

**Demography, Development and  
Disorder: Changing Patterns of  
Interface Areas**

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July 2004**



**Photographs by Frankie Quinn**

### **Background**

The summer of 2003 was relatively quiet in comparison with previous years in Northern Ireland, but there has continued to be tensions in interface areas in North and East Belfast and there have also been a number of violent incidents across the city scattered through the summer months.

Some of these incidents have occurred in one of the many well established interface flashpoints that have been well documented in the media in recent years, but worryingly some of the disorder and violence has broken out in areas that either had not been considered as an interface area or in an interface area that had been relatively quiet in previous years.

There has been a steady growth in the recognition of the specific characteristics and problems that help to define interface areas over recent years. However we are still largely working with a fairly basic model of interface areas. This model tends to focus on interface areas as conjunctions of working class residential zones which identify with opposing ethnic/political communities and, although there is growing acknowledgment that interfaces are often invisible to all but the finely tuned local eye, there is still something of a perception that interfaces and peace lines are synonymous and exclusive.

The trouble over the summer of 2003 has occurred in areas that do not readily conform to this limited conceptual framework of an interface and an interface community. For example:

- The Deerpark Road area is perceived as more middle class than working class with a high number of owner occupied houses.
- Similarly when trouble broke out around the Donegall Road/West Link area, this was not in an area that had been recognised as a problematic interface of the traditional model.

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Recently redevelopment has been seen as a potential factor that can impact upon interface violence by keeping people further apart yet providing common resource, but this is not inevitably the case:

- The opening of the new Dunnes Stores complex on the Crumlin Road was perceived by some as creating a new potential interface area as the area was already perceived as a problematic interface.
- Similarly concerns have been expressed about the impact of the housing development on the Dunmore stadium site in North Belfast on the still fragile community tensions in the area.

These brief examples indicate that interfaces and interface areas are perhaps more complex than has hitherto been explicitly defined and analysed, that such changes are affected by a number of factors including demographic change, lifestyle shifts, redevelopment and also perhaps in response to attempts to reduce violence and disorder in traditional interface areas.

Therefore the Community Relations Council decided to commission a brief review of our current understanding of interfaces and interface areas in Belfast:

- To identify new or potential interfaces;
- To identify the factors that mark them as interface areas;
- To identify why such areas have, or have potential to become interfaces;

Neil Jarman from ICR carried out this short piece of research review for CRC. It includes a review of new and emergent interface areas in Belfast, a summary of factors that have led to their emergence.

### **Introduction**

1. The recurrent and persistent presence of inter-community tensions, street disorder and violence in numerous interface areas in North and East Belfast has been a notable factor of the transitional period between militarised conflict and an established peaceful society. Interface violence involving rival groups from Protestant Unionist Loyalist communities, Catholic Nationalist Republican areas and the security forces has been a significant factor sustaining fear, mistrust, hostility and antipathy between the broader political constituencies in Northern Ireland.
2. The cyclical and persistent nature of the tension and violence has encouraged a wide variety of initiatives to counter and respond to the violence. These include numerous community projects (e.g. Belfast Interface Project, CDC, SICDP / Interaction), community based initiatives (mobile phone networks, community watch schemes), some positive work from paramilitary organisations (stewarding crowds, Protestant Interface Network), an official enquiry (Dunlop Report and Community Action Unit), various security responses (CCTV, changes to policing practices), redevelopment programmes (Urban II) and several pieces of action research (e.g. Peter Shirlow, Callie Persic, BIP, Neil Jarman).
3. It is difficult to gauge the level of impact of each or any of these various initiatives as each has its champions and critics. The uneven pattern of violence and its sporadic nature in different areas also makes it difficult to unravel the contribution of all or any of the various activities.
4. Furthermore the interfaces themselves are not fixed, clearly defined or static. Areas that have been tense for several years may experience periods of quiet, while new flashpoints may emerge in neighbouring or more distant locations, which may in turn spark tension in long established interfaces.

