, 2006: 1288) was not dissimilar to my methods of gaining consent within the SSE Arena. These cases of correspondence and the flexibility they offered participants added a different medium and widened the pool of who I was able to reach for interviews. Hardey (2004) notes that person-to-person interviews offer a site of narrative production in qualitative research projects; such a notion is challenged by email correspondence. The medium of email affords the interviewee an opportunity to provide a more polished response as they have the chance to reflect more carefully on how they would like to present themselves (Hawkins, 2018). Further, Bowker and Tuffin (2004) suggest that the comfort from which research participants are able to answer the questions they are being asked adds to “the richness of the data gathered” (320). In the spectrum of interview styles highlighted above, the questions that I asked in email correspondence were the most formal, as they lacked the nuance of in-person conversation, instead consisting of only the formal question and answer. Although these interviews often took longer to complete as I awaited answers from the participants, email offered an ability to reach sources vital to the research (James, 2016). One such example was my email correspondence with Jim Gillespie, a former owner of the Giants who resides in Texas, which allowed me to reach a perspective and voice in my research not possible through in-person interviewing.

**Journaling**

A research routine that spanned across my experiences and research within and beyond the SSE Arena was the consistent practice of journaling which I undertook during my research time in Belfast. This practice provided several different benefits to my research. Donald Schön’s (1983) early work on reflective practice highlighted reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. This framing aided the way I understood
my observations and experiences from Belfast as they were occurring, as well as in the process of writing up my thesis back in Manchester. The routine of keeping a journal throughout the fieldwork strengthened my observational abilities and became “central in the analytic endeavour” (Mason and Dale, 2011). In the post-fieldwork reading of the journal I have been able to observe the evolution of my thinking and understand how certain themes came into focus through the research, a notion supported by Atkinson (1990), who highlights the value in understanding the development of researcher knowledge within the research setting. Through this process, the journal emerged as the format where I would write the ‘stories’ of the side-by-side interviews; in doing so I would utilise my own voice, only using direct quotes when I had the hard notes written or texted to myself. In this way the journal drew me further into the study, a point outlined by Ortlipp (2008), who recognised the journal in “conceptualising my study and enacting my research as an individual with particular personal experiences, desires, and ways of looking at the world” (700).

Reflecting on the Side-by-Side Approach

Burgess (1982) notes that, “Field research involves the study of real-life situations. Field researchers therefore observe people in the settings in which they live, and participate in their day to day activities. The methods that can be used in these studies are unstructured, flexible and open-ended” (22). The side-by-side interviews that took place in the arena offer an innovative approach to studying the everyday, and warrant being drawn out further conceptually. The casual nature in which these interviews occurred, aided by the seating arrangement of being to the left or the right of the interviewee while sharing an experience, offered an opportunity to make a connection that was not scripted; perhaps aided by informality, the format lent itself to opportunity for opening the door to discussion that would not otherwise have taken place.

The dynamic and changing nature of the research site, and the unpredictability of the stimuli offered by the hockey game, connects to Elwood and Martin’s (2000) understanding that “interview sites and situations are inscribed in the social spaces that we as geographers are seeking to learn more about, and thus have an important role to play in qualitative research. We suggest that the interview site itself produces “micro-geographies” of spatial relations and meaning, where multiple scales of social relations intersect in the research interview” (649). While this resonates with the SSE Arena
interviews, there is also something more to the arena during a live sporting match that extends just beyond a stationary research site. Thus, one of the influences on side-by-side interviewing was the walking interview. The practice of walking through a neighbourhood, city, or area throughout the course of an interview offers “insights into the dynamic emotional, affectual and physical relations of power-differentiated people within the everyday fabric of urban life” (Warren, 2017: 789). Although the physical aspect of walking was not embedded in these interviews, the physical set up of watching ice hockey from the same vantage point and the need for the research questions to be “framed by a ‘place’” (Evans and Jones, 2011: 849) display similarities in method. Walking offers an interview experience where the researcher and participant are exposed to ‘multi-sensory stimulation of the surrounding environment’ (Evans and Jones, 2011: 850; Adams and Guy, 2007). Without the movement, the SSE Arena offered a multi-sensory experience with a crowd that interacts and responds differently to the unscripted stimulation of the game, while also avoiding the mundaneity in setting and structure of generic academic interview structures.

Having conducted side-by-side interviews at 20 hockey games, I observed a great deal of difference in the way people engaged the space, as well as how they engaged with the interview. In some interviews people aligned their answers and discussion with the Giants’ early message (‘In the Land of Giants Everyone is Equal’); in other interviews some interviewees stayed connected to the fan experience, highlighting how great it is to have a professional hockey team in the city/region; and in other interviews things took a turn for the personal, explaining how the team had an impactful meaning in their life. Such diversity across the interviews underscores the value of ensuring the interview maintained the comfort of the interviewee – also a fixture of the walking interview, where the interviewee is recognised as a ‘local expert’, giving them agency in the process (Clark and Emmel, 2010).

Further worth unpacking from this interview style is the role that being in an audience and focusing on sports fans had in the research. Early sociological research focused on audiences saw the audience as the sponge that absorbs the messages of the stimulus being presented to them (Katz, Blumer and Gurevitch, 1974). Such expectation of an audience deserves challenge, and Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) offered this through acknowledging the individual as unique, and highlighting that everyday life has become intertwined with mass media, noting, “Life is a constant performance; we are
audience and performer at the same time; everybody is an audience all the time” (73). These words help to frame the audience at a Saturday evening Giants game within the everyday, instead of seeing such an event as sitting outside the routines of those in attendance. This is supported by Nowell-Smith (1981), whose focus on football found that the idea of being a sports fan was embedded in the everyday lives and conversations of fans, beyond the act of being in the audience at a match. This observation was very much supported by the online activity across social media platforms, both following and leading up to games throughout my fieldwork.

One of the challenges to this research is highlighted by Crawford (2004), who notes that sports audiences are:

“…frequently divided into coherent units, most commonly based on friendship networks or family units. Though the audience may appear as a ‘mass’, most supporters will travel to the game in small groups, consume and largely interact within these, and then leave with them.” (26)

The side-by-side interview method being reflected upon here responded to this assertion through immersion amongst the Giants’ audience, in an effort to better understand the dynamics of the Giants supporter community. Within the context of Northern Ireland, such an assertion would also come with the assumption that these ‘coherent units’ abide by the division of nationalist and unionist. At the heart of the research agenda are questions of whether Giants games are compartmentalised as such, and whether this has an effect on a wider shared fan identity. The side-by-side research method, and the close physical proximities of sharing armrests, navigating spilled beer during the celebration of goals, and the introduction of a PhD student to the experience gave way to very human interaction, and it is within these interactions that the themes explored in the findings chapters emerged.

What must be mentioned in reflecting on this side-by-side method is that I very much enjoyed this research format. I enjoyed the randomness of the people I interviewed, I enjoyed the sense of casualness and unscriptedness that occurred in the arena, I enjoyed hearing their stories about life inside and outside the hockey arena and I very much had fun becoming a supporter of the Belfast Giants like those who I was there to interview. It is hard to say for certain, but I believe the fun I had with the interview approach contributed to the willingness and honesty of those I was seated beside to participate in my interviews.
Research Analysis

The data collected throughout the participation, observations and interviews is inductively analysed, with the following chapters identifying themes, trends and issues which “generate tentative theoretical explanations from their empirical work” (Reeve, Kuper and Hodges, 2008: 513). Broadly, the research in this thesis is not testing a hypothesis, as is done in deductive research often associated with the hard sciences; rather, this methodological approach is written from a position that is guided by the research participants and their responses in my interactions with them, with the intention of generating knowledge around the complexities of humans in conflict and contributing to theoretical conversations. At the heart of the research analysis is Winter’s (1986) recognition that, “We do not ‘store’ experience as data, like a computer: we ‘story’ it” (176).

Thematic analysis has a clear focus on themes and patterns that emerge from the research (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). This method of analysis has a routine of identifying initial themes, categorising the data that relate to these patterns and then sorting further into subthemes before explaining the ‘story’ of each theme from all perspectives (Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal, 2004). From a practical perspective this approach involved reading through and analysing interview transcripts, field notes, and my journal; such an approach was primarily completed with a notepad and a highlighter. In this way, the ‘coding’ of themes from the research goes “beyond counting explicit words and phrases and focus[es] on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data…” (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012: 10); thus, pulling out core themes is a central method of research analysis spanning across the thesis. The analytical framework highlights six thematic guideposts (prejudice, anxiety, tolerance, trust, space and identity) from the three conceptual chapters of social capital, intergroup contact, and civility. These guideposts influence, without handcuffing the findings, themes which emerged across the fieldwork. The following two chapters offer discussion of group identity, sanctuary and resistance before Chapter 10 highlights and conceptualises a meta-theme of side-by-sidedness that emerged across the thesis from the context and concept chapters to the methodology and research findings.
It warrants noting that the use of thematic analysis has strong links to grounded theory, which “construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data” (Charmaz, 2006: 2). The inspiration of grounded theory runs through this PhD thesis, as the research and the themes that emerge from the substantial fieldwork are presented with the intention of remaining true to the subjects that people discussed and the actions which I observed in the SSE Arena.

The ties between these two theories and approaches to research analysis are valued within the construction of this thesis, where the “primary goal is to describe and understand how people feel, think, and behave within a particular context relative to a specific research question” (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012: 13).

**Positionality**

Positionality is dynamic. This research, under the umbrella of social science and seeking to contribute to knowledge around the way human beings encounter and engage one another, requires an understanding of the researcher and her/his status and role within the research. This is particularly important in a qualitative investigation, as it aids in framing the ‘objectivity/subjectivity’ of the research. The following examination of my own positionality first identifies and discusses the classic meta-categorisations of positionality, described by Muhammad and colleagues as “…both societal ascribed and achieved identities that confer status on an individual researcher, such as race/ethnicity, or level of education attained” (Muhammad et al., 2015: 1051). This discussion then utilises Moser’s (2008) notions of the personality as positionality and considers how my disposition became embedded in the research.

**Gender, Language, Race, Religion, ‘Canadianism’, Class, and Personality**

This section targets the positional intersectionality of gender, language, race, religion, citizenship, and class – aligning with Kezar’s (2002) suggestion that “Within positionality theory, it is acknowledged that people have multiple overlapping identities. Thus, people make meaning from various aspects of their identity…” (96). In acknowledging these multiple positionalities through social, cultural and gender-oriented lenses, a deeper understanding of my place in the research process and findings is established.

All of my interviews were conducted in English, which was also the language of output for my research. My first language is English, and in Northern Ireland this is the
primary language of communication. As I expected of research taking place outside of my own local context, there was a learning curve around cultural references and differences, particularly the heavy accent, use of sarcasm and self-deprecating jokes around what could be perceived as sensitive subject matter (and which as researcher I was not always comfortable laughing at). However, person-to-person communication was smooth, without the complicated use of third-party interpretation or translation. In a context where individuals seek to categorise one another upon meeting, my accent immediately exposed me as a foreigner in Belfast. Belfast/Northern Ireland does not boast an incredible amount of racial diversity, with the 2011 census in Northern Ireland revealing that only 4.3% of the population was born outside of the United Kingdom or Ireland (NISRA, 2011a). The population is predominantly white (98%), and as a white male, access to this research population was not impeded by my racial construction, despite my obvious ‘foreignness’ (NISRA, 2011b). Northern Ireland has serious issues with racist actions and mentalities from both unionist and nationalist communities against those who are from outside (McVeigh, 2015); this is inclusive of those who would identify in a census as white, but represent different ethnic backgrounds, such as Polish or Roma (McDonald, 2014). However, these biases were not inclusive of the white Canadian male academic researcher – Americans and Canadians have historically been strongly connected to both populations in Northern Ireland and Ireland, and in my experience, there was a respect held for both these identities that is not transmitted to other ethnic groups. The effect of my national predisposition went further, as my social identity was not classified into the usual binary ‘Catholic’ or ‘Protestant’ identities; rather my social categorisation was filled by my Canadian identity. My separation from both core ethno-sectarian groups – both in Canada and in Northern Ireland – further enabled fluidity for research between and across divisions.

As a sport with very Canadian roots, ice hockey is a sport I grew up playing as a child and know reasonably well. The hockey arena represented a space which to the Belfast hockey supporter I would logically be present in; throughout my research conducted in the arena, I was never asked to explain or defend my presence at Giants games. The response from those I interviewed was consistent, even if the research participant thought it odd someone was conducting PhD research in a hockey arena – it still made sense that this person would be Canadian. In many ways my ‘Canadianism’ presented an opportunity to not only access the hockey arena without any suspicions or negative
assumptions connected to my outsider status in this divided society, it also gave the key informal interviews a sense of genuine interaction. In many ways the interviews often evolved into a sense of host and guest, even though the role was thrust unknowingly upon the host. In many ways being hosted by the research participant gave my research a sense of being baggage-free, which often gave opportunity for people to speak freely of their experiences and beliefs, a trait generally avoided in such shared spaces in Belfast. In return I was expected to have a strong sense of what was occurring in the sport we were watching. As hockey is a non-native sport in the Belfast community, there is less experience and familiarity with the game, and so a regular part of interactions included discussion about rules or strategies occurring on the ice. In the ensuing back and forth between research and ‘hockey-talk’, a uniqueness to the relationship emerged where my outsider status offered a usefulness to the research, rather than acting as an impediment as is often the case with outsider/insider qualitative research. Having said that, the outsider/insider element was lessened through shared fandom. In the following chapter, the expectation and ease of access that came from being a hockey fan, in particular a Giants fan, is detailed; however, it also warrants recognition in this section on positionality that I was (and continue to be) a fan of the Belfast Giants. Aoki (1996) discusses the role of being in between the binary outsider–insider; in doing so he bridges the two together with a hyphen. In this way he is acknowledging that the researcher may at different points and in certain settings feel that she/he has reached a point of both being an insider and an outsider – and may often feel somewhere between these two poles. These are feelings I experienced: on one hand I was right in the middle of interactions and engagements as a Giants fan, but at the same time I was not from Belfast. In bringing this ‘between’ space to this research, the interviews and immersion can best be described as a knowledge exchange between researcher and researched that shared the power and control over what was to be discussed and the willingness to decide what level the interview would reach.

My gender as a male, and particularly as a white male, played a role in my access. The sport I followed is played by men, and despite growth in the women’s game, ice hockey as a spectator activity predominantly focuses on watching male athletes. Pre-fieldwork, I worried that I would be unable to access the voices of women in my research, and thus I made a concerted effort to seek out voices across the gender spectrum. What I found once I was comfortably in the field was that by being alone in my research, not with a
group of people, I was able to access women’s voices and opinions, particularly if I was seated beside a group of women or a woman alone. However, when I was seated beside a heterosexual couple or a group of supporters that was mixed gender, the person who was in the seat beside took the lead role, although in one circumstance there was a shift in seating arrangement during intermission and the male took the lead role in the discussion occurring, which highlighted an underlying comfort of male-to-male discussion in this setting for this couple.

In Belfast, socio-economic class strongly influences to what level you are willing to associate and share space with the other community (Sugden and Bairner, 1993). Within this paradigm, my own social class became a part of my researcher positionality. The opportunity to learn and research in higher education is symbolic of a privilege that is not often associated with working class neighbourhoods of Belfast. However, growing up in a rural community, the grandchild of World War II refugees, I have struggled to situate myself with surety in a British-style discussion about the spectrum of class. In many ways this lack of clarity was also representative of the hockey arena, where the embodiment of class division was muted compared to within the wider city. There are some symbols of class – the private corporate boxes apart from the crowd are one such example – but widely the single price admission, no matter the seat location, contributed to less class-oriented seating arrangements. Also, the supporter community’s desire to dress passionately and almost uniformly in the team jerseys further amalgamated classes based on shared appearance. I understand the mobility that comes with my opportunity and social position; however, at Giants games I did not feel I stuck out based on class but rather because I did not have a Giants jersey for most of the season!

**Personality**

“I found that it was aspects of my personality, such as my skills, my emotional responses to and interest in local events, how I conducted myself and the manner in which I navigated the personalities of others that were the main criteria by which I was judged. This in turn affected my access to certain people, the degree to which they opened up and shared their stories and views, and ultimately had an impact upon the material gathered.”

Moser, 2008: 383

Sarah Moser, quoted above, recognised personality as very much integral to her access and research. Such inclusion is fitting and central to my methodology, which was designed around my personal ability to conduct interviews with the person randomly in
the seat beside mine at hockey matches. The not knowing element of who I might encounter in an environment relatively beyond my control demanded an extroverted responsiveness that was capable of finding a common ground to enable the interview to occur. When sharing stories of my research with colleagues, the pliability and congeniality required to utilise this method often elicited a sense of dread from my more introverted peers. I concede that before each game, as I prepared for the interview and the unknown that was ahead, I came to refer to my mile and a half walk to the SSE Arena as the ‘white-knuckle walk’ – a time for me to prepare and focus on the evening ahead, grounded in my core research questions but without knowing who I would be asking them to. Yet despite pre-game anxieties, as noted in the reflections above, the core research methodology is rooted in enjoying an ice hockey game with a stranger willing to be interviewed. In this way, my personality played a role in the responsiveness and engagement that was able to occur and opened doors to conversation in much the same way that the positionality categorisations to which I belong did – white, heterosexual, male, PhD-student, etc.

**Research Ethics**

This thesis research was conducted with human subjects in a place that, as highlighted in the contextual chapter, has been the site of protracted conflict that has spanned across generations. In conducting research with a focus on peace and conflict in this setting, sensitivity was required. In abiding by the ethical standards required by the University of Manchester, this study needed to prove that “the risk it poses to participants is outweighed by the potential benefits of the research” (University of Manchester, 2018). Under the umbrella of institutional ethical principles and process, there is a desire for doing no harm to human research subjects (Gorard, 2013). However, an ethical approach is not confined to university policy alone, thus this section discusses the manner in which this research abided by the processes of ethical research, as well as highlights ethical decisions and researcher awareness.

Within the context of institutional research approval, this thesis research was designated as low risk by the University of Manchester (ethics application form – Appendix 2). The approval level was agreed upon due to the location in the United Kingdom, as well as a constructed research plan that did not set out with the intention of reaching into people’s histories to recall trauma. The research was further befitting of low risk designation as it
avoided participants under the age of 16. Those interviewed within the SSE Arena had their identities protected; none of the interviews led to responses that impacted on the safety and security of the interviewees. Consent was received in written or verbal formats for each interview conducted, and interview recordings and transcriptions were, and continue to be, kept secure and encrypted as per University of Manchester policy. Throughout my fieldwork and corresponding write-up of my thesis I have ensured the integration of ethical requirements of the University of Manchester.

Researcher awareness is an important part of accessing narratives and information, and in maintaining a respectful relationship with the participants. In the act of face-to-face qualitative research, ethical decision-making becomes inherent and embedded in the production of research (Janesick, 2003). Conducting interviews seated side by side random interview participants dictated that different situations, responses and relationships were navigated within the SSE Arena. One such example is that it is commonplace at an ice hockey game, as well as in many social settings in Ireland, to drink beer (or other alcohol) as part of the social experience. The consumption of alcohol has ethical considerations (Anderson and DuBois, 2007), and I took these into account in my interviewing and observational practices. I monitored alcohol consumption for changes in behaviour and responses to ensure that the discussion was not misled by intoxication; however, I did not avoid people based on their choice to drink in this setting. Another example of ethical decision-making was in the use of online forums. I was an invited member of a ‘moderated’ Facebook group of Giants supporters; in this group I was privy to interactions between fans with whom I had no explicit consent to use their posts in my research. In considering online research (Garcia et al., 2009), I regarded this forum as observational and the thesis does not identify or directly quote any of the material from this setting – it did however inform a deeper understanding of interaction around the Giants.

The awareness, highlighted above, also requires an intuitiveness to ethical decision-making that comes from the understanding of self (on behalf of the researcher) in the research. In this regard I have continuously worked to have an ethical approach to the research I conducted in Belfast, and to the presentation of the stories, themes, observations and people that I encountered. Inherent in this approach is the recognition of myself and my own objectivity within the research, a point illustrated by Janesick (2003) when she notes, “As we try to make sense of our social world and give meaning
to what we do as researchers, we continually raise awareness of our own beliefs. There is no attempt to pretend that research is value-free” (56). In an effort to present an ethically-considerate presentation this thesis has included my own inspirations, aspirations, and an epistemological worldview that gives nuanced and deepened framework and understanding to the themes that are identified throughout the thesis.

**Conclusion**

At the core of this research was the understanding that “the researcher must be able to understand issues from the inside and empathize with people’s experiences and points of view, at the same time analyzing them critically and impartially from the outside” (Bray, 2008: 307). Although this methodology chapter has ranged from interview question formats to researcher worldviews, it has sought to encompass the methods in which the research was conducted at a personal/interpersonal as well as academic/professional level. Across the chapter I have expressed “an attitude and perspective involving an ethic of openness and flexibility and a willingness to allow oneself to be transformed in the research process” (Juris and Khasnabish, 2015: 580). In the reflexivity of this research is a wider understanding that the information presented through the interviews at the core of this methodology is reliant on the sharing of knowledge that has come from experiences, both personal and shared, and it is in the good faith of the interviewees that my knowledge has developed to inform this thesis’ findings. In many ways, this thesis connects me with the researched community in a similar manner to my interview approach – side-by-side.
Chapter 8

‘The Hockey Family’

Introduction

When I asked her about whether divisions that are apparent in Belfast can be seen here in the arena she was firm and unwavering in rejecting the notion that they are. She said she doesn’t know whether people are necessarily Catholic or Protestant, while taking this time to let me know she is a Protestant. She made it clear that sectarianism doesn’t affect a Giants game and that many fans refer to their fan community as a ‘hockey family’.

“We are a hockey family, so that stuff doesn’t matter here.”

17 October 2015
Belfast Giants 2 vs. Cardiff Devils 3 (Loss)
Gate 19 – X39

The opening account depicts a community and shared identity that has been constructed by the supporters of the Belfast Giants, a group that is passionate about the sport, the team, and their community. The thesis introduction highlighted community as something of a boundary in the ‘us’ and ‘them’ categories of Northern Ireland; however, the discussion of the ‘hockey family’ as a community trends away from community as a boundary between difference, instead highlighting shared interest “within and in between sets of social relations” (Probyn 1996: 13), generating a sense of belonging. The act of attending ice hockey games and other team-organised functions has developed into a regular social outlet for a large number of people from all walks of life. The seemingly normalised activities and social routines occurring between supporters across historical division are the central examination of this thesis because such events have not been a regular occurrence in Northern Ireland. Traditionally, social activities are constructed under the pressures of unionist/nationalist division, socioeconomic class, or as in the case of Belfast’s punk/goth movement, a rejection of these mainstream cultural identifications (Stewart, 2014; Bairner, 2006b; Shirlow, 2006). Thus, the construction of an identifiable social group around the Giants – the ‘hockey family’ or the ‘teal army’ – is an interesting post-peace agreement phenomenon,
especially when supporters connect to imagery and relationships characterising close-knit social units in a place where social conflict is deeply engrained.

The hockey family as a social identity and social group offered a macro-level understanding that shed light on my questioning around the thematic guideposts highlighted in the analytical framework – prejudice, anxiety, trust, tolerance, identity and space. The purpose of initially drawing out these topics was to better understand if, and to a certain level how, Giants games and the spaces of the SSE Arena offer a space of lower levels of prejudice and anxiety, higher levels of trust and tolerance, and more equitable shared identity than in other locations of Belfast. The first four guideposts were quickly seen in the research through the fifth – identity. The hockey family, highlighted in the opening vignette, emerged very early in my research as a term, a status, and an identity characteristic within the SSE Arena. In response to this commonly acknowledged shared identity, this chapter focuses on the hockey family as a social identity, amidst the many social identities of a person, and is constructed on themes that emerged from individual stories, observations and experiences taken from my side-by-side research within the arena and face-to-face research in wider Belfast. In doing so, this chapter has four sections: shared interest, diversity, the Giants as a ‘Post-Troubles’ phenomenon, and ‘identifiability’. It warrants recognition that these sections are intertwined, yet for the sake of analysis they are siloed so that their attributes can be discerned and discussed.

The first section highlights the shared interest that draws people together around the Belfast Giants. The hockey game is the recurring event out of which the hockey family has been born. In this section my research exposes that even when relationships bring together those who subscribe to parts of the divisive culture and rhetoric of Northern Ireland, the team and the sport is identified as being at the centre of new alliances, acting as a common ground.

The second section gives evidence and narrative to the assertion that the hockey arena is a shared space with members of both Catholic/nationalist and Protestant/unionist communities present. Further, diversity is displayed in the audience – at any Giants game the constitution of the hockey family includes pensioners to children, and spans socioeconomic class, gender, abled/disabled and difference in sexual orientation. Yet, the diversity of the hockey family goes beyond these demographics and is seen when surveyed across other similar social events in Belfast, as well as in accessibility to group
membership. What comes out of the fieldwork is that there are fans who are in the arena at every game, and there are leaders of the community who shape the experience at and around Giants games, but the identity of this niche social group has engrained within it a sense of openness to diversity for all who attend, no matter how often – a characteristic highlighted by their welcome of me and my research openly into their community.

The third section, entitled a Post-Troubles Phenomenon, investigates the notion that the Giants are for those unaffected by the Troubles and the conflict in the region. In this section I investigate this reputation through in-arena interviews, offering an informed presentation of the varied political ideologies and affiliations participating in this social group.

The final section of the chapter is rooted in marked measures of identity, particularly the identifiability of members of the hockey family as strongly highlighted by the jerseys that the team and a large number of supporters wear. Beyond this clothing, the reputation of the team and their consistent presence in Belfast over the last 15 years has led the way to an assumed, familiar and identifiable shared space, where the etiquette and assumption of diversity is markedly different than it might be at other comparable activities in Belfast. The interviews and relationships of the SSE Arena highlighted in this chapter showcase the thematic guidepost of identity as fluid and multi-layered, and the shared interest in ice hockey acts as a catalyst in generating a new group identity within Belfast.

**Shared Interest: Ice Hockey**

Through the interviews within the arena, a precarious line had to be walked. I needed to not only allow for the person I sat beside to enjoy and be involved in the spectacle of watching ice hockey, but at the same time stay true to my research goals of generating dialogue and questioning the significance of what was occurring in the arena, particularly with regards to relationships across historical division. In some ways I had assumed that hockey, being a non-native activity, may just be a guise for some sort of gathering – my line of thinking being that the people of Belfast could not be ‘real’
hockey fans. However, what immediately emerged was that there were deeply committed and knowledgeable supporters at the games, and everyone was a fan of the team. The games, and the Giants, immediately became apparent as the shared interest that brought everyone together.

My interviews uncovered that this shared interest was something that was protected from discussion of politics and sectarianism, including whether the hockey arena was a place that pushed back against larger assumptions of divisive rhetoric. The hockey game as a protected space was highlighted through my quick learning that I needed to construct a relationship based on shared interest in the Giants game at hand before engaging with some of my questions about the deeper meaning of gathering in the SSE Arena. It is notable that discussions on ethno-sectarian division were generally rebuffed until the person in the seat beside me became more comfortable with me, and this comfort was achieved by showing my allegiance to the Giants.

The man I sat beside tonight was with his wife and daughter – they were proudly season ticket holders – I know they were proud because his status as a season ticket holder was mentioned with frequency.

He grew up in Brampton, Ontario, Canada where he had learned to love hockey. Though he had never played it, he was convinced he would have been great at it.

His Dad had moved the family to Canada when the Troubles were at their worst. He came back as a young man in the early 90s after he finished high school and there was a lot of stuff still going on, but he was young and he thought it was all really exciting. He mentioned the rush of going to the pubs and hearing stories from guys ‘who’d done killings’. It felt exciting to be around. Having grown up in Brampton everything in Belfast was new and different and dangerous, and then he’d go back to Brampton to visit and tell the stories about what was going on in Belfast and he was cooler in Brampton than he’d ever been when he was growing up there. So he stayed in Belfast but as the times changed and he aged and met his wife and had his daughter and things were less exciting and the things that were once so exciting he began to find meaningless. He talked about a point of recognition that people had been dying for no reason and Canada started looking better and better – problem was it is a lot harder to move a family away from Belfast.

Ice hockey is one of the places where he can get in touch with his Canadian upbringing.

“None of that other stuff matters – It’s just hockey”.

16 October 2015
Belfast Giants 4 vs. Cardiff Devils 3 (Win- OT)
Gate 9 Seat Q73

This was seemingly rooted in my Canadian-centric arrogance connected to the sport.
The gentleman in the excerpt above was from my first game and interview of the season. His commitment to the team, through season tickets and including his family in this interest, exemplifies the value that hockey has in the experience. With the team highlighting themselves as much a form of entertainment as a sporting experience (Thornton, 2015), my early days of research did not fully respect the role of the sport at the centre of the Giants. The centrality of hockey taken from this interaction offered an important notice that the act of cheering for the same team was more important in this setting to this man than community division, highlighted by his words, “None of that other stuff matters.” At a wider level this interview displayed a pattern of reasoning in the shared identity of Giants supporters – one might sit with someone they may not agree with or like based on other aspects of their identity, but the shared interest in supporting the team takes precedence in this space.

As I watched hockey games with people across the season, a multitude of motivations emerged explaining their presence at the game – but at the centre of this social group are those who share an interest in the Belfast Giants. There are many reasons for coming – the family friendly environment, great facilities, interest in sport, dragged along by a friend, etc. – yet the game of hockey and the Giants had a central role in people coming back or including the Giants in their lives and schedules in a meaningful way. An observation of the interactions amongst the hockey fans within the SSE Arena links back to the contact hypothesis – specifically the condition of having a common goal. In the hockey family this goal, as it is for any sports fan, is to offer support for the team in the hopes of winning championships. If one did not gain an interest in the game, the other stuff – the dance cameras on the big screen, the division-avoidant agenda, the chuck-a-pucks, etc. – did not seemingly foster enough interest that one would continuously identify with this common goal – and thus would not be as connected to this social group.

