The Security-Threat-Community
Abstract

At the height of ‘the Troubles’ in 1976 social-housing in Belfast was in a crisis situation as communities consolidated along ethnic boundaries, often with violent consequences, with some communities becoming drastically overcrowded and others falling into abject dereliction. Using declassified government documentation this paper examines how these events legitimised an emergent confluence of housing and security policy which brought into being the security-threat-community; a socio-material construct where every person is a potential insurgent and every dwelling a potential security-threat. Crucially, the paper problematises the complex entanglement of political, military, paramilitary, economic and ideological forces which shaped its formation. The discussion traces a descent through contingent events within a wider dispositif and reveals the formation of the Standing Committee on the Security Implications of Housing, a confidential government body which assessed the viability of social-housing procurement within communities in terms of the security-threat it might present rather than the housing-need that it would address. As a complement to post-911 discourses concerning increasingly ‘globalised conflicts’ the security-threat-community reinforces the complexities of local discursivities. The paper makes visible the sophisticated socio-material effects of these operations and illustrates how they remain embedded within contemporary community structures. The paper concludes by reflecting on how this permits conflict-era forces to remain active, but largely unacknowledged, within the post-conflict era. Ultimately the paper argues for a ‘revaluing of the value’ of this conflict-architecture within post-conflict policy frameworks.

Keywords:

Architecture; Conflict; Society; Military; Urban, Belfast, Planning
Introduction

Belfast is often described as a ‘contested’ city and its social and physical divisions remain most visible in its housing settlements. This paper presents an examination of a formative period in urban history between 1976 and 1980 during which the Victorian-era housing stock which characterised the inner-city underwent a government-sponsored process of comprehensive redevelopment. Whole communities were uprooted and relocated, often in new suburban estates or satellite towns, in parallel with the effective territorialisation of social-housing settlements by paramilitary organisations. This created a hitherto unforeseen confluence of housing policy and security policy largely shaping the contemporary form of Belfast’s segregated social-housing settlements. Ethnic consolidation, sectarianism and paramilitary activity are historically endemic to divisive settlement in Belfast (see Boal, 1969; Hepburn, 1996; Jones, 1960; Monaghan and Shirlow, 2011; Murtagh, 2002; Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006).

However, it was during this critical juncture these territorial divisions became formalised in the redeveloped built environment.

An extended scholarship addresses the interrelationships between conflict, urban form and societal conditions in Belfast (for example, Bollens, 1999; 2000; Calme and Charlesworth, 2008; Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2011; Murtagh, 2008; 2011; Sterrett et al., 2011; 2012). This paper presents original research extending these literatures by revealing the complex entanglement of political, military, paramilitary, economic and ideological forces (Mann, 1984; 2006; 2012) shaping Troubles-era social-housing redevelopment. Government agencies maintain that redevelopment lacked any latent military agenda yet suspicions persist of Security Forces (the
British Army and former Northern Ireland police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary or RUC) involvement in redevelopment processes (Alcorn, 1982; Berseford, 1982; Cowan, 1982). This paper reveals how the Security Forces became a determinant factor in social-housing redevelopment practice. In doing so it does not seek judge the validity of decisions taken amidst the chaos of violent conflict. Instead it regards this confluence of housing and security policy as a complex social function that requires critical examination in order to reveal the full detail of its complexity.

To wit, the paper focuses on previously confidential correspondence from 1976-1977 between government officials responsible for analysing this emerging pluralism in policy in consultation with ranking officials within the RUC and British Army. These discussions reveal the coordinating role played by the Northern Ireland Office (the NIO, the UK Government Department responsible for administering Direct Rule in Northern Ireland\(^1\)) in setting a clear policy strategy that mediates between the concerns of the Security Forces and the social-housing pressures faced by the Department of the Environment (the DoE, the government department responsible for planning and housing policy). This documentation does not reveal a generalised plan and official policy to deal with this new domain of security-threat within social-housing management. It demonstrates the unfolding of a new and uncertain discursive territory where policy is evolved as a reactive process of contingent actions. Here the assessment of the *security-threat* posed by the redevelopment of a particular community replaces *housing need* as the mitigating factor in the allocation of land and housing awarded to that community. This brings into being the *security-threat-community*, a discursive object wherein all citizens are ostensibly designated by default as a potential security-threat. The
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events described in this paper carefully detail a small number of social-housing settlements which provide the first visibilities of this discursive terrain. They illustrate how Troubles-era social-housing redevelopment becomes an instrument of moderation between the objective provision of welfare to those in need and the contested processes of conflict. Importantly, the paper establishes how the inconsistencies emerging from these interactions affirm the security-threat-community as a contemporary phenomenon that enables historic conflict-era forces to remain latently active within the present-day post-conflict city (Garland, 1997; 2014).