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5. In contrast with many recent years the summer of 2003 was relatively quiet across Northern Ireland. There was nevertheless an increase in tension in a number of interface areas in North and East Belfast and around the Fountain area of Derry, while a number of violent incidents were reported in the local daily media across the summer months. Some of these incidents occurred at one of the many established interface flashpoints, but some of the disorder and violence broke out in areas that either had not been considered as interface areas or in interface areas that had been relatively quiet in previous years. The table below sets out the main incidents that were reported in the media through 2003.

**Table 1: Media Reports of Outbreaks of Sectarian Disorder and Violence**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Nature of Incident</b>
19.4.03	North Belfast	Rioting on Limestone Road.
3.6.03	North Belfast	Disturbances in Ardoyne Glenbryn area.
21.7.03	Antrim	Clashes between youths from Stiles and Rathenraw estates. Two police officers injured, one man arrested.
24.7.03	South Belfast	Police and army attacked by crowd of c30 people in Belvoir estate. One man arrested.
27.7.03	Antrim	Houses attacked by c30 youths. One man arrested.
31.7.03	West Belfast	Clashes between youths at Broadway Roundabout area after 11 year old wearing a Rangers top was attacked.
4.8.03	West Belfast	4th night of disturbances at Broadway Roundabout.
4.8.03	West Belfast	Five police officers injured when attacked by crowd of c100 people. One man arrested.
9.8.03	Derry	Vehicles damaged and rioting in Bogside before ABs parade. Two males arrested.
30.8.03	North Belfast	Four houses in Deerpark Road damaged by c30 youths.
3.9.03	North Belfast	Houses damaged and man injured in disturbances in Deerpark Road.
14.9.03	Carnmoney	200 loyalists protest at Blessing of the Graves ceremony. Two cars destroyed, one youth arrested.
14.9.03	North Belfast	Windows broken in house on Deerpark Road.
26.9.03	North Belfast	Two school buses attacked. Eleven girls injured.
9.10.03	North Belfast	Attack on schoolchildren outside secondary school.
12.10.03	East Belfast	Riot on Mountpottinger Road /Albertbridge Road, 2 arrests.
27.10.03	Glengormley	Sectarian clashes involving c 40 young people. 1 injured, 2 arrested.

### Interface Areas

6. In recent years there has been a growing recognition of the distinctive characteristics and problems that help to define interface areas, particularly in relation to issues of marginalisation, poverty, social exclusion and limited access to resources. However, while there has been growing interest in and acknowledgement of the complexity of interface communities, we still work with a fairly basic and limited model of an interface and of interface areas.
7. This model largely defines interface areas as the intersection of segregated and polarised working class residential zones, in areas with a strong link between territory and ethno-political identity. Furthermore, although there is growing acknowledgement that interfaces are often invisible to all but the finely tuned local eye, there is also still something of an expectation that interfaces and barriers or ‘peacelines’ are synonymous and exclusive. Interfaces are regarded as something of an anomaly, an aberration and abnormal feature of society, rather than being viewed as an increasingly normative feature of Northern Irish society.
8. Interfaces, as zones of tension and violence, are still predominantly viewed as confined to residential areas, they are situated largely within the realm of public housing and they are primarily a facet of working class urban life, rather than acknowledged as simply the most visible exemplars of the social segregation and polarisation that pervades contemporary Northern Ireland.
9. This is not to suggest that the established understanding of an interface is not true to a great extent. The most well known and troublesome of the interfaces do indeed conform to these stereotypes. However, it is also clear that there are a much wider variety of interfaces than those that exist at the boundaries of segregated working class residential areas.

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10. In recent years interfaces and outbreaks of sectarian violence and disorder have occurred in a number of areas that do not easily fit the stereotypical model, but which give some indication of the potential for new interfaces. These include:
  - The intersection of middle class residential areas and working class areas;
  - The emergence of interface issues in suburban residential areas;
  - Sectarian violence in parks and other open spaces;
  - Segregation of shared spaces such as shopping centres and town centres;
  - Violence in relation to schools and sites where children can be defined by school uniforms.
  
11. Physical barriers of brick or steel are no longer the only ways in which territory is demarcated. Interfaces can also be identified by simple things such as:
  - a turn in the road, a local landmark, or a row of shops;
  - low-level barriers used to close roads and entries;
  - redevelopment which distances residential areas by the construction of industrial or commercial zones;
  - new road lay-outs or developments;
  - flags, murals, election posters and street names;
  - grills and bars used to protect domestic properties.
  