Across the season I heard regular boos and comments directed at players who had once played for the Giants and had moved on to other teams in the league, as though leaving the Giants was a sign of betrayal. Such possessiveness amongst the supporters illustrates

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28 Chuck-a-Puck is an activity that takes place during the 2nd intermission. Fans can purchase a foam puck and try to throw it closest to the centre ice dot, with the closest puck getting free ferry passage to Scotland and back from Stena Line, the Giants biggest sponsor. (Aside: I was also nicknamed the ‘Chuck-a-Puck Canuck’ by supporters because of my affinity for taking part in this activity, no matter where my seat in the arena.)
that the hockey family also finds a shared interest in what they are not. A common
disdain for the other team intertwines with the uniting interest in the Giants, and further
connects fandom with Allport’s (1954) required condition of common goals in
intergroup interactions. An identity and interest constructed in shared antagonism is not
unfamiliar; it can be seen in the rivalries that emerge in sports fandom (Tyler and
Cobbs, 2015). A comparable outgroup – be they fans of a rival team or the other team
itself – offers something to compare against and define the characteristics of the ingroup
(Turner, 1982). In this way, having an outgroup strengthens the identity of the Giants
supporter community (Crocker and Luhtanen, 1990). Havard (2014) gives the rivalry
further meaning, noting that as individual fans and as a collective, joy and confidence
emerge when a favourite team defeats a rival in direct competition. Although there is a
need for sports organisations to be careful not to heighten animosity and incite
inappropriate behaviours (Havard, Wann and Ryan, 2013), throughout the research I did
not observe levels of disdain that would register as inappropriate.29

The power that shared interest in ice hockey has in building a wider community
supporter identity that spans ethno-sectarian cleavage is not confined to the arena seats,
even if that is where it has its foundation. Attending a hockey game is a voluntary
experience, and to involve one’s self in the community beyond the watching of the
game is completely optional. Choosing to stay after the game around McCool’s pub30 to
greet and talk with the players, attending signature signings, going to the meet-the-
player ferry rides31 or even introducing yourself to others in your section are all a choice
and not necessitated by the act of going to a game. However, each of these is a popular
activity, displaying that the team and supporters do interact beyond the arena.

Supporting the Giants also goes beyond the arena into online spheres. The shared
interest in the team has driven an increasingly active and wide-ranging social
media/online community. There are podcasts, official and unofficial Twitter accounts,
Snapchats and several Facebook forums. Correspondingly, the free Wi-Fi throughout
the arena was one of the regularly identified perks of the arena being rebranded from the

29 I did, however, recognise the irony in this thesis’ highlighting of shared identity in lowering prevailing
prejudices within Belfast by raising prejudice towards others.
30 McCool’s Pub is the team’s official pub. Located within the SSE Arena, the pub is open following the
game for drinks and most of the players come to greet the fans.
31 Stena Line Ferries is the main sponsor of the Giants and host a day cruise for meeting the players and a
wide range of family friendly activities (see: https://belfastgiants.com/2018/03/30/enjoy-a-giant-cruise-
with-stena-line-2/).
Odyssey Arena to the SSE Arena. When attending away games in England, Scotland and Wales, the fans who either travelled from Belfast or are living in other areas of Great Britain who come to games to support the team almost unanimously pull out phones following a goal to text, tweet or Facebook update those who are not present. The Facebook pages and social media outlets are representative of connection that transcends community division but is also centred on the results of the game. These forums are not free from quarrels; however, unlike many Internet forums where opinions are expressed, these manage to avoid trending into the direction of personal attacks, remaining focussed on the team and opinions around the team. It was my observation that the largest of the Facebook groups would have constant discussion threads where disappointment was expressed around coaching strategies or the efforts of players. These online discussions between users could get fairly opinionated, but the arguments were most often simply airing of grievances based on personal opinion and player preference – often because they are personally known. The online forums and external conversations that I observed stayed focused on ice hockey; rarely, if ever, trending towards any political or community discussion, reaffirming the gentleman in the excerpt at the beginning of this section who noted that ‘other stuff’ was not generally associated with the Giants experience.

The theme of side-by-sidedness presented in Chapter 10 highlights the side-by-side seating arrangement and interaction within the SSE Arena as a distinct factor in ‘lightening’ the encounter that occurs within the hockey family. It should be noted that the online activities which surround the Giants offer a different method of communication and engagement. The network of relationships expands in the online forums, not being confined to seats, rows or sections of the arenas, and providing, in many ways, a much more direct space for communication. There was one instance where I was in McCool’s pub with one of the people I had done research with during a game, and a person I had sat with at a previous game came up to say hi. I introduced them to each other and they mentioned that they had met online before, but not

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32 Steve Thornton, Head of Hockey Operations, regards access to players as central to the construction of an engaged community, stating - “It is access to the players. I bet you we are the only sport in the world that after a win or a loss on a Saturday, when you are playing on Sunday, go to the bar. Don’t drink, but the fact that a lot of them are blue collar guys that love the fact that fans adore them. And they are up there kissing kids and babies and signing autographs and that is what really creates that hardcore adoration. When is the last time when you went to a rugby or football game where you actually got to see and meet the players? It never happens.”
personally. This suggests that the seen networks of the arena are supported and widened by the online spheres in which people are active around the Giants.

Having underlined the importance of the hockey game as a shared interest, the focus of this research rests on the unique interpersonal relationships that have voluntarily emerged around the sport. The bringing people together as fellow fans can be viewed as a platform for the construction of deeper relationships; however, it does not have to, nor is it necessarily expected to – and that may be what makes this interest so unique. The enthusiasm for the team at the heart of this ingroup connects to the sport for development and peace paradigm, which sees the role of shared interest in sport as having potential for bringing people together. The United Nations (2015) recognises “the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives”. Such a vantage point reinforces my research questions and highlights the value of tolerance, one of the six thematic guideposts presented in the analytical framework, as essential for a space where connections can be made that bring people together across division. The normalisation of intergroup contact at Giants games is an enabler for interpersonal relationships to occur – a primary example of this is Patty and Davy.

**Patty and Davy**

At the heart of the Belfast Giants supporter community, these two men host a weekly podcast known as ‘A View from the Bridge’, which focuses on all things Giants. In my interviews and observations around the arena, the names Patty and Davy are known to many of the supporters without need for mentioning surnames. If something is occurring in the arena, or around the team, these guys know about it. For the fans they represent an informal connection with the organisation; their website (Kingdom of the Giants), podcast and accompanying Twitter feed is a place for showing support or airing grievances with game results and coaching/organisational decisions. When I had the chance to interview them together, the centrality of the hockey team came to the

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33 The bridge is the one end of the arena – the seats are a horseshoe shape and are connected by a bridge that hangs above the ice level.
forefront, but their relationship spoke volumes about the possibilities within the arena setting and it is worth quoting our discussion at length:

Davy: ...for me 15 years down the line it’s good that the Giants are still getting mentioned for doing some sort of good community thing but it is now a sports club that people are following for the sport, rather than you can go to the Odyssey and no one will call you a ‘Prod’, nobody will call you a ‘Fenian’. They are all here for the hockey game supporting the city and no matter if you are North, South, East or West Belfast you’ve something – sports teams generally around Belfast are orange or green – Linfield you are clearly what you are, Cliftonville you are clearly what you are, Rugby sort of has the class element, where you get the middle upper class people or who think they are anyway. So it’s a sports club that everyone can support at a decent price, you get a good family night out, you can bring your kids, you can do it as a family.

Patty: It’s assumed. It’s gone, it doesn’t exist. This is just as Davy says a sports club and it’s a well-run organization where people are sitting next to you and nobody cares because we are here to support the guys on the ice.

Davy: You can get from our conversation, I’m a political animal, I love politics – I have very, very strong probably childhood engrained beliefs – this is the way we were brought up. I am passionately British. Patty is passionately Irish. There is no middle ground between us when it comes to politics – none. We will never agree on politics but we love hockey.

Eric: This is the marriage of hockey on full display.

Davy: Yeah.

Patty: Yeah.

Eric: Ten years of friendship around something other than what has dominated Belfast for so long.

Patty: Pretty much.

Davy: I never once tried to be anything to Patty that I am not.

Patty: Likewise.

Davy: He has to either accept me warts and all and likewise or, what are you going to do?

Patty: I’m aware of who Davy is and I’m aware of his religion – we’ve talked about it. But the majority of our conversations revolve around hockey, they revolve around our sport, they revolve around the passion for our team and hating the Nottingham Panthers, how we are despising the Sheffield Steelers at the moment. And you know it’s all – that is how engrained we are in this club. The club itself consumes every single day, every single day we talk about it even in
the off-season. Even the fact that on a Tuesday night myself, Davy and Aaron come forward and do the podcast that is just a microcosm of what we’re talking about day in, day out anyways. And we got the very privileged position that the club themselves have accepted us to be part of them. ... They respect what we do to promote them and talk about our club. And we get a great reception from the guys out there in the bars out there, whatever ... because they enjoy what we talk about. And that is what it is now.

This interview with Patty and Davy underlines that supporting the Giants has played a role in normalising interaction that would not otherwise occur, and that from this normalisation of encounter based on shared interest, friendships have emerged that would not be likely without it. The interview sheds light on the two key points of this section, the first being the centrality of being a fan with a shared interest, and the underlining that this interest does not come with expectations of something more occurring across historical division. The second point arises from the observed aspect of this interview and the common interaction patterns occurring within the supporter community, which illustrate that hockey fandom can have deeper meaning against the divided backdrop of Northern Ireland – all the while constructed on a hope that the Giants score more goals than the other team and a shared aversion for the Nottingham Panthers or the Sheffield Steelers.

**Diversity**

The shared interest in ice hockey draws in a diverse crowd of ice hockey supporters. The unique makeup of the hockey family is core to this thesis’ inquiry of whether there is engagement across division occurring within the SSE Arena, and this section highlights that the Giants draw from across the unionist-nationalist cleavages that exist within the city. However, any discussion of diversity should not end with a simple checkmark noting both communities’ presence, rather a deeper understanding of diversity must also seek to include and comprehend the experiences of supporters and the complexity of identity in 2016 Belfast. What emerges in this section is a clearer view of the hockey family as a dynamic social group that grows and shrinks in membership, spans genders, sexual preferences, social classes, age, abilities, etc. Further, to frame hockey supporters in simplified broad strokes would be a disservice to the relationships that have been built within the SSE Arena around a shared interest in ice hockey.
Demographics and Dynamics

The demographics at the arena display a wide-ranging diversity. Throughout my season of research, I sat side-by-side members of the nationalist community, the unionist community, as well as groups of people who had come to the game together and included members of both communities. I sat with men, I sat with women, and I sat with men and women who came to games together. I sat with a lesbian couple, a gay man and I sat with a husband and wife with their children. The gender parity, with the club reporting a 48% female attendance rate, is unique for a sporting event in Belfast. Further, the number of people present who used mobility scooters or wheelchairs highlighted an accessible facility utilised by supporters and the Giants organisation. It deserves highlighting that there was no survey work made available to me through the organisation that gives any certainty as to who is in attendance at a Giants game. When I sought to work with Ticketmaster to map the season ticket holders by their postcodes, based on the idea that in Belfast knowing where one lives is generally a clear indicator of community, I was not granted the required access by the organisation. However, as noted in Chapter 2, attendance figures shared with me by the organisation highlight an average of 4,500 fans at each game, and approximately 1,500 season ticket holders (Brooks, 2015). What the statistics, experiences and observations demonstrate is that there were many iterations of who I would find myself beside in the arena on any given night, the common traits being that everyone was there for the hockey game and that everyone I sat beside was from Northern Ireland, Caucasian and English-speaking. These attributes of the crowd, combined with my observations of the wider audience, illustrate that this arena is not yet a place where the growing multiculturalism of Belfast is on display. However, as the excerpt below points out, the Giants offer opportunity for people to congregate from different groups and backgrounds, which speaks to the hockey family as a social group that is an outlier in Northern Ireland. Also notable in this excerpt is the term ‘nerdfest’; I believe this was used in the description that she gives because the group, and many of its participants, sit outside many of the expected social norms in Belfast – not single identity, not revolving around the pub and not one of the typical sports.

The 2011 Northern Ireland census highlights that over 32,000 people gave their ethnicity as something other than ‘white’ and over 90 languages were recognised as spoken (NISRA, 2011b).
As the three of us were chatting together in Rockies I asked them both what the Giants meant to them. They both had very personal responses. They both loved what the team represents - as a same sex couple in Northern Ireland, there are not a great number of places where they feel they can hang out together and not feel overly judged or having to live up to a stereotype of what people of the LGBT community should look and act like. With this as a foundation, she noted that the Giants represented what so many want for Northern Ireland, although as an accepting place her older brother had taken to referring to it as a “nerdfest.” They both remarked that being a large group of people from different groups of the community – punks, goths, straight-laced people, old and young – had made them feel at home in the year since they had started going to games. She thought the arena had representatives from many aspects of Belfast’s society – calling it:

‘a real family of misfits where nobody is looking for trouble’.

27 November 2015
Friendship Four – Day 1

When I spoke to Robert Fitzpatrick (2015) about the demographics of who was at a Giants game he gave an historical explanation, noting that for the most part everything in Belfast has been separated. For instance, he noted that if there were a new community centre or school being built in a Catholic section of the city, there would be demands for a similar development to be built in a Protestant section, and vice versa. Belfast in this sense has long been developed and redeveloped based on a sense of ‘if they got one, we got one’. Such separate and single identity infrastructure has included sport in Northern Ireland, a notion that relates to Putnam’s (2000) concept of bonding. Single-identity gatherings around sport have focused inwardly around their teams and in the odd case that they competed against one another, in football/soccer for example, fandom reinforced expectations of contempt between communities in Northern Ireland. The heterogeneity of the hockey family, the term family used again in the previous excerpt, has had a distinct effect on the exclusiveness of identity, aligning with Lubbers et al.’s (2007) notion that the more heterogeneous of a social network in a social group the higher the tendency to be accepting of others; such a statement and observation of diversity in the hockey family gives way to conjecture that as a group the levels of

35 ‘Rockies’ is the Canadian-themed sports bar in the Odyssey Pavilion.
36 Robert Fitzpatrick (2015) noted, “We are a divided society, if anyone tells you anything different tell me how? We are a divided society. And sport has, unfortunately sport has, not up until now had the ability to bridge that gap. And I will argue now that whilst the Giants don’t have all the answers they are the closest thing we have to being a sporting experience first-hand where I care who you are because you are a Giant.”
prejudice and anxiety do not act as an obstacle to gathering together. As Fitzpatrick (2015) points out, there were never going to be two Odyssey complexes or two ice hockey teams, and so if there was interest in the activity it was going to be open to all.

**Against the Backdrop of Belfast**

*If you are into hockey you support this team.*

*Whereas if you are into football you have a choice and you maybe start to go down sectarian divisions.*

*With this you can invite your friends from wherever.*

...when people did work with young people during the conflict and bringing people together to do programmes the challenge they always had was was they would then return to their sectarian segregated communities and it was difficult for people to go and meet each other because there weren’t the shared spaces.

Well, one of the things you do have now is the fact that you do have shared spaces where people can go and meet and therefore you might find that fact that you’ve got the same team, the fact that it’s a neutral venue, neutral location does mean that people can build relationships across the divide and they don’t have to put themselves at risk of asking people into different spaces.

Neil Jarman
Queen’s University Belfast

Scanning Belfast for activities or communities comparable to the Giants proves difficult. When I asked what people do for fun, the Irish stereotype and reputation of going to the pub arose as a common answer. Such an activity offers little comparative value as these institutions are often neighbourhood-based, and as living arrangements remain predominantly divided, pubs offer little challenge to the cross-community and family-friendly dynamics of Giants games. In sport there remains a great deal of segregation – popular sport that draws across communities, like boxing, happen infrequently. Rugby would be the closest comparable, with 15 matches in Belfast between August and May, although the ticket price is prohibitive to many at up to almost three times more than a general admission Giants ticket (ticket prices for sporting events in Belfast/Northern Ireland are highlighted in Figure 14). With regards to football, I interviewed Michael Boyd (2015), Director of Football Development at the Irish Football Association (IFA). He spoke of the process and challenges encountered in working towards transforming the culture of supporters around the Northern Irish
national football team. He drew attention to networks of entrenched fans and supporter
groups as though these ‘old boys’ clubs had been influential in dictating much of the
happenings at Windsor Park over the past decades, through chants and songs which
informed who was welcome at the games. The major sports of Northern Ireland all carry
similar baggage to that evident at Windsor Park; however, the Giants and their
relatively short history offer a night of North American sporting entertainment that does
not have association with any entrenched ethno-sectarian histories, aiding their ability to
draw diverse crowds.

Figure 14: Snapshot of Ticket Prices across Ice Hockey, Rugby, GAA, and
Football/Soccer 2017/2018 seasons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ice Hockey Belfast Giants</th>
<th>Gaelic Football (GAA) Down</th>
<th>Rugby Ulster Rugby 37</th>
<th>Football / Soccer Cliftonville</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult: £16.00</td>
<td>Adult Stand Pre-Purchase: €28.00/£24.00</td>
<td>Grandstand: £22.45</td>
<td>Adults: £11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concession: £11.00</td>
<td>Adult Stand MatchDay: €35.00/£30.00</td>
<td>Family Stand: £13-33</td>
<td>Concessions: £7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child: £9.00</td>
<td>Juvenile Stand: €5.00/£5.00</td>
<td>Memorial End Stand: £13-33</td>
<td>2017/18 standard admission prices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family: £39.00 (2 Adults &amp; 2 Kids)</td>
<td>Adult Terrace Pre-Purchase: €18.00/£15.00</td>
<td>East Terrace: £17-25</td>
<td><a href="http://cliftonvillefc.net/online-ticketing/">http://cliftonvillefc.net/online-ticketing/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018 Season</td>
<td>Adult Terrace MatchDay: €20.00/£17.00</td>
<td>West Terrace: £17-25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Juvenile Terrace: €5.00/£5.00</td>
<td>Family Terrace: £9-20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prices for the match at Pairc Esler, Down -- 26/05/2018 Down v Antrim</td>
<td>Memorial End Terrace: £9-20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://gaa.tickets.ie/Listing/EventInformation/38188/ulster-gaa-senior-football-championship-down-v-antrim-pairc-esler-26-May-2018">http://gaa.tickets.ie/Listing/EventInformation/38188/ulster-gaa-senior-football-championship-down-v-antrim-pairc-esler-26-May-2018</a></td>
<td>Prices depend on the competition (Friendly or League) and whether a Child or Adult.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The regularity with which the Belfast Giants play offers a consistent option for social
activity in Belfast, where the majority of shared entertainment is one-off or short-term
activities and cultural events like theatre shows, cinema or music gigs. During the
2015/2016 season, the Giants played in Belfast 32 times, including preseason games.
This equals a full month of evenings for the season ticketholders and the regular fans in
attendance through the winter, and also represents a regularly-occurring option for

37 Adult prices in the grandstand at an Ulster Rugby depend on the competition, ranging up to £44/ticket
vs. Giants flat general admission prices of £16/ticket.
participation and attendance by those who may be interested in the experience. The hockey schedule also adds an interesting element to the social fabric of Belfast. The Giants’ schedule is based on their geographic location, separate from Great Britain where the rest of the teams are located, generally necessitating that a visiting team will come to Belfast to play a doubleheader – one game on Friday evening and then another on Saturday evening. When the Giants play away games they will do similarly, perhaps playing in Sheffield on Friday night and Nottingham on Saturday night. This keeps travel costs at a minimum for their meagre budget, but it also means that when games are in Belfast they happen two at a time through the weekend. For many this means a weekend planned around the Giants, where continuity is offered.

This consistency, reputation and diversity against other familiar events was on display with two brothers from Ballymena that I sat beside at the game on 28 November 2015, as the excerpt from my field notes below illustrates:

These brothers shared a father but had different mothers; one of them grew up in a Protestant neighbourhood with his mother and the other in a Catholic neighbourhood with his. They were at their first Giants game in years; they had come as children and had decided they wanted to attend again. As I asked them about their other interests, I noted a difference in taste – one a Rangers supporter (he showed me the pendant on his necklace chain), the other admitted a light interest in GAA but without being a serious follower of any sport.

They wouldn’t have described themselves as hockey fans; I spent most of the game explaining the rules to them. However, they acknowledged in our discussion that they were aware that the arena offered them a place of equal footing for the evening, without either of them worrying about their wider identities or that they were from different communities with different affiliations. One brother conceded that most activity where they could be together revolved around drinking in certain bars or hanging around the home and family.

28 November 2015
Belfast Giants 1 vs. Manchester Storm 3 (Loss)
Gate 6 – X26

These two young men were not from Belfast, nor had they attended a game in years – and yet they knew what the space offered as a place where their different upbringings or community affiliations would not be an issue between them or those around them. Deaux and Martin (2003) recognise identity as the interplay of two levels: the interpersonal relationships and the larger social groups with which one affiliates. These brothers had the closeness of a familial relationship and were for the most parts at odds
in the larger social groups they identified with. This is not unlike many who have found the Giants. The difference between these brothers and Patty and Davy, the two fans who host the podcast, is that the relationship between Patty and Davy was built through being regulars at hockey games, while for the brothers it stems from outside the arena but lacks a shared space in which to connect. Both types of relationships reinforce Jarman’s observation at the beginning of this section of the SSE Arena as a shared space. Examples like Patty and Davy or these two brothers again highlight that the Giants have clearly been identified (and self-identified) in Northern Ireland as a place where one can expect to encounter difference – a key characteristic that keeps some people away and welcomes others in, even if only for an evening.

**The Ability to Come and Go**

Attendance at a Belfast Giants game is never the same group of people twice, and yet there are many who attend each and every game. This gives way to the sense of familiarity and strong familial nucleus implied by the term ‘hockey family’, yet the interactions that occur in the arena involve those who are present, not discriminating whether you are a regular or not, meaning every game is influenced by who happens to be present on that given day. There are never isolated activities that have a homogenous section of the hockey family – never are there only the season ticket holders, or a childfree group of fans. In this way the fluidity of the group, including any combination of regular, irregular and one-off attenders, is central to shaping what is happening in the arena, and contributing to the diversity of the hockey family.

In his study on social capital amongst Polish football supporters, Grodecki (2016) highlights that fandom of a team has a great deal to offer discussion on social capital, although he highlights that “there is a lack of awareness about specific factors of the football fans’ structures that create trust between members, promote shared aims and enable supporters to cooperate to achieve their particular goals” (6-7). In doing so he uses an account of the ‘ultras’38 at a Polish football match choreographing a display in the stands which included a number of flares which are illegal on stadium grounds. Such an example highlights the organisation, planning, but also the trust that exists within networks of sports fans, particularly when willing to break laws in the name of

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38 Ultras are fans that are extreme in their support of their team, a term often associated with those who push their support beyond what is deemed socially acceptable and/or legal.
supporting the team. Putnam (2000) considered sports as having a distinct social sphere where social capital could be generated. Supporting Putnam is Harris’ (1998) understanding of sport as offering a ‘communal endeavour’, and Blackshaw and Long (2005) suggest that sport has an ability to connect people from different social milieus. Social identity theory considers a person a member of a group if they identify as a member instead of using any form of ‘objective’ criteria for membership (Taylor and Moghaddam, 1987). This openness to experience and corresponding agency gives opportunity for people to interpret their own social world. Within the paradigm of the hockey family this suggests that one is a member of this social group if one perceives her or himself to be a member of this group. The diversity and makeup of a hockey game, as well as the shared identity of the hockey family, reinforces that the ‘communal endeavour’ and representation from across the social landscape are present within the SSE Arena. Tonts (2005) noted that sports’ ability to unify a group can encourage an air of exclusivity to the supporter community. The individual agency and ability to consider one’s self a part of this group dismisses this bonding-style of group formation with the hockey family; however, the open-ended nature of the shared identity also contributes to the challenges in understanding the benefits of social capital highlighted by Grodecki.

What my time in the arena at the games uncovered is that whether people are there for one game or every game, they feel like a member of the group on that night, primarily because the activity stands in contrast to other social options and encounters. Tajfel (1982) notes that some groups “are more salient than others; and some may vary in salience in time as a function of a variety of social situations” (2). The salience of the hockey family has great value in encouraging the congregation of diverse groups of people together with the effectiveness seen in the construction of a different normalisation at ice hockey games. This setting, where contact across division, class, gender, etc. occurs without a great deal of attention paid to it, does not necessitate that the arena is void of differing and divergent beliefs and identities, it simply requires you to support the team – what happens after that is up to the individuals within it.

A ‘Post-Troubles’ Phenomenon

What comes out of this shared interest and diversity is a sense that the Giants and their supporters represent a post-Troubles phenomenon. What I learned through conversation and observation is that the city is home to a significant number of people,
predominantly working class and living in single-identity neighbourhoods, who reminisce about the ‘good-old, bad-old days’ with a glint in their eyes that carries a fondness for a time of violent conflict, and often manifests itself with some difficulty adapting to political and social power-sharing in present day, despite the 20 years since the 1998 agreement (Mac Ginty, 2006; Shirlow, 2006; Gaffikin and Morissey, 2011; Jarman and Bell, 2012). On the other hand, alongside this group, there is another considerable segment of the population that has seemingly had an easier time adapting and moving past the ‘Troubles’, and has found less issue in sharing spaces, increasing tolerance of difference, and managing some semblance of integrated living. To those who have struggled to leave the doctrine of the Troubles behind, this ‘post-Troubles’ group is often perceived as the younger generation, the unaffected, or the privileged whose lives have been less impacted by the harshness of division. As I spoke to people around Belfast, what emerged in some populations was a sense that if you carry the scars of the Troubles (emotional, physical, mythical) you should carry them proudly, and if you did not carry them, you were seen as weak. This perceived failing is commonly ascribed to the hockey family, by those struggling to move past the Troubles, as a group of people willing to be associated in a social group that includes ‘the other’. Thus, it is implied that if you are a hockey fan you are post-Troubles, a sentiment reinforced when I was warned that if you wore your Giants jersey through certain parts of the city you should expect to “get chirped” (Neill, 2015).

![Figure 15: Matt Nickerson (Belfast Giants) fights Mark Louis (Cardiff Devils) in Cardiff – 14 January 2017 (Murray, 2017)](image)

To ‘get chirped’ means to have insults or negative comments directed your way.
When I arrived in Belfast I had not expected ice hockey fans to be associated with ‘softness’ or weakness, as my Canadian upbringing had socialised me to view hockey players – and many of the fans – to be a tough group (Fighting is a part of Hockey! See Figure 15). The timing of the establishment of the Giants and their marketing decisions to consciously become a part of the post-peace agreement fabric of the city has strengthened these ties to weakness, aligning with findings that suggest that peace initiatives are often synonymous with the weak, and often the effeminate (Boulding, 1995; Neocleous, 2011; Ashe and Harland, 2014). The organisation and supporters’ connection with this period of significant political change following the Good Friday Agreement, which challenged the entrenched social identities of many, has been a lasting part of their modus operandi, even after slogans like ‘Game for All, Game for Everyone’ and ‘In the Land of Giants Everyone is Equal’ have been discontinued. This section of the chapter challenges any notion that the ‘hockey family’ can be viewed through such a singular lens. After my season following the team, I cannot make such an assumption that everyone there was uninvolved or unattached to sectarianism or sectarian activity, nor have they necessarily moved completely past the violence and vitriol that is associated with these actions and times. It is within this understanding that the diversity of the group and the individuals of the Giants community is displayed.

The two guys really talked a lot about hockey, but when I asked about the Giants and what it means against a backdrop of sectarianism they noted that such a conversation was fatigued. The two men talked about life as if there were two main elements in their day-to-day lives – their jobs (both worked in the IT sector) and the Belfast Giants – neither of them was hung up on division. Before the Giants they had never been into sport, avoided football and other sports, noting that all the other sports and their teams carried ‘baggage’ that they had never had an interest in.

The Giants were different.

They admitted to being drawn in because of the sectarian-free atmosphere, but it was the sport that won them over and kept them coming back every year.

15 November 2015
Belfast Giants 2 vs. Dundee Stars 3 (Overtime Shootout Loss)
Gate 8 Seat S46

40 Smith (1979) highlighted that displaying toughness is an important way to establish a positive identity among teammates, peers and coaches in ice hockey. This is also a message shared by Don Cherry and Ron Maclean every Saturday evening of the ice hockey season in Canada on their ‘Hockey Night in Canada’ segment called ‘Coach’s Corner’.
This excerpt from my field journal gives a representation of two fans that fit the mould of those who have found the Giants based on the non-sectarian agendas of the team aligning with their personal convictions. The team has given them something they could not find elsewhere, and in finding this they have willingly bought into this social group. These are not the only fans who I spoke with that found their way into the hockey family first through the intercommunity nature of the event and based on the sport second. Amongst those who cited being drawn to the team for these reasons, two prevalent attributes emerged – exhaustion with conflict/division and the presence of families, particularly children.