Targeting the community

The architecture of the city is recognised as a fundamental integer in the complex operations of urban conflict (Savitch, 2005). During the Troubles seventy per cent of terrorist bombings were aimed at housing in the Belfast Urban Area (Bollens, 1999). Despite the geopolitical leaning of many contemporary conflicts, the inherent complexity of local conflict operations, acting at the level of the body, permit the socio-material effects of conflict to be especially visible (Boano, 2011; Meade, 2011; Piquard and Swenarton, 2011; Pullan, 2011). Weizman (and Segal 2003; Weizman, 2007; 2010), Graham (2009; 2011), Sassen (2002; 2006) and others have helped clarify the social, political and economic terrain subject to distortion and transformation through embedded connectivity between local conflict processes and the material realm. This literature has helped establish a critical narrative concerning the instrumental use of architecture by state authorities. Such arguments become persuasive through triangulation with post-911 security-threat / civil-liberty dialectics where (pre)insurgent citizens (Anderson, 2011) are cast as potential belligerents of conflict (for example, Chang, 2002; Wilkinson, 2011;
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Weizman, 2012; Ignatieff, 2013). Anti-ram bollards (Coaffee and Murakami Wood, 2006), CCTV surveillance infrastructures (Graham and Wood, 2003) and pre-emptive ‘kettling’ of protestors and non-protestors (Cammaerts, 2013), present a range of crude material practices addressing this domain of potential belligerents. In such operations, ‘Citizens and non-citizens alike are now treated as an always present threat…. All are imagined as combatants and all terrain the site of battle’ (Packer, 2006). This parsing of civil liberty and social practice through architecture powers the longer-term and mutually conditioning dynamics between citizens and their built environment. The urban realm has the ability to filter a diverse range of conflicts, channelling effects through non-military counter-processes (Sassen, 2010b). Belfast offers a robust example of such dynamics, manifest in the material forms of social-housing settlements. Here, the security-threat-community presents a prescient socio-material conciliation between the tensions of civil and security technologies. The governmental decision-making processes underpinning the assessments of threat posed by the security-threat-community during the Troubles need to be problematised in a post-Troubles era. How is it that the social-housing community has become the essential site for the expression of conflict and the essential place for its transformation? Has housing policy implemented to ameliorate conflict in fact conditioned its reproduction?

Asymmetries

Security Forces input within social-housing practices in Northern Ireland can be understood as a political conflict where the need for social-housing becomes subordinate to military efficacy. The adoption of a ‘hearts and minds’ military strategy in 1972 (Campbell and Connelly, 2003;
Dixon, 2009) marked a shift away from largely colonial-era counterinsurgency tactics (Edwards, 2010) which failed to adequately address the growing social dimension of the conflict (Alonso, 2004; Thornton, 2007; Tuck, 2007; Wither, 2009). The limited effectiveness of security policy was also evident in the security issues proliferating within social-housing estates. ‘Political interference’ in housing policy was already a controversial issue prior to the Troubles. The NIO took ultimate responsibility for assessing the security implications associated with social-housing. In a 1977 internal memo to the heads of the NIO divisions responsible for housing and security, P.W.J. Buxton recounted the historic politics of social-housing provision:

For the very reason that [housing] issues are deeply sectarian, and thus irredeemably ‘political’, an extra effort is made to treat them ‘on their merits’ which means without the intrusion of political or security considerations...so long as the voters see housing in the same sectarian context as they see politics generally, their locally elected representatives are going to give precious little leadership on the issue. This is the precise reason why Mr Callaghan advised Stormont to take housing away from the local councils and set up a central executive.3

As a non-sectarian centralised executive, the NIHE are widely regarded as providing ‘an objective and apolitical’ assessment of social-housing need throughout the Troubles (Bollens, 1999: 55-68). However a persistent and dominant Unionist-Protestant political hegemony4, coupled to historic entrenched sectarian territoriality and paramilitary influence over local areas (Brett, 1986), creatively destroys the principle of policy equivalence between social-housing communities. A confidential 1976 DoE report on the impact of historic segregation in housing within Northern Ireland, commissioned by the Secretary of State, acknowledged the distinctly asymmetrical social effects of unequal land distribution between Roman Catholic and
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Protestant communities. This founds a distorted premise upon which further practical solutions to the problems posed by security-threat-communities are then based:

[T]here are fewer Catholic families (about 25%) to Protestant families in Belfast [and] the great majority (80% +) of the housing movements in the early years of the Troubles resulting from intimidation were Catholic families… Large numbers of refugee families have poured into the already over-crowded areas. It is absolutely inevitable therefore that the Catholic parts of the city will expand. But expansion is difficult in some areas as it would produce immediate confrontation with strong Protestant communities.⁵

Population movements varied in size but typically followed patterns of violence. The report cited a number of Belfast cases from that year exemplifying the systemic intertwining of security and social-housing management (Figure 1).

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

In the Springfield area, 77 Roman Catholic families were forced out by sectarian intimidation. In the Grosvenor area, 150 Roman Catholic families and fifty Protestants abandoned their houses. In a two-month period at the New Barnsley estate 700 Protestant families fled for fear of violent reprisals following rioting occurring during a recent ‘Orange Order’ march.⁶ In the Rathcoole estate the ‘Rathcoole Defence Association’ was established by Loyalist paramilitaries to assume the role of ‘policing the estate’, evicting Catholic tenants and organising the squatting of Protestant tenants in their place. Similarly at the Cregagh estate, a masked vigilante group installed barricades and patrolled the area with support from the local ‘Cregagh Tenants Association’ forcing over 100 Roman Catholic families to leave. As a coda to the report the DoE cited the legacy of unchecked sectarianism evident in the Willowfield area
in East Belfast. In early 1970s the area had a Roman Catholic population of 3000 families affiliated to the local St. Anthony’s parish. In the words of the DoE, following intermittent gun battles and violence in August 1971, the area ‘boiled over’:

Catholic schools and churches were petrol bombed and by October 1972 the last of the Catholic owned shops and business premises in the Willowfield district was burned out. [B]y November 1972 over 154 families attached to the Willowfield Parish had been forced to leave the area. The present situation is that the Catholic enclave around St. Antony’s [sic] has virtually disappeared.7

These events are part of a wider dispositif8 which renders the social-housing community as an honoured site in Northern Ireland where the hearts and minds of a citizenry can be most authentically observed (designated) and authentically expressed (reproduced). This imposes upon the architect, citizen and policymaker alike, a hidden power to regulate the practice of societal liberty through simple articulation and habitation of material and space. Social-housing practice is not extrinsic to conflict but core to its formation, establishment and perpetuation.