12. Furthermore, forms of interfaces and examples of inter-ethnic violence have occurred beyond the inner city areas of Belfast and Derry Londonderry in which it has to some extent come to be expected as a fact of life. Over recent years more formalised segregation and associated violence has become a feature of towns such as Antrim, Ballymena, Larne, Lurgan and Portadown, to name only the most prominent.
  
13. It is therefore useful to broaden our understanding of an interface in order to be able to recognise and analyse the developing patterns of violence in many areas. However, it is also important to retain our understanding of the specific issues that are particularly pertinent to established urban residential interfaces.

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14. In this paper the concept of an interface is broadened to be defined as the conjunction or intersection of two or more territories or social spaces, which are dominated, contested or claimed by some or all members of the differing ethno-national groups.
15. In this definition it is the process of domination, contest or claim that transforms an otherwise unexceptional space or location into an interface, not simply the conjunction or intersection. Violence, the threat of violence or the fear of violence should thus be considered to be at the heart of the concept of an interface. And it is violence or the threat or fear of violence that transforms otherwise peaceful locations and boundary areas into interfaces.
16. Interfaces are thus the product of a society where violence and conflict between rival groups exists and as such interfaces are subject to change, expansion, contraction and disappearance in response to changing social dynamics and local demographics.
17. New interfaces will not exhibit the same characteristics as established interfaces from the outset, but rather will initially only be apparent to those with local knowledge who are attuned to the threat and fear of violence at or near a specific location, or in the buffer zones or supposedly shared or neutral spaces between defined territories.
18. Although new interfaces are likely to be less prone to the large scale and persistent cycles of rioting and public disorder that have dominated the headlines in recent years, they do necessarily have the potential to become sites of recurrent violence, harassment and fear, if on a smaller scale than the better known and well established interfaces.
19. The remainder of this paper reviews the types of locations in which interfaces are emerging or expanding in Belfast and other towns across Northern Ireland. It

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explores some of the different forms of violence that are occurring and which thus help define the emergent presence of an interface and it reviews some of the reasons for the emergence of such new contested spaces.

20. One of the aims is to highlight the fact that segregation, polarisation and social division are endemic within Northern Ireland society, rather than being confined to one relatively small section of it.
21. Furthermore, Northern Ireland is not a static society. The processes of social and economic development, redevelopment and regeneration and the growing diversity of minority ethnic communities and minority faith groups, must always interact with the facts of division and segregation. The intersection of these processes will thus inevitably create new sites and forms of intersection and conjunction, which may in turn become problematical and even violent.
22. Another aim of the paper is thus to draw attention to a potential problem before it is allowed to develop and become a major problem. Only recently has there been a more general recognition of the importance of addressing the needs and problems of existing interface areas in a systematic and holistic manner. It is all too easy to ignore minor issues and allow them to become significant problems before initiating any response. One example will illustrate this point.
23. In 1996 many people were surprised when the White City - Whitewell area of North Belfast erupted into violence. As a result of the crisis over Drumcree 2 a number of people were forced from their homes and a significant interface emerged. Furthermore, the trouble expanded to include the neighbouring Graymount and Longlands estates and a number of other nearby areas.
24. This was not a traditional interface area although it had been subject to a number of small demographic shifts over a period of time. But the violence led to an increase in levels of intimidation and segregation, a collapse of working relationships and a hardening of local boundaries. In the subsequent years one of

the interlinking roads has been closed by a wall, an extensive high fence runs between a number of the houses and numerous entryways have been closed off and protection installed on many houses. The 'peace line' was erected shortly after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. The area is now regarded as a persistently problematic interface area.

25. The next section of this paper looks at a number of contexts in which different spaces have become sufficiently contested and conflictual to justify their consideration as forms of interfaces. The contexts include various forms of demographic shift, both within an urban area and through suburbanisation, varieties of regeneration and redevelopment, forms of displacement of ongoing activity and contests around the maintenance of neutral or shared spaces.