The first of these attributes is represented in weariness toward the conflict or conflict-narrative. The long history of lived division in Northern Ireland has for most meant that peace walls and unwelcoming sections of cities and towns have been a significant part of the entire lives of many Giants supporters. The conflict exhaustion, and in many ways corresponding avoidance, was further evident in the way that the team presents itself as being disconnected from the history of Belfast, and as a part of a new future.41 One significant indicator of this was that the players are imported, and therefore have no sectarian or political baggage, which was highlighted in their avoidance of and lack of knowledge about the ethno-sectarian conflict that I was regularly asking about (Nickerson, 2015; Benedict, 2015). The power of fatigue with protracted conflicts instigates change: Kelman (2004) realised the role of fatigue as a factor in the signing of ceasefire agreements, and Darby and Mac Ginty (2000) acknowledge fatigue as a reason for shifting political strategies to more sustainable goals within the Northern Ireland context. In this vein, the feeling I got in discussing peace and conflict over six months in Belfast is that people are dissatisfied with the Good Friday Agreement, while also recognising that it came at a time of such weariness with prolonged conflict, fraught with anxiety and mistrust, that people voted in its favour as it was the ‘best’ option. This option was also accompanied by a great deal of interest in redeveloping Northern Ireland, with the SSE Arena and the ice hockey team arriving as part of the sweeping changes that came with ‘peace’.

One significant shift to the redevelopment of Northern Ireland has been a change in rhetoric to being ‘outward looking’, a phrase I heard regularly in my questions about

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41 See: Bill Clinton’s speech acknowledging the Belfast Giants, quoted in Chapter 2.
post-peace agreement Belfast. To be ‘outward looking’ was one of the seven strategic priority targets highlighted by the The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (2001). David Hassan (2015), Head of the School for Sport at Ulster University, built on this notion and the timing of ice hockey’s emergence in Northern Ireland, noting:

“It [ice hockey] also came along at a time, I suppose, when there was a fascination with all things global. I mean certainly through the period of the Troubles and up until 1998, Northern Ireland was a very insular and inward-looking society. And really didn’t have any particular global impact or entrance from any part of the world in a meaningful sense, people didn’t really invest in Northern Ireland in any meaningful way. They didn’t travel there, there were very few cultural links to the country so it was a country occupied with itself and then all of a sudden with the end, I suppose, of the internal conflict there was this almost awakening to the outside world and a great sense in which things could be achieved which weren’t previously achieved. Along comes a sporting manifestation! And a group of local people are completely flattered by this notion that, you know, that this so-called foreign sport would want to come and play amongst us.”

This early notion that Hassan mentions – that the team and sport came along and gave a break to the weariness from years of division – has not diminished, as the city has continued to be reshaped and rebuilt in the Giants’ 15 years as a team. Attending a Giants game, by and large, presents a break from the norms and routines – including those which perpetuate division – by giving supporters an experience in sporting entertainment that is similar to the ones that their cousins may experience in Boston or Toronto, offering a connectedness to the wider world that has not historically been easily accessed in Northern Ireland.

The second attribute that emerged from the ‘post-Troubles’ crowd was very connected to the marketing of the game as ‘a family friendly night out’ (Thornton, 2015; Brooks, 2015). The number of children present at a Giants game was surprising, and in stark contrast to the Linfield/Cliftonville football match I attended. The child-friendly environment is bothersome to some of the sports fans that seek a more antagonistic sporting experience; however, the Giants organisation is very proud of their all-ages appeal. The team operates an educational programme which visits 60+ schools a year, and offers tickets to a wide variety of community youth groups (Cameron, 2016) – something that large sponsors, like Subway, have invested in. The welcoming of children is a fitting part of Lederach’s ‘Moral Imagination’; in a blog for the

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42 Both Boston and Toronto were popular sites for Irish emigrants during the famine, and both have popular professional ice hockey teams.
organisation Humanity United, Lederach (2016) revisits his idea about the “capacity to imagine themselves within a web of relationships that included their enemy”, referring to this as, “the grandchild imagination: The simple recognition that the well-being of my grandchildren intimately ties into the well-being of my enemy’s grandchildren”. Correspondingly, in casual conversation with a group of Giants supporters in their mid to late-20s about my PhD research, one of the supporters expressed the notion of their generation as ‘placeholders’ between the violence and trauma of their parents and the lives that their children would be able to lead. This term ‘placeholder’ is fitting of an idea that the peace in Northern Ireland is for a future that has not quite arrived, although this notion of being a ‘placeholder’ has an ability to come across as passive, or even as a way of shifting blame for the way that things are in present-day Belfast. However, Lederach’s notion of ‘the grandchild imagination’ demonstrates the pressure that is on young adults in Northern Ireland. They have often grown up in homes with parents whose experiences and environments have shaped a rhetoric of hate, yet so many that I met are acting as a generational buffer for their children, a difficult task in a place where, as noted earlier, there is an active ‘Troubles Pride’ that exists within both communities. In some ways the normalised interactions across division at a Giants game offer a view into what Belfast could look like.

The value of intergenerational interest and sharing of experience has been a core part of the team’s existence. When I emailed with former Giants owner, Jim Gillespie (2016), he connected to this as his reason for ultimately purchasing the team when it was headed towards bankruptcy, writing:

“My motivation was driven in part by a horrific sectarian incident I witnessed many years ago at a soccer match in Northern Ireland. … When the opportunity arose in 2008 to become involved in and promote a sport that was entirely without historical or religious "baggage" I felt this was the right time to try to help create a friendly "don't care what side of the fence you come from" ethos. The Giants organisation was failing, but I felt that it could be turned around. I am delighted that now it seems to have progressed and is in capable and caring hands, which have boosted attendances while maintaining the positive non-sectarian family atmosphere.”

The purchase of the Giants by Mr. Gillespie was founded on the reasoning that the Giants are connected to the notion of being post-Troubles. As this section notes, conflict

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43 “…the past is woven into the present in Northern Ireland because the argument upon which it is founded has never really been resolved” (Cochrane, 2014: 2).
fatigue and family-friendliness born out of a better future for children are attributes that emerge from the hockey family; however, any notion of a space that is free from a long history of conflict in the region should be approached cautiously.

The people who attend Giants games and identify as members of the hockey family are diverse, and any claims trending towards being baggage-free do not fully represent the complexity of individuals who make up this social group. The hockey family is a group of people whose multiplicities and intricacies of identity give the group depth. The members of this group identify as hockey fans, but they are all also members of many other groups simultaneously. Important in this setting is the recognition that other social groups one might belong to may or may not actually be in conflict with one another. This returns to Valentine’s (2008) work highlighting urban etiquette and tolerance of difference. The public space of the SSE Arena offers a space where the supporters are “obliged to curb the public expression of their personal prejudices and negative feelings” (329). As Tajfel and Turner (1986) recognise, no person is confined to one personal identity; rather one has multiple selves and identities that are attached to the different groups of which they are members. Thus, choosing to act with a level of civility in this shared space is foundational to the hockey family; the woman featured in the excerpt below gives an example of prioritising simultaneous and conflicting group social identities when at a Giants game:

At the games on 7 and 8 November in Nottingham and Manchester I was welcomed into the group of travelling supporters who were at both of the games. I had met a few of them at the Saturday evening game in Nottingham and we picked up our cheering of the team and discussions the next afternoon when the Giants were playing in Manchester. A few of these folks referred to themselves as the ‘Mainland Fanbase’, a comment that is steeped in political meaning and exposing of identity. However, despite this I noticed at away games that everyone follows the etiquette of the SSE Arena, even in these far-off settings – in particular, no flags or other colours. Of course in the arenas of Nottingham and Manchester they play the national anthem and from what I could observe everyone stood respectfully.

At the game in Manchester I got a chance to speak more with a woman originally from Belfast who regularly attended games with her partner. Living near Birmingham they were able to get to games in Sheffield, Nottingham, Manchester and Coventry with ease. They both wore jerseys from several seasons ago (a sign of a long-time fan) and were a wealth of knowledge around all things Belfast Giants. They regaled me in stories of past players and the more exciting games they had attended. As we were talking about being a Giants fan, the comparisons to other sports and fan experiences came up; she mentioned how they were looking forward to an upcoming football game. It was in this moment that she lifted her jersey to expose her Glasgow Rangers hoodie that she was
wearing under her Giants jersey. This was something unexpected – it hasn’t proven out of the ordinary for those I have sat with to self-identify community affiliation without prompting – but this presented a visual to layers of identity that were like the peeling of an onion.

7 November 2015
Belfast Giants 3 vs. Nottingham Panthers 4 (Loss)
National Ice Centre (Nottingham)

8 November 2015
Belfast Giants 2 vs. Manchester Storm 1 (Shootout Win)
Altrincham Ice Dome (Manchester)

It warrants mention that Rangers, also used as a symbol of difference between the brothers mentioned earlier, were regularly used as an example of the opposite of the Belfast Giants, where instead of being founded on neutrality they represent the intersection of sectarianism and sport (Giulianotti and Gerard, 2001). Sport in Northern Ireland is heavily connected to this Scottish sectarian football rivalry, which sees Rangers heavily supported by Protestant populations, and their rival Celtic heavily supported by Catholic populations (Kelly, 2010). This football rivalry has a long connection to two dominant social identities – ethno-sectarian community membership and being a football supporter – both of which reinforce ingroup/outgroup dynamics that manifest themselves in conflict (Brewer, 2001). At the ice hockey game, this woman seemed right at home clad in her Giants jersey amongst fellow Giants supporters, a fan experience that would no doubt be very different than the way she would participate as a fan at Ibrox Stadium, the home of Rangers. The layers of clothing this woman displayed are an example of the simultaneousness and complexity of social identity. Social identity recognises that a person may act differently in different social settings dependent on the group in which they find themselves (Reicher, Spears and Haslam, 2011). This example offers challenge to the notion of the hockey family as singularly post-Troubles.

It also warrants noting that as I sat amongst the Giants fans in Nottingham and Manchester over two nights the woman highlighted above proved to be one of the biggest supporters there, and had clearly been for a long time, with her knowledge of the team and friendly relationships with other Giants fans that sat around us. This

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44 The work of Back, Crabbe and Solomos (2001) offers a nuanced understanding of football tribalism and racism – highlighting the way that difference is exemplified in and amongst supporter communities.
woman does not stand out as an outlier, either. There were games I sat next to supporters of Cliftonville (a local Catholic football club) or those who commented about how they enjoyed taking part in the parades on the Twelfth. At one game (5 December 2015) I took part in the chuck-a-puck, and when I threw my puck competently from the upper regions of the arena it was commented to me that I could be useful come July – implying my throwing ability would be an asset in the skirmishes that occur around the parading on the Twelfth. Such a comment lends support to the multi-layered nature of identities within the hockey family. In being able to sit side-by-side ethno-sectarian (and other) differences, the uniqueness of the hockey family in Belfast is made clear. These differences and the diversity within the arena challenge a social capital framework, as Putnam (2007) acknowledged increased diversity threatens the construction of social capital. In this way, what is occurring within the ice hockey community may not translate to the wider civic participation that Putnam prioritises, and it may not institute wider social change; however, it is offering a shift beyond the dualistic identity constructions of wider Belfast and constructing a shared identity that aids in the removing of this primary “obstacle to increased inter-ethnic contact” (Hughes, Campbell and Jenkins, 2010: 983). Returning to the analytical framework, associating with the hockey family identity has some implicit influences, including tolerance and to a lesser degree trust. Such characteristics highlight the lowered levels of prejudice and anxiety around interactions that occur at hockey games, even if, as this chapter has illustrated, the Giants supporters do not exist within a bubble, and the SSE Arena is not a place for only the sacred, unaffected of Northern Ireland.

Identifiability

III

“Religion’s never mentioned here”, of course.
“You know them by their eyes,” and hold your tongue.
One side’s as bad as the other,” never worse.
Christ, it’s near time that some small leak was sprung

In the great dykes the Dutchman made
To dam the dangerous tide that followed Seamus.
Yet for all this art and sedentary trade

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45 The 12th of July in Northern Ireland is the Protestant celebration of King William of Orange over Catholic King James II at the Battle of Boyne in 1690.
46 This also demonstrates the humour of those I interviewed towards their own multiple and conflicting identities!
I am incapable. The famous
Northern reticence, the tight gag of place
And times: yes, yes. Of the “wee six” I sing
Where to be saved you only must save face
And whatever you say, you say nothing.

Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us:
Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,
Subtle discrimination by addresses
With hardly an exception to the rule
That Norman, Ken and Sidney signalled Prod
And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape.
O land of password, handgrip, wink and nod,
Of open minds as open as a trap,

Where tongues lie coiled, as under flames lie wicks,
Where half of us, in a wooden horse
Were cabin’s and confined like wily Greeks,
Besieged within the siege, whispering morse.

“Whatever You Say. Say Nothing”
Seamus Heaney (1975)

In his famous poem, Heaney draws attention to the role of identifying the other as a central, and often silent, element of interaction and contact in the Northern Irish context. Identity as a focal point of interaction, like that described by Heaney, was highlighted by Goffman (1956), who recognised that people ‘perform’ as actors, noting particularly the front stage and back stage behaviour. Goffman’s work links to civility, as noted in Chapter 5, where on the front stage in public settings the actor is aware of being observed by an audience and thus follows rules and social conventions that overarch the interaction, whereas backstage, in private settings, behaviour offers something different and unmasked, as performance is not necessary. The two dominant groups in Northern Ireland, which are rife with stereotype and manufactured expectation of the other, offer strong support to the observation that an individual’s identity and action is strongly influenced by what is expected from being a member of a social group (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Heaney highlights that the actor is never fully masked in Northern Ireland, noting ‘you know them by their eyes’. Although this particular identifier may be a stretch, this identifiability was reinforced in my interview with Kris Brown (2015), Lecturer in Politics at University of Ulster. He underlined the centrality of social identification on community lines, explaining:
“…people sift information very sneakily, almost unconsciously about what community background they have and this is done simply not as a defence mechanism, it can also be done out of politeness – you don’t want to say something in mixed company which would be seen as untoward, so you want to be sure you’re not going to offend someone. It’s about discerning how freely you can talk to someone. So if it isn’t acquired from their name, sometimes it can be, the information you fish for is where they live or what school they went to …how someone pronounces the letter H – Aich (H) will almost automatically prescribe to me a Protestant identity and saying Haych (H) is about 90% accurate actually in ascribing Catholic identity because of our segregated schools … these processes of telling are old and we’ve got them down to a fine art.”

From my position as a non-native researcher, the routine of seeking to know who one is in the company of was not as obvious at Giants games as it was in other parts of Northern Ireland. The Giants and the spectacle they provide for an evening draws attention and lessens the direct social contact that occurs in the arena, a setup that limits the space for sectarian scoping of ‘the other’. This, combined with the clear territorial marking as a setting that is open to everyone, means that the participants in this space, the members of the hockey family, enter the SSE with the knowledge that they are in mixed company. The act of having a shared interest, as noted earlier, also challenges the embeddedness of looking for difference – whether seated side-by-side, or at a community-based team function. The excerpt from my field journal (below) identifies the role of common interest as being something that distracts from the value of these identifiers.

He noted that the first question is always to find out which side you are on. It can be as simple as asking where you are from in Belfast. When he goes to Linfield (he has season tickets) he knows who he is with. When it comes to hockey he has not got a clue. He has gone to games for years with his wife and daughter and they are friendly with everyone around them because it is the same people with their season tickets. After their third season he and his wife were talking and she pointed out that these people they have spent so much time with, she didn’t necessarily know if they were Catholic or Protestant. He said he didn’t even care about his new friends’ ethno-sectarian identities, even though admittedly he likes to know. He figured that is what being a hockey fan does to you, as you become a part of its community it steals the first question and gives everyone something else to talk about.

16 October 2015
Belfast Giants 4 vs. Cardiff Devils 3 (Overtime Win)
Gate 9 Seat Q73
This excerpt warrants a little further placement. It was my experience that many people I encountered in Northern Ireland sift identifying information so naturally, it is so second nature, that they hardly recognise they are doing it. Therefore, for this man to highlight that he is not doing this in this space requires a certain level of intentionality. In a similar manner of intentionality is the Giants branding themselves as identifying across division. The quick visual ethno-sectarian identifiers popular elsewhere in Belfast – such as O’Neill’s GAA shirts, football jerseys or school jackets and uniforms – are not openly present in the SSE Arena; the SSE house rules require that fans are only permitted to wear hockey colours in the arena (SSE Arena, 2016). In this way, taking on the characteristics of social groups has become a big part of generating an identity that differentiates itself from the less-than-subtle primary identifiers in Belfast. The oft-binary nature of identifiers in wider Belfast is challenged within the arena, where one is greeted by ice hockey jerseys that have no significant standing in Northern Irish history.

*The Jersey*

“There are other clubs across different sports where if you wear the shirt people will make assumptions about you, rightly or wrongly, but there will be certain connotations about where you are from geographically, what your backgrounds is, what your politics might be, what your religion is going to be. You wear a Giants shirt people know you are a hockey fan – that’s it.”

Victoria Stevely
Sports Reporter – UTV, Belfast

As a tool of social identification, large teal shirts covered in corporate advertisements certainly have a way of classifying you as a member of a distinct social group, while also creating an ambiguous identifier that stands outside of the identity pigeon-holing occurring in other settings. The jersey, as the first point of reference, challenges some of the more obvious identifiers of what community a person belongs to, and identifies the wearer as part of the hockey family. When walking into the SSE Arena, the first thing that one, particularly one who is new to the Giants, notices is that people are not necessarily dressed the same way that they would be outside the arena. The building is awash with teal, white and black Belfast Giants hockey jerseys. The team wears the teal for games in Belfast, the white for away games, and the black jerseys for Challenge Cup
The number of jerseys on supporters in Belfast is remarkable when compared with hockey games I have attended in Canada. When I asked players and management (Nickerson, 2015; Thornton, 2015) if they had ever been a part of a hockey team with so many jerseys in the stands, the consensus was that the jersey here was very much integrated into the experience.

![Figure 16: Belfast Giants jerseys from 2015-2016 season](image)

Teal – home
White – away
Black – Challenge Cup
(photo by author, 2015)

The prevalence of the Giants jersey amongst the supporters was matched by the reverence with which it was often held. There are multiple examples to this veneration; the first of these is seen at each game when one player is identified for the ‘Shirt Off The Back’ promotion. For this activity, supporters buy raffle tickets, and at the end of the match, after the teams shake hands and the ‘Man of the Match’ is named, the winner of the raffle goes out on the ice and the player takes off his jersey and gives it to the winner. This is always accompanied by cheers, whistles, and catcalls at the player being stripped of his shirt with his hockey equipment and undershirt on display. A second form of reverence can be seen in the way that Giants jerseys are shared, sold, or traded. The online forums – Facebook groups, eBay, etc. – have jerseys for sale or trade regularly. The informal market of jerseys is only bested by the sales made by Kukri, the team sponsor and jersey supplier. Each winter, Kukri opens a seasonal shop in the

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47 The Challenge Cup is a tournament that runs throughout the EIHL ice hockey season, not unlike the FA Cup in English Football.
central Belfast Victoria shopping plaza, featuring Giants and Ulster rugby uniforms, memorabilia, and general team-branded knick-knacks.\textsuperscript{48} Crawford’s (2004) work on consumption and being a sports fan highlights the way ties between the leisure activities of watching sports and shopping, with particular focus on memorabilia. The intertwining of these acts is seen in the way that’s each season the team gets new jerseys, with a slight difference in design or the addition of new sponsors – these are very much a must-have for many fans each season.

The third way that the jersey is revered is highlighted in the field journal entry below:

\textit{It was really hot in the arena at the game. At some point in the second period it became a topic of conversation with fans throughout the section I was sitting in. We were in the second to top row, so any coolness from the ice was not noticeable here. The woman I was sitting beside was clearly uncomfortable and when she couldn’t handle the temperature any longer she asked aloud to everyone and no one in particular, “Would it be alright if I took my jersey off?”}

\textit{Nobody said anything notable in response, but it was that she felt the need to ask the question, the way that removing it could be conceived of as a slight against others or the team, that was so interesting.}

17 October 2015
Belfast Giants 2 vs. Cardiff Devils 3 (Loss)
Gate 19 – X39

The regard with which this woman held her jersey, and the value in wearing it, had her question taking it off. In many ways, the loyalty to the shirt reaches beyond any adoration of the colour teal, or an affinity for Stena Line ferries (the team’s biggest sponsor). It is what it symbolises: it identifies the person wearing it as a pledged member of the hockey family.

The jersey also provides a strong example of how far from outside identifiers the hockey arena is. It is commonplace to see jerseys of other hockey teams, usually from the National Hockey League (NHL), the top league in North America. One of the NHL’s most popular franchises is the New York Rangers, whose jersey is blue, white and red with the word RANGERS cut across the front (seen in Figure 17). These

\textsuperscript{48} The Kukri shop sells an incredible amount of Giant branded products -- from ballpoint pens and bumper stickers to capes and golf ball sets -- see: https://www.belfastgiants.kukrisports.com/teamshop/belfastgiantsshop (April 2018).
colours and the team name would seemingly offer the opportunity to observe the ‘hockey colours only’ policy and make a political statement – a loophole in the rules for the wearer to identify with the Protestant community, based on colours of the Union Jack and a team name the same as the Glasgow-based football team. However, the ‘it’s just hockey’ convention was clearly displayed when I asked about the acceptance of this jersey at Giants games. I was told that this shirt did not necessarily mean anything – it was a hockey team from New York. In one side-by-side interview (27 November 2015), I queried a woman who identified as Catholic about the Rangers jersey. She warned me not to make any assumptions, as the Rangers were her favourite NHL hockey team. Such an assertion exemplifies the contrasting identity that the Giants have carved out in a city and culture that seeks to politicise the way the letter ‘H’ is pronounced.

One further observation was the lack of visibility that the Giants jersey had in wider Belfast. I did not see the jersey with regularity in the city centre or near Queen’s University where I lived during my fieldwork, meaning that for the most part the jersey is not one that is normalised against the wider backdrop of Belfast. The jersey is an identifier that is mainly worn by active members of the group, within the designated space of the SSE. In fact, it was common to see people remove their jerseys as they crossed the street to the car park after games. I did not query why people chose not to wear them in wider settings, only donning them when attending team events; however, this points to a number of possible factors. People may only be comfortable wearing this jersey in this setting because, as noted previously, there exists in some corners of wider
Belfast a sense that Giants fans are weak, for avoiding sectarianism. The jersey also offers an easy mechanism of identifying one with the group identity of the arena, as well as giving the opportunity to show respect to a favourite player with the name and number printed on the back – not to mention that the older the jersey (they change each season) the longer you would appear to have been a fan. At a wider level, people may not wear their jerseys outside of the arena simply because the team has yet to reach the mainstream level of popularity like that of Liverpool FC or Manchester United. The activity continues to be niche in its draw; however, a lack of teal around the city has not necessarily impacted its symbolism or recognition – everyone I met and spoke to in Belfast was aware of the Giants and their colours and logo. Having been gifted a jersey by my partner, it also warrants acknowledgement that this article of clothing is not one easily worn in an everyday setting, as it is a large, ill-fitting, and brightly coloured piece of clothing.

Returning to the words of Heaney, in particular his line, “O land of password, handgrip, wink and nod”, conjures images of knowing and categorically, yet subtly, situating one’s self and one’s social identity in the presence of one’s own and amongst the other. The routine of this social dance was very much confirmed by those I met and interacted with in all areas of Belfast, but it was also seemingly challenged by a group of 4,500 people sitting side-by-side one another, a great deal of them in bright teal jerseys, cheering for a sport with no significant history for either ‘us’ nor ‘them’. It is not my argument here that people attempt to bury their identities when in the SSE Arena, they just do not carry the same value in the interactions here as they might in other places.

In 2015, I was in the audience of a conference panel focused on Northern Ireland at which Faye Donnelly (2015) presented her paper ‘Raising the flag as a contested security emblem in N. Ireland and beyond’. She concluded her discussion of flags as identifiers with a reminder that materially a flag is a piece of cloth tied to a pole; it is the social, cultural and national connections to the identity of the flag which gives the cloth its meaning.49 Likewise, the jersey is a thin piece of cloth that people use to express a Giants identity; the example of the woman whose jersey covered her Rangers FC sweater demonstrates this cloth identifies the wearer as a hockey fan regardless of what

49 Donnelly’s arguments find support in Billig’s (1995) notion of ‘banal nationalism’, which focuses on mundane and everyday reminders of national identity. In this way materials and language reproduce national identity in often unnoticed ways.
is underneath. The hockey family offers something unique in that if you are a hockey fan you are welcome as part of this social group, even if, as Heaney notes, “you know them by their eyes”, there is seemingly an acceptance based on their shirt.

**Conclusion**

This social group, with a shared interest in the Giants at its core, displays a capacity for constructing relationships when the wider narrative shifts from an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ mentality to that of belonging to a similar group. In this way, the hockey family offers support to Allport (1954), who notes that shared interests are integral to deconstructing division. Anxiety, outlined as a thematic guidepost for this research in the analytical framework, is a clearly identified contributor to avoidance and protracted division, and as noted previously, anxiety levels rise in divided societies in situations where intergroup contact is occurring or expected to occur (Binder et al., 2009). Such a supposition suggests that in Belfast, where sectarianism permeates and guides the everyday, high levels of intergroup anxiety are part of unscripted interactions with the other. Maya-Jariego and Armitage (2007) conclude that an individual’s involvement in new groups/communities lessens their dependence on entrenched and strong social identities. Any anxiety or prejudice that can be associated with interacting with people across a long-standing division was not seen in the arena. There were only civil, public displays of tolerance, and I believe this is rooted in the fact that what is taking place in the arena is so normal, so everyday. There was no fanfare, no overarching expectation or need to pretend to be someone else in this unique social group. Intergroup anxiety was dispersed by the diversity of, identifiability with, and accessibility to this group, and was further supported by the fact that something as innocuous as a hockey game was the reason for getting together.

This chapter’s discussion of the hockey family as a distinct social group offers support to revisiting the concept of social capital. There has clearly emerged a sense of community that spans the arena between regular fans and into online forums where virtual interaction occurs across locations. The openness, heterogeneity and salience of the hockey family are a contrast to other social groups in Belfast; however, it is also these traits that give it softened standing as far as wider social recognition. The hockey family could be seen as trending towards a bonding social capital, albeit a porous one, that does not have a strong visible presence outside of game nights in wider Belfast –
with the example of the jersey being taken off on the way to the car as a sign of this. However, the hockey family clearly connects people across previously entrenched and established social groups, which aligns with bridging social capital. The issue with both of these categorisations of social capital is that the impact of this contact is occurring in an inherently personal way. Lowered levels of anxiety and prejudice, and changes in tolerance and behaviour, have occurred at the interpersonal level – the construction of relationships like that of Patty and Davy give example to this. As the hockey family is a group where relationships are realised, there is an opportunity in the arena for relationships to be constructed across division and between those sitting alongside one another. Social capital theory sees such a group as having potential for a shift towards cooperation, but as Northern Ireland continues to wait for any shifts to happen, those who see themselves as humble ‘placeholders’ can enjoy the normalcy of a hockey game together.
Chapter 9

‘Kingdom of the Giants’:
The SSE Arena as a space of sanctuary and resistance

Introduction

The research of this PhD was conducted with a two-pronged agenda, identified by the guiding research questions – seeking to both learn what is happening within the SSE Arena at and around Belfast Giants games, as well as to understand what the experience of supporting ice hockey in Belfast means beyond the arena within the wider divided setting. Where the previous chapter, the Hockey Family, constructed a deepened understanding of the dynamics of the ice hockey supporter identity, this chapter, entitled Kingdom of the Giants, widens the scope to better understand what the Belfast Giants have come to represent within the city. The thematic guideposts of the analytical framework note space as a core subject in the research of this thesis. Much like the previous chapter which used identity to discuss prejudice, anxiety, tolerance and trust, this chapter brings these four thematic guideposts together under the idea of space in better understanding the SSE Arena. Although the inquiries are intertwined across chapters and thematic areas, this chapter constructs an understanding of what the supporter community and the arena embodies beyond the walls of the arena.

In spending the winter immersed within the Giants’ supporter community, I was able to engage with many of the fans repeatedly, often catching up and casually chatting in the arena lobby or around McCool’s following a game. After a couple months of being amongst fellow supporters, I had a pretty good idea of how my interactions would go and what these ‘felt’ like. In contrast, the research I conducted beyond the arena was varied, with a wide collection of opinions gathered, often depending on where I was in the city, who I was with, the institutional affiliation and the formality of the questions I was asking. For example, in the stands at a Linfield football match, the opinion on the Giants was that of an imposed presence taking funding from ‘real’ sports, like football. Yet, when interviewing cross-community organisations that have taken ‘at-risk’ youth

Kingdom of the Giants is the website which serves as an online community for Giants fans including Patty and Davy’s podcast ‘A View from the Bridge’ (see: http://www.kingdomofthegiants.com/).
to Giants games, the responses to my questions were met with a tone of appreciation, no matter how many times I clarified that I was not an employee of the team. For the most part, I can posit that the thoughts and attitudes that exist at a wider community level towards and about the Giants are best represented on a spectrum, demonstrated by answers to my interview questions registering from affection to general ambivalence to downright animosity. What did emerge across class, setting, and interview format was an acknowledgement that the Giants are more than a passing phenomenon, and have become a fixture of the social and sporting landscape of Belfast. Further, through the hockey family, highlighted in the previous chapter, the social group that comes together has done so despite different beliefs, classes, religious beliefs, or sectarian understandings, underlining a sense of unlikelihood in the encounters. One thing that I take away from this social construction is that the people make the space, and although they remove jerseys in the carpark after the games and are not overtly visible throughout Belfast, they also take what they experience in the SSE Arena with them when they leave. This chapter focuses on two distinct themes – sanctuary and resistance – that came out of my research as I asked questions in different corners of Belfast about the Giants organisation and the SSE Arena about what such a space means. These themes demonstrate the interrelatedness between the spaces that ice hockey occupies in Belfast and the actions that emerge within.