**Transparency and Opacity**

In November 1976 Minister for Housing Ray Carter made a representation to a confidential gathering of the Secretary of State’s Executive Committee formally raising the issue of a ‘housing crisis’ for the first time:

Two of the main reasons for this were past neglect and sectarianism which gravely hampered the action being taken. The civil disturbances had greatly aggravated the situation: 32,000 houses had been damaged and there were 10,000 currently unoccupied which roughly equalled two years supply of new
A confidential analysis of this entanglement between housing and security in November 1976 by Ken Bloomfield of the DoE focuses on two specific questions: ‘the impact of sectarian segregation on housing programmes’; and ‘whether it would not be beneficial to make a more open public acknowledgement of the situation.’ The answers provided to these questions outline a high-order governance over the new political territory that was unfolding. Bloomfield’s narrative presents a distinct picture of the ethnic peculiarities of societal conditions in Northern Ireland:

In a great many instances, however, segregated communities have been created by a desire to live amongst congenial neighbours, and alongside one’s own schools, churches and social recreational facilities. To characterise this trend as necessarily or in all circumstances bad in itself is to challenge the right of people to preserve that distinctive sense of community which is so strongly characteristic of life in Northern Ireland.\(^9\)

Bloomfield describes the inseparability of the social and material problems associated with sectarian violence as a ‘malign influence... It leads to vacancies, vandalism, squatting and territorial struggles at the sectarian “interfaces”’. Bloomfield warns also of a genealogical lineage of destructive effects: ‘As mixed communities ...become solidly of one colour or the other, the inter-communal inter-face becomes a front line. Murders occur, people are intimidated, families move out, and houses are vandalised, squatted in or at best bricked up’.\(^10\)

Despite the attribution of little more than a perfunctory paragraph to the issue of housing and sectarianism in his autobiography (Bloomfield, 1994: 228) Bloomfield’s report makes two
pivotal recommendations. First, his suggestion of a redeveloped inner city consisting of ‘[A] pattern of smaller residential enclaves, surrounded by substantial areas of open space [which] could represent a better and safer basis for the future’ alongside a ‘steadily increasing pressure by the security forces’ provides a schema for redevelopment design founded on the premise of security-threat primacy. Secondly, Bloomfield’s support for ‘honestly and publically’ acknowledging the impact of sectarianism on housing programmes brings public disclosure into the political debate. In response, an NIO policy briefing authored one month later for Minister for Housing Ray Carter quickly shuts down any ideas of disclosure:

There would not seem to be a great deal of merit in provoking public debate on the evils of sectarianism… there is no great merit in exhaustively discussing the symptoms without coming forward with some very positive proposals for tackling the source of the complaint.\textsuperscript{12}

The briefing proposes instead that ‘the over-riding need to reduce public expenditure on the housing front in the interests of the national economy’ and the ‘aesthetic argument that one cannot go on allowing the centre of Belfast to fester in squalor while continuing to build new houses beyond its perimeter’ be used as the public rationale for addressing the inner-city area blighted by sectarian violence.\textsuperscript{13} The implicit shortcomings of both housing and security policy present a political liability, confirming nondisclosure to the public as the politically expedient option:

[We] feel that an inspired debate on the subject of sectarianism is likely to provoke the riposte that all would be well if only the security situation allowed people to live peaceably outside sectarian boundaries… Our general view is that for security and policing reasons the balance of advantage lies against provoking widespread discussion on sectarianism in housing…It would be
unlikely to be actively supported by the army and the police who seem to find it easier to control violence in areas where community boundaries are clearly defined...better we feel to get on with the rebuilding of dilapidated areas...while trying to weaken sectarian boundary lines by stealth...

This conditions an opaque and confused field between civil and policy practices (Birchall, 2011). It becomes no longer appropriate to measure the presence and effectiveness of security or housing technologies as separate social or material entities. Rather they become separate forms of representation within a distinct socio-material field and the communities within this jurisdiction are indubitably distinguished as a special quantity. The security-threat-community is designated as a complicated socio-material problem to be explained through socio-material solutions. Considered within an emotive pathology of conflict in Northern Ireland, this is a profound contingency that is germane to the legacy of community suspicions that the cul-de-sacs, court-yards and dead-end streets of the redeveloped inner-city that are part of an undisclosed spatial diagram designed by the Security Forces (Dawson, 1984; Coyles et al., 2013; Coyles, 2017).