### **Demographic Shifts**

26. Demographic change has been a significant factor in Belfast over the duration of the Troubles and is still a factor in the social geography of the city. In general terms demographic change in Belfast and many other towns has involved a shift of communal identity from 'Orange' to 'Green'. The trend has been for Protestant areas to become more mixed as Protestants have moved out, not necessarily due to any form of intimidation, and Catholics have moved in. As and when the process has continued some previously Orange areas have become predominantly Green. The demographic transition on the lower Ormeau Road is one example of this process.
27. The process of demographic shift has rarely occurred in the other direction, whereby predominately Catholic areas have become largely Protestant, although Catholics have been forced to leave predominately Protestant or mixed areas on numerous occasions. The Graymount estate in North Belfast is one such example of a mixed area, which has experienced significant out-movement of Catholic residents as a result of violence, intimidation, threat and fear in recent years.

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28. There have also been examples of areas where Catholics began to move into predominately Protestant areas, or began to blur the boundaries between Protestant and Catholic areas, in the aftermath of the ceasefires in 1994, but have subsequently moved out again because of violence or the fear of violence. This process occurred along Clifton Park Avenue and in the Torrens estate in North Belfast. In both cases the movement of both Protestant and Catholic people out of the area led to the dereliction of numerous properties and their subsequent demolition.
29. Many of the most important changes have been in relation to the consolidation of more homogenous single identity working class communities and the hardening of the interfaces between them. However, some of the recent changes have been due to processes of upward social mobility as people have moved out of public housing in inner city areas and either rented private accommodation or bought their own houses. Changes in 'Little America' (an area of North Belfast where the streets are named after American states) in recent years have seen the area become 'Greener', with Sinn Fein posters appearing at election times and nationalist commemorative marches taking place. This process has also seen the interface with the nearby Westland estate become more problematic and volatile.
30. The process of upward mobility has also seen some more middle class areas become more mixed, while others have become more polarised in their identity. In terms of the traditional categories of interfaces this involves changes to what have been described as 'buffer zones'. Such changes have also introduced a class element to local tensions, a factor that has not been widely acknowledged in consideration of interface issues.
31. There have been two ways in which this process has worked within middle class areas. One has been for Catholics to buy houses in areas that were predominately Protestant and thus contribute to a general 'Greening' of an area. The other has been for Catholics to move out of working class areas and buy property in established middle class areas. Examples of these forms of change are evident on

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the Oldpark Road above Cliftonville Circus, the Cavehill Road above Westland Road, both in North Belfast, and in the Rosetta area of South East Belfast.

32. One prominent example of this kind of change has been in the Mountainview area, off Crumlin Road. This small group of streets was until recently regarded as part of the broader Woodvale area, but is now seen as part of greater Ardoyne. This has had an impact in two ways. First, fences have been erected between Mountainview and Twaddell Avenue as a result of ongoing low-level violence (the first in 1997, a second in 2002) and second loyal order parades along the Crumlin Road now pass between two Catholic nationalist areas rather than simply pass the Ardoyne shops. There is also some evidence of further 'Greening' of the area further up the western side of Crumlin Road, while anecdotal evidence suggests that some private housing on the upper Crumlin Road is becoming a more Protestant as Catholics move out.
33. These situations do not necessarily create an obvious interface but rather they create a broader buffer zone in which opportunities for forms of low level violence, harassment and intimidation might take place. A key factor in these locations, as in many other emergent interface areas is the presence of young people hanging around the streets, moving through the area and making use of local resources. Very often it is the visible presence of groups of young people that begin to raise concerns and tensions.
34. On the Oldpark Road there have been tensions and concerns linked to different groups of young people hanging out in the evenings outside some of the local shops and commercial premises, with young people from Joanmount and Glenbryn disputing with groups of Catholic youth effectively over who had the right to hang out in front of which shops. The role of young people in the process of creating interfaces will be discussed in more detail below.
35. The nearby Deerpark Road is perceived locally as a more middle class area with a high number of owner occupied houses and there was thus some surprise when

trouble broke out in August and September 2003. There was some suggestion that the violence was associated with the area becoming more residentially mixed, but equally there was speculation that this disorder was also linked to the presence of CCTV cameras at the nearby Alliance–Glenbryn interfaces, and that these had served to displace the violence to a neighbouring area.