Much like the themes of shared interest, diversity and identifiability that emerged in the hockey family chapter, the themes of sanctuary and resistance emerge from the field research and are supported by the concepts of social capital, intergroup contact and civility. The thematic guidepost of space offers an operational means from which to draw this together. Sanctuary, a term that has historically described the offering of protection from external influences and threats (Bagelman, 2016), gives structure to discussion about how territory is marked within the city and within the arena; how participants are filtered based on moderating visible extreme beliefs and consumerist conduct; and finally, how such space offers a temporary pause from routine and the suspension of division.

Resistance is framed more specifically by the context-specific cross-community association and the intergroup contact that is occurring within the arena in a place where such integration is not yet normalised. In doing so, this theme posits that Giants supporters are performing an act/movement of resistance in the SSE Arena. This section
discusses the manner in which attending a Giants game offers resistance to both the expectations of social division intimately tied to everyday life in Belfast, but also to the liberal peace interventions occurring in post-peace agreement Northern Ireland. It is through the understanding of the hockey arena as a site of lowered anxiety and prejudice, with higher levels of trust and tolerance – as highlighted in the hockey family – that the notion of everyday resistance is realised and seen in the SSE Arena. This chapter does not view sanctuary and resistance as two separate entities, but as tied together through defying separation, nationalism, and sectarianism as the only options in Belfast.

Sanctuary

The theme of sanctuary arose out of the research through the notion that a specific space can offer, or perceive to offer, freedom from constraints of political, legal, religious or social arrangements that exist outside its ‘walls’. This theme emerged through my questioning about what the SSE Arena, as well as the hockey family within it, represented against the backdrop of present-day Belfast. As a theme, sanctuary emerged from the research questions, responses, and observations that sought to contextualise and better understand the significance of this shared space. As the SSE Arena is being framed as a sanctuary in this section, it also warrants recognition that the contextual and conceptual chapters earlier in this thesis presented a great number of divisive traits that the arena is a sanctuary from; these include but are not limited to: prejudice, intolerance, single-identity social networks, mistrust, and power imbalances.

The term sanctuary has a long history in the Christian theological tradition. Within this sphere, sanctuary is represented in the church or tabernacle, or in a ‘city of sanctuary’, as a space that offers refuge and safety without discrimination (Villazor, 2008). This understanding of sanctuary meant that these marked spaces gave refuge to criminals, revolutionaries or the destitute, and were recognised as off limits to the business of the marketplace, the reach of state policing and governance, and were a place to bring disputes from outside (Meens, 2007). The condition was that this sanctuary had a time limit attached to it, generally offering refuge until a resolution could be negotiated.

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51 Walls can be metaphorical in this case; however, Bagelman (2016) highlights that there remains “the suggestion that sanctuary was, originally, territorially fixed. Sanctuary, from the beginning, tends to be understood as an enclosed, fixed and contained practice” (22).
between those seeking safety and those from whom they were seeking refuge (Baker, 1990).

In more recent years, sanctuary has been used primarily within the context of programming focused on refugee and asylum seekers in the Western world. The modern sanctuary movement emerged in the 1980s in America as a response from Christian groups to the growing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers (Villazor, 2008). Widely, this movement aimed to give a place of shelter to individuals and families from a political and legal framework that systemically sought to keep people in neat little state-identified boxes. In the years since this movement emerged, it has changed and spread through the USA, Canada and United Kingdom from churches to cities, where denominational and municipal interest has sought to challenge political and social rhetoric of ‘us’ and ‘them’ thinking (Patsias and Williams, 2013). As sanctuary practices have evolved, so too has academic literature on the subject, with legal studies focusing on the immigration framework and urban and political geography leading discussion towards understanding themes of welcome and openness to difference (Darling, 2014). Within peace-focused literature, Mitchell and Hancock (2007) place the concept into the context of peace zones, where Mitchell noted the connection is “a place where certain individuals, communities, or categories of people can go to be safe from those who would otherwise harm them, usually through the use of violence” (2).

Within Belfast, sanctuary would not be a relevant theme in a setting free from division, or if the SSE Arena were a single-identity space – just as this theme would be irrelevant if the arena did not offer patterns of interaction and a level of civility that differed from other parts of Belfast. As noted in the Hockey Family chapter (Chapter 8), people attending Giants games are familiar with spaces in the city which offer much more divided rhetoric, behaviours and interactions. Thus, in the discussion of the SSE Arena as a sanctuary, three discourse-relevant discussion points emerged from my fieldwork. The first of these is as a clearly marked territory. The SSE Arena, as well as the wider Titanic Quarter, represents a distinctly identified space, which, through policy and social arrangement, differentiates itself from social norms and divisive rhetoric normalised in other areas of the city. The second theme discussed in this section is the limits of welcome. The Giants, though constructed on a modus operandi of all being welcomed, oversee a filtering that ultimately decides who is included and what views or opinions must be tempered for the right of access. The space, however, is something
which cannot be lived in continuously, and this temporality gives way to the third theme of sanctuary that arose from my fieldwork, which is the way in which the Giants and the SSE Arena provide a means of giving pause to usual activity, routines, and social norms and roles. The concept of sanctuary pulls these themes together, as it is through the space, the rules of welcome, and the accompanying pause that relationships “which are not always already imbued with traces of domination but are continuously open to challenge” can potentially occur (Darling and Squire, 2013: 191).

**Giants Territory**

The idea of sanctuary as focused on the clearly marked territory around the Giants is further developed into three categories. The first examines how the ice hockey arena is distinguished as a setting of sanctuary, and the second expands in scope to address the Titanic Quarter, which surrounds the SSE Arena. Following discussion of these two spaces, the third section utilises a Giants-themed mural on Lord Street in East Belfast as an example of understanding and interpreting the ‘hockey sanctuary’ within the city.

**Dundonald International Ice Bowl**

There are two sites for ice hockey in Belfast, one where the sport is played by ordinary people and one where the sport is watched by ordinary people. The Dundonald International Ice Bowl has been the city’s primary home for participation in ice hockey, figure skating and public skating since it opened in 1986 (Dundonald International Ice Bowl, 2017). The ‘Dundonald’ and its accompanying entertainment facilities – bowling alley and kids’ play-land – are located in a primarily unionist neighbourhood in an eastern part of the city. The constituency profile for Belfast East highlights that in 2011 the region had a 75.4% Protestant population, and a 12.7% Catholic population (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2013).

As I travelled to meet Belfast Giants players after their practices here, I observed that the route to this arena via public transit was through territorialised areas of the city, with flags, banners, and murals making clear that this area of Belfast was not presented as a shared space, reiterating what was noted in Chapter 2 – that residential segregation is a significant feature of everyday life in Belfast. Getting to this arena is challenged not only by crossing clear and uninviting indicators of territory, but also because one does not just pass through en route to a neutral destination; at the Dundonald the flags of the
Union Jack and the red hand of Ulster greet you in front of the building, and the red, white and blue colour scheme has been further utilised at the entrance, as seen in the stock photo used by both The Irish News and Belfast Telegraph (Figure 18).

Figure 18: The entrance to the Dundonald International Ice Bowl – Red, White and Blue (The Irish News, 2016; Belfast Telegraph, 2014)

Once in the actual arena, one could be in a hockey arena anywhere in the world – the cold air, the smells of musty equipment, the terrible canteen coffee all immediately brought me back to a place of my childhood in Canada. Having made these observations of both difference and familiarity, I interviewed Rob Stewart (2016), who organises the Junior Giants, the children’s participative ice hockey programme. He underlined that participation in children’s hockey bridges across communities based on interest; however, the location of the arena in the city was an obstacle to growing interest in the game. This observation by Stewart highlights Allport’s (1954) condition of the contact hypothesis requiring support from authorities. The authoritative structures, be they the governing powers in Belfast East at council and regional level, or the social authorities

52 The Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (where Dundonald is represented) has 39 councillors; 30 are from historically unionist parties – Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), and the Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) (see: https://www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/council/elected-
which have constructed an environment that I observed throughout Belfast as intentionally and often aggressively marked territories, are not welcoming to nationalist participation. The Junior Giants ice hockey programming may seek to create an inclusive environment within the confines of ‘the Dundonald’; however, the supported construction of an unwelcome environment impacts everyday movements, let alone the stopping, staying, and participating in shared activities in a place on the other side of an ethno-sectarian divide (Hamilton et al., 2008).

**Titanic Quarter and the SSE Arena**

The Giants offer a different experience for hockey fans than the one experienced by hockey players whose destination is ‘the Dundonald’. The SSE Arena offers a space that is not territorialised in the same way. At a wider geographical level, the SSE (and the larger Odyssey Complex) is located in the Titanic Quarter, a key development in the city’s post-Good Friday Agreement landmark regeneration effort. Carved out of the shipyards where the famous Titanic was constructed, the area – particularly the Titanic Museum – has been manufactured to act as a hub for tourism, education, knowledge, entertainment, and creative economies that is planned and designed for utilisation by both ethno-sectarian communities (Etchart, 2008). It warrants noting that the SSE Arena is much more than a hockey arena, acting as a purposeful and regularly used venue for musicians, comedians, boxing matches, and professional wrestling. During the Union for European Football Associations (UEFA) championships in the summer of 2016, Northern Ireland took part for the first time. As a means of creating a fan zone for those interested in watching the matches on large screens and partying with fellow fans, the Irish Football Association (IFA), who govern Northern Ireland Football, utilised the car park of the Odyssey Complex as a site for these festivities. The home ground of the Northern Ireland football team, Windsor Park, did not have the capacity or the ability to offer a shared space that welcomed across division. In football, the nationalist community historically supports Republic of Ireland, but part of the reason for this is that historically Northern Ireland has not been a good team, rarely qualifying for any tournaments of note. This carpark allowed people to come together to support the team.

members). The Minister of Parliament for the East Belfast is Gavin Robinson of the DUP (see: https://www.parliament.uk/biographies/commons/gavin-robinson/4360).
The wider Titanic Quarter represents a re-development site in Belfast. A colleague in the PhD programme at University of Manchester, Robert Schulz (2017), recognises the Titanic Quarter as “Representing an idealised image of the Belfast shipyards where the Titanic was built a hundred years ago and thereby sidelining controversial issues, i.e. not engaging with the ethnonational divisions of the past, made it possible to create a shared space, physically and ideologically” (20). As a public-private initiative, Titanic Quarter follows a very neoliberal model in its construction, as it seeks to draw in investment to and for the city (Kelly, 2012; Muir, 2014b). This fits into Atkinson, Cooke, and Spooner’s (2010) description of place-marketing and the modern city, which they describe as “a site of cleanliness, leisure and consumption, but one marked by distinctive historic buildings or quarters, notable leisure or sporting facilities, or natural features or landscapes” (27). In such place-making there is clear avoidance of the past, and in many ways the wider issues of the present, by not greatly contributing to socio-economic struggles within the impoverished single-community neighbourhoods that sit only down the street (Schulz, 2017). My observations of walking through Belfast confirm that there are very different settings side-by-side one another, and the Titanic Quarter and the neighbourhoods of East Belfast offer one of the more drastic transitions of shared and single-identity spaces. The dramatic differences of this private-public partnership development can be seen in the advertisement highlighted in Figure 19.

There are a number of problems with private involvement in the Titanic Quarter, including the production of memorial sites by private, profit-seeking actors (Schulz, 2017), as well as concerns of creating a ‘city within the city’ highlighted by reinforcing and reaffirming that there are single space areas and shared areas, rather than a more integrated development approach (Gaffikin and Morrisey, 2011). However, this arrangement also in some ways removes the state from the space, and in Northern Ireland much of the conflict is based on either the defence of, or undermining of, the state. Seemingly in this section of the city, the support for intergroup contact (highlighted by Allport) is less reliant on state support; instead support has been generated, as it has been realised by the private investment dictating this quarter of Belfast that shared space is more profitable.
The SSE Arena during Giants games is further territorialised within the Titanic Quarter, with even less connection to the historically divided territories of Belfast. The wider reputation of the Giants is that of something different, whether in the sport they play or in revolutionising the way that sport is consumed in Northern Ireland (or Ireland).

The particular territorial construction of the hockey arena experience is manufactured to avoid disputed markers, with the city of Belfast itself being a central rallying point for the Belfast Giants. The Giants stand alone in name; there are no other professional sports clubs that carry the name Belfast. The football teams in Belfast are all neighbourhood-situated (Linfield, Cliftonville, Glentoran, etc.). Ulster Rugby takes its name from the four provinces of Ireland, and Gaelic athletics are parish-based and thus named correspondingly. Although the city of Belfast is constructed of neighbourhoods and areas that move from militantly single-space segregation to shared and integrated, the wider city name is not disputed in any of these neighbourhoods. This is notable because Northern Ireland’s second largest city, Derry/Londonderry, carries a name disputed across dividing lines. In contrast, the Giants have rallied around the image and name of Belfast. As you enter the arena, you are greeted by the large, full-end banner that hangs over the ice, which reads: This is Belfast. We are Giants (Figure 20). Such a sign says a great deal about the Giants being a product of the whole city through two simply stated facts – This is Belfast. We are Giants.

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53 Ulster being the province that includes the six counties of Northern Ireland.
Territorial markings that emphasise commonality instead of difference extend beyond the cityscape to encompass a regional focus. The choice of name (Giants) and mascot (Finn McCool, the mythical Irish giant whose nemesis is the giant Bennadonner, who lives across the sea in Scotland), does not evoke any division; rather they are associated with a shared myth and the tourist site, Giant’s Causeway (Mulraney, 2016). These symbols help generate an environment of familiarity, while also building a separate identity away from the oft-binary engagement of wider Belfast, fitting of the sanctuary framework which I am applying to the hockey arena. A study of intergroup contact between Polish and Jewish students by Bilewicz (2007) highlighted positive intergroup relations around present day interactions; however, when the past of the two groups was introduced there were less positive outgroup attitudes and a lessened perceived similarity between the groups. This study exemplifies the role of history in divided societies – and the Giants have been able to avoid the pitfalls of introducing history to the cross-community relationships occurring within the SSE Arena. The territorial markings, branding around undisputed shared history, and the sport itself make generating a sanctuary possible. Within both zones of peace and cities of sanctuary ideologies, the theme of a clearly marked space of welcome is foundational,\(^{54}\) and the

\(^{54}\) The role of welcome and sanctuary is discussed by Richard Williams (2018) on the ‘Standing with Refugees’ podcast - https://www.refugeesupport.eu/richard-williams-welcome-and-sanctuary-podcast/
Giants utilise this in the delivery of their product by avoiding the things that might be objectionable – no small order in a place where division impacts so much of everyday life.

**Lord Street Mural**

*The mural with the Giants is a pretty big deal. It might seem like just some painting on the side of a house but people don’t like giving up those pictures of old heroes or groups.*

Andrew Dickson
Belfast Giants Goaltender

![Mural](image1.png)

**Figure 21: Ulster Defence Association (UDA) Mural on Lord Street**
*(Extramural Activity, 2013)*

**Figure 22: Belfast Giants Mural painted over UDA Mural – February 2016**
*(Photograph by author, 2016)*

The SSE Arena and Titanic Quarter are controlled environments in a different manner than the more sectarianised parts of Belfast, offering a site of sanctuary from divisive rhetoric; however, the question of the Giants’ place in wider Belfast is an important part of this research. My research, primarily conducted within the arena, found that the activity and this space matters deeply to those who choose to participate in it; however,

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55 Andrew Dickson is the only player on the Belfast Giants born in Northern Ireland. The EIHL Rules stipulate that the teams must have a roster of 19 players, 14 of which can be ‘import’ players. The remaining five players on any given night must be ‘UK-trained’ citizens of Great Britain.
limitations in the scope of my approach make it difficult to assert any bold and widely encompassing statements about how the arena and team are received on a broader level. That said, one clear indicator that this territory is relevant in wider Belfast can be seen in the unveiling of a Giants mural on Lord Street in November 2015.

On 18 February I conducted a walking interview through the Lord Street neighbourhood with Gareth Beacom (2016), the Young Emerging Leaders Project Coordinator for Charter NI.56 A neighbourhood deeply affected by sectarianism, drugs, and high rates of unemployment, the Lord Street area has been seeking to change its reputation. I will use four excerpts from my walk with Gareth as a means of understanding the process for such change, as well as to show how the Giants’ reputation extends beyond the confines of the SSE Arena.

GB: The story is, whether it’s true, but the local pub here would have been a UDA pub, a pub where UDA people would have drunk, still do, obviously, but it’s not as bad now as it was before. But these murals, the guy was painting the murals and fell out with the guy that run the pub, who’d said I’m not paying for the murals. So they just left, half done and they have been left like that for 15 years. So they really did need this … we did have to work with them [the UDA]. There was a lot of meetings in smoky rooms, trying to get these things sorted out. Let’s say from the leadership end – the organisation was wanting change, wanting to move forward. It was just getting the foot soldiers in and talking to them and convincing the main rung of people at the bottom – that’s what we needed to do. ***

GB: Murals are pretty close to the heart for a lot of people in Northern Ireland. Half of the people like that are very close to people, so when we were saying to people about bringing the mural down – people were like why are you taking our history, that is our history, why are you taking that away? So we had a lot of talking to do with a lot of people to get to this stage, we had to take them away for a day bring them into the rooms and say this is what we are thinking. What are you thinking? I don’t believe we should wipe away all the murals as well, I think there should be some kept. Gunmen maybe could be changed, but to tell the story. ***

GB: Giants? It has nothing to do with the Giants. Initially with the Giants part was Adam Keefe [captain of the hockey team] came out and showed up to things and he got us a few free tickets for the residents’ group to go down and watch the Giants one night. But there was nothing that happened overly big by the Giants. This was a process we were doing ourselves, it wasn’t about let’s go to the Giants

56 Charter NI is the community organisation at the heart of the Lord Street community’s regeneration efforts (See: http://www.charterni.org/).
and get some money. They [the resident’s group] said we will put this up and see how it goes. So it’s got rave reviews and all that, as far as Canada and America and Australia in terms of on social media, people retweeting it and sharing it and stuff it went wide, which was good. It has gotten a lot of publicity, and publicity for the group so that is good.

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GB: … And I like the slogan to be fair. We are trying to build that from the ground up, from the young people. Kids will go and do cross-community work with the other side and they will be proud of them but once you get into the house bit with their opinions – sectarianism begins in the house and that is where a lot of those opinions come from. A lot of these kids are 4 or 5 years of age are saying kill all Catholics or kill all Protestants. They don’t know! That’s what they have been learned in the house. It is about changing their mindsets. So instead of walking to school past a gunman, now you are walking along saying ‘What’s that there?’ – ‘That’s the Giants.’

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The inclusion of the Giants brand in such a project without the organisation’s direct involvement exemplifies that the Giants have become a consistent part of the city’s post-peace agreement consciousness, but not as a top-down imposition. Particularly symbolic is the physical marking of the team logo and slogan, ‘In the Land of Giants Everyone is Equal’, over an historical emblem of division that is visible in everyday Belfast. It warrants mention that use of the word ‘land’ in the Giants’ slogan is significant, as it highlights a shared territory in a city defined by territorial claims that are not welcoming of the other. In this way the mural’s message is similar to the message of sanctuary for refugees and spaces for peaceful interaction in conflict zones – all seemingly imply a possibility for coexistence. This notion of coexistence is a theme discussed in the civility chapter (Chapter 5), seen through discussion of increased levels of tolerance to difference, as well as lowered levels of prejudice in interactions across divisions. In this way the civility understood through this example of a mural in East Belfast is at the crux of what Ash Amin describes in his discussion on the daily negotiation of urban life as “central in defining the privations, provisions, prejudices and preferences of a very large section of humanity” (2006: 12). The mural represents acknowledgment of the Giants as a safe choice for not perpetuating division against a backdrop where there exists a wide disconnect between private in-home indoctrination, public calls for change, and actual behavioral and attitudinal change in these single-identity spaces. The Giants, within a framework of sanctuary, represent a hopeful
marker of possibility for a ‘web of relationships’ which can include the other that reaches beyond the hockey arena.

Filter

The territorial markings and messages of the Titanic Quarter, the SSE Arena, and the Giants organisation underline an invitation to access shared space. Such an invitation is widely extended; however, the invitation is not necessarily open to everyone – particularly not those unwilling to adhere to social rules and individual actions that demonstrate tolerance across division. Marina Warner (2016) connects sanctuary to exclusion when she refers to sanctuary as an enclave of safety; however, “…every enclave has an outside as well as an inside: boundaries enclose some and exclude others”. As the previous chapter has highlighted, the Giants have a widely diverse crowd, yet there are certain exclusionary principles that contribute to the arena being a sanctuary that offers refuge from some of the harshness of the outside. Two significant ‘filters’ emerge57 - the first highlights the Giants as a consumerist enterprise, specifically designed for those with the financial means to access the space. The second focuses on extreme viewpoints and the structures that have boxed them out of this space.

Consumerism

The thesis findings have not explicitly addressed the consumerist principles on which the Giants are founded; however, the principles of the Titanic Quarter also include the SSE Arena. In reality, the tickets cost money, the jerseys cost money, the car park costs money and in exchange for money the hockey fan receives a product – hopefully one that sees them want to return. Several studies highlight the strong ties between commerce and sports fandom,58 with Nash (2000) highlighting a difference between ‘core’ and ‘corporate’ fans, and Armstrong (2002) noting that the fan as a consumer enables overlooking difference, thus being treated as a homogenous group. Amidst all the consumerism of a match is the Giants organisation, which is on its third ownership group in its 15-year history, having altruistically been saved from financial ruin by Jim Gillespie, and remaining dependent on the Belfast Giants being a successful business.

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57 ‘Filter’ is used here to describe the characteristics which cause separation with regards to accessing the SSE Arena.
58 See: Coakley, 1994; Holt, 1995; Giulianotti, 2002
When my line of questioning trended towards the Giants as a peacebuilding exercise, Kris Brown (2015) offered a reminder of the profit-driven agenda, noting:

“The Giants were not just promoted as a non-sectarian team for the good of Belfast, it was a business move, why halve your potential audience? That fits in with the Odyssey as well though – it’s in East Belfast but it is in this sort of rebuilt area. So why halve your potential consumer base? You market as a post-community to get as many people as possible. That’s what drove it…”

The organisational business plan utilised timing and opportunity to create a business, based on the support of the hockey fans. Along with the early slogans of inclusiveness, the Giants’ business plan would seemingly point to an organisational need to appeal to as many people as possible across the city and region to remain viable. Ice hockey was not a sport with a rich history that would naturally draw potential supporters (customers), thus finding the right appeal was an important part of the Giants’ agenda.

The SSE Arena was at the centre of their draw – a facility of this quality had not been seen in Northern Ireland, and people came to see what both the building and the sport were all about. Jarman and Bell (2012) support the exclusivity of the Titanic Quarter, observing:

“The redevelopment of the docklands area of east Belfast, which has created a new environment with spaces such as the Odyssey leisure complex, has provided a shared space, both for people from the segregated interface areas across the city and for those from middle-class areas. In such spaces people can in some sense become ‘anonymous’ – providing of course they have the means and access to afford the facilities.” (48)

When I asked Odyssey Trust CEO Robert Fitzpatrick (2015) about this business model, with an understanding that these kinds of developments normally receive much criticism,59 he described the team as a tenant to the Odyssey Trust before they took ownership in 2013, noting:

“The Giants and their ownership made a business decision to rent space in Belfast. They rented space and that rental of that space was open to anybody else. Were they given the ice? Were they given the building? No. Have they paid through the nose through the years? Absolutely. They were a tenant and at the end of every year and the start of every season they signed a rental contract and after that it was up to them.”

59 Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez (2002) offer a strong critique in their comparative look at 13 large scale urban development projects in 12 EU countries.
One of my concerns going to Giants games was that I would be participating in a predominantly middle-class activity. This was a concern in large part because middle-class neighbourhoods have historically been mixed/shared spaces, and if this was just a gathering of this social group it would challenge my research motivations – however, my observations and conversations within the arena dismissed this concern. The crowd was described to me by a fellow supporter on 8 November 2015 as an ‘aspirational’ one, and no one I interviewed identified as incredibly well off financially. My interviews showed a range of social classes throughout the arena, with the bulk of the people I sat alongside in the arena working in semi-skilled labour, such as technical support, bookkeeping, or engineering, and were represented by a range of education levels. Those I sat with aligned with Gaffikin and Morrisey’s (1999) observations of the deindustrialisation of Belfast and trend towards service employment. At one game when I was in line to enter the arena, a man was asking around if anyone needed a free ticket; he had been given extra through his work and was willing to give away the extra ticket. The practice of giving away tickets, or reselling them, can also be observed on the Facebook fan forums, which demonstrates a back-channel economy of ticket distribution. For the most part, however, the people attending Giants games have all made a financial choice to be there (for more information on comparable ticket prices in the sporting landscape of Belfast see Figure 14 in Chapter 8). For many of them this is their chosen activity and not necessarily one of many similar initiatives, and for others the Giants game hardly registers in their week.

The different types of fans (consumers) are often given different typologies, where being seen as an ‘authentic’ fan by one’s fellow fans is noticed by sacrifices for the club and not in the consumerism and collection of materials sold by the team (Dixon, 2016; Crawford, 2004). That being said the patterns of consumption are incredibly visible, as seen through the previous discussion around the jersey. The number of studies focused on the consumption of sport has grown with the constant media, advertising, and sponsorships around the act of spectating at a sporting event. Giulianotti (1999) refers to the ‘mallification’ of sporting venues, in a comparison with shopping malls. Crawford (2004) builds on this argument by highlighting that sports teams are given the opportunity to create an image and tradition, or re-invent and re-

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60 Admittedly I am not sure what admitting to being middle-class would look like in a city and setting that has a sense of pride in its working-class heritage.
package a history as a means of selling tickets and t-shirts. The existence of the Giants is based on the assumption that people are willing to spend money to be at games, whether this is because it began in a shiny new arena the region could be proud of, or because they were hockey fans. Although the Giants generously give tickets to student and youth groups, and have captivated a passion within a large number of people, there are limits to who they can draw in. Financial ability of supporters and the profit-seeking agenda of the organisation thus act as a filter in a number of ways – put simply, those who cannot afford to go are not present.

**Intolerance of Intolerance**

The marking of territory and location goes beyond banners and shared mythologies – it is also seen in the practices of the space. The Giants’ organisation and SSE Arena abide by a strict set of house rules requiring a baseline expectation for public behavior, and these rules give the arena staff the right to remove anyone for behavior likely to cause disruption. The policing of behavior is such that it plays an important role in creating the sanctuary that is the arena. The policies that are aimed toward behavior and apparel systematically seek to eradicate the sort of disdain for otherness that can be seen or is permitted in many other areas of Belfast. These rules, as well as the space being identified as shared between nationalists and unionists, in many ways act as a deterrent from keeping those with extreme views out of the arena. In returning to the thematic guidepost of tolerance, the consistency in expectations have been socialised into Giants players and fans for 15 years, and through this process a social activity constructed on a foundational understanding that ‘the other’ will be represented in the space has strongly influenced the way people act within the arena. In this way there has been an overarching edict that tolerance is the expectation, and if one displays intolerance they are excluded from the social group – marking this behavioral pattern, whether or not it is displayed outside of this setting – as the baseline expectation.

It warrants recognition that extreme viewpoints span beyond the historical conflicting divide of unionist and nationalist. Northern Ireland is the last state under jurisdiction of the United Kingdom to uphold several draconian laws, notably anti-abortion legislation and withholding rights for same-sex marriages. These hot topic issues are supported in their current capacity, as well as actively advocated against, on both sides of the

61 Such as the rule that states: “no flags, banners or sports team colours”.
Northern Irish divide. In a manner similar to the tempering of bringing into the arena any extreme grudges and opinions on loyalty to the Union or the Republic, these political issues are not welcome in the arena. For example, in one of my in-arena interviews, I sat with a gay man who was a very active supporter of the Giants. Through our game together he cited his draw to the team as based on the location, activity and the overarching rules acting as a ‘filter for the idiots’.

He did not claim there was any overt support for his sexual orientation, but rather a comfortableness to be who he was, without fear, a sentiment that ties to the SSE Arena as a sanctuary. He often brought friends from the LGBT community, whether or not they liked hockey (Gate 17 Seat Y168, 2015). Such an example underlines the way that the exclusion, or prohibiting, of extremist viewpoints plays a role in lowering anxieties around difference that extends beyond the nationalist/unionist identities central to division in Belfast and highlights the contrasting norms that exist within the arena compared to nearby areas of the city.

These two factors – financial standing and intolerance – do not stand in complete isolation from one another. As the contextual chapter (Chapter 2) noted, those who are middle and upper class with financial means are more likely to live in shared neighbourhoods, attend integrated schools, and participate in social circles that cross sectarian division (Hewstone et al., 2005). Conversely, the lowest income levels often align with people living in single-identity neighbourhoods and estates, near interfaces and peace walls and with less interaction across communities – such as the Lord Street neighbourhood. These experiences increase the likelihood of intolerant and definite viewpoints of those on the other side of partition, thus there is correlation between class and sectarian views (Hewstone et al., 2005). The Giants supporters seemingly occupy a space between these two poles, as the description of “aspirational” seemingly suggests. The focus on a family night out in Giants marketing campaigns, as well as the number of children attending games, suggests that the aspirational description applies not only to class, but also to a desire for a less segregated life for the children. The Giants organisation has identified this as well, and regularly invites community and school groups to games to experience such a setting (Cameron, 2016). Although this outreach is connected to a consumeristic caveat of encouraging children to return with their

\[62\] This quote is the reason for using the term ‘filter’ for this section.
families, it is founded on the understanding that the SSE Arena is a sanctuary dismissive of intolerance.