**Socio-material practices**

A December 1976 press-release details the establishment of a ‘Ministerial Steering Group on Belfast Housing’ set up within the NIO and charged with ‘master-minding’ a full-scale attack on the housing crisis: ‘Belfast faces acute problems. In common with places like Liverpool and Glasgow the inner city has fallen into decay...In addition the Troubles have affected living conditions throughout the City.’ However, a more complete picture of the sectarian
implications was becoming clear through events at the Twinbrook and Suffolk estates on the outskirts of Belfast. Here, the practice of ‘squatting’ describes how political and military dimensions of government power (Mann and Haugaard, 2011; Mann, 2012) can be refined as (para)political and (para)military expressions of power common to insurgent and counterinsurgents.\textsuperscript{15} Squatting remains an ahistorical political action with clear socio-material consequences (Sanyal, 2010; Pruijt, 2013; Abaza, 2014). The bodies of civilians seeking rehousing, and the dwellings within which they squat, are assembled into a singular body-dwelling construct where the wider discursive operations of security and housing policy now target them as potential security-threats.

A confidential report on problem housing areas authored by the DoE in October 1977 for the NIO describes how Twinbrook presents ‘…one particularly important lesson… the dangerous consequences of allowing uncontrolled squatting in public housing estates’. Originally envisaged as a ‘model mixed religion estate’ of 3000 families, the first arrivals to Twinbrook set up a ‘Tenants Association’ determined to keep the settlement mixed:

…the problem was that Twinbrook… was becoming increasingly regarded as a probable extension of Belfast’s West Belfast Catholic areas. It became increasingly difficult to attract Protestant families… Many refugees, all Catholics [began] to squat in Twinbrook occupying homes that had been just built. The Twinbrook Tenants Association moved quickly and set up an anti-rumour service but the problem was clearly [the] desire of Protestants within the estate to leave it because of the influx of Catholic families…\textsuperscript{16}

In 1977 around 156 squatters conducted the non-violent political act (Spindler and Nathan, 2001; Sanyal, 2010) of occupying newly completed but still unoccupied housing. Within a
further 256 NIHE houses tenants had been illegally evicted by direct or indirect sectarian intimidation and replaced with ‘tenants’ selected by local paramilitary forces. The inability to ‘enforce decrees for possession in the Twinbrook Area’ would eventually force the NIHE to admit that it had ‘lost management control of the estate’. 17

The events in the summer of 1977 at the mixed enclave of Horn Drive on the periphery of the predominantly Roman Catholic Lenadoon estate, and adjacent to predominantly Protestant Suffolk estate, further demonstrate how both counter-insurgent and insurgent forces possess similar provenance. The ability to be able to predict, control, and even pre-empt behaviours, becomes a powerful weapon imperative to political gains:

The [Suffolk] estate is becoming increasingly surrounded by Roman Catholic housing and [the] underlying threat is that what happened at Horn Drive will be repeated: i.e. that the IRA will mount intense pressure on the Protestant residents so as to accelerate their departure; that the UDA will counter by staging an organised withdrawal, while doing so much damage as they can to the houses; and that the new occupants will be chosen by the IRA rather than the Housing Executive. 18

The engagement of the Security Forces with the security-threat-community moves further from an enterprise to protect the territorial rights of displaced tenants and the legal rights of landlords to a (para)military project to manage (para)political practice:

[T]he security forces consider that the situation could deteriorate at any time with the PIRA engineering a confrontation which would escalate as outside paramilitary assistance move in to support both sides... In the long term it is probable that Suffolk will become a Roman Catholic estate. However the pace
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... at which this occurs and the way it happens should as far as possible be controlled by the Government and not a reflection of outside pressure orchestrated by the PIRA.¹⁹

As the conventional governance of housing allocation and management is broken it effectively splinters social and territorial rights (Sassen, 2010a). This is a sophisticated operation of security-threat object designation wherein the docile bodies (Maddalena and Packer, 2014) of non-insurgent citizens become mobilised by the forces of military conflict into agents of paramilitary action. The civilian squatter occupying the relinquished dwelling commensurately reinforces ethnic territoriality and security-threat. The illegally evicted tenant is not afforded the tenancy protections of the law and in being dispossessed becomes a potential squatter and security-threat. The controlled allocation of tenants by paramilitaries and the ‘control of this controlling’ by the Security Forces creates a situation where objects become military assets strategically positioned to address political objectives. Bloomfield openly suggested, and quickly dismissed, theories of managing objects in this way.²⁰ In a series of proposals offered within his 1976 analysis, the ‘Stabilising the lines’ strategy suggested an open and transparent management of population movements along lines of conflict: ‘...to secure, through negotiation with political and other community leaders, local agreements on lines-of inter-communal demarcation which would hold for the time at least’. Later, he would reject this notion: ‘In too many instances the local communities are simply pawns in the hands of malignant forces manipulating them without any real concern for their interests.’ Regarding the opaque practice of ‘Controlled Allocation’ of tenancies to engineer social order, Bloomfield writes: ‘There is something repugnant about the notion of using families in housing need as
raw material for a form of social experiment which might, or might not, succeed.’ Security Forces opinion differed. Their first official report on ‘potential problem areas of housing’ in September 1977 cited controlled allocation of tenants as essential to ameliorating threat and maintaining order. Of the ‘mixed’ Ormeau Road, an area then ‘evenly spilt’ between Protestants and Roman Catholics, the Security Forces noted: ‘The Protestants fear that large numbers of Roman Catholics … will creep up the Ormeau Road and eventually outnumber them… This part of the Ormeau Road is about the only remaining mixed working class area left in Belfast. It is essential to maintain the present population balance.’ Similarly, the Woodvale area was ‘in general a mixed one’ but where ‘it was essential from a police point of view that [social-housing] tenants be hand picked.’ It becomes possible to conceive of a symmetry where the (para)military ‘squatting’ of insurgent forces is agnate to a (para)political control of allocation by counter-insurgent forces.