36. The upper Cavehill Road area has been subject to similar changes to the nearby Little America area, with the eastern side of the road in particular becoming a more mixed and diverse residential community. From the late 1990s occasional band parades were organised between the Sunningdale area and the Westland estate (in part in response to public events in Little America). There have also been a number of incidents linked to people drinking in the Cavehill Inn (which sits on the interface) to the extent that the bar was forcibly closed by the police in December 2002 on the occasion of an Old Firm match in Glasgow.
37. In South Belfast, sporadic incidents of disorder in the Rosetta area have been linked to the steady process of gentrification. In this case the problems have been linked to growing number of Catholic families moving into streets nearer to the Cregagh estate, this has led to provocation and attacks upon or by school children who can be identified as belonging to the ‘other side’ by their uniforms. And while such attacks may be little different from other contexts where children going to ‘better’ schools may be targeted by other local children, the sectarian element becomes a compounding factor to issues of class.
38. One other form of demographic change that is having an impact on inter-community tensions is related to the growing size and visibility of the minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. There are no areas that are dominated by any of the minority communities, but even small conglomerations of non-White households have generated negative reactions from the local indigenous communities. This suggests that the hostility of Protestants and Catholics to sharing residential space is being extended to members of other, newer communities.

39. In many cases the recent increase in racist attacks have been focused on individuals and individual households, but there have also been more sustained attacks in areas where there is something of an emergent distinctive community. In the late 1990s there was sustained harassment of the Chinese community in Donegall Pass and Village areas of South Belfast, and the small Sikh community in the Alexandra Park Avenue area of North Belfast, in 2003 there was a series of violent attacks on minority ethnic households in both Craigavon and in the Village area of South Belfast, and in early 2004 there were concerns raised against plans for a Chinese resource centre on Donegall Pass. The dominance of mono-cultural communities across Northern Ireland means that it is likely that such tensions will continue to emerge as minority communities grow larger and as they have an ever more visible impact on the landscape on more urban areas.

### **Suburbanisation**

40. The process of ethno-demographic change has largely been considered a problem of the inner city areas of Belfast and Derry Londonderry, but it is increasingly becoming a feature of many suburban areas and satellite towns around Belfast. Until recently the ‘Greening’ of inner city areas of Belfast was balanced by the movement of Protestants from these areas to neighbouring towns and estates in the greater Belfast region. As the eastern part of Northern Ireland has been predominately Protestant, working class Protestants from the inner city estates had more options for moving to new houses and estates than did Catholics. Many took up this possibility, while Catholics largely consolidated their presence in the existing communities.

41. While some Protestant activists have seen the scheming of central government behind this process, there is no evidence of a great desire for Protestants to return to the subsequently redeveloped inner city areas, and this has in turn fuelled demands among nationalists for housing developments to not be constrained by notions of ethnic territorial boundaries.

42. However, there is also now evidence, for example in comparison of Census data from 1991 and 2001, of changing patterns of population in a number of satellite towns and suburban areas as Catholics have begun to move out of Belfast in larger numbers. This process has led to an increasingly visible presence of Catholics in places such as Glengormley, Antrim, Crumlin and Glenavy. And, as Catholics have begun to assert their rights to equality and have demanded respect for the newly emergent diversity of such towns, so there have been some levels of resistance and opposition to such moves and a subsequent rise in inter-communal tensions.
43. Demographic changes in Glengormley, for example, have coincided with protests over the presence of an Orange arch in the centre of the town since 1999, and more recently there have also been numerous clashes between rival groups of young people in the commercial centre and leisure facilities in the town. In the past two years loyalist paramilitaries have mobilised against Catholic religious ceremonies in Carnmoney cemetery, have attacked gravestones and made threats against individuals.
44. In Antrim there have been numerous and persistent clashes between residents of the neighbouring Stiles and Rathenraw estates, which spilled over into disorder and violence between school children attending neighbouring schools through the Autumn of 2003. While in Crumlin a number of protests were mounted from 1996 onwards against loyal order and loyalist parades in the village. Although there have been no specific incidents in Glenavy, there is some acknowledgment of the changing demography of the village, and of the potential this has for the impact on local relations.