**Giving Pause**

Thus far discussion on sanctuary has focused primarily on the hockey arena as a clearly identified territory, which upholds certain principles of exclusion to maintain a wider welcome. This final section focuses on the temporality of such sanctuary and offers support to the arena as a pause from routine, activity, and division. This pause connects to the space as a sanctuary where different rules and norms of behaviour are expected and enacted, thus suspending actions and consequences connected to the historical conflict in Northern Ireland, whilst also seeking belonging in a space that offers refuge from mundaneity and the routine of everyday.

**Pause as a break from routine**

Attending a Belfast Giants game is an event. The average crowd of 4,500 fans per game, with 1,500 season ticket holders, shows that 3,000 people have chosen this event with no commitment beyond that evening’s hockey game. The swell in crowd sizes during the Christmas vacation period in the school calendar demonstrates that for most people, going to the Giants games is an event that is outside the routine day-to-day. The previous chapter – The Hockey Family – illustrated the wide degree to which supporters immerse themselves in the community of followers. However, going to a hockey game is a temporary activity (or 30+ temporary activities a year if you are a season ticket holder) and has been occurring throughout winters for 15 years – yet everyone who accesses the hockey arena is hosted for an evening’s activity, and this is not a place that one has the opportunity to stay indefinitely. There are community initiatives that offer more continuity, for example the online Facebook groups, Twitter feeds and podcasts span beyond the event of an ice hockey game. However, the act of going to a Giants game can be seen as a disruption, an exception, a pause to normal activities and interactions.

In many of my interviews, as my discussion with the person in the seat beside me unfolded, a theme of difference emerged – that the Giants represented something that was not like other parts of life, in action and/or in ethos. This arena offered a pause from different things to different people, and this crossed ethno-sectarianism, age, gender,
and occupation. As I set out into the arena with my research questions that aimed at understanding how attending a Giants game was an act of re-imagining what is possible across historic division in Northern Ireland, what emerged was the simple fact that the hockey arena gives a break to monotony, particularly within the pressures of divided living. For some, like the fan mentioned in the section above, it was a place that as a gay man he could come to and not have that part of his identity spotlighted or preyed upon – it was not relevant to the activity. For the man highlighted in the excerpt below, the Giants games offered a place where he could still be viewed as a contributor in his retirement.

Tonight I sat beside a 74-year old man who volunteers to sell 50/50 tickets and ‘shirt off your back’ tickets at every home game. He proudly wore his ‘Giants Staff’ jacket and just before intermissions he slipped away to work at a nearby sales booth. I went with him in the second intermission to buy some tickets and there were a group of volunteers happily selling tickets for the team. What became immediately clear throughout our conversation was that the Giants helped him feel wanted and important in his retirement and current life stage.

He reminisced about how at the Friendship Four weekend, when the American colleges and universities came to town he worked so many hours Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

He talked about how exhausted he was.

He was clearly loving it.

4 December 2015
Belfast Giants 4 vs. Nottingham Panthers 3 (Win)
Gate 20 Seat Y48

Suspending Division(s)

Examples of individuals finding meaning and acceptance within the SSE Arena offers a reminder that the pause from entrenched views, mundaneity, and divided living that the SSE Arena offers has value, highlighted in the shared identity that emerged in the previous chapter. The ice hockey arena as a temporary sanctuary provides a break from the normal, and corresponds with my research inquiries of how ice hockey impacts division in Northern Ireland, as routine and division are not separate in Belfast. In many ways, everyday routines in Belfast respond to, account for and perpetuate lived division of Northern Ireland. Although taken from a study in a different era of Belfast’s history, Larsen (1982) noted that this division was preserved through “avoiding interaction in a
very systematic and often ritualised fashion” (133). At present, activities of the everyday continue to perpetuate division – whether workplace, education, or exclusive social circles; thus, an unorthodox activity such as ice hockey is capable of giving a pause or break to such entrenched routine.

A clearly identified setting with enforced rules that disrupt routines of division challenges some of the assumed proceedings of wider Belfast through an emergent tolerance that has grown in this collective culture and temporary space. Wilson’s (2011) work on city buses draws attention to sensitivities, which can “…reduce one’s capacity to tolerate other affects and people and can, in turn, encourage the surfacing of prejudice” (644). With symbols and the narrative of division being purposefully removed from the arena, this ‘pause’ that the Giants offer is not in what is added to interactions, but rather in what is taken away. In a setting void of the common reminders of division, such symbols become far more noticeable when they do they occur – it ruptures the surface of the interaction and reclaims sensitivities. One such example was during the game on 16 October 2015, when the Giants were trying out a new crowd involvement competition during the intermission – an activity to provide entertainment during the extended break in play. There were three t-shirts that had been soaked in water, bunched up, and frozen. The first contestant to crack open the t-shirt and put it on won the prize, offered by a local Mexican restaurant. Such activities are not foreign to the crowd, as events like this are used routinely throughout the game; however, on this day what ruptured the sanctuary was that one of the t-shirts was green. This colour, commonly associated with the Irish/Catholic community, was seen as a breach of code. The man beside me was disappointed, and uttered his disdain, saying something along the lines of “Not a green shirt, not here” (Gate 9 Row Q Seat 73, 2015). The temporary suspension of division in this sanctuary can be seen through the fact that a green t-shirt, although political, would be of little note in the rest of Belfast.

In concluding this theme of sanctuary, the interconnectedness of marked territory, the filter of who is and is not welcome, and the way that the hockey arena offers pause to routine and division becomes clear. These traits are all carefully orchestrated by city planning initiatives, private investment, and organisational policies for the purpose of creating a place in the city, Titanic Quarter, free from divisive rhetoric and territorial assertions and actions. However, it warrants mention that top-down rules alone cannot dictate the character of a space. As Sennett (2003) notes, “treating people with respect
cannot occur simply by commanding it should happen. Mutual recognition has to be negotiated; this negotiation engages the complexities of personal character as much as social structure” (260). An understanding, like that expressed by Sennett, also gives value to the role of the individual and the collective in wanting and working towards a sanctuary founded on civil interaction. The personalities and individuals of the hockey family, like Patty and Davy or Stewart ‘Boomerang’ Boone, have contributed to this negotiation across the 15 years that the Giants’ organisation and their supporters have had to construct the space where I completed my research.

In linking these three discussion points – territorial markings, filter, and giving pause – the re-organisation of power within the SSE Arena, away from ‘us’ and ‘them’ dynamics, becomes clear, and in doing so the intergroup interactions take a different tone to include ‘we’. However, this is not to say that there are no limitations to this sanctuary framework, a key limitation being that the hockey arena does not offer a great deal of opportunity to resolve issues that are occurring outside this space. Instead this is a clearly marked territory that safeguards the occurrences within and provides a temporary pause from the encompassing nature of the conflict that is embedded in the interactions of Northern Ireland. Further, the Giants, though constructed on a modus operandi of all being welcomed, oversee a filtering that ultimately decides who is included and what views or opinions must be tempered for the right of access and participation. Then there are those who argue proximity alone cannot produce meaningful interaction (Valentine, 2008; Wood and Landry, 2008); however, from my experience and observation throughout the arena, when the proximity of interaction is under the umbrella of markedly different social expectations than that of the wider social setting, the possibilities for more meaningful engagement increase. Within Northern Ireland, and to some extent in the Republic of Ireland, the reputation of the SSE Arena and wider Titanic Quarter has become, by intention, separate to that of the historical narrative of Northern Ireland. This reputation, when accompanied by a common interest in ice hockey (for at least one evening), gives way to a refuge fitting of a sanctuary.
Resistance

For the purposes of this section, resistance is used to give structure to the pushback against hegemonies of power that I witnessed at Giants games. Resistance as a broad academic discourse casts a wide net, fitting of findings for an inter- and multidisciplinary thesis. A commonly utilised term with a loose definition, the term resistance is widely applicable and confusing in ‘is it or is it not’ discussions around the theme. Hollander and Einwohner (2004) note resistance is often “diverse, imprecise, and seemingly contradictory” (534). However, Stellan Vinthagen (2016) gives a working definition, noting, resistance is a subaltern practice that might undermine power/domination in general. In an analysis of resistance case studies, certain characteristics of resistance emerge across its wide use; these include resistance as an oppositional action or social movement, as well as resistance through symbolic behaviours, be they visible or invisible (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004).

There are overt actions, rooted in anti-establishmentarianism, which can be observed around the arena on game nights, which give support to resistance occurring within this space. Fans I met in different areas of the arena would partake in different levels of anti-authority behaviours. One obvious indicator of this was around alcohol consumption – it was not uncommon to see fans drinking types of alcohol not available for purchase within the arena, meaning it was snuck in. The most undisguised example was at one game I sat a few rows behind a woman who drank a full magnum (1.5L) of red wine throughout the course of the game. Further, the prevalence of Buckfast consumption, a caffeinated tonic wine produced by a monastic order in Devon, represents a relation to anarchist movements which have rallied around this beverage described as having “almost supernatural powers of destruction” (Jeffreys, 2015). Beyond alcohol, there were also cheers that overtly displayed irreverence to beliefs shared by Catholic and Protestant communities. A primary example of this was the cheer and nickname for one of the forwards, Jonathan Boxill. His long red hair and beard had earned him the nickname ‘Ginger Jesus’, which was chanted from Boomerang Corner whenever he was playing well. This raised complaints, mostly from mothers of children who believed this to be sacrilegious. In response to one particular complaint, the supporters told one objector that they were simply chanting ‘Ginger Cheeses’, citing Boxill’s affinity for dairy products as the reason for the cheer (Neill, 2015). I may have imagined it, but I think that the chanting of ‘Ginger Jesus’ was louder and more frequent after grievances
were aired. In such a large group, particularly amongst sports fans, individuals and groups resisting the rules imposed by the sports club or league is not uncommon (Taylor, 1971; Crawford, 2004). What these acts of defiance did was open my eyes to the acts of resistance to both social and political expectations that were occurring within the SSE Arena, and ultimately this theme emerged as something that the Giants represent in wider-Belfast.

The practices and institutions that lead the governing of Northern Ireland have more or less remained intertwined with the sectarian politic of the electorate (the recent, albeit tempered, emergence of the People Before Profit Alliance being the exception). This entanglement has meant that there is little movement in the power structures of Northern Ireland; such entrenchment creates a power that has manifested in a certain way since the peace agreement, giving plenty of opportunity and rationale for resistance to occur (Young, 2015). Thus forms and employment of resistance to power structures is aided by a space and activity that stands outside of historical significance, and yet has become commonplace in the city. It is through this perspective that the SSE Arena and Belfast Giants emerge as a site of resistance.

In this section I examine the theme of resistance by the Giants and supporters in two ways – first as offering resistance to division and the second as a resistance to top-down liberal peace agendas. This second notion comes out of the politicisation and institutionalisation of peace initiatives in post-peace agreement Northern Ireland. Following discussion of these two designations of resistance is an exploration of how resistance to division and peace are fitting of allocation under the umbrella of ‘everyday resistance.’ Such classification is born out of James C. Scott’s (1989) early works, in which he referred to everyday resistance as an “an ambiguous message being delivered by clearly identified messengers” (54-55). Bridging this notion of identified messengers to Belfast Giants supporters – the over-sized teal ice hockey jerseys highlighted in the previous chapter offer a discernible marking fitting of such a description.

**Resistance to Division / Resistance to Peace**

This thesis has reiterated that the division, segregation and sectarianism of Northern Ireland permeates the everyday lived lives of people in and around Belfast, and it has also been highlighted throughout the research focused on the Belfast Giants that the SSE Arena is host to different patterns of behaviour and openness to difference. In this
way the sanctuary of the hockey arena, with its cross-community appeal and shared social identity around the Giants, has led to my understanding of the arena as a space of resistance that offers a challenge to wider societal division. There are multiple case studies where resistance is inherently tied to identity, most notably in Scott’s influential works on resistance (1985; 2009). With regard to binary lines of identity, Helman (1999) wrote about the way being a conscientious objector in Israel challenged the militancy associated with being an Israeli citizen. This ‘one or the other’ element is similar to that of Northern Ireland, where strong identity characteristics suggest that there is an ideological difference between communities that is seemingly irreconcilable.

Although many supporters gave tempered responses when discussing the deeper meaning of these interactions (‘it’s just hockey’) there was a consensus across the supporters, the Giants organisation, and within the wider Belfast community that division was not welcome in the SSE Arena. The ease of relationships built with the common interest of ice hockey stands in contrast to other sections of the city where the same two people in relationship would be much more notable, representing the contrast in contact patterns that the hockey arena enables. In this way, it is these patterns of contact inherent in the Giants game which I am framing as a resistance to the social and political pressures that perpetuate division and seek to maintain an environment of antagonism for difference.

The resistance that I am highlighting is not only seen in the presence of people who come from unionist and nationalist backgrounds to congregate together around the team, but also in that the way they interact and converge causes difficulty in knowing who is from what side. Such banality in interaction and ‘indifference to difference’ is a means of resistance in a place where identity is so closely associated with divergent political and social beliefs, while also offering connection to the conceptual overview of civility, which unlike social capital and intergroup contact lends focus to the interactions of the everyday. Public interactions that are tolerant and free from displays of prejudice and anxiety, when normalised, are really quite boring – and in this humdrum civility is a resistance to social and political expectation. This thesis is not original in targeting the phenomenon of ice hockey in Northern Ireland as cross-community interaction; media outlets, predominantly from the North American sporting community, have tried to frame the team in such a light, the most high-profile being a Sports Illustrated article entitled, ‘Peace, Love and Hockey in Belfast’, which
sensationalised the team’s cross community appeal against the backdrop of the Troubles (Farber, 2011). For the most part hockey is a predominantly white sport from the global north played primarily by those with the financial means to play a game that involves expensive equipment and niche facilities. Such positionality has meant that this sport has had little place in the emergent sport for peace and development movement, and thus a team with a draw across division in a post-peace agreement setting makes for a catchy headline. However, attention drawn to the Giants being “post-conflict” does little to underline the complexity and intertwinedness that is occurring in the SSE Arena, where the Giants, as an organisation, a group of supporters, and a physical space, normalise resistance to division in subtle ways.

Resistance to patterns of division and socialised dualistic identities are not the only patterns of resistance that emerge at Giants games. If resistance can be viewed as a pushback to power, it must also be contextualised with the political enterprise that has institutionalised ‘peace’ in Northern Ireland. There is a good deal of research on the institutionalisation of policy, governance and the role of civil society that comes part and parcel with peace agreements, like the Good Friday Agreement (Mac Ginty, 2009 and 2011; Richmond, 2005). This form of interventionism, known as the liberal peace, is recognised as a “vehicle for transformation”, identified by its “distinctly institutional” approach (Jabri, 2010: 41). The liberal peace agenda is highlighted by its top-down approach, which has led to wide critique from scholars and practitioners who highlight that an international institutional agenda steals away from a sense of agency for local populations (Tanabe, 2017; Vogel, 2016; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013; Selby, 2013). I highlight the critique of institutionalising ‘peace’ initiatives here to draw attention to the way that peace can become engrained alongside the politics of the places it is prescribed, and in doing so peace takes a place in politics and not with the people.

Northern Ireland has institutionalised and compartmentalised peace programmes through the EU Peace Programme and the Shared Future policy documents, which clearly state the goal of a “shared society defined by a culture of tolerance and the achievement of reconciliation and trust” (CRU, 2005: 3). These overarching goals have generated an outlook towards reconciliation, a relatively ambiguous term and yet one that carries a heavy weight of expectation, which can cloud over positive intercommunity activity in Northern Ireland. McEvoy, McEvoy and McConnachie (2006) demonstrate serious concern with the wide utility of the term reconciliation, as it
has come to represent a perceived political goal and has shown little functionality in cross-community social processes where there has yet to emerge an imagined shared common ground to work towards. This idea of reconciliation being a ‘dirty word’ was supported when I used the word with Patty and Davy, two individuals who had come from opposing backgrounds and forged a deep friendship: I was met with the backlash that such a word had no place at a Giants game – it was far too political (McGimpsey and Smyth, 2015). However, this concern has not stopped reconciliation from being central to much of the externally-pressured peace agenda in Northern Ireland.

The distancing away from ‘peace’ and ‘reconciliation’ extends beyond Patty and Davy’s disdain for my bringing up reconciliation, as these are inherently political topics within Northern Ireland. The Giants organisation has worked to remain relatively outside of any discussions involving its supporters and wider political or reconciliatory aims. This came through in my interviews with the players and management, where topics related to social outcomes of the shared space were tiptoed around or avoided. Two supporters I sat with on 15 November 2015 also recognised a shift from the early slogans of “Game for All, Game for Everyone” and “In the Land of Giants Everyone is Equal” – as an excerpt from my field journal notes:

At one point these gentlemen responded to my questioning that it had been a long while since they had heard any talk about the Giants as a peacebuilding activity. They said that the cross-community appeal slogans and advertising that had existed when they had first started attending Giants games had all but disappeared from marketing around the team. One of them noted that although the game and the audience remain open to everyone, these advertising campaigns undermined the supporters’ abilities to become fans of the sport as they represented a certain politics that the fans had moved on from. He didn’t think there was a need for pushing this message of inclusiveness from the organisation as these qualities are inherent and entrenched in the game experience.

15 November 2015
Dundee Stars 3 – Belfast Giants 2 (Shootout Loss)
Gate 8 Row S Seat 46

At a simplistic level I envisioned association with peace as a positive and conflict and division as a negative, and yet the Giants fans and organisation sought to distance themselves from both. What emerged from my fieldwork is the recognition of just how big the peace industry in Belfast is. There exist a vast number of organisations that have a primary focus on intergroup contact and the bringing together of people (particularly youth) across lines of division. However, the Giants’ move away from these early
explicit slogans about being a place for everyone is representative of a distancing from the stigma of initiatives like these, as the peace industry in Northern Ireland remains entangled with the politics of the region. The resistance to being aligned with peace was something I did not anticipate.

**Everyday Resistance**

Gathering at the SSE Arena as a resistance to both division and peace is fitting of an everyday resistance framework. Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) describe everyday resistance as not a direct or open confrontation, and yet recognise it as a practice in resistance in relation to dominant culture that is entrenched in the everyday act. As division and peace have become both lucrative and complexly intertwined within the political landscape of Northern Ireland, intentional cross-community spaces that do not overtly seek to be divisive or reconciliatory are rare. Acknowledging that I have written about the ice hockey arena as an exceptional activity that exists temporarily outside the routines of the everyday, here I align an ice hockey game within everyday resistance because a Giants game offers a social space for shared agency to materialise and resist power. A hockey game may be a temporary event that stands outside of daily routine for many participants; fandom, however, transcends the event, and the Giants’ presence in the city is widely recognised as a consistent fixture against the backdrop of wider Belfast. Running through the conceptual chapters is the role of power, in particular the different power structures which dictate attributes of socialisation such as where one should be and how one should act in any given setting. The support of social hierarchies and structures of power are a condition for positive intergroup contact according to Allport (1954), which highlights the ability of these structures to also do the opposite – when preaching division, sectarianism is the result. Within the SSE Arena the space has been negotiated over the past 15 years between the city, the organisation, the developers of the Titanic Quarter, as well as the collective of supporters. It is important to reiterate that those in attendance at a Giants game are there by choice – no matter their class, gender, whether they are Buckfast-drinking anarchists or there with their children. The Giants give space for a diverse population in attendance to challenge their personal and collective worldviews outside of prescribed social and political agendas, and as a collective offer resistance to expectations that have been placed upon them – and in doing so they become “both the subject and the object of power” (Vintaghen and Johansen, 2013: 13).
The counter-cultural aspect of ice hockey is an important point to highlight, when discussing the hockey arena and the hockey family within a resistance framework. Bowles and Gintis (2002) interpret social capital as referring to “a willingness to live by the norms of one's community and to punish those who do not” (F419). Having spent the season amongst the supporters, I would agree with the sentiment of willingness to live by different norms than other comparable social groups in Belfast; however, the notion of punishing those who do not live this way is a stretch. What comes through in this social group, and through the social capital constructed within the SSE Arena, is a civil acceptance that not everyone thinks or acts the same way as everyone else. This is what makes this group an outlier in Belfast. It is in the routine and public acts of the everyday that sectarianism has embedded itself into Northern Irish life, and it is these same traits that can be seen as resistance (Lepp, 2018). The civility of the SSE Arena stands in contrast to the civility in many other places. Civility does not give opportunity for construing images of violent conflict, just as it does not create expectation of hand-holding and kumbayah sing-a-longs. Civility as Krygier (2005) notes, “is not one of those ideals that quickens the pulse … But a civil platform is a secure place to stand” (173). What the SSE Arena offers in resistance to political and social pressures is the normalisation of civil interaction between the known and the unknown at a Giants
game, discussed further through the theme of side-by-sidedness in the following chapter.

Conclusion

The two themes of sanctuary and resistance highlighted in this chapter do not stand in isolation from each other. As Karl Shoemaker (2013) suggests, historians have often noted that sanctuary is a space that enables trouble to occur, with Trenholme (1903) stating that sanctuary was “…costly to civilized community, in that wrongdoing was protected” (96). If the trouble and wrongdoing fostered in the SSE Arena are recognised here as the charting of a pathway that is not the one prescribed by hegemonic powers, be this social division or top-down liberal peace policies, the two themes of this chapter become intertwined, fitting of modern sanctuary practices, which, as outlined by Czajka (2013), have the “…potential to disrupt the state’s attempt to monopolize territorial sovereignty and ways of being political” (44).

A sense of defiance is an attribute embraced by both sides of the ethno-sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland. The unionists I met in Belfast spoke of a power-sharing government, particularly the inclusion of Sinn Fein, as if this outcome of the Good Friday Agreement was a reward for terrorists. The nationalists continue to feel occupied by the British, and although there was wide agreement amongst those I met that physical violence was no longer relevant, a desire for a future with a united Ireland lingered. In both of these communities existed a sense that they were overcoming something that was wronging them. Defiance is a strong attribute, and in both cases there is a strong sentiment of anti-authoritarianism. The Titanic Quarter, and more relevantly the Odyssey Complex, may have been constructed as an organised, top-down initiative with a series of rules and guidelines that dictate certain aspects of who is there, but this has not completely rounded off the sharp edges of defiance within those who are in attendance. There is as much an air of defiance in sharing space with ‘the other’ as there is in the defiance of not letting such space sharing be constituted as an institutionalised exercise in peacebuilding.

Returning to themes from the conceptual chapters, the civility enacted within the SSE Arena stands in contrast to much of lived Belfast, having devised a sanctuary that my Canadian researcher-self felt completely at home in, despite a wider setting where steel
walls decorated with paintings of gunmen separate neighbourhoods – a concept completely foreign to this same worldview. Although this example is centred on my own experience, it is indicative of what the Giants represent in wider Belfast. Out of literatures on civility, processes of conflict transformation, and everyday peace the idea of ‘getting on with it’ becomes of value in post-peace agreement settings. The Giants, with their clearly marked territory and different expectations, give opportunity for getting on with it in an arena that includes those who are able and willing to be there.

The long struggle over space in Northern Ireland has seen that sanctuary from negativity has historically been found in single-identity spaces – this can be seen at a hurling match between parishes for those in the Catholic community or the socialising which takes place in an Orange Hall for those within the Protestant community. For the most part spaces that included both communities were not sanctuaries, rather they were places, as noted by Heaney, where little was shared and little was learned. Komarova (2008) recognises these spaces as having a distinct lack of appreciation for diversity or for fabricating a shared identity. This is what makes the Belfast Giants such an interesting case study. On the famous docklands of Belfast, a foreign sport, played by foreign players has gained a notable level of popularity. The very notion of this is absurd when placed against the history and present backdrop of the region. Yet, it is in this absurdity that a representation of what the team means within the city emerges – largely because it is truly different in this setting to rally around one team and one city, when in reality the city continues to offer so many places of unwelcome. The previous chapter recognised that spending an evening at the SSE amongst teal jersey-clad supporters of the team does not require that meaningful interpersonal interaction occur, certainly not fulfilling the conditions of Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis – equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by social and institutional authorities. Further, the fluidity and heterogeneity of the hockey family does not clearly carry the bonding principles of social capital (Putnam, 2000). However, at a city and regional level, what the game offers is a sanctuary from structural violence that permeates through society. It is in the navigating and welcoming of different social rules and required civilities that the arena as a sanctuary arises, but it is also in making the space their own that the hockey family can be seen as offering resistance to the hegemonic powers operating around it.
Chapter 10

‘Side-by-Sidedness’:
A conceptual and methodological contribution

Introduction

The overarching research goals of this PhD thesis have aimed to contribute to knowledge and understanding of shared space in settings where relationships have been complexly intertwined with protracted conflict and division. In doing so, themes have emerged throughout literatures, contexts, methods and the research experience that offer deepened understanding of the Belfast Giants supporter community against the backdrop of everyday division in Northern Ireland. This chapter draws together the many themes of this thesis into a meta/over-arching theme that has surfaced throughout the thesis, which I have termed ‘side-by-sidedness’.

Conceptually, the term side-by-side has been used across the thesis. It can be found in discussing civility in Chapter 5, where van Leeuwen’s (2015) concept of side-by-side civility was highlighted as a “benign neglect of difference, a casual way of dealing with diversity” (803). Within the context of researching Northern Ireland and its long history of conflict, such a notion was seemingly alternative to the norms of segregation and ethno-sectarian division. Side-by-sidedness also takes a more metaphorical angle, befitting of peace and conflict study and a normative understanding in support for relationships that are less confrontational. In this thesis such a notion is drawn from the change processes required to transform relationships from violence and conflict to inclusion of ‘the other’; such a shift moves from inward looking, with feelings of prejudice, anxiety and intolerance, towards a more accepting arrangement of sharing experiences side-by-side. Finally, the most straightforward use of side-by-sidedness emerging from this thesis arises out of the methodological description of my primary interview technique, which involved sitting side-by-side the research community at ice hockey games. This theme represents the most significant contribution I make with this thesis, offering in metaphor, methodology, and conceptual idea an expansion to the way that post-peace agreement relationships can be viewed. In this contribution, this chapter poses a challenge to widely accepted expectations of relationships following peace.
accords, be these assumptions of physical face-to-face relationships or in reconciliation between communities.

There are multiple interpretations of what the term side-by-side can mean, which warrant recognition before this theme is unpacked through this chapter. One of these interpretations is in describing how things match up when placed beside one another, as in the side-by-side comparison. This use of the term sheds light on the revealing of similarity and difference that cannot be done when separate, a sentiment fitting of Belfast where trends of living in separation continue to this day. Ted Gurr’s (1970) work on relative deprivation highlights how comparison with the outgroup is a fundamental driver of ethnic division. Another regular use of the term side-by-side is found in illustrating unity in social movements and protests (Bond, 2017), as well as in depicting support for one another, as seen through the term’s use in the mental health peer support programming across England by Mind, a mental health support and advocacy organisation (Mind, 2017). This interpretation of side-by-sidedness offering imagery of solidarity and support comes back to notions of shared identity, resistance and sanctuary found in the Giants supporter community and highlighted in the findings chapters of this thesis. A final application of the side-by-side is slightly more obscure than the previous two, being found in post-colonial literature, recognising that side-by-sidedness “leads to possibility of sharing cultural experience rather than ‘resisting’ the imposition of alien forms of culture” (Smith, 2000: 4). This interpretation benefits this theme within this thesis as it speaks to a coming together across cultural – and in the case of Northern Ireland, ethno-sectarian – division to share an experience, and one that is not native to the sporting landscape in Northern Ireland. The focus of this thesis on the shared space of the SSE Arena offers a space for interactions across difference to be navigated. In this chapter engaging this notion of side-by-sidedness, these existing understandings of this versatile term situate the term side-by-sidedness in its many forms amongst current literatures.

In investigating side-by-sidedness this chapter has three distinct sections. The first of these re-engages the three core concepts – social capital, intergroup contact and civility – that have guided this thesis. These three literatures have at their foundation contact within and across difference, providing a platform on which to examine the implications of side-by-sidedness found through the research in Northern Ireland. Influencing and appearing across this section are the themes identified in the analytical framework
(Chapter 6) – prejudice, anxiety, tolerance, trust, identity and space. The second section of engagement with side-by-sidedness in this chapter is in contextualising the theme through the backdrop of Northern Ireland, Belfast, and the SSE Arena. The context of the research offers a reminder of the struggle to live physically side-by-side one another, and yet within the SSE Arena a shared identity has been formed, bringing this section back to the notion of everyday peace. The third and final section of this chapter returns to the methodology undertaken. The act of sitting side-by-side offers an innovative approach to interview technique; however, what emerges across this re-visiting of the methodology is a personal research worldview that situates the research alongside the researched, challenging epistemological worldviews and conceptions of power within the relationships constructed around and through this research.

Social Capital, Intergroup Contact and Civility: Relationships While Rubbing Shoulders

The willingness of hockey supporters to sit side-by-side those who come from different communities in a city where physical and symbolic lines of separation remain prevalent offers strong connection to the literatures influencing this thesis – social capital, intergroup contact, and civility. This section revisits these concepts and frames them with research findings as a means of highlighting how side-by-sidedness is reinforced, as well as challenged, by assumptions inherent in these theories. What becomes apparent in this section is that the thesis is constructed around the (often radical) assumption that people can engage with one another and build relationships across difference – in doing so lowering anxieties and prejudices while raising levels of tolerance and trust – if they have the willingness to do so in a space free from the pressures of expected division, and aided by the diminished intensity of interaction that comes with sitting side-by-side.