The Spark

A meeting in January 1977 to discuss the development proposals for Squire’s Hill-Ligoniel provides what the NIO would deem the ‘spark’ that later formalises the Standing Committee on the Security Implications of Housing as a device to ensure proper reconciliation between housing and security policy. The 1977 DoE report on ‘potential problem areas of housing’ describes the green-field site at Ligoniel as having ‘an extremely important part to play in easing the problems of re-housing people from Catholic re-development areas in Belfast’ as it was the only land available within the city on which to build housing for the Roman Catholic population. As well as providing new housing for local Roman Catholics, the site would have
capacity to house some 250 additional families displaced from other parts of the city.\textsuperscript{24} Security problems anticipated in the proposals would be reported at the meeting by Captain Melville (HQNI, 39\textsuperscript{th} Brigade) and Assistant Chief Constable David Chesney (RUC), with Messrs Simple and Simpson of the DoE in attendance with NIO officials. P.W.J. Buxton of the NIO provides an account of the meeting that demonstrates the volatile nature of this newly shared territory between security-threat and social-need. In this description Minister for Housing Ray Carter states that the views of the Security Forces ‘would have to be considered, as security was important, but could not be taken uncritically.’\textsuperscript{25} Additionally, NIO officials present clarify security advice as ‘just one of the range of aspects which had to be considered in reaching a conclusion... [I]t was improbable that absolute priority could be given to security considerations; the weight would vary from case to case.’\textsuperscript{26} Buxton also notes the problematic position of the social-housing authority itself:

[I]t is important that the Housing Executive should not be allowed to suspect that they are being prevented from thrashing out the security issues with those directly responsible for security on the ground. At the proper moment it will be much better to let [the security forces] put their views across directly, rather than seeking to filter them through the NIO. This is not to say that we should not take precautions to see that their views are properly reconciled and in accordance with [NIO] ideas (both of the immediate future and of the long-term) before they are put forward. [We must] throw into the balance the mostly unknown quantity of the long-term interests of Belfast city as opposed to these essentially short-term considerations of sectarian intimidation, lawlessness and so forth.\textsuperscript{27}
Phase one of the proposals received planning permission in 1976, with construction yet to begin in early 1977 when phase two also received full approval. The public exposure given to the role of the scheme in re-housing displaced Roman Catholics significantly limits options available for security remediation. This demonstrates the need for more effective targeting of the security-threat-community, the capability to pre-empt behaviours, rather than deal with the effects of existing behaviours:

[The] Squire’s Hill case illustrates our current shortcomings and the probable limitations of any improved system. The security consultation was too late [and] the proposals [were] known in general far and wide; evidently security advice ought to be taken while the options are still open.28

The modifications that the Security Forces offer relate to phase one of the development bordering the playing-fields of a Protestant Primary School and phase two bordering the private Protestant residential settlement of Squire’s Hill. These lands form fixed points within a fluid grid around which simulations are constructed and pre-emptive solutions then recommended:

[Squire’s Hill] residents were taking a firm line against the scheme… very strong objections would be made against the second phase which would bring Roman Catholic houses to the edge of the Squire’s Hill estate. If [phase one] housing could be stopped some way of the [Primary School] playground then the… scheme would be acceptable on security grounds. The Squire’s Hill residents would probably tolerate the situation.29

The fundamental nature of architecture as a socio-material practice becomes axiomatic to the modelling of a better or worse security practice by the Security Forces that, in turn,
subordinates the encouragement of better or worse social practice. Humanitarian obligations to refugees from other parts of the city are reconceptualised as hazardous security choices (Figure 2):

If the Roman Catholic houses were built as far as the edge of Squire’s Hill estate a point of conflict would be established. It was likely that the majority of the residents would move and would be replaced by hard-line Protestants (thus creating a confrontation zone) or the estate would become a ‘no mans land’ with perhaps some Roman Catholic squatters. In the latter circumstances a confrontation line may eventually develop across the Crumlin Road with the hard Protestant Ballysillan Estate. Furthermore the new Orange Hall (built to replace the one abandoned on the Ligoniel Road) on the Crumlin Road would be threatened and would be an additional emotional factor in Protestant reactions.  

The adherence to the conjecture provokes uncomfortable parallels with an apartheid era that linked ethnic integration with inevitable violence (Hart, 1988; Douglas, 2011) as well as with a more contemporary restructuring of the liberated migrant as the unwanted refugee (Höing and Razzaque, 2012; Long, 2013). In this new domain an entire collective of body-dwelling objects can be designated, targeted and pre-empted prior to actual physical creation as part of a project of better security practice.
The Committee

A critical and confidential memo by P.W.J. Buxton in June 1977 to NIO officials with overall responsibility for coordination with the Security Forces marks a watershed in how competing and conflicting demands of housing policy and security policy would be resolved:

[Squire’s Hill-Ligoniel] raises in acute form the problems that are likely to recur frequently in the coming months. We have no objective grounds for contradicting security advice. On the other hand it plainly needs to be balanced against the over-riding need for more land for Catholic housing, and the predictable response of the Housing Executive and in particular its chairman to a ‘political’ request to amend its plans etc… whatever is decided is certain to cause offence somewhere and show that government decision-making has been less than perfectly co-ordinated… [T]roubles of the Horn Drive description [may] stem from previous vagaries, errors or inadequacies of housing policy. But in their current manifestations they are better treated as security matters, on the grounds that the security forces have to lead in dealing with them, not the housing authorities.31

The dislocation of the NIHE from these operations enables security-advice to move unhindered from a relativist position to a deterministic one, a security intervention to direct challenging political processes. This logic details how housing policy becomes a tool; not to assert more control over of security-threat communities, but to establish better control through a mosaic of political and material practices. Pre-emptive control is identified as a strategic operation to be enacted via the technologies available to social-housing policy:

A sufficiently early consultation could provide many ameliorations and improvements of a scheme which the security forces intrinsically disliked. [The Standing Committee on the Security Implications of Housing] could also
contribute to the progressive tactical handling of an issue [from] a political and security point of view. It is in this context that I would see a useful political element in the arrangements. That is to say, housing policy itself is not political, but the prosecution and promulgation of it is.\textsuperscript{32}

In this way, the dispositif restructures complex social and security problems resulting from complex social and security policy failures, to elemental political problems resulting from elemental political failures. The depoliticisation of security advice is made possible by pre-empting the conventional decision-making processes of the NIHE and enabling the size, density and scale of a given social-housing proposal to be reviewed and assessed before it is delegated to the NIHE and made public. This depoliticisation is a conditioning effect of conflict itself. Its first operation is a passive dislocation of the processes that generate security advice from potential sources of repoliticisation through its passive relocation as ‘technical’ information:

Security is merely a technical matter (although its requirements may of course have strongly political considerations). A given housing policy may have consequences for security, of a variety of kinds. Conversely, adjustments can be made to a given housing scheme, for the betterment of security… Their advice is technical, and following it or not is apolitical.\textsuperscript{33}

The power of technical designation privileges security-threat assessment over other technical considerations: ‘[If] we cannot reconcile housing policy with security considerations, we should deal with this as with any other inter-departmental conflict of interest… in matters of housing policy, the Minister decides. Major disputed issues could go on up to the Secretary of State.’\textsuperscript{34} Effective introduction of security-advice is reasoned as its pre-emptive insertion thus avoiding
conflict with other concerns. The statutory planning process provides the critical juncture (and subterfuge) where productive engagement is most beneficial:

The problem lies in the planning area... what is needed is not interference in the policy-making system...but practical working-level consultation between the housing planners and those with security concerns... the earlier they are given the opportunity to do so, in any planning process, the better.... the planners rightly feel that it can distort their conclusions but they are well aware that they cannot ignore it.35

The memo concludes by affirming the need to form a committee comprising of a ‘...fairly informal group [that] would regularly meet and would co-opt members of the security forces for particular matters as necessary’ in order to ‘regularise the rather loose practice’ which had accompanied previous events. The Standing Committee on the Security Implications of Housing becomes the discursive mechanism that mobilises the formerly erratic and ad hoc tactics of circumspect control of tenancy allocation, encumbered involvement in the illegal evictions and civilian squatting, and the reactive responses to illegal to interface violence. It coordinates the productive effects of these disparate actions through a centralised body of high-ranking decision makers who would be responsible for dissemination of the agreed strategy and actions within their respective procedural processes. The ratiocination of its operation describes a descent from debating the ethical implications of introducing security-threat constraints to potential security-threat communities, to the evaluation of the balance of security-advice that will be given to communities now designated as security-threats by default.
The first meeting of the committee on July 8th 1977, under the chairmanship of A.W. Stephens of the NIO, would see Deputy Chief Constable John Hermon and Assistant Chief Constable David Chesney of the RUC join Brigadier John MacMillan and Lt. Colonel Malcolm McLarney of British Army to review ‘the security aspects of housing in Belfast’ alongside Messrs Semple and Steele of the DoE. The minutes detail an aim to ‘ensure that all concerned were aware of the problems and to consider whether anything could be done to anticipate and perhaps reduce trouble’. Stephens outlines three aspects to consider: how major housing policy decisions of the time were likely to involve in some instances ‘the transfer of land from one community to the another which would have security implications’; trouble at ‘sensitive interfaces’; and, crucially, ‘the problems posed by trouble at individual houses’. A driving factor in the discussions that follow is the unease of the Security Forces with the lack of interest shown by the Ministerial Steering Group on Belfast Housing in matters of security, with the RUC noting how ‘the security dimension in strategic housing planning should not be ignored’ and how it was important that ‘realistic security input’ was introduced into their discussions. The RUC also emphasise ‘the massive problem in the housing field because of the inequalities between the two communities’ and the ‘grave shortage’ of Roman Catholic housing and the ‘overall surplus’ for Protestants. In this regard, the British Army officials also draw attention to the ‘general tendency in areas of West Belfast for Roman Catholic areas to gradually encroach on the Protestant estates like Suffolk’. What emerges is a recognition of the ‘absence of consultation and co-ordination between all the agencies involved’ and the central importance of the social-housing dwelling to security management:
It is the demolition of exiting buffers or ‘the building of new houses in a previously neutral zone that develops flashpoints…Problems could be alleviated by the creation of a neutral zone. In positive terms industrial development or the construction of amenity or welfare buildings would have the added advantage of providing an area for neutral contact. Failing that the creation of a wide open space, a dual carriageway or the erecting of fencing would at lease serve to separate hostile communities.\(^{37}\)

In his conclusion Stephens notes that the ‘need had been identified’ for a mechanism to bring the planning and security side together to ‘deal with crises and identify potential areas of conflict… a committee consisting of those present would be the most suitable form’.