### **Redevelopment**

45. The redevelopment and regeneration of brownfield sites, specifically in urban areas, is another process that has the potential to change the demographic balance

of an area or to impact upon established patterns of use. This in turn can have an impact upon community relations as established boundaries are revised and traditional understandings of territory are forcibly amended. Redevelopment can take the form of creating both commercial buffer zones and new, often private, housing developments. Each form of development can create different types of tensions.

46. In some areas the strategy of redevelopment has been used as another form of buffer, as a means of keeping people further apart, while at the same time providing common resources. The recent redevelopment of Duncairn Gardens is one such example, where reduced demand for housing in Tiger's Bay has allowed for the construction of numerous buildings housing small businesses, community based projects, a health centre and warehouse/factory buildings. A similar idea was proposed for part of the Springfield Road interface, where it was planned to construct a campus of the University of Ulster and thus provide educational and training resources, which would be accessible to both main communities. This project did not reach fruition.
47. It is not inevitable that the redevelopment of brownfield sites in or near interface areas will be unproblematic, however. The construction of the new Dunnes Stores complex on the Crumlin Road was perceived by some people as creating a potential problem as the site had been a problematic location in a number of recent years. When the store was opened there was some justification for concerns about the presence of rival groups of young men wearing football colours. However, following some discussions with the local communities, the potential problems seem to have been overcome and there have been no reports of major problems at the complex.
48. Similar concerns were expressed about the impact on local demographic profile of a private housing development on the Dunmore stadium site in North Belfast. The site on Alexandra Park Avenue is a previously unproblematic and soft boundary area, but the development faces Alexandra Park on one side, which itself is

segregated by a metal fence, and backs on to the mid-Skegoneill interface area on the other side. Another corner of the development is literally a stone's throw away from an Orange Hall, and the starting point for a number of local parades.

49. A similar development project on the site of the old Throne Hospital on the Whitewell Road in the late 1990s soon became a (relatively minor) facet of the increasingly complex interface geography of the area and became an area for low-level exchanges of missiles. There is thus the potential that the Dunmore stadium site will be incorporated as a problematic component of the local sectarian geography, once the site is completed and the houses are fully occupied. It might also become problematic as it provides an opportunity for sectarian clashes in an area where many other interfaces are now highly monitored.
  
50. Most recently tensions have visibly emerged in the form of public protests by residents of Sandy Row towards the occupants of a recently constructed apartment development on the edge of the area. The development was clearly not intended to appeal to the existing residents of Sandy Row, but was rather orientated to students, nurses and young professionals. And, while it occupies a prominent plot, facing an Orange Hall and the site of the former Ranger Supporters Club, the entrance is as far from Sandy Row as possible, facing towards the lower Lisburn Road and Bradbury Place. The development literally has its back turned to Sandy Row. This new developments opens up an interface between the traditional and the new, the Protestant working class and professionals from diverse communities, the old and the young and is indicative of the pressures that are pressing in on the inner city areas of South Belfast.

### **Displacement**

51. The increased focus of community and police attention in trying to maintain order and reduce violence at problematic interfaces has in fact been a factor in trouble occurring at other nearby locations. As the established interfaces become more heavily policed or subject to surveillance, violence and disorder has occurred at

neighbouring locations, which are perhaps less readily monitored and controlled. As a result theoretically neutral or non-contentious spaces may become sites of conflict for rival groups of, in particular, young people and as a result, social boundaries become hardened and places become more clearly coloured.

52. The previously discussed case of the Deerpark Road area in North Belfast was one such example. It has been suggested that the presence of CCTV cameras in many of the nearby contentious interface areas may have been one factor in the trouble erupting in a previously untroubled area.
53. Open spaces also provide an opportunity for attacking the other community, either to reduce their access to local resources or simply because they are less readily policed and monitored. Alexandra Park in North Belfast was the first such open space to be divided by a fence in 1994, and the barrier has been strengthened and extended on a number of occasions since that time.
54. More recently through the summer of 2001 clashes between young people from Westland and Little America were focused in the relatively accessible Waterworks Park. The persistence and severity of the violence led Belfast City Council to draw up plans for the erection of fences around the boundaries and across a section of the park, which would have effectively divided it into Protestant and Catholic sections. However, local residents opposed the proposal and people also worked to reduce the recurrent disorder. One positive response to this threat was that local people took greater interest in the park, this included stocking the upper lake for fishing and promoting the sport among young people from both communities in the area.