Social Capital

As the findings chapters demonstrate, connections to and interest in ice hockey has generated relationships within the SSE arena fitting for discussion of social capital. The social networks required for social capital to be produced, described by Tönnies (1957) as ‘Gesellschaft’ (referring to large-scale relationships that are non-kinship based), are present in the hockey family. Coleman (1988) interprets these wider social networks as
a form of exchange that an individual benefits from, aligning with rational choice theory, which recognises that when faced with a choice, humans will choose a path that suits their personal interests. In this way, Coleman’s explanation of cooperation for personal benefit lends itself well to sitting side-by-side difference in the social network that emerges from watching ice hockey games in Belfast – the choosing to avoid politic-speak and adhering to the physical and social rules of the arena becomes a personal interest because to not do so would result in taking a more difficult path. To sit side-by-side whoever is in the seat next to you and choose to get along, in whatever that specific context demands, is required for a hockey fan to enjoy a hockey game, have their kids be entertained, enjoy a social gathering with friends, or whatever the motivation for attending the game was in the first place.

However, if a more sociological view of social capital is taken, the needs and interests of the wider group come into focus. The use by supporters of terms like ‘hockey family’ or the ‘teal army’ sheds light on the fact that the displaying of affinity for one another has become a personal, as well as a group, development within, and to a lesser extent beyond, the SSE Arena. These terms of kinship align with a key theme within the social capital literature – trust – which offers a great deal to the theme of side-by-sidedness. First, Putnam (1993) recognised the trust that comes from social interaction as essential to the construction of social capital, believing that “trust lubricates cooperation”. As noted throughout the thesis, trust is not something that has historically been in great supply between individuals and across social groups in Belfast, and Fukuyama (1995) notes that conflict and the ‘othering’ processes of conflict, like that between unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland, impedes trust and hinders relationships from developing. However, at a foundational level, being willing to engage in the shared space of ice hockey has an embedded element of trust. This trust, particularly its relation to security, was an observable quality – I would attend each game with my backpack and was only asked on one occasion to have my bag searched, something that would have historically been completed in a great deal of public settings in Belfast. Ulsaner and Conley (2003) highlight two types of trust, ‘particularised’ and ‘generalised’, where particularised trust is that of one’s own social group and generalised trust includes a trust of those outside this group. The SSE Arena offers a

63 They were likely looking for alcohol.
64 They would have likely been searching for weapons.
generalised trust, which is what makes it unique in a region where particularised trust remains the norm.

This particularised trust was displayed in my experience at the Linfield/Cliftonville football match at Windsor Park, highlighted by a very different crowd with very different expectations. This example does not illustrate a norm in Northern Ireland where sporting matches are rarely framed as unionist versus nationalist, in large part because much of sport is segregated along community lines. However, this setting was prepared for a ‘clash’; my bag was searched by security upon arrival, and the fans of the two teams were kept in separate sections completely across the stadium, exemplifying a trust that did not include ‘the other’ – or even physically allow the groups to be side-by-side one another, as highlighted in Figure 24. The history of separation in sport in Northern Ireland was on display in this setting, with the contention between these teams being particularly noteworthy within the Irish League (Bairner and Shirlow, 1998). The close-knit nature of the Linfield fans and similarly, yet separately, the Cliftonville fans, gives support to the claim that the more rigid the categorisations and divisions that exist, the stronger the intra-group networks – Putnam’s (2000) bonding social capital. It is worth noting that although there are reserved seating sections for away supporters at ice hockey games in the EIHL, there are no physical barriers or separate entrances – supporters mix throughout the arena and concourse. The visiting supporters do not come from Northern Ireland, rather they visit from Scotland, England or Wales, and support their cities’ teams; in ice hockey within the United Kingdom there are no political attachments that drudge up cynicism or hostilities, only light-hearted exchanges about whose team is better. Widely, the generalised trust on display within the hockey arena aligns with the notion that trust is a motivator of action (Brunet and Bossert, 2009). Under the umbrella of social capital, this action takes the form of “participation in groups, community and civic activities” (Brunet and Bossert, 2009: 13), which in the case of the Giants (and unlike the interactions on display at Windsor Park) manifests itself in identifying as a member of a group inclusive across historical division. Putnam (2007) later noted that diversity has a way of weakening positive social capital, and it is not my contention that sitting side-by-side in the relatively diverse setting of the hockey arena inherently engineers deep social capital; however, it does require a willingness to trust in one another and the organisation enough to accept that everyone present is worthy of sharing an experience with.
Figure 24: Linfield/Cliftonville football match – 27 October 2015

In the top right of this photo at the far corner of the stadium are the Cliftonville supporters. This picture taken from the Linfield section shows the Union Jack (a clear and direct community identifier) is on full display.
(Photograph by author, 2015)

**Intergroup Contact**

Side-by-sidedness, highlighted by the physical copresence of both unionist and nationalist communities, finds connection with the contact hypothesis, starting with Allport’s (1954) overarching belief that contact offers “knowledge and acquaintance” which can reduce prejudice between divided groups. The reduction of prejudice offers support to this thesis’ focus on being in the company of different people and becoming familiar, acquainted, and comfortable with the variety of diverse individuals drawn to hockey games in Belfast. The centrality of the contact hypothesis, which has a vision of improving relations between groups in conflict with one another, entails greater expectation than simply being comfortable side-by-side. A critique of the contact hypothesis is the requirement of a laboratory-like setting to achieve the desired results.
between the groups (Dixon et al., 2005); however, the SSE Arena represents a very dynamic research site. This discussion on the theme of side-by-sidedness warrants revisiting the four conditions of the contact hypothesis – equal status between groups, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support from authorities.

*Equal status* within the SSE Arena offers a notable difference to the status demonstrated outside of this setting. Within the hockey family are a wide range of education levels, socioeconomic classes and ethno-sectarian positionalities, yet these are diminished within the arena where the side-by-side seating and flat rate prices for tickets anywhere in the arena have a way of neutralising the role of class in the engagement of supporting ice hockey. Further, and most importantly for the focus of this study, this neutralising effect offers an impartiality and indifference to nationalist or unionist identity. There are those who want to sit as close to the action as possible, and those who prefer to sit higher up and watch the game from a wider perspective; the single-price tickets enable people to make their preference without it being an identifier of status, with the one exception being the corporate or VIP box suites. These were not accessible to my research; however, beyond looking down on the wider arena of supporters, there is a lack of direct engagement between those in the suites and those in the stands, and they do not play a role in the environment of the game experience. The rules and social expectations of conduct in the SSE Arena apply to everyone, with no exception. The jersey, as noted previously, also offers a levelling of difference across status through creating an equality of clothing – removing the way one dresses as a symbol of class and of community contributes to a sense of equality. The single price tickets and jerseys offer a levelling of status at a surface level that is specific to the space and time of the game. Pettigrew and Tropp (2005) offer a reminder that Allport originally stressed that this condition should be interpreted as equal status within the contact situation, and there is no visible extension of equal status spanning beyond the arena; yet, these equalisers put people side-by-side one another who likely would not be otherwise.

The second and third conditions of *common goals* and *intergroup cooperation* within the setting of a Giants game in the SSE Arena align with Williams’ (1947) early recognition that gathering across division holds potential to reduce prejudice when two groups share similar tasks and are involved in personal activities that promote meaningful interpersonal interactions. As fans of a team there is a measure of being connected to the team and having a vested interest in the outcome of the game, which
could be interpreted as a shared task – for example, the louder the cheering, drumming or singing, the greater impact on the game. The common goal of wanting to win games and championships is one that many present in the SSE Arena wish for. The Giants organisation recognises winning as key to their success in carving out a sustainable crowd in Belfast; Brooks (2015) emphasises this by noting, “People want to support a winning team, people want to be part of something great – everybody loves a winner!”

A scan of online message boards following a loss highlights just how much this means to supporters, when a myriad of opinions and expectations come out as part of the fan experience. Broadly, there was a clear understanding that fandom was the role that people had gathered for; this understanding was made clear to me during a side-by-side interview on 12 November 2015, when as I asked about the coming together across historical divide, I was met with a straightforward reply:

“It is not about that stuff, it is fun.”

Freedom from ‘that stuff” offers a subtle uniqueness within Belfast where most other shared sites are established to encourage engagement, alter patterns of interaction, and transform social processes to include the other (Komarova, 2008).

The final condition, supported contact, presents an interesting paradox amongst Giants fans. The SSE Arena, with its distinct rules and routines of socialisation, presents a very constructed environment. One example is found in the ticket give-away associated with the educational programming offered by the Giants, particularly when there are single-community school groups from both Catholic and Protestant schools present at Giants games on the same night. Gordon Cameron (2016) noted that he always meets school groups at the same entrance. In doing so, he is putting the students and teachers in a position that they must interact casually, and in a normalised manner, through the Giants experience. In this routine, the space, and the organisation’s control over it, acts to generate informal contact between these groups. Mr. Cameron was happy to highlight that this arrangement of mixing school groups was a matter of convenience; however, in Northern Ireland convenience has historically been seen in the act of remaining separated, not being together. This being said, supported contact between nationalist and unionist communities is not an odd phenomenon, having been integral at a policy level in Northern Ireland where Shared Future documents and EU Peace Programme initiatives continue to strive towards more integration across ethno-sectarian lines (CRU
2005; European Parliament 2016). Many peacebuilding programs in Belfast are constructed on the principle of putting people together as a means of challenging preconceived prejudices and expectations, as well as promoting civic engagement (McKeown and Taylor, 2017). PeacePlayers International utilises basketball as a method of bringing kids together from single-identity neighbourhoods. Gareth Harper (2015), managing director, described the change processes that his organisation seeks to facilitate:

“… once those relationships are in place it is more likely that they are going to engage in a conversation around things which are divisive here. Also, then we try to build in some capacity building - so we try and tell them about the other community, we want to give them a positive experience with the other communities through direct contact but then facilitate a conversation between the two so that they can understand the other community. Theory being, you know I could be on the same ice hockey team, same basketball team, same rugby team and you and I might get on very well and I say that ‘Eric is great’ but you see all the rest of them Protestants or all the rest of them Catholics they are not so nice. So, what we try and do is lead the relationships to facilitate a wider understanding of the other and the capacity of the other.”

There is dispute over how effective micro-level interpersonal friendships can be in generating macro-level change, either behavioural or attitudinal (Steinberg, 2013). There is also wider dispute over whether academic study needs to generate such change to be effective (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The Giants are quite different than PeacePlayers in that they do not set out with the same intentionality in programming – they are a hockey team which have not publicly highlighted an overt, or from what I could discern, a covert, strategy for influencing macro-level change. Overarching these policy and programmatic aims is the power of social construction decades in the making; fluidity across dividing lines is not yet fully supported socially beyond the arena, and as a result, expectations of contact shift based on place and time.

At an academic gathering I was asked informally by a renowned Northern Irish scholar whether if Belfast or Northern Ireland had two teams would one become supported by the unionist populations and the other by the nationalists. Although there are a great deal of sports teams associated with a single identity community, such expansion is not viable for professional ice hockey in Belfast. The costs are prohibitive with facilities, travel (which is significant with all away games requiring travel to Scotland, England or Wales) and player salaries. These costs have driven the ownership to openly admit that they would not exist if supported by only one community in Belfast (Fitzpatrick, 2015).
Such an understanding has been central to their work in fan appreciation and advertising campaigns. Beyond the logistical issues, this hypothetical question remains an intriguing one, as historical division suggests that given two options a split would occur on the existing ethno-sectarian cleavage. However, having no choice in which team to cheer for connects with the notion of supported contact, and in many ways prerequisite contact, enabling the side-by-sidedness occurring within the SSE Arena.

Pettigrew (1998) suggests a fifth condition that aligns with the side-by-side theme – the space and opportunity for intergroup friendships to be manufactured. The fans carry a certain agency with them in this setting, with an opportunity to be as involved as they want to be in the community around the team without a larger coercive agenda. The network of relationships I observed and became a part of within the ice hockey arena exemplifies that this low-pressure setting enables friendships to happen organically and without expectation; however, for many the arena also offers something between strangers and friends. There is an enjoyment in one another’s company in this space, likening the arena to Oldenburg’s (1999) description of third spaces, which he notes as having “neither the blandness of strangers nor that other kind of blandness, which takes zest out of relationships between even the most favorably matched people when too much time is spent together, when too much is known, too many problems are shared, and too much is taken for granted” (56). As Binder and colleagues (2009) note, intergroup anxiety occurs through contact with members of a distinct outgroup; however, what became clear in my fieldwork was that the informal, hockey-focused and side-by-side nature of the interaction and the lack of required face-to-face contact played a role in alleviating anxieties of division amongst fans.

Face-to-face interaction is the subject of a good deal of research, particularly in communication studies and social psychology. This method of communication and interaction, although often presumed, is constructed amidst growth and challenges of online interaction (Grieve et al., 2013), as well as questions around whether face-to-faceness embodies greater honesty between people (Citera, Beauregard and Mitsuya, 2005). Widely, the depth of communication at visual and auditory levels in face-to-face interactions “increase[s] the rate of social information transmission” (Van Zant and Kray, 2014; Walther, 1992), which in turn reduces miscommunication (Kruger et al., 2005). These factors are key in the construction of rapport and cooperation (McGinn, Milkman, and Nöth, 2012). Further, being face-to-face helps to lower the perception
that someone is being deceptive – following the mantra ‘you wouldn’t lie to my face’ (Rockmann and Northcraft, 2008). However, in settings of division like Belfast, the honesty of face-to-face encounters can contribute to division. In his essay ‘On Face Work’ Goffman (2005) highlights:

“During direct personal contacts, however, unique informational conditions prevail and the significance of face becomes especially clear. The human tendency to use signs and symbol means that evidence of social worth and of mutual evaluations will be conveyed by very minor things, and these things will be witnessed, as will the fact that they have been witnessed. An unguarded glance, a momentary change in tone of voice, an ecological position taken or not taken, can drench a talk with judgmental significance.” (33)

The physical seating setup of the SSE Arena, as well as the more metaphorical level of relationship described by Oldenburg above, places side-by-sidedness uniquely as a faceless but close encounter. Thus, relationships constructed through a mutual interest in ice hockey are afforded the ability of not giving away too much and entrenching pre-existing divisions before a shared interest and identity are established in a space that offers the distraction for this to occur. Such an observation fits with Stephan and Stephan’s (1985) discussion of how initial contact lowers anxieties and makes way for further contact. In doing so, an informal process of discovering similarities is able to take place.

**Civility**

Side-by-sidedness and civility share a close relationship. One of the most direct influences on this relationship is van Leeuwen’s (2015) concept of ‘side-by-side civility’, a form of civility situated in a tolerance of divergent viewpoints that enables those in relationship to look past areas of disagreement. The ‘tolerant enough’ temperament that is required to sit side-by-side someone from the opposing side of a historically violent cleavage connects to Whitman’s (2000) requirement that civility include politeness, or ‘the outward show of respect’. However, Whitman furthers this construction of civility with a need for “sincere acknowledgement of the equality of others” (1291), a notion not necessarily required of, nor overtly demonstrated in, side-by-side interactions at ice hockey games. In many ways, side-by-sidedness fits with Goffman’s (1956) notion of the person as an actor taking on different roles and moving between these roles dependent on setting and company. The chapter on the hockey family, particularly the example of the woman with the Giants jersey over top of her
Ranger sweatshirt, exemplifies the way that different roles are played by people within the SSE Arena. Side-by-sidedness requires that each person, in the act of civilly navigating the sharing of space, be capable of playing a role ‘respectful enough’ of difference that common experiences can be undertaken, something Ash Amin (2012) refers to as “a civility of indifference, a skill of co-habitation without rancour.” (75).

Figure 25: Back of a hockey ticket outlining the rules of the SSE Arena (Photograph by author, 2016)

Bourdieu (1987) notes that those with greater capital guide the rules of who decides civility, and Callahan (2011) believed that the rules of a certain place are constructed by a particular social group. The Giants have utilised their agency and power to create a culture around the sport, and their team, with the vision (and the Giants’ financial need) for a Northern Ireland that experiences leisure activities together (Fitzpatrick, 2015). Present-day Belfast is not the Belfast of old; activities like attending an ice hockey game trend away from difference, and civil experiences found in supporting the same team generate a sense of similarity. Whether the shared identity of being members of the hockey family and the associated levels of tolerance is enough when a wider picture is taken to maintain peace in more trying times is debatable. Ignatieff (1997) notes, minor differences become magnified in times of conflict, and these differences can cause further division. However, within present-day Belfast, where division and encounter are a part of everyday life, the Giants offer something that stands out within
the network of relationships surrounding the team, exemplifying aspects of both formal and informal civility.

Within the SSE Arena, the foundation of civil interaction has roots in the arena’s house rules (highlighted in Figure 25), offering the groundwork for formalised civility. On the other hand, my field journal includes several notes about the ‘banter’ that I encountered in shared settings. Widely, avoidance of conversation pertaining to conflict and community was a safe practice in shared spaces of Belfast, and with complete strangers this was common practice in my experiences and observations. However, the informality of my interview style highlighted a good deal of banter\(^6\) between individuals from within and opposing groups. As an outsider, the banter seemingly included insulting statements delivered with smiles that would often receive laughs from all sides. These exchanges existed outside the realm, or the rules, of the formalised civility that was demanded by the Giants’ organisation. This type of interaction also came to represent that a relationship had evolved – one would not make fun of complete strangers. Such a viewpoint is tempered by Valentine’s (2008) understanding that civility as an outward action does not necessarily align with an inward disposition towards ‘the other’. Highlighting the difference between public acts and private views is a challenge to connecting civility with deeply-rooted tolerance of ‘the other’; however, as I constructed relationships with members throughout the Giants supporter community, it became clear that many in this setting have an ability to hold differing views and actions side-by-side within themselves and still be part of the hockey family.

These three theories – social capital, intergroup contact, and civility – offer a great deal to the theme of side-by-sidedness. However, it is worth noting that the three theories do not come together with the synergy of a Venn diagram, with the overlap of these three concepts central to my analytical framework (Chapter 6). Rather these three concepts offer something of three fairly independent guiding influences to the grounded observations, participation and direct guidance from the research community that has produced the theme of side-by-sidedness. What is common across these three literatures is ‘encounter’. Encounter has taken broad definition across academic disciplines and is

\(^{6}\) The term ‘banter’ was often used in Northern Ireland as a means of describing good-natured teasing between people.
used to describe a wide range of meeting points, be they ‘organised’ public spaces (Wise, 2016), or as a framework for better understanding unexpected forms of interaction (Wilson, forthcoming). In the case of Northern Ireland, encounter has often focused on relations in conflict, be they between police and citizens (Pehrson et al., 2017) or across community division (Tausch et al., 2007). Schmid (1998) notes that, “Etymology shows that the English word ‘encounter’ as well as the French word *recontre* contains the root *contra*, the Latin word for ‘against’, in the same way as the German word *Begegnung* is formed from the root *gegen* (against)” (75). This etymological understanding has ties to the face-to-face as an interaction that is much more confrontational, with imagery of coming together at a meeting point from opposite directions. Face-to-face encounter seemingly has inherent possibilities of more defined outcomes than the side-by-sideness highlighted in this chapter – be they in the scale of confrontation or on the other end of the spectrum of reconciliation or forgiveness. The revisiting of literatures that frame this thesis exposes side-by-sideness as a concept that offers something to discussion about lived lives between these two poles. My research experience arrives at side-by-sideness as offering a ‘lightened encounter’ that is civilly inattentive to ethno-sectarian difference as a contributor to improved relationships between individuals following conflict.

**Contextualising Side-by-Sidedness: Belfast, the SSE Arena and Everyday Peace**

This section of the chapter engages side-by-sideness within the context central to this thesis – Northern Ireland, Belfast and the SSE Arena. In doing so, the discussion revisits Mac Ginty’s concept of everyday peace and its characteristics – avoidance, ambiguity, ritualised politeness, telling and blame-deferral – utilising this framework to highlight the way that shared and single-community spaces are situated side-by-side, yet separate from one another.

**Where? And with whom?**

Within Northern Ireland, and in particular Belfast, the notion of side-by-sideness is one that is often captured in the negative – a history of disdain for being side-by-side the other. The contextual chapter (Chapter 2) highlights the history of this divided society, one that 20 years following the Good Friday Peace Agreement has yet to come
to consensus on how to live beside one another. A man I sat next to on a city bus driving through East Belfast on the way to the Dundonald Ice Bowl explained to me that in working class neighbourhoods, like the one he was from, there is a continued resentment within the unionist community that a minority population of their union (the nationalists) had achieved a role in government through tactics that the unionists considered terrorism (26 November 2015). Contrastingly, at the end of the street where I resided in Belfast – a neighbourhood known as Lower Ormeau, a traditionally nationalist neighbourhood – was a mural denouncing occupation including the images of the Palestinian flag and a plaque paying tribute to Nelson Mandela (see Figure 26). Such images align with the nationalist belief that Northern Ireland is occupied by the British. There is also a third population that has the worldview, politic, and/or privilege that seemingly wishes to move beyond the conflict. This is also the group that it was suggested would be Giants fans – those ‘unaffected’ and ‘unwilling’ to take up the torch of division. As my research has shown, these three groups do not represent definites, rather people move between these (and more) roles depending on social and physical setting. In turn, what emerged from my fieldwork was a research setting that is divided over how to be divided.

Figure 26: Mural in Lower Ormeau
(Photograph by author, 2015)
Quincy Wright (1942) drew attention to the idea that "Peace is an equilibrium among many forces" (1284) and Galtung (1964) later highlighted the concept of negative peace, defined by the absence of physical violence. These theoretical constructs offer a fitting analytical lens for present-day Belfast, particularly highlighted by the silenced guns and bombs of the Troubles. Darling (2014) describes such a state through the term the ‘less than violent’, defined as that “which lies in the ambiguous and contested space between the violent and the peaceful” (237). The breadth of this state leaves room for violence beyond the physical, in particular through spatial, structural and epistemic challenges to side-by-side living. The city of Belfast offers a clear case study in how location changes the social interaction and civility that occurs. Edward Soja (2011) recognises the city as offering a terrain for wider societal division and tensions to be displayed. The tensions between history and present day are on display when Nagle (2013) points out Belfast has been a site where “civic and social life tends to occur within, rather than across ethnic cleavages…” (78) and Murtagh (2011) recognises post-peace agreement Belfast as a place where “simultaneous processes of segregation and mixing” (213) are occurring. Belfast city centre, for example, is a place that has long been shared as a centre for consumer activity, and is presently a hub for tourism, international companies, hotels, shopping malls and government offices. Short-term interactions that occur in the city centre can be identified primarily as casual in nature, and shared spaces in Northern Ireland have created a functional coexistence alongside heavily segregated spaces (Jarman and Bell, 2012). Where one is within Belfast plays a strong role in dictating the engagement and interaction occurring across ethno-sectarian division, and in this spatial understanding another way of thinking about encounter and side-by-sidedness emerges, as spaces of interaction across division are side-by-side spaces where only one ethno-sectarian group is welcome.

On 17 October I purchased the second seat in from the stairway/aisle. Once in the seat, I was informed by an older gentleman in the row behind me that I would likely have to move. This caught me off-guard, but once everyone arrived in the seats it became clear – two close friends had season tickets on either side of me, and they usually brought a friend who would purchase the ticket between them when she was able to attend. They had strategically chosen their seating pattern under the assumption that no one would purchase the single ticket between them. In my research I thought this seating arrangement fit my needs very well – somebody was seated on either side of me. At this
game, being seated between good friends – and having been warned that I should prepare to move for them, no matter what my ticket had written on it – gave a vantage point of how community and camaraderie developed amongst the regulars in this one specific section. These little communities within the wider arena were not uncommon to encounter; however, they were also side-by-side large numbers of spectators that were attending Giants games with much looser connection to the sport and other supporters within the arena. Further, amongst these spectators the interaction and conviviality within the arena would shift dependent on company, time and location – much like in wider Belfast, but without the grounding in ethno-sectarian communities.

*Everyday Peace*

Returning to Mac Ginty’s (2014) notion of everyday peace has much to offer discussion of research setting and side-by-sidedness. An interdisciplinary concept, “Everyday peace refers to the routinised practices used by individuals and collectives as they navigate their way through life in a deeply divided society that may suffer from ethnic or religious cleavages and be prone to episodic direct violence in addition to chronic or structural violence” (549). The concept is further defined by five characteristics which have particular relevance in the SSE Arena setting – *avoidance, ambiguity, ritualised politeness, telling and blame-deferral*. Central to Mac Ginty’s depiction of this theoretical approach is how people in their everyday lives seize any opportunity to avoid open conflict or confrontation and keep peace, regardless of how superficial and fragile it may seem.

_Tonight I sat beside a woman who was polite and quiet. In a lot of ways, she reminded me of my Mennonite mother – she didn’t exhibit any of the sharp edges that many people in Belfast show in conversation focused on difference, and yet when I asked this woman about whether divisions of Belfast infiltrated into the Giants supporter community she replied with a bluntness I hadn’t expected, stating:*

“Nobody cares.”

...and that was very much the end of it.

24 October 2015
Belfast Giants 4 – Sheffield Steelers 1
Gate 13 Row Q Seat 63
The woman highlighted in the excerpt above offers support to avoidance. She was a season ticket holder who would attend games alone; this is notable in Belfast, where the long history of working class labour, violent conflict and religion has generated a space that carries with it, and remains, masculine dominant (Ashe and Harland, 2014). Smyth and McKnight’s (2013) qualitative research on Belfast as a city experienced quite differently across gender lines note, “…mothers may seek to avoid face-to-face encounters in particular situations, when they do not expect to be treated with civil inattention or toleration by a gathering of young men in a public place” (309). This notion of civil inattention, a term originally highlighted by Goffman (1963) as a method of noticing others without notable interest in their particular characteristics, was on display within the arena, in the less intense form of encounter that required no further interaction than civilly sitting side-by-side while enjoying a hockey game. The comfort of women in this space, highlighted by this woman’s willingness to attend alone, and the statistics given to me which show 48% of the crowd being female (Brooks, 2015), further highlights that this setting may offer a higher form of negative peace than other settings within the city. The avoidance and civil inattention that is occurring in the side-by-side relationships at ice hockey games has lessened sensitive interactions. The example above highlights reduced gender disparity and discomfort, ironically in an environment established to watch men play sport for an organisation that is predominantly run by men.

The ambiguity of how the sport fits in Northern Ireland has been a part of its success. The SSE Arena and the sport of ice hockey sit beside much of routine life in Belfast. The hockey games, which can only be hosted in the niche facilities offered by the SSE Arena (and, to a lesser extent, the Dundonald International Ice Bowl), take place in the Titanic Quarter, located next to predominantly Unionist East Belfast. Titanic Quarter is, as noted in Chapter 9, a regeneration project based around leisure, tourism, and housing that Ramsey (2013) states, “provides a concrete case study of how the so-called ‘New Northern Ireland’ was established through the coalescing of political and economic forces, and how historical conditions can be neatly negated for the opportunity of development” (177). This notion of intentionally carving out a place of significance is something that extends to within the ice hockey arena, where historically ice hockey has not been an activity that has had any significance within the city, particularly as a non-native sport. The primarily non-participative nature of ice hockey in Northern Ireland
has positioned the game steadfastly within the realm of a spectator activity – a spectacle to watch. Returning to the theme of side-by-sidedness, ice hockey sits beside the other sports of the city rather than amongst them (football/soccer, GAA, rugby, boxing, etc.), and thus provides a space that allowed the supporters to also remain outside the norms of division.

The ambiguity, ‘outsiderness’ and light-hearted nature of the activity in many ways challenges need for blame deferral, as there was little reason for the side-by-side interactions to end up in a place of either blaming or deferring blame with regards to ethno-sectarian conflict. However, as highlighted in Chapter 9’s focus on the SSE Arena as a site of resistance, my research uncovered pushback to engagement with political, as well as reconciliatory, themes within this setting. In this resistance, I observed within setting and interactions a sense that the larger issues of division were those of ‘others’. There was a sense that those present would note they were ‘not into politics’, or that anti-social behaviours were those of a ‘special few’ who did not represent those in the SSE Arena. This returns to the idea of the Giants being a “filter for the idiots” as discussed in Chapter 9. In this way, the Giants offer a space of deferred blame, and once it is recognised that the ethno-sectarian struggles are enacted by, and thus blamed, on those who are not present at hockey games, a sense of shared space and sanctuary materialises.

The shared space nature of the SSE Arena connects to Bhabha’s (1994) construction of culture through a hybrid identity, which he believes arose from the give and take of interactions between the dominant (coloniser) and the dominated (colonised). He notes this hybridisation occurs in a ‘third space’, which offers new possibilities for integrating across an us/them divide and generates an ability by those who navigate these spaces to also traverse both cultural contexts that go into constructing this hybridity. This idea of the ‘third space’ returns to the previously highlighted use of side-by-sidedness and postcolonial literature, as well as provides a discernible meeting point with everyday peace. The emergence of a hybrid/shared culture and identity around ice hockey is founded on civility, which connects to Mac Ginty’s inclusion of ritualised politeness. This civility is both organically constructed and organisationally demanded, and it is somewhere between these two civilities that signs of telling are controlled and minimised – the primary example of this throughout the research findings was the hockey jersey and its ability to provide a covering which enabled the wearers to
navigate the arena without concern, in large part because of the civil inattention paid to their clothing.