**Visibilities**

An assessment of the interventions at Twinbrook-Areema and Squire’s Hill-Ligoniel elucidates how the Troubles-era social-housing estate provides a ‘grid of intelligibility’ (Garland, 2014: 375) for understanding how the historic decisions taken by the committee objectify the security-threat-community, and continue to do so in the contemporary post-conflict city. In September 1977 the DoE authored a report which describes the 100m wide playing-field between the Twinbrook and Areema estates as a ‘no mans land [which] serves as a battle-ground.’ The report clarifies the ability of the *Standing Committee on the Security Implications of Housing* to co-opt seemingly unrelated statutory processes to achieve security-focused outcomes: ‘It is understood that if the nearby Poleglass Estate goes ahead that a new road or motorway will be built on this ground. It is believed that a motorway would provide a fairly effective buffer zone between these two communities.’\(^{38}\) The resultant dual-carriageway (Figure
3) productively obliterates the divide (and with it the security threat) yet also concretises this perpetual divide by making it fundamentally resistant to future social or material reintegration (Figure 4).

[SINSERT FIGURE 3]
[SINSERT FIGURE 4]

Squire’s Hill-Ligoniel provides further visibility of the opaque use of statutory processes, this time to bring about a battlespace where body-dwellings continue to be singularly targeted and designated by hidden discourses. This provides a new means of explaining the contemporary qualities of these objects by understanding the passive power of security-focused interactions with statutory planning permission. A report prepared by the Squire’s Hill Residents Association and forwarded to Minister for Housing Ray Carter, details the fear of the local community for ‘overspill from Roman Catholic parts of North Belfast’ causing a deterioration in conditions in the area:

If an excess of houses were built they would be allocated to people from Ardoyne and New Lodge. To bring families from these areas into one which is at present living in harmony would be inviting trouble...we feel that sectarian strife may develop between the residents of this new estate and those from Silverstream... the mixed community of Squire’s Hill would be in the middle and our quiet streets would become an interface...”39

The report recommends a considerably reduced scheme based on ‘taking these very real fears into consideration together with strong advice from sources within the military and RUC against the planned siting of the estate’.40 A briefing note issued in September 1977 noted a
'continued pressure' from the Security Forces for modification of the Squire's Hill-Ligoniel scheme premised on these continued objections:

Mr Carter met a deputation of residents from the Squire’s Hill private development, accompanied by Mr John Carson, MP... and while he agreed to study their proposals carefully, he held out little prospect of the development programme being changed. He is however under obligation to reply to Mr Carson.41

In response Minister for Housing Ray Carter directed the DoE to incorporate compensatory 'conditions' to the granted planning permission (Figure 5 and 6):

I. that there should be particularly heavy planting, to a minimum depth of twelve metres, in the proposed landscape strip between the two developments;

II. that a physical barrier should be erected before any of the Executive houses immediately adjacent to the private development were occupied;

III. that the relevant Executive houses should not face towards the private development; and

IV. that there should be no access whatever, vehicular or pedestrian, between the two developments.42

What appear as benign conditions in fact propagate a productive disciplining of the security-threat-community that passes undetected through the statutory processes of measurement and culpability. The quality of ‘not facing’ the ‘relevant Executive houses’ has been achieved through a reversal of the social-program of the dwelling rather than a reversal of its physical-
program thus avoiding any conflict with the permitted layout of housing and roads. Front-gardens have been reverse-engineered as back-yards; large living-room windows as disproportionately sized kitchen windows. Only the adjacent doorway cannot be disguised and remains ‘front-facing’. The privileging of the social-program of Squire’s Hill is bound to the disciplining of the social-program at Ligoniel. This is the most astutely precise and perverse targeting of body-dwellings within the security-threat community.

[INSERT FIGURE 7]

The dangerous and unknown nature of these historic security-centred forces evident in how they continue to manifest in post-Troubles conditions (Figure 7). The divisive twelve-meter wide ‘heavy planting’ installed in 1980 is not on the list of interfaces recognised by government (Department of Justice, 2012: 25). Despite the continued absence of interface violence over the decades this division has been extended in more complex and problematic forms. Most discernible is the extension of the heavy planting barrier accompanying the recent extension of the Squire’s Hill in 2013 (Figure 8). Less noticeable are the fallow playing-fields wilfully abandoned by the primary school authorities to create physical dislocation from the adjacent housing, effectively completing the continuous buffer first sought by the Security Forces in 1978 (Figure 9).