### **Polarising Shared Space**

55. This last example, and a number of the others given above, indicates something of the difficulty of maintaining shared spaces and mutually accessible resources. Unless such places are actively maintained as a shared resource and a neutral

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space, violence or the threat of violence can lead to them being abandoned by members of one community or to one community being excluded from access.

56. Recent research by Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh has shown how far people are prepared to travel to access resources and avoid potential trouble spots. The resources may theoretically be available to both communities but feelings of safety mean they are, to all practical intent inaccessible, to many sections of one of the communities.
57. Some resources may be regarded as accessible for much of the year, but at times of tension, such as during the marching season, they may be considered as out of bounds to one section of the community. In other cases it may only be some sections of a community that feels unable to access certain resources, this may be a particular problem for young males who are both the main proponents and the main victims of much sectarian violence.
58. There are a number of examples where shared or neutral spaces are neutral in name only and they either remain inaccessible to one community or are contested in some way. Commercial spaces may thus become subtle forms of interface. The Co-op shop between Whitewell Road and Gray's Lane was regarded as inaccessible, by some within the local nationalist community, once loyalist flags were hung from the lampposts in front of it. Similarly residents of White City were reluctant to use shops or resources in the Whitewell Road because of ongoing local tensions. A variety of resources, including the local campus of BIFHE, a doctors surgery and shops, in East Belfast were regarded as out of bounds for residents of the Short Strand as a result of the violence between Cluan Place and Clandeboye Gardens and because of graffiti and visual displays that were erected.
59. The commercial centres of many smaller towns are similarly divided or contested. The centre of Glengormley has become an increasingly contested space among rival groups of young people. Many young Catholics feel unable to walk through

the centre of Larne unless they are with parents because they fear being attacked. The centre of Lurgan is broadly divided into two distinct domains. Many Protestants prefer not to shop on the city side of the Foyle, but either stay on the Waterside or travel as far as Coleraine. In Ballymena the two main shopping centres have been broadly claimed by young people from one of the two main communities, one is used by Catholics, the other by Protestants. Ballynahinch is another small town whose central area becomes more visibly claimed by one community during the summer months, although informal patterns of segregation exist as local knowledge and impact on social movements throughout the year.

60. Such outwardly 'neutral' spaces are not clearly identifiable as interfaces and may not even be considered as particularly problematic because people have internalised the patterns of segregation rather than challenging them. There may not be any signs saying 'stay out', but there are effective barriers to accessing local resources nonetheless.
61. When trouble broke out around the Donegall Road / West Link area over the summer of 2003, this was not in an area that had been recognised as a problematic interface of the traditional model. In this case the trouble seems to have been linked to the presence of young people from rival communities, identified by their football strips, in and around the Park Centre area. And although the disturbances began over a relatively minor issue, the violence re-occurred over several days before it was finally stopped.
62. This, and previous, examples illustrates the role of young people in helping to sustain tensions and generate disorder in interface areas and indicates how the tensions and violence can all too easily and quickly spread to what may be otherwise perceived as neutral spaces such as parks and shopping centres. In such cases the tension may be experienced by wider sections of the community, and if not addressed quickly, may lead to the establishment of some form of perceived barrier.

## Young People

63. Many of the above examples cite the role of young people in generating new forms of interface areas as well as in initiating and sustaining tensions between communities in established interface areas. Although there has been some recognition of the role that young people play in interface violence and forms of ‘recreational rioting’, it is also important to note their role in extending the presence of contested and segregated spaces.
64. In this young people and especially young men play both the roles of perpetrators and of victims. Their role as provocateurs and a defenders of communal boundaries all too readily impacts on their ability to access common resources and shared spaces as they in turn become the victims of other groups of young males who challenge their right to utilise facilities and public space. Young men thus become more spatially constrained and more willing to constrain.
65. One area of activity that is more exclusive to young people is through forms of aggression that are linked to schooling. The dispute over access to Holy Cross primary school in the Ardoyne-Glenbryn area has been the most prominent interface dispute linked to a school, and although that particular dispute has ended, tensions in the area have been maintained because of ongoing clashes between school students and through attacks on school buses.
66. In a similar fashion interface violence in the Antrim area was sustained after the end of last summer through repeated clashes involving young people from the Rathenraw and Stiles estates who attended the neighbouring St Malachy’s School and Masserene Community College. The frequent violence was only brought to an end as a result of an intensive and extensive process of mediation.
67. Attacks on school students who can be identified by their uniforms have also been a problem in Ballymena in the past year or more, with certain bus stops becoming identified as particularly problematic locations. Similarly, school students have