**Beyond the everyday**

The paradigm of top-down, liberal peace initiatives has seemingly developed a prerequisite set of requirements in post-peace agreement settings that include initiatives such as truth and reconciliation commissions (Andrieu, 2010), human rights tribunals (Prorok, 2017), and liberal democratic structures of governance (Call and Wyeth, 2008). In situations such as South Africa, where one party has universally been deemed to have been in the wrong, these processes can be gauged to have a certain level of effectiveness (Vora and Vora, 2004); however, in a context like Northern Ireland, where neither side feels they have been in the wrong, there remain challenges with regards to the consociational nature of post-peace agreement relations (Coakley, 2011). One viewpoint on the Good Friday Agreement that speaks to the theme of side-by-sidedness is from Eamonn McCann addressing *The Irish Times* in 2013 when he noted:

> “It was the fundamental flaw in the agreement that it was not to bring people together but to police them apart, to replace hostility between the people by a grudging willingness to rope along together separately . . . The contradiction at the heart of the agreement is the fact that it institutionalises and formalises the sectarian division which gave rise to the violence in the first place. I am still convinced about that.”

(Moriarty, 2013)

At the core of these challenges is a question that is still evolving, which transcends what this thesis offers: how can Northern Ireland chart a pathway forward together, and as two seemingly separate, side-by-side entities?

**A Side-by-Side Methodology**

The theme of side-by-sidedness that this chapter examines finds its primary influence in the act of conducting research while seated side-by-side the person (or people) being interviewed throughout a hockey game. The physical act of sharing an experience during the interview was influenced by several methodological approaches, including Lefebvre’s (1991) desire to understand the “lived environment” and Malinowski’s (1922) belief that successful ethnographic research is able “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world” (25). Although I do not claim to have gained this ‘native point of view’, at a very literal physical sense the research
setup included the researcher and the researched literally looking at the same thing whilst in discussion about what this experience represented. However, this notion of vantage point can be applied to a deeper metaphorical understanding of this meta-theme, particularly through a greater balancing of power in the relationship between the researcher and the researched. There was a sense of equality embedded in the approach from early on, including in the academic decision to focus on a group that has not been academically overexposed, offering voice to new individuals in a research landscape that is not short on academic researchers. By entering the SSE Arena, the core voices of the research came from the random fans in the arena and not from the organisation or its handlers. This discussion of power is further drawn to the physical setup: the horizontal seats, side-by-side, meant that the instruments of the institution – desks, notebooks and recorders – were replaced instead with meaningful interactions that allowed both parties to leave the ‘script’ and enjoy a shared experience as Giants fans.

With this understanding of power and equality, this section of the chapter explores side-by-side research further to construct deeper understanding of this method as adaptive. The interview method is discussed as a response to the research space, whilst also situating key aspects of shared identity, rapport and informality as factors to side-by-side access. The final point of discussion presented in this section shifts away from the physical and methodological towards a metaphorical positionality that discusses the epistemological humility influential in the broader theme of side-by-sidedness.

**Reading the Room: Adapting to the Research Space**

Integral to case study research design is an adaptability and reflexivity that accounts for the setting, research communities and the overarching research goals (Bryman, 2008). This research required careful consideration in this regard, as the people I was there to interview were paying to have a night out at the SSE Arena watching the Giants, with no expectation of being the subject of academic study. The last thing I wanted to do was to dampen or ruin the experience for them. This consideration, central to adapting to the research setting, informed the original decision to try and interview the person beside me throughout the game. I did not feel that interviews in the arena concourse or meeting in McCool’s pub after the game would have been as informative and befitting of my research agenda. Although this is the most obvious adaptation to the research space,
there were further elements of adaptability that connect to the theme of side-by-sidenedness.

It quickly became evident in my research that I would be much more welcome in my efforts to interview people if I knew the team, its history, the players, and had developed a vested interest in the outcome of the game, instead of being focused primarily on the interview at hand. Essentially, my questions were much more welcome once we had a baseline commonality fitting of the research space; within the SSE Arena this meant becoming a fan of the team. In my preparation for field work, I had read my way to a theoretical framework, gained understanding of the historical divisions of Northern Ireland, and achieved ethical clearance for conducting research; yet what mattered to my fellow fans was that I was a supporter of the Giants and carried an enthusiasm for the team. Being a Canadian and having grown up understanding and playing ice hockey earned me some capital amongst Giants supporters. However, my first days in Belfast were spent consuming all things Giants: watching clips of past seasons on YouTube, reading about the season when ex-NHL star Theoren Fleury led the team to a championship, figuring out who Paxton Schulte was with his number 27 jersey retired and hanging in the arena, and why that violent brawl between the players of the Belfast Giants and the Nottingham Panthers on 26 October 2002 still evokes emotion from supporters.

In my immersion I wanted to align my Giants experience as closely as possible to that of fellow Giants fans. This saw me attend away games with supporters in Sheffield, Nottingham and Manchester, and as the journal excerpt below highlights, I found my way to the Boomerang Corner:

After getting in touch through Twitter I got myself an invite to Boomerang Corner. What a different experience!

There was no interview because there is not a great deal of talking. The songs and chants move with the game, dependent on who is on the ice, and whether the cheering is directed at goaltending, defence or offence – leaving me very little time to have discussion with the people I was around. Once I was in Boomerang Corner two things stood out: the first was realising how tight the space was; the corner is elevated compared to the seats around it, creating a sense of separation and being on display that makes it feel exclusive, even if it was one of the most welcoming places in the arena. The second thing I noticed was that it was a very wide array of people who had voluntarily come to scream and sing and be the main cheering act for the Giants. Behind me were a couple of kids, in their early teens, the gender disparity leaned to
more males, but not as intensely as I had expected for these being the ‘hardcore’ fans. And in front of me sat the widowed partner of Stewart ‘Boomerang’ Boone;66 she must have been 20 years older than anyone else up there, but it was the anniversary of Stewart’s death and she wanted to put on one of his hockey jerseys, sing, drink and cry in his memory.

It was here, way up in this corner of a hockey arena in Northern Ireland, as I sang out an ode to one of the star players67 that followed the tune of The Beatles’ ‘Yellow Submarine’ surrounded by a varied group of strangers – some Catholics, some Protestants, and a bunch of atheists – that I realised how attached I had become to this team, these fans and my thesis research.

Boomerang Corner
Nottingham Panthers 3 – Belfast Giants 2
5 December 2015

In returning to the theme of shared identity, becoming a fan as I described in the excerpt above, became part of the “lived experience and source of identity” (Crawford, 2004: 49) that I carried through the research. With regards to side-by-sidedness, becoming a fan was much like showing support with others, a meaning tied to side-by-side and highlighted in this chapter’s introduction. Samra and Wos (2014) identify the emotional attachment that is considered a central aspect of being a sports fan; in this manner I shared in an identity trait based on mutual emotional attachment to the team. It was from this platform, where I could ‘talk hockey’ and ‘bleed teal’, that the person in the seat to my left or right was open to talk about the things I had come hoping to discuss.

In essence, my support of the Giants gave me rapport with other fans, considered to be “a key ingredient in successful qualitative interviewing” (King and Horricks, 2010: 48). This rapport, particularly as highlighted in the methodology chapter (Chapter 7), was constructed throughout the first period of the hockey game, where I proved myself as belonging in the space as a hockey fan, and where I was transparent and clear about my research agenda. In this vein it warrants highlighting that this approach had a participation rate of verbal consent to be included in the research of one hundred percent; in the 22 hockey games I attended, not once did a participant disagree or opt out of being included in my research.

66 Boomerang Corner is named in honour of Stewart Boone, who I was told battled several bouts of cancer but he kept coming back like a Boomerang - which became his nickname.
67 “We all dream of a team of Darryl Lloyds, a team of Darryl Lloyds, a team of Darryl Lloyds…”
One further attribute of the side-by-side research that warrants discussion under the
wider theme of side-by-sidedness is the informality embedded in the approach. Across
the Giants’ season, I conducted 25 interviews in face-to-face settings, and in these
interviews questions and answers carried with them a very different tone than those
within the arena. In these more formal interviews with hockey players and Giants staff, I
was continuously met with generic or avoidant responses, later explained to me as likely
stemming from the team-wide mandate not to discuss anything ‘political’. In the
interviews I conducted with community peace organisations there was a sense that I was
one in a long queue of post-conflict researchers who came through their offices. Clark
(2008) highlights the role of research fatigue that can occur across qualitative research
settings, noting an increased “apathy and indifference toward engagement” (965). In my
experience with some organisations I interviewed in Northern Ireland this apathy took
the form of what were seemingly rehearsed and scripted-like responses that met my
questions with generic answers that had likely been recited to most all of the post-
conflict researchers that came before me. Gilligan (2016) attributes the inundation of
researchers in Northern Ireland to the ease of transportation to the region, the English-
speaking context, and the relatively low level of violence experienced in this conflict, as
well as considerable funding and influence which has steered research towards a focus
on how to improve the lives of those affected. However, my interviews in the SSE
Arena presented something very different from these organisational and formal
interviews, both in interaction and outcome. Jowett and O’Toole (2006) draw attention
to informality, noting that the ability to access information can be aided by the
informality of the interaction it is obtained in. The physical aspect of sitting beside
someone while sharing an experience offered the ability to make a connection that was
not over-thought by the person I was with; there was great opportunity for opening the
door to candid discussion that would not likely have occurred otherwise.

The discussion of informality connects to the way language was used in the research
process. The language used in research of the everyday requires adapting to the research
environment for research to be effectively understood and communicated (Foley, 2002);
although James C. Scott (2013) warns that language is often utilised as a tool of states,
media, and academics to shape the messages and agency coming out of local accounts
of conflict. As noted in the previous discussion on conditions of intergroup contact, the
SSE Arena does not offer laboratory-like conditions for studying human interactions,
and correspondingly I made sure to adapt the language of my interviews to be befitting of the environment. The interviews in this thesis were representative of the general interactions I experienced in the SSE Arena; there were numerous times in the conversations that an explanation or a statement would be offered that was laced with the expletives of everyday Northern Ireland, only to be followed with caveats like, “Sorry, you probably don’t want swearing in your PhD”. A statement of apology suggested both a certain level of respect for the collection of research while also being comfortable enough to answer honestly. At a wider philosophical level, language use can be understood within the framework of side-by-sidedness as offering challenge to the power and privilege that often cloud researcher-researched relationships, choosing instead to enter into an association that has a horizontal level of engagement. Foucault (1972) draws attention to the understanding that knowledge and power are very much related and cannot really be addressed separately. The barriers, or perceived barriers of knowledge/power can be commonly observed in both the arrogance and carelessness that is often displayed in the distance between researcher and researched, as well as between the researcher and the intended audience, be it academic or applied. Motivated by this personal critique of academic research(ers), I continuously and consciously sought the reflexivity to have my understanding of what was occurring within the SSE Arena be informed through discussion of experience and knowledge with the person beside me, using whatever language the interviewee deemed appropriate – an approach that finds support in Mac Ginty’s (forthcoming) observation that “scholarly interpretations of conflict and peoples’ experiences of conflict can be anti-vernacular processes that risk stripping agency from individuals and groups who actually experience a conflict” (6).

This informed discussion returns to the notion of ‘reading the room’ and adapting to the research space. The selection of a seat, without knowing who would be next to me, is worthy of discussion as it offered space for the unexpected to occur. The unknowns of sitting beside someone chosen at random at a sports match with an unknown outcome made possible “fluidity within and between different positions and its potential for unexpected encounters to flower…” (Moles, 2008). The research site was not fixed, with the atmosphere of the game and the supporter community always changing. However, the nature of the arena, the civility that is embedded in the experience, and the knowledge that this is a safe place free from concerns related to ethno-sectarian
contention afforded me confidence for the side-by-side methods and the informal approach to conducting interviews. In the introduction of their text on ‘narrative inquiry’, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) cite Dewey’s (1938) criteria of experience noting that, “People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context” (2). This quote resonates with this research, as the sensory experiences of the game and the always changing crowd trend away from the static nature of a more formal interview, and in response each interview took on a life of its own, with the person in the seat beside me holding a distinct level of agency in the direction the interview went. Thus, the interviews themselves became an important part of observation in the research experience.

_Side-by-Sidedness: Epistemological humility and Interdisciplinarity_

In this section focused on methodology, the manner in which the research was conducted and written has a role in the discussion of side-by-sidedness, particularly with primary research being conducted in the horizontal setting of sitting side-by-side. This approach, if I may say, offers an epistemological humility that differs from common practices of academic and knowledge production and enterprising.

In utilising a reflexive and interdisciplinary, mixed qualitative approach, this research finds grounding in Back’s (2007) sociological curiosity which utilises C. Wright Mills’ attempt to “write it right”68 through “an invitation to engage with the world differently, without recourse to arrogance but with openness and humility” (Back, 2007: 4). Such an approach trends away from hierarchical academic egoism, and draws the focus to listening, a method which aligns with my intentions as a researcher. As noted in the analytical framework, the academic field of peace and conflict study originates in social change-seeking solution construction, but has evolved to include critical, academic literature with less connection between theory and practice (Rogers and Ramsbotham, 1999). This has become normalised, in what Skelly (2002) notes as “reinforcing the cult of expertise” (59). In this way, writing honestly the themes that emerged from the research interviews and observations, as well as my role within them, rather than manufacturing research results that cater to research excellency frameworks and

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68 Referencing a letter Mills wrote to a friend, William Miller, in the late 1950s (Back, 2007: 2).
academic prestige, offers a challenge for an aspirational academic researcher like myself.

In seeking to better understand the epistemological and disciplinary undertaking, this in-depth qualitative research mines a spectrum of scholarship and practices, particularly the diverse fields of peace studies, human geography and sociology. In doing so an approach emerges that enables the written work to follow the lead of the research findings rather than to fit findings within disciplinary boundaries. Such an approach is not unique to this thesis, with a rise in interdisciplinary scholarship in higher education; however, it does offer a challenge to mainstream academic notions which encourage specialisation and the corresponding reinforcement of pre-existing ways of thinking (Gruenwald, 2014). In this way, the bridging of ideas from across existing academic disciplines offers challenge to the academic placement of this research, while also becoming engrained in its production. From this interdisciplinary approach, an epistemological humility has emerged that is intrinsic in my relationship with the authoring of this thesis; it is in this humility that there emerges a respect for and desire to expand the edges of my own knowledge, both that which I have gathered across observation and interview in Belfast, as well as in theoretical and interdisciplinary understanding.

The idea of Northern Ireland coming out of a long period of being insular and inward-focused, as highlighted in Chapter 8, is supported by the changes and shifts that are observably occurring within Belfast. The supporters of the Giants exemplify an embracing of change to the outward looking, globally-influenced and aware. The introduction of this chapter, and my positionality as a fan, recognise side-by-side as implying a sense of solidarity and support; this comes through metaphorically across this methodology. Through the side-by-side approach I did not just fill a seat and conduct an interview or cheer for the hockey team, but rather continually developed a personal desire to be side-by-side my hosts and witness their navigation of the long and challenging road from violent conflict to a more meaningful definition of peace.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has drawn out the meta-theme of side-by-sidedness that has emerged across this thesis by reengaging with the theories presented in the literature review
chapters, the context of the research and the methodological approach. However, this prevalent theme also offers something more: what has emerged through this chapter is an awareness of the potential for side-by-sidedness to be used as a tool for better understanding encounter in deeply divided settings. By circling back to the theories, side-by-sidedness offers an alternative to the assumptions of face-to-face encounter inherent in social capital, intergroup contact, and civility literatures. Instead it offers support for ‘lightened encounter’, which has potential for reducing pressure and lessening the anxiety of those in contact. In returning to the context of Northern Ireland, side-by-sidedness presents a unique lens through which to view the movements and everyday decisions and interactions within this space, and how segregated, single-community spaces coexist side-by-side shared spaces. There is a uniqueness to the methodology that responded to the research space and saw the primary interviews conducted while literally side-by-side. The distinctness of this methodology goes further, offering a deeper understanding of the metaphorical reach of side-by-sidedness across the research landscape.

Overall what emerges is a theme that has a wide variety and adaptability in meaning. The introduction to this chapter highlighted the versatile uses of side-by-sidedness, utilising examples of side-by-side comparison, support/solidarity, and sharing rather than resisting cultural experience. Each of these uses emerges in the application of this theme to the field research and understanding of the Belfast Giants supporters, just as the themes identified in the analytical framework – prejudice, anxiety, tolerance, trust, power and space – shape the way I have framed my approach to engaging this theme throughout this chapter. As a theme, side-by-sidedness casts a wide net that enables it to be explored, applied, and philosophically understood; however, there is also a specific value to this theme that emerges and warrants highlighting in this conclusion. The following quote, from a Giants fan named Joel Neill, whom I interviewed in Rockies Sports Bar on a Saturday afternoon prior to a game against the Nottingham Panthers, encapsulates what side-by-sidedness looks like in this setting.

There are people in that arena, and I won’t name names, that I know have entrenched views one way or the other and if the two people who would shake hands in that arena were to meet in another scenario they would despise each other.

Rockies Sports Bar
Joel Neill
5 December 2015
This quote captures the multi-levelled particularism involved in being a Giants fan in divided Belfast, where the physical act of sitting beside someone from across an historical ethno-sectarian cleavage is a symbol of change processes that are occurring and which warrant recognition, as it is a willingness that cannot yet be assumed of everyone in Belfast. This thesis identifies the shifting interactions and attitudes that correspond with the spaces of encounter, while highlighting what people are capable of, and how they are willing to act civilly and engage with difference in the defined space of the SSE Arena; however, this level of interaction has yet to prove capable of altering wider structures of ethno-sectarian division in Northern Ireland.

In the context of this research which has sought to understand the phenomenon of ice hockey against a wider backdrop of Belfast, the willingness to enter the SSE Arena and sit side-by-side with difference emerged. This space exemplified a sense of acceptance of other fans; the uniqueness of shared interest in ice hockey in a place that has little meaningful history with the sport lent itself to a version of ‘Belfastians’ that trended away from more rigid social and political expectations that permeate roles and identities in other settings. The relationships of the arena offer a great deal to post-peace agreement understanding of ‘the other’ through the three interpretations of the chapter. This understanding demonstrates that a willingness to share an experience side-by-side makes way for opportunity to see similarity in shared experience that is not possible when divided, to generate a shared culture in something new instead of resisting new experiences in an effort to stay entrenched in insular regional division, and in doing so there is the potential to create a sanctuary from divisive rhetoric and action. In returning to a personal framework of this thesis, which was presented in the thesis’ introduction (Chapter 1), side-by-sidedness intertwines with Friere’s (1996) understanding that humans cannot be confined by the current state of things, and Lederach’s (2005) definition of the moral imagination, where the physicality and philosophical notion of side-by-side has something to offer a discussion of “the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies” (5).
Chapter 11

Conclusion

“People here will not accept change. The arguments are over the same things between the same people since I was born. That’s why the Giants mean so much to me, they are always changing.”

“They might not always win but they keep trying to get better.”

12 November 2015
Belfast Giants 6 vs. Edinburgh Capitals 3 (Win)
Gate 6 - Y106

This thesis is founded on a curiosity around better understanding those who have been deeply affected by the cleavages of conflict, and yet manage a willingness to share encounter, experience, and/or a piece of their identity with those they are expected to oppose. These initial research motivations were guided academically by interdisciplinary engagement, including diverse literatures, particularly those at the centre of the theoretical framework – social capital, intergroup contact, and civility. Inherent across the literatures is a valuing of positive social experiences, particularly when people can navigate interpersonal and intergroup relationships with one another across difference. Within the context of divided societies, the approach and expectation in each of these literatures is different, particularly the varying perspectives of what positive relationships look like and how they might be achieved; for example, there is a significant difference between van Leeuwen’s (2015) side-by-side civility, Putnam’s healthy bridging social capital and Allport’s four optimal conditions for intergroup contact. This thesis’ analytical framework was sculpted out of these three concepts to guide the questions and frame fieldwork thinking. This analytical framework connects the social-emotional processes that encompass personal and interpersonal responses with the context of Northern Ireland, Belfast and the SSE Arena as a means of linking the interpersonal and intercommunal with the spatial.

Northern Ireland offered a fitting environment for this study, with the thesis’ core interests in post-peace agreement relations between divided groups. The protracted
conflict has had many stages, from periods of intense violent conflict to disdainful coexistence. What is evident in Belfast is that the cleavages are not left to history, rather they are embedded in all aspects of life. The all-encompassing nature of ethno-sectarian division – be it residential, economic, educational, political, social or cultural – presented a research setting that had division at its everyday level. This offered a valuable opportunity to research a space (the SSE Arena) where ‘the way of things’ was being challenged.

The primary research findings were presented through the lens of themes that emerged throughout my season with the ice hockey supporters. The methodology of sitting side-by-side the interviewee heavily impacted the themes that emerged. The identity construction presented in ‘The Hockey Family’ (Chapter 8) comes out of the hockey arena, the wearing of the hockey jersey, and the ritual of attending hockey games. What emerged is a hockey-generated community that Turner (1969) would highlight as arising from its position outside of the norms of social structures. The uniqueness of this ever-changing community is fitting of the physical setup of a hockey game, as the arena offers the gathering of a crowd that is never the same twice and is dominated by the spectacle of hockey that distracts from requiring face-to-face interaction. In this chapter the accounts of Giants supporters who have built and continue to foster relationships within the shared identity of the hockey family are described. They illustrate that the relationships around this sport are developing despite the limitations of time and space – highlighting that the SSE Arena is a space where the ‘we’ includes ‘the other’. The next findings chapter, ‘Kingdom of the Giants’ (Chapter 9), follows on this notion of shared identity by offering a contextual understanding of the Giants and the SSE Arena within Belfast through the themes of sanctuary and resistance. The sanctuary theme highlighted the SSE Arena as a space that offered temporary respite from the divided lived experience of Belfast. In the normalised and almost mundane nature of dealing with difference within the hockey arena, an everyday resistance emerged to both the pressures of divided living as well finding deeper meaning in shared spaces. In this way, within a wider setting that encourages segregation and antagonism, as well as one that pushes a liberal peace agenda focused on cross-community initiatives, the SSE Arena is recognised as exceptional.

Across the thesis an overarching theme emerged – side-by-sidedness. As a meta-theme, side-by-sidedness offers a framework for which to examine the phenomenon of sitting
side-by-side across significant historical cleavages in the ice hockey arena. This theme materialised most strongly in the method of primary interviews; however, once it was recognised, the theme grew in scope to offer connections across the thesis. The theoretical applications of social capital, intergroup contact and civility highlight that this theme offers a conceptual understanding of ‘lightened encounter’ that challenges the intensity of the face-to-face interaction. Side-by-sidedness is also utilised in examining the SSE Arena as situated side-by-side more historically encumbered settings within Belfast, offering a spatial conception of this theme. At a methodological level, this theme is highlighted through the response to the physical set-up of the space and in the conducting of primary interviews with the person seated beside me, but as the previous chapter emphasises, is also seen in the research approach, which aimed to situate myself as the researcher side-by-side members of this community as they challenge the social structures of division in which they live. Broadly, what materialised through this meta-theme was a tool for better reasoning and understanding encounter in deeply divided settings.

In concluding this thesis, three sections bring this research project together. The first, and most substantial section identifies three significant contributions arising from this thesis. These contributions include the unique side-by-side methodology employed in the research, the complex and fluid relationship between identity and space, and a discussion of ways in which the meta-theme of side-by-sidedness makes an offering to peace and conflict research. The key contributions are followed by potential ways forward for this research, and a final section reflecting on what this research has meant to me.

**Key Contributions**

This section presents three specific contributions that come out of this thesis. The first contribution is rooted in the innovativeness of the methodology. The unique physical, side-by-side setup of this approach presents arguments for research adaptability, informality, and support for grounded and inclusive research. This method contributes to the ‘local turn’ in peace and conflict research, and the corresponding trends toward ethnographic design. The second contribution returns to two thematic guideposts presented in the analytical framework, through focus on the interplay that occurs between identity and space. The research findings demonstrate that present-day Belfast
is a place where identity is multi-layered and fluid, shifting with the spaces one occupies across the cityscape. The relationships constructed within the SSE Arena offer challenge to simplistic binaries and expectations associated with group identity through this intergroup activity.

This thesis’ interdisciplinary inductive approach led to a theme of side-by-sideness that transcended across the academic exercise. This theme offers a great deal as the final featured contribution. The methodology aspect of side-by-sideness is highlighted in the first contribution, thus this discussion steers towards side-by-sideness as a way to frame and analyse relationship construction following protracted conflict. In doing so this key contribution highlights the metaphorical and physical idea of sitting beside history, and the relationship construction that occurs across cleavage, which offers challenge to expectations encountered in post-peace agreement settings. With the thesis framed in the SSE Arena, this section illustrates the creation of new shared identities, which are not embedded in the narrative of conflict that continues to play out repeatedly in Northern Ireland; in this way it demonstrates a contribution that what is new and different is not always bad. This contribution arises from side-by-sideness as a form of resistance to social and political pressures, some of which seek peace and some of which seek conflict.

**Side-by-Side Methodology**

*Having conducted interviews at five games I suspect I should reflect on my interview approach.*

*I keep expecting someone to ask me to leave them alone and yet there haven’t been any outward signs that I am being a pain in the ass with all my questions.*

*The welcome and the willingness to offer explanations and educate me about their lives and their Giants experience is a remarkable trait I hadn’t expected. I thought it would take more work to get people to talk to me, turns out all I have to do is cheer for the Giants and ask.*

**Field Journal**

10 November 2015

The side-by-side approach to interviewing quickly became a central feature to the research project. This methodological approach is instrumental in drawing out side-by-sideness as a meta-theme across the research project. This section stays within the
methodology in its discussion of the side-by-side; focusing on this way of doing research as a contribution to wider literatures focused on methodological approach. In doing so, three distinct characteristics warrant highlighting as a reminder of the grounded research that can come from listening to the answers that people are offering.

The first of these three characteristics is the adaptability of the research. As I have sat in my shared office in Manchester with my fellow PhD researchers, I have realised that in preparing for fieldwork we all go through the methodological literatures explaining the research that is similar to that which we intend to conduct, and we treat textbooks like menus which describe the possibilities of research. We then submit to our supervisors a framework that describes how our research will be conducted. Back (2007) highlights that “Sociological craft involves choosing the right tools of investigation and honing them in a way that is appropriate to the task” (164). The side-by-side methodology comes out of adaptation to the research environment, utilising academically-tested methodological influences to situate the approach; however, this method offers a contribution through underlining a continued need for adaptability to the research space and goals, a sentiment highlighted by Back. If the research goal is to produce narratives embedded in the experiences and truths of the researched, the standardised research methods and questions are unlikely to grasp elusive answers.

The second characteristic offered by the side-by-side methodological approach is reinforcing the argument for informality in the research process, previously highlighted by Jowett and O’Toole (2006). Key to the informal nature of this research is the use of everyday language, the physical setting, and the seating arrangement in which the research is conducted, all within the boundaries of a shared interest in the Belfast Giants. Highlighting informality as a key contribution of this methodological approach may open up this approach to a critique that the loose structures of the interview format and style lack academic and technical preparation. Through my research experience, I would suggest that my side-by-side interviews were more effective and required a much greater level of researcher preparation and participation than my face-to-face interviews; further, the informality embedded in the methodology broadened the appeal of participation and developed a researcher understanding and answers that offered greater insight than those more formally conducted.
The third offering of this methodology is best seen when examined against a backdrop of peace and conflict research as it offers a critique of this interdisciplinary field’s current trends. Across peace and conflict research is a common critique that top-down approaches to peacebuilding and intervention lack local expertise and are less effective than those that are developed from and within local communities affected by conflict. Ironically, the majority of research conducted in this area is from institutions in developed countries in a manner that involves ‘flying-in and flying-out’ to get answers to a set of specific questions. It has been my observation that the same academic research that critiques external actors entering conflict situations for a short-term while motivated by self-interest are indeed utilising these exact characteristics in their research approaches and methods. I write this critique with full recognition that this PhD research is not exempt from this judgement, as embedded within this academic exercise is an inherent power and privilege. The side-by-side methodology is situated within a framework that focuses on the lived experiences of the research community in an in-depth approach. From this position it offers a contribution of support for existing calls for peace and conflict research to continue to be locally grounded (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013; Dzuverovic, 2018).

Identity and Space

The Giants backup goaltender, Andrew Dickson, is the only Belfast Giant from Northern Ireland. He normally doesn’t play unless there is an injury, but in the Challenge Cup with games that are not counted against league play there was opportunity for him to play. There are a lot of crowd favourites and opinions on players but nothing quite compares to the reception Andrew Dickson receives.

“He’s one of our own
He’s one of our own
He’s Andrew Dickson
He’s one of our own”

The chants coming out of Boomerang Corner were all about how ‘Dicko’ is one of ‘our’ own. The use of a possessive pronoun might not be notable in many places but in Northern Ireland ‘our’ seemingly always connects to a specific community.

It says something important that in the SSE Arena a young male Protestant from Ballymoney was being claimed by everyone because he is a Belfast Giant.

Field Journal
12 December 2015
The journal entry above highlights the complexity of identity that is consistently on display in post-peace agreement Northern Ireland. As a region and a people where there is constant negotiation and renegotiation with a long history of divided living, cheering for Andrew Dickson is something that only half of the fans would traditionally have done. However, the SSE Arena, as highlighted through this thesis as a site that stands apart from such norms, is a space where ‘Dicko’ can be supported by everyone. My research presents personal identities within the hockey family as fluid and multi-layered; such an observation and understanding offers an important contribution to peace and conflict study.

Recognising the shifting and adaptable nature of identity in present-day Belfast makes an offering to the thesis’ research questions, which sought to further understand what levels of interaction and communication are occurring across historical division within the SSE Arena during Belfast Giants games and whether these interactions and activities have an impact in wider Belfast. As highlighted throughout this thesis, in the city of Belfast indicators such as living arrangements, voting patterns and education systems continue to show a city that normalises separation; however, there are also complexities intertwined within single identity neighbourhoods. One such example is found in Ardoyne, a section of Belfast that has voting patterns explicitly tied to being a nationalist community, yet of those community members who hold a passport, 56.2% have a British passport, while only 40% possess an Irish passport (Liggett, 2017; NISRA, 2011c). Such inconsistencies, no matter how small the sample size in passport possession, illuminate that expectations that might be held cannot necessarily be assured. In this inconsistent and conflict-affected setting, the normalisation of relationships and consistency in interactions within the SSE arena present a significant phenomenon.