[INSERT FIGURE 8]

[INSERT FIGURE 9]
Concluding Reflections

The Together: Building a United Community Strategy (Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive, 2013) is the chief policy framework for post-conflict Northern Ireland. Under its auspices a range of initiatives are provocatively testing integrated education, integrated housing and shared community spaces. Given the premise of a peace-process built on ‘equality’ it is understandable too that in matters of space, place and architecture, political attention is dominated by examples where outcomes common to both communities can be easily demonstrated. Whether it be the shared and neutral tourist orientated neoliberalism of the Crumlin Road Gaol and Titanic Belfast visitor centre (Coyles, 2013), the ‘shared space’ of the Girdwood Community Hub (Gaffikin et al., 2016), the Northern Ireland Executive ‘Shared Future Housing’ programmes, or measures addressing the peace-walls ‘shared’ between communities, these initiatives have been made possible by a common political will where the benefits are, at least in theory, equal to both communities. The elemental value this places upon architecture can be seen in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy:

Some of our areas continue to be overshadowed by the physical reminders of the past, with residents living segregated lives as a result of dividing structures. These structures can come in a number of forms but their impact is exactly the same (OFMdFM 2013: 20).

The ‘peace-walls’ are recognised at international level and the political thinking underpinning them is well understood (Byrne et al., 2012). This has enabled incremental progress to be made toward ameliorating their divisive effects (International Fund For Ireland, 2012). The lack
of similar recognition of the security-threat-community means that the true value of the Troubles-era social-housing settlement becomes lost. The socio-material problems presented by the security-threat-community become recognised instead as distinct social problems and distinct material problems. However the machinations of the Standing Committee on the Security Implications of Housing demonstrate the complex socio-material nature of its constitution. The processes which inform the assessment of threat posed by the full range of social-housing communities redeveloped during the 1976-1980 period, and their consequences in socio-material forms, remain a fundamental historical praxis that requires comprehensive deconstruction and evaluation in the post-conflict era.

Whilst others have theorised how the planning process might address post-conflict conditions, to class the security-threat community as a planning issue is to miss the larger point. In the context of a post-conflict Northern Ireland, the historic and undisclosed involvement of the military in matters of social housing is foremost a political issue. The introduction of ‘community planning’ to Northern Ireland (McAlister, 2010), and a shift from centralised planning to local development plans, offers a potential policy infrastructure more cognisant of the links between social and material community issues (Bradley and Murtagh, 2007). However, whilst the planning process has its part to play, successful restitution can only be possible through a political process that engages with the sensitive disclosures at the heart of this paper and recognises the social, economic and environmental dimensions enmeshed in Troubles-era social-housing development and management. This cross-cutting approach to policy is not unknown in Northern Ireland and explicitly underpins the ‘four priority areas’ of the Together: Building a United Community Strategy: ‘Our children and young people; Our shared
community; Our safe community; Our cultural expression’ (OFMdFM, 2013). The commitment of the strategy to remove all ‘peace-walls’ by 2023 (OFMdFM 2013: 6) is not planning policy but an interdepartmental matter led by the Department of Justice (Department of Justice, 2012). The examples of visibilities presented within this paper are a small part of a wider programme of interventions across Belfast and its hinterlands currently undergoing extended research by the author. As normalised, single-identity parts of Belfast they lack the political currency of ‘interface’ and ‘shared-space’ endeavours. Yet the security-threat-community is an equally important legacy of conflict that demonstrates the need for a cross-cutting post-conflict policy to address its perpetual designation of citizens as potential security-threats. If post-conflict policy seeks to enable social and material integration, can this be achieved when the historic forces that produced secure social-housing settlements continue to reproduce the very security-threat-objects that they have been employed to resist?
In 1972 the Northern Ireland power-sharing government collapsed and the Northern Ireland Office, a department of the UK Westminster government, took over the administration government.

Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1976 to 1979.


‘[T]he Ulster Unionist Government had been in power for more than fifty years… There were no Catholic members of the Administration; there never had been… They excluded themselves from any share in government and, in addition, they were deliberately excluded by the Ulster Unionist majority. The Ulster Unionist Party where insensitive to the injustices that the majority suffered in such matters… as housing allocation…[Prime Minister Harold] Wilson pointed out that the twelve Ulster MPs at Westminster could vote against the government and even defeat it. [We] could not even debate Northern Ireland at Westminster.” (Callaghan, 1973: 4-10).


A Protestant fraternity established in 1795 with strong affiliations to Protestant political parties, giving the Orange Order considerable political influence during the Troubles. See (Edwards and Knottnerus, 2010, Tonge et al., 2011).


‘[A] thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions… The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.’ (Foucault, 1980).

CJ 4/1559 Press release on the setting up of the ministerial steering group on Belfast housing 8 February 1977.


CJ 4/1559, AA Pritchard to Parliamentary Under Secretary, 6 December 1976.

CJ 4/1559, AA Pritchard to Parliamentary Under Secretary, 6 December 1976.

CJ 4/1559 Press release on the setting up of the ministerial steering group on Belfast housing 8 February 1977.


CJ 4/1985 Security Implications of Housing Problems in Belfast, Note by RUC, 1 September 1977

The letter from Buxton to Stephens and Ford of 29/06/77 was copied to the secretary of the department head Richard Alvin Neilson who scribbled on the document: ‘What sparked this and what happened subsequently?’ His secretary responded by return that ‘Squires Hill provided the spark and your Wednesday committee is the result’.


The central purpose of this programme is to develop neighbourhoods where people choose to live with others regardless of their religion or race; http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/community/community_cohesion/shared_future_housing.htm
References:


Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive (2013) *Together: Building a United Community Strategy.* Belfast: OFMDFM.


The Security-Threat-Community