been targets for sectarian attack when waiting for buses or travelling to school in diverse parts of Belfast and elsewhere.

### **Conclusion**

68. Belfast and many other urban areas of Northern Ireland are extensively segregated and polarised places in which all forms of territory have a potential to become contested and fought over. Interfaces are an important element of that segregation, and while some interfaces may have been made less volatile over recent years, unfortunately new types of interfaces can and all too readily do emerge.
69. This paper is a contribution to the emerging discussion on responding to processes of segregation and issues in interface areas. It suggests that it is important to recognise and acknowledge that interfaces are not a static phenomenon, nor a purely historical legacy of the Troubles, but rather they are a dynamic part of the social fabric of a community that is highly polarised and extensively segregated.
70. The examples given indicate that the concept of an interface and of the range of forms of interfaces are perhaps more complex than has hitherto been explicitly defined and analysed. This review suggests that the development of new interface areas are affected by a number of factors including demographic change, lifestyle shifts and processes of redevelopment and regeneration
71. It is also worth noting that localised attempts to reduce violence in established interface areas may only serve to displace the violence to other locations, which may be less easy to manage.
72. It is important to acknowledge the social dynamic in processes of segregation and the continuing pressures to further segregation in many areas. As such shared and neutral spaces come under particular types of pressure and they need positive and sustained actions to ensure that they are not abandoned and avoided, but rather that they remain shared and used by all sections of all communities.

73. There have been many examples of positive work being done in interface areas, with interface communities, and on raising the profile of interface issues as a key factor for policy development, for example the recent working paper prepared by Belfast Interface Project. Together, these two documents aim to stimulate new thinking and to encourage new actions to tackle the specific issues in interface areas and to respond to the processes that help to create new interfaces.

## Appendix - Interface Structures in Northern Ireland

### West Belfast

1. Ainsworth Avenue/Springfield Road (including Kirk Street)
2. Malinmore Park / Oranmore Drive
3. Springfield Park / Springmartin Road (including Moyard)
4. Cupar Way / Clonard
5. Beverley Street / Ardmoulin Avenue
6. Roden Street / Distillery Street
7. Springhill Avenue / Springfield Road

### East Belfast

8. Bryson Street / Thistle Court
9. Newtownards Road / Strand Walk
10. Mountpottinger Road / Woodstock Link
11. Cluan Place / Clandeboye Gardens

### North Belfast

12. Duncairn Gardens / North Queen Street
13. Newington Avenue / Halliday's Road
14. Parkside Gardens / Mountcollyer Street (including Alexandra Park)
15. Manor Street / Rosevale Street
16. Rosapenna Street / Oldpark Road
17. Torrens / Oldpark Road
18. Torrens / Wyndham Street
19. Torrens / Oldpark Avenue
20. Alliance Avenue / Glenbryn Park
21. Crumlin Road / Flax Street
22. Serpentine Gardens / Gunnell Hill
23. Squires Hill / Hazel Brook Drive, Ligoniel
24. Mountainview Parade / Mountainview Park
25. Longlands Road / Arthur Bridge
26. Henry Street / Westlink
27. Woodvale / Holy Cross

### Portadown

28. Corcrain Road / Obins Avenue
29. Ban Boulevard
30. Duffy's Field
31. Charles Street Railway Embankment
32. Craigwell Avenue / Charles Street

### Lurgan

33. Margretta Park

### Derry Londonderry

34. Bishop Street Without
35. Bennett Street
36. Harding Street
37. Tullyally / Currynerin

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