This thesis’ findings in Chapter 8 focused on the role of the team jersey as a symbol of shared identity that transcends, as well as avoids and covers, other symbols of community allegiances. The SSE Arena as a space for shared identity to emerge across historical division offers support for new identity construction (‘the hockey family’), and ice hockey offers a contribution to the argument that activities from ‘outside’ the historical and regional boundaries offer potential for sharing space that does not exist.

69 People born in Northern Ireland have rights to both Irish and UK passports.
with those intertwined with ethno-sectarian history. The abilities, however varying, of individuals within the Belfast Giants supporter community to have multiple public identities side-by-side each other and to be able to adapt based on space and company is a defining attribute of this social group. Such a core finding speaks directly back to the relationship between identity and space, highlighted in the analytical framework (Chapter 6), through an overarching understanding amongst Giants fans that everyone present in the SSE Arena is somebody else somewhere else, but when in the arena as a whole they make up a shared social group.

The fluidity of identity ties to the notion highlighted in ‘The Hockey Family’ of being placeholders, which I understood to describe those who are not confined to the rhetoric and actions of a divisive past, and neither do they feel a peaceful coexistence in the present. This was attributed to a generational gap, but also represents a position people are selecting into within the city that sits between conflict and peace. The Giants offer a draw for this group, as highlighted by the CEO of the Odyssey Trust, Robert Fitzpatrick (2015):

“...It could have been lacrosse, it could have been beach volleyball, it could have been polo, it could have been anything 15 years ago that just changed the conversation. The fact that it was ice hockey and guys could drop the gloves, or guys could slap into each other, or it was fast and that the silent majority could say we can go watch something and not worry about getting labelled. If you look at all the patterns within our society – 50% of us don’t vote. The silent are the majority and all we want to do is live our lives and raise our families…”

(Fitzpatrick, 2015)

The placeholder may illustrate a fluid identity, but there is also a sense of having a cross to bear that removes any accountability to the state of things, as Fitzpatrick notes, a desire to just live one’s own life. This is important to the second research question guiding the thesis, as the attributes of tolerance and civility that permeate this shared space do not have explicit effects on the wider negative social structures and arrangements of Belfast. Both social capital and the contact hypothesis have pre-determined expectations, particularly in the construction of neatly discernible and mutually beneficial social groups; however, the Giants supporters do not fit neatly within this, in large part due to the way in which they have taken an exceptional activity – in this context gathering across historical division – and made it seem unexceptional.
In places of conflict, as well as in the study of conflict, there is a tendency to assign labels to individuals or people from particular backgrounds or places as being defined by certain identifiers; this was highlighted in Chapter 8 with the use of the Seamus Heaney poem “Whatever You Say. Say Nothing”. However, findings in this chapter challenge such binary thinking, offering pushback against such sentiments as “you know them by their eyes”. The Giants supporters as a social group challenge any romanticised processes of telling that suggest they are only Catholics or Protestants, or even that those in the SSE Arena are the unaffected post-Troubles population. The interplay of identity, space and social group construction that emerges across this thesis, although limited to the sample size of one such community, offers a reminder to scholars across disciplines that residents of Northern Ireland, and more widely populations in conflict, cannot be neatly fitted into a simple binary of one or the other.

**Side-by-Sidedness**

“...reconciliation in the broader sense of Northern Ireland is many, many decades away, if even can ever occur.

Whereas I think the approach of learning to tolerate each other, learning to have mechanisms where we can live by each other is perhaps less ambitious but it is more realistic.”

Graham Greenlee
Windsor Park
27 October 2015

Side-by-sidedness acts not only as the meta-theme of this thesis, but also as its most defined contribution. In drawing out this theme across the thesis, the previous chapter highlighted the multiple ways that side-by-sidedness emerged across method, concept and research findings. This section will outline explicit ways in which this theme provides an addition to interdisciplinary study of peace and conflict. Side-by-sidedness offers a new angle to the study of relationship construction in post peace-agreement settings, which is best understood as a framed form of encounter that is both physical and metaphorical. From this, side-by-sidedness offers challenge to lofty goals of post-peace agreement programming, by adding to the growing literatures that recognise everyday ways people tolerate one another in the area between peace and conflict.
The relationships constructed within the SSE Arena are based on shared interest in the Belfast Giants; the encounter that occurs within this setting is softened by the indirect way in which the interactions of the space are occurring. The site lines are unobtrusive, with focus on the game, rather than who one is next to or near. The method of the encounter and the shared goal of supporting the team through the game offers a space that does not necessitate relationship construction, rather is overlooked by only enough institutional guidance to demand a civility that is based on the universal understanding that both communities are present and must not be disrespected. Watching ice hockey side-by-side at first glance does not seem to have much to offer in linking people together; however, as Chapter 8 demonstrates, relationships of all kinds regularly develop within this setting, both in and across communities.

A critique of side-by-side relationships would be that such a setting does not require a level of interaction that could bridge division with any significant depth. This is a fair assumption; however, the physical setup of being side-by-side is not uncommon. There was an emo-punk band in the early-2000s called ‘Dashboard Confessional’ taking their name from the heartfelt discussions that naturally occur during car rides. This setup of being together in a car, side-by-side, has been employed by Jerry Seinfeld in his recent series “Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee” or James Corden’s “Carpool Karaoke”, being lauded as a way to really get to know someone (in both of these cases celebrities) without the intensity and mask involved in a face-to-face official interview. Also attached to this idea of the ‘confessional’ of the side-by-side is the literal confession booth, associated with the Catholic church, where one goes in and sits side-by-side (and also separate) a priest, while seeking absolution from sins committed. Such a setup seemingly limits harshness of human-to-human judgement that could be embedded in the interaction. Beyond the religious, there is an awkwardness to turning fully to look directly at the person in a seat beside you, it is easier to scrutinise the people one can see ‘over there’ across the room or in this case in another area or section of the arena. The side-by-side relationships of this arena, portrayed throughout this thesis, can neither be defined as confessional nor void of scrutiny of those beside; however, these examples of side-by-side relationships offer a contribution to expanding understanding of the way that encounters and relationships occur, in particular through the thematic guideposts of the analytical framework of raising tolerance and lowering levels of prejudice and anxiety. Such a contribution to peace and conflict study, particularly the way that
relationships are constructed in post-peace agreement settings, extracts from human and urban geography to present new framing and value to a physical setup that is often easier to navigate than something more direct.

At a more macro-level, side-by-sidedness can be seen in activities, initiatives, or social groups that sits side-by-side social norms, offering further contribution from this theme. The Belfast Giants case study lends itself to imagining a new future in which non-traditional activities play a valuable role in the construction of shared social spaces. One other such example of popular cultural activities sitting outside of history which I observed during my winter in Belfast was the ‘The Lady Boys of Bangkok’. This global touring cabaret show was one of the main leisure attractions in the city centre in November 2015, with circus-style tents covering a good deal of the central Custom House Square. As I would walk the waterfront to professional ice hockey games, the entrance queues and pounding bass beats of this entertainment became familiar; these two activities were indicators of a willingness in Belfast to come together and share events that have no place in the still embedded conflicts between communities. It would also bring a smile to my face to think about how the violent and passionate characters that adorn this region’s history would have looked upon a willingness to go and sit side-by-side the other at cabaret shows and ice hockey games, an indicator of Belfast’s shift to being a global city.

In discussing the place that the Giants occupy in Belfast with Stephen Bloomer (2015), a PhD researcher at Ulster University whose thesis investigates football/soccer and conflict transformation in Northern Ireland, he suggested that the Belfast Giants have achieved a reputation in Belfast that if reached by a local football club there would be much greater meaning attached to it. He is likely right. However, Northern Ireland is not yet a place where this has been consistently possible. Bloomer’s work with concepts of conflict transformation is notable, as this approach corresponds with the critiques mentioned above, that the most effective approach to building peace is one which is organic and self-constructed (Lederach, 2003). The Giants are steeped in external influence, their arena was a mega project that was completed with intentionality, and the sport they play is a completely non-native activity in this region; and yet the

70 The UEFA championship in the summer of 2017 offered a brief opportunity for cross-community support of the Northern Ireland team.
relationships and atmosphere around the team offer something to a discussion of locally-constructed, inclusive interactions. The original appeal of the Giants is that they were the antithesis of the local sporting scene; to return to the theme of side-by-sidedness, they were located in Belfast but sat beside the issues of the region. As a core contribution to this thesis is the highlighting that new initiatives and activities in post-peace agreement settings are not necessarily synonymous with lesser impact, rather they are capable of offering welcome expansion to spaces that can include difference.

The research findings of this thesis also offer a challenge to expectations that exist in post-peace agreement Northern Ireland. The findings in Chapter 9 highlight the SSE Arena during Giants games as a site of sanctuary from both the pressures of division and peace that are placed on people in contemporary Northern Ireland. The Giants were born into and out of a regional push for shared activities; their arena stands as one of the landmark projects of shared space in the region. However, they have also left their all-inclusive marketing behind, and as highlighted in this thesis have become a place of resistance to the opposing pressures that are on people in present-day Belfast. The notion that watching the Giants is normalised, the ‘it’s just hockey’ mantra that came out of many interviews, offers a contribution to literature on peace and conflict study which tends to polarise intergroup activities as either that of peace or conflict. In doing so, this thesis makes a contribution to what Mac Ginty (2014) refers to as the under-researched realm of “grudging coexistence” that is a part of everyday life in deeply divided society, as well as responds to Brewer’s (2010) appeal for more human-focused research in peace and conflict.

The expectation and pressure that exists to continue patterns of division remain strong in the Northern Ireland setting. It is in the spaces of separation that Kunovich and Hodson (1999) highlight that there is greater opportunity for the growth of animosity between divided antagonistic groups. The continued use of physical, social, and political barriers highlighted throughout this thesis are embedded in the everyday life of Northern Ireland, which make the pressures of maintaining division more concrete. There are also significant pressures within Northern Ireland for communities to come together. Cochrane and Dunn (1999) highlight the size of the NGO community in Northern Ireland, noting that:
“…the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) estimated that over 5,000 NGOs were active here, with an annual turnover of over £400 million, and this in a geographically small area with a total population of about one and a half million people. … the development of the P/CRO [peace/conflict resolution organisations] sector has been facilitated and encouraged by funding from the British government and the European Union in an attempt to encourage reconciliation and conflict resolution activity. In addition the Northern Ireland government has encouraged growth in this area as part of its strategy to promote good social, cultural and community relations between the two communities.”

What this illustrates is a substantive ‘peace industry’ that is well-funded and widely active in Northern Ireland. As this movement has set about to challenge the divisions and conflicts that permeate life, it has also introduced an opposing pressure that is encountered in shared spaces, one that seeks to produce a narrative of meaningfulness out of every cross-community interaction. The Giants and their supporters have sought to distance themselves from both forms of pressure, as well as the pressures of division. The failure of the ice hockey arena to impact wider social change makes it less obviously a part of a liberal peace solution, and much more appealing to the people who have found it.

From its position somewhere in the middle of the pressures of peace and conflict, side-by-sidedness offers a contribution to literature about human relationships in settings of conflict. It is a common trait of peace literature to underline that the complexity and challenges tied to relationships in conflict is incredibly difficult to theorise.71 In this vein, it should be highlighted as a contribution that the well-trodden peace and conflict concepts of social capital and intergroup contact have not, in my opinion, proved up to the task. The critique that the contact hypothesis requires near laboratory-conditions (Dixon et al., 2005) rings true within the Belfast and SSE Arena settings, where side-by-side civility is the only expectation that is placed on the group, and generates, as highlighted in the previous section, a unique relationship with identity and space. Further, the vague descriptive language which surrounds social capital stands in contrast to the hockey family in that it comes across as requiring exclusivity while offering what amounts to vague and imagined benefits without context. In many ways, the encounter

71 “...viewing conflict at a single point in time, or focusing on a single aspect (e.g. obstacles), was ultimately problematic because it failed to capture the fact that conflict, particularly intractable conflict, is multifaceted; involving multiple experiences and encounters between many different parties over a variety of issues under diverse conditions at different points in time.” (ICCCR, 2008 as cited in Hendrick 2009: 24)
offered by sitting side-by-side at ice hockey games in Belfast illustrates that the relationships constructed in the SSE Arena offer a simplicity beyond complexity.

**Ways Forward**

*It’s been suggested that since I am in Northern Ireland asking questions about identity I should probably quit renting and buy a place.*

*They say I am going to be here a while.*

Field Journal
4 December 2015

As with any research, this thesis has brought about a great number of questions that I believe are worthy of further investigation. At a wider level what emerged from this PhD research is a need for detailed study in peace and conflict study on the relationship between space and peace. As an academic field, peace and conflict studies has become principally tethered to constructing an understanding of what peace is and/or how it can be built, limiting the picture of peace and peacebuilding. What emerges from my engagement with interdisciplinary literatures is that research focused on peace and conflict has yet to trend towards understanding where peace is occurring.72 The research outcomes from Belfast, particularly around the central theme of side-by-sidedness, have more to contribute to understanding spaces of peace across divided groups. This thesis evolved through the themes that were presented in academic literatures, methodology, and research findings to reach the wider theme of side-by-sidedness; simply put, it was what this research came to and not its starting point. Thus, in discussing ways forward for research this theme is central to further research, learning and academic outputs.

Side-by-sidedness would benefit from further conceptual development, and it is my opinion that the best way for this to occur is to use the methodological influences and themes to shape this concept further. Further case studies designed around side-by-sidedness would add a great deal by offering a comparative angle that a single study in Belfast is not capable of. At present I have proposed post-doctoral study in applying side-by-sidedness as a conceptual framework to a case study of Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) in divided, post-peace agreement Nepal. Community-led forest

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72 Peace and space is approached by McConnell, Megoran and Williams (2014) and Björkdahl and Kappler (2017).
management in Nepal is an exceptional development that sees CFUGs as fully responsible for managing forests, collecting revenues, and deciding on the use of available funds (Chapagain and Sanio, 2012). These groups pre-date the Nepali civil war; management of most national forests has been overseen by CFUGs since 1993, although the history of community-led forest management dates back to 1978 (Chapagain and Sanio, 2012). The ten-year long civil war resulted in a great number of internally displaced peoples, cleavages within communities, and challenged education, infrastructure and food systems (Shrestha and Niroula, 2005). However, CFUG decision-making, consensus-building, and cohesiveness seemingly remain – and are of particular attention to this research, as this setting offers a challenge to entrenched identities in spaces that bring people together in wider-settings dominated by the bitterness associated with years of protracted conflict.

In proposing further exploration of side-by-sidedness beyond the context of Northern Ireland, this theme’s potential for impact beyond being an academic concept warrants highlighting. Fuller understanding of the places that division is suspended in hostile environments holds with it potential value to peacebuilding practitioners, civil society, and policymakers. It is in developing deeper understanding across multiple case studies that this academic research can potentially (and hopefully) offer applicability in wider practical settings.

**Hope**

“I think the Giants represent something hopeful”

24 October 2015
Belfast Giants 4 – Sheffield Steelers 1
Gate 13 Row Q Seat 63

Following the contributions of this thesis and discussion of possibilities for further research moving forward, I believe it is fitting to conclude this thesis with one last contribution that this PhD research has made for me. I was driven to complete a PhD in large part because of experiences working with displaced people along the Thailand/Burma border and on advocacy projects in conflict-affected Mindanao, Philippines. I began this PhD with a desire to learn more about human relationships that have been fractured by violence between distinct groups. Through the PhD experience, I
have been granted an opportunity to gain more knowledge and spend more time in experience with people in and affected by conflict; in doing so I have deepened my own personal learning about the construction of relationships in settings that are impacted by violence and the weight of history. However, the people I met in the stands of the SSE Arena have also taught me that there are always possibilities for relationships to emerge; ice hockey in Northern Ireland is quirky, there is no doubt. The agency these people have exercised to break the mould of past and present Northern Ireland returns to Lederach’s (2005) definition of the moral imagination and takes on “the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence” (5). Through the lens provided by the moral imagination, an important reminder and contribution emerges that reinforces my learning journey: hope.
References


Kruger, J., Epley, N., Parker, J. and Ng, Z-W. (2005). ‘Egocentrism over e-mail: Can we communicate as well as we think?’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89 (6): 925–936.


Interviews:


Side-by-Side

Gate 9 Row Q Seat 73. Interviewed by: Lepp, Eric (16 October 2015).
National Ice Centre (Nottingham). Interviewed by: Lepp, Eric (7 November 2015).
Altrincham Ice Dome (Manchester). Interviewed by: Lepp, Eric (8 November 2015).
Gate 8 – S46. Interviewed by: Lepp, Eric (15 November 2015).
Boomerang Corner. Interviewed by, Lepp, Eric (5 December 2015).

Email

Gillespie, Jim (4 March 2016). Email to Lepp, Eric
(eric.lepp@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk).
Figures

Belfast Newsletter (1940). *Short and Harland Raiders ice hockey team*. 2 February. Available at:


Re: PhD Research at the SSE Arena

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to verify that Eric Lapp, PhD student from the University of Manchester, has permission to approach and interview consenting supporters of the Belfast Giants within the SSE Arena. Eric has informed the Giants organization of his planned research and we support his work. He may use the facility during games throughout the 2016-2017 ice hockey season to speak to fans for his research.

Sincerely,

Steve Thornton
Head of Hockey Operations
APPENDIX 2

RESEARCH ETHICS ASSESSMENT
LOW RISK RESEARCH PROJECT
SALC, University of Manchester

To be completed by the relevant SALC office administrator (Research Office, PST, PGR) or held by supervisor in the case of UG research projects.

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SECTION A – SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL
This section should be completed by the person undertaking the research. A3-A9 apply to students only.

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<thead>
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<th>Eric Lepp</th>
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<tr>
<td>A2. Email Address:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:eric.lepp@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk">eric.lepp@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3. Student ID (quoted on library/swipe card):</td>
<td>9478957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4. Name of Supervisor:</td>
<td>Roger MacGinty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5. Supervisor email address:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:roger.mcginty@manchester.ac.uk">roger.mcginty@manchester.ac.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>A6. Programme (PhD, ProfDoc, MA, BA etc):</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A11. Participant Recruitment Start Date:</td>
<td>On confirmation of ethical approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A12. Project Submission Date:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A13. Proposed Research Start Date:</td>
<td>1-10-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A14. Location(s) where the project will be carried out:</td>
<td>Belfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A15. Signature:</td>
<td>Eric Lepp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following section to be completed by the SUPERVISOR/STAFF MEMBER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A16. Confirmation of assessment as a low risk level research project</th>
<th>✓</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A17. Supervisor/staff Signature</td>
<td>R. MacGinty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A18. Date</td>
<td>18-6-2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION B – DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

This section should be completed by the person undertaking the research.

B1. Provide an outline description of the planned research (250 words max)

Principal Research Question(s):

The main objective of this research is to examine the space within the city that has been constructed by the Belfast Giants. The research primarily aims to gather stories from supporters and analyse the larger impact of a space built around the notion, 'In the land of Giants, everyone is equal'. The research utilises an understanding of the civilty constructed within the Odyssey to ask whether and how such a space spreads to a broader Belfast society.

Academic justification of the research:

The research outlined here examines and investigates the space and civility that has been constructed by the Belfast Giants ice hockey team. The research is theoretically situated on an analytical framework informed by bodies of literature that include social capital, contact hypothesis and civility. The research responds to a gap in existing academic literature that presents human-focused understandings and accounts of peace and conflict.

The process and results of this thesis will contribute on several levels. At an intellectual level the paper will contribute to discourse around the generation of tolerance and civility in divide society. At a practical level it will generate discussion and suggestions to add to the commentary around the construction of space that is inclusive of difference and the importance of intergroup contact and interaction. The focus on ice hockey in Northern Ireland fits well with the academic search for utilizing creativity as a means of expanding current understandings of the everyday ways in which peace is constructed.

B2. Provide a description of the research methods and methodologies (250 words max)

Project Design:

The design will see the researcher immerse himself through participant observation at Belfast Giants games, in an effort to ethically access and highlight a narrative inclusive of opinions, expressions and stories from those in attendance. Through regular attendance and 'side-by-side' interviews with supporters, this research examines the space constructed by the Belfast Giants on two differing levels. The first of these asks what levels of interaction and communication are occurring across historical division within the Odyssey Arena during Belfast Giants games. The second question, building on the first, asks whether any goodwill and social capital constructed through supporting the Giants carries forward into the Belfast community. These questions seek to present a multi-level analysis of how people do or do not interact in post-conflict Belfast.

Data Collection Methods:

Semi-structured interviews conducted during the course of Belfast Giants hockey games are the primary vehicle of use of this research. Participants will be chosen at random. They will be approached based on their seat in the arena being next to that of the researcher. Their inclusion in the research will be based on their willingness to participate in an interview throughout the course of the ice hockey game.

Method(s) of Analysis:

Interview analysis – Extensive notes will be taken throughout the interviews. These notes will later be transcribed and analysed for stories, account trends, themes and differences. The names of all participants will be coded to ensure anonymity.

NB: If your research methods include collection of image or video data, you must complete the SALK Ethics Template instead of this form and submit it for review (unless this is an undergraduate project with an accompanying justification for low risk video/photography supplied by the supervisor).
B3. Please confirm that none of the following groups will be participating in this research:

- Children under 16, unless in an accredited setting such as a cultural institution, school or youth club and accompanied by a carer or professional with a duty of care
- Adults with learning difficulties
- Adults who are unable to self-consent
- Adults with mental illness/terminal illness/dementia/in a residential care home
- Adults or children in emergency situations
- Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the researcher
- Prisoners
- NHS patients
- Young Offenders
- Other vulnerable groups

☐ None of the above groups are involved in this study

B4. Number of expected research participants. 50

B5. Will you conduct fieldwork visits off-campus?

☐ Yes Complete either the high or low risk Risk Assessment documentation
☐ No Complete the Declaration in Section 02

B6. The research will take place (tick all that apply):

☐ within the UK
☐ within the researcher’s home¹ country if outside the UK* 
☐ wholly or partly outside the UK and not in the home country of the researcher*

* Please ensure that these projects still comply with low risk status after completion of the risk assessment documentation.

¹The researcher's home country is defined as one in which (1) the researcher holds a current passport through birthright or foreign birth registration, (2) a country where the researcher has resident status, or (3) where the researcher holds a permit or visa to work, has a contract of employment, and is a UK tax-payer.
SECTION C – Criteria for research classified as LOW RISK

This section should be completed by the person undertaking the research (in consultation with the supervisor for student research projects).

C1. Human participants (i/we confirm that this research (pick as appropriate):

X is not of high nor medium risk to the researcher, or participants, in accordance with the criteria provided in the Research Ethics Assessment documentation.

X a reasonable person would agree that the study addresses issues of legitimate interest without being in any way likely to inflame opinion or cause distress.  

X Practice review (i.e. the research involves data collection from participants on issues relating to the researcher’s professional role, in a setting where the researcher is employed or on a professional placement).

X Practice evaluation (i.e. the research involves data collection on a student’s professional role, in a setting where the researcher is employed or on a professional placement. The data collected will be used for comparison against national or other targets or standards).

X Primary research on professional practice with participants in professional roles conducted in their work setting.

X Market research (i.e. the research may involve data collection from the general public approached or observed in public locations for the purposes of market investigation).

X Primary research using a questionnaire completed and returned by participants with no direct contact with the researcher.

X limited to participant groups of peers, colleagues, family members and friends.

X the researcher will not give out personal telephone information to participants, in relation to the research project, and only university contact details (email, postal address) or dedicated project mobile phone numbers will be used.

C2. Research context (i/we confirm that (pick as appropriate):

X the location(s) of the research are not listed on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office warning lists.

X the researcher is not in a position to coerce potential participants/secondary data owners.

X the research involves a vulnerable group (as indicated in question B3).

X primary or practice research will be conducted in a public space or building (e.g. the high street, the University campus, a school building, etc.).

SECTION D – LOW Risk Fieldwork Declaration (D1 or D2)

This section should be completed by the person undertaking the research.

D1. Fieldwork visits (i/we confirm that:

X all research activity complies with the low risk fieldwork risk assessment and that documentation has been completed and appended to this application.

D2. No Fieldwork visits (i/we confirm that:

this research does not involve fieldwork visits of any kind.

---

X A reasonable person would agree that the study includes no issues of public or private objection, or of a sensitive nature.

SECTION E – UG/PGT/PGR/Staff Ethical Approval for LOW risk research

Section E1 to be completed by the researcher and self-certified in case of staff. Sections E2 and E3 to be completed by supervisors/tutors in the case of student applications.

E1. Research ethics criteria

Tick as appropriate and/or indicate N/A against items where they do not apply to this research.

I/we confirm that:

Codes of Practice

X I/we have read and understood the SALK Ethics and Policy Guidelines

X the researcher will abide by the SALK ethics risk guidelines detailed herein

X the researcher is aware of and will abide by any organisation’s codes of conduct relevant to this research

Researcher skills/checks

X all necessary training procedures for this research have been completed

X all relevant enhanced DBS or other checks have been completed

X I will inform SALK (and my supervisor if relevant) if my DBS (or related) status changes

X written permission to be on site to conduct primary research has been received

> Permission verbally granted 17.06.2015 from Belfast Giants coach Dave Thornton – documentation forthcoming.

Rights of participants

X participant information sheets (PIS), consent forms, questionnaires, and all other documentation relevant to this research have been discussed with the supervisor/tutor named in A4.

X PIS and consent forms have been confirmed by the supervisor/tutor named in A4, as covering required headings illustrated in the Participant information and consent templates, and as accessible to the proposed participant groups.

X the researcher understands the Data Protection Act and the University Data Protection Policy and all data will be handled confidentially and securely, including storage on encrypted devices.

X data will be fairly and lawfully processed; processed for the purposes detailed in the information sheet only, which clearly states the limits of anonymity and confidentiality afforded to research participants; not be shared with any researcher or organisation other than in ways detailed on the information sheet.

Researcher Declaration:

By signing this completed document, I declare that the information in it is accurate to the best of my knowledge and that I will complete any actions that I have indicated I will complete.

Signature: ________________________________ Date 18-06-2015

Name (in capitals): ERIC LEPP Student ID: 9476957
E2. Research integrity (students only)

Research Integrity (students only)

X No data will be collected before approval of the study by the supervisor/tutor.

X The student researcher will immediately report any issues arising during the course of the study that conflict with low risk categorisation declared here, to the supervisor who has signed the ethics approval and suspend data collection pending advice from that supervisor/tutor.

X The researcher will report any proposed deviation from the research specification outlined in this assessment to the supervisor/tutor to update the current assessment or clarify any need for further approvals BEFORE such changes are made.

Research output (students only)

☐ The only publication/output from this research will be the assignment or dissertation unless consent has been obtained from participants for further dissemination.

When satisfied that the assessment is correct, supervisors should complete this section.

For ‘low risk’ research approval, relevant items in bold must be ticked or marked as N/A if not applicable to this research and one or more of the specific research criteria must be ticked as appropriate.

The supervisor confirms that:

X The submission has been discussed and agreed with the person(s) undertaking the research.

X The student has had appropriate training and has the skills to undertake this study.

X The research activities outlined in the proposal involve no substantive risks to the student researcher or potential participants.

AND one or more of the following as appropriate:

X The research will not address issues of public or social objection or of a sensitive nature.

X Information giving and consent taking processes follow SALC templates.

X The risk assessment completed by the student complies with the LOW Risk Fieldwork Declaration.

X They will act as custodian for data used for any study that results in a publication (Masters dissertation or otherwise) and will arrange for archiving of data within the Manchester Institute for a minimum period of 5 years.

Please sign next section.
I confirm that the proposed research matches low risk criteria and that the documents supplied are complete and correct. I submit the items below in support of this Low Risk Ethical Approval:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Submitted</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Document</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Completed Research Ethics Assessment Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Completed Fieldwork Risk Assessment Form where indicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student research proposal, or equivalent, on which the assessment is based*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting documents including:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Draft questionnaire/interview topic guide/other data collection tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Recruitment email/advertisement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Information sheet for each participant group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consent form (or alternative) for each participant group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**supervisor's signature: [Signature]**  
**Date:** 18-06-2015

Documents should be submitted electronically for archiving and audit purposes, to the relevant PG office by the supervisor. Copies of all documents should be retained by the supervisor.

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*For audit purposes, a person unfamiliar with the research outlined in Section B must be able to ascertain the full details of the student project from this REA form and/or supporting documents appended.*
E3. Amendments to proposed research design for LOW risk research or justification for permission to grant undergraduate students dispensation for medium risk aspects to their research projects.

Any minor amendment to low risk approved research submissions should be recorded and signed-off by the supervisor as necessary below. Substantial change to research will require a reassessment and revised ethical approval. A revised copy of the REA showing the approved amendments, and any amended supporting documents, should be forwarded electronically to the relevant office (research, PGT, PGR) and the administrator will provide formal acknowledgement of approval of the change by email. For undergraduate projects a copy should be retained by the supervisor.

To be completed if/when applicable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor amendment to assessed research agreed (1):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Details of amendment/justification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This section will record any applications made during the lifetime of the Project regarding minor changes from approved research projects.

| Supervisor’s signature: | Date: |

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5 Minor deviations from previously approved research submissions are defined as those that neither change the nature of the study nor deviate from any participating research groups previously identified. Supervisors should contact a member of the MIE Research Integrity Committee for advice if in doubt.