BRILL

Northern Irish Migrants in Glasgow and the Troubles in Great Britain: Echoes of Conflict in a 'Home Away from Home'

Jack Crangle
Department of History, Maynooth University, County Kildare, Ireland
jack.crangle@mu.ie

Liam Harte
Department of English, American Studies and Creative Writing,
University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
Liam.Harte@manchester.ac.uk

Graham Dawson
Centre for Memory, Narrative and Histories, University of Brighton,
Brighton, UK
G.Dawson@brighton.ac.uk

Fearghus Roulston
School of Humanities, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK
fearghus.roulston@strath.ac.uk

Barry Hazley
Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK
Barry.Hazley@liverpool.ac.uk

Abstract

This article diversifies and deepens our understanding of Northern Irish settlement in Great Britain during the era of the Troubles (c.1969–1998) by exploring a previously under-researched destination: the West of Scotland. Featuring oral history interviews with Northern Irish migrants in Glasgow, it considers how centuries of cultural exchange between the two places shaped migrants' memories and subjectivities. Our narrators' childhoods in Northern Ireland were punctuated by sectarian rancour and

conflict. The presence in Scotland of similar – albeit less violent or systemic – sectarian attitudes often acted as mnemonic triggers to a conflict migrants felt they had left behind, reopening psychological wounds and reviving repressed traumas. Informed by theoretical conceptions of home, the analysis examines convergences between home and elsewhere, disrupting the idea of migration as a severance between the two. The article therefore offers a new perspective on both the Northern Irish presence in Great Britain and on interreligious relations in the West of Scotland.

Keywords

religion – sectarianism – migration – memory – diaspora – Northern Ireland – Scotland

Introduction

One Sunday during the early 2000s, Barbara McKee was walking to work at a central Glasgow church when an Orange march proceeded past her on the street. Encountering once again the sounds and imagery of Orange fraternalism that had punctuated her Belfast upbringing, Barbara remembered feeling 'frightened' and 'triggered' as traumatic memories of the Troubles came flooding back.[1] Raised during the 1960s in a middle-class Northern Irish Protestant family, Barbara thought that she had left such tribalism behind after departing to Great Britain, grateful to have found a way 'out of Northern Ireland'. However, she eventually settled in Glasgow, a city that harboured many of the same sectarian rituals, beliefs and prejudices that underpinned the Northern Ireland conflict.

This article diversifies and deepens our understanding of the Irish diaspora in Great Britain by exploring how the distinctive context and culture of the West of Scotland influenced Northern Irish people's memories of migration during the era of the Troubles (c.1969–1998). Foregrounding immigrant Northern Irish voices in Glasgow, we probe a distinctive but under-researched context of Irish and Northern Irish settlement. Despite the burgeoning literature on Irish communities in Britain, few historians have considered how Scotland's historic links with Ulster have shaped individual or collective diasporic experiences. In his seminal 2007 book, *The Irish in post-war Britain*, Enda Delaney explicitly excluded Scotland from his remit.[2] Similarly, despite acknowledging important 'differences between England, Scotland and

---

1   Interview with Barbara McKee, by Jack Crangle, 15 June 2020 (online).
2   Enda Delaney, *The Irish in post-war Britain* (Oxford 2007) 3.

Wales' for the Irish diaspora, Bronwen Walter failed to unpack those regional nuances.[3] Likewise, Mary Hickman wrote in 2000 that for Irish migrants in Scotland, 'the situation is different', but did not explain how or why.[4] Mo Moulton similarly acknowledged the 'distinctive' history of Irish immigration to Scotland, hence their decision to confine analysis of interwar Irish settlement exclusively to England.[5] Oral historians such as Louise Ryan and Johanne Devlin Trew have extensively researched Irish and Northern Irish migrant subjectivities, but both focus on England, a society where Irish migrants faced different challenges to those who moved to Scotland.[6] Using life-story interviews with Troubles-era Northern Irish migrants, this article presents how centuries of cultural exchange between Scotland and Ulster elicited in them an often jarring sense of living in a 'home away from home'. Migrant memories are shaped by encounters with the active remnants of this history, stimulating a dialogue of comparison with 'home', which re-emerges as a site of ambivalent meanings and a repository of complex psychic and emotional states.

The following discussion also broadens our comprehension of Scottish interreligious relations. Existing studies on this topic – mainly from sociologists – have focused on measuring the extent of structural sectarianism between Protestants and Catholics. For example, Patricia Walls and Rory Williams assess workplace anti-Irish discrimination.[7] Since 2000, there has been widespread academic debate on the form, nature and pervasiveness of religious bigotry in modern Scotland.[8] There has also been a major initiative, sponsored by the Scottish government, to investigate the modern legacy of sectarianism and to advise ministers on action that could be taken to address it.[9] We take a different approach. Our aim is not to evaluate the extent of sectarianism,

---

3 Bronwen Walter, 'Whiteness and diasporic Irishness: nation, gender and class', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27:9 (2011) 1295–1312, 1296.

4 Mary Hickman, '"Binary opposites" or "unique neighbours"? The Irish in multi-ethnic Britain', *Political Quarterly* 70:1 (2000) 50–58, 54.

5 Mo Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish in interwar England* (Cambridge 2014) 10.

6 See Louise Ryan, '"I'm going to England": Irish women's stories of migration in the 1930s', *Oral History* 30:1 (2002) 42–53; Johanne Devlin Trew, *Leaving the North: Migration and memory, Northern Ireland 1921–2011* (Liverpool 2013).

7 Patricia Walls and Rory Williams, 'Sectarianism at work: Accounts of employment discrimination against Irish Catholics in Scotland', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26:4 (2003) 632–661.

8 For more on this debate, see Michael Rosie, *The sectarian myth in Scotland: Of bitter memory and bigotry* (Basingstoke 2004); Steve Bruce, Tony Glendinning, Iain Patterson and Michael Rosie, *Sectarianism in Scotland* (Edinburgh 2004); T.M. Devine (ed.), *Scotland's shame? Bigotry and sectarianism in modern Scotland* (London 2000).

9 See Michael Rosie, Cecelia Clegg, Duncan Morrow, Margaret Lynch and Ian Galloway, *Tackling sectarianism and its consequences in Scotland: Final report of the Advisory Group on tackling sectarianism in Scotland* (Edinburgh 2015). https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id /eprint/23084/1/00477619.pdf

bigotry or anti-Irishness in Scotland. Instead, we consider how the oral testimonies of Northern Ireland migrants who moved to Glasgow illuminate the different and competing ways in which the city exists as a second or replica home for them, to the extent that it unsettles their subjectivities and complicates their existing relationships with home, both as a place and as a state of mind. Although Jim MacPherson, Joseph Bradley and Mark Boyle have each conducted excellent, nuanced qualitative studies of Irish religious and cultural influences in Scotland, their work focuses on Scottish-born Protestants and Catholics.[10] While many such individuals were of Irish descent, our approach assesses Scottish sectarianism through the eyes of Northern Irish-born migrants, individuals whose positionality differed markedly to those raised in Scotland. While our testimonies do not seek to capture the macro-statistical data surrounding sectarianism, they instead offer qualitative responses to the minutiae of everyday Scottish life. We ask, how does Catholic-Protestant acrimony look to those *not* from Scotland, but those raised in an environment where sectarian strife had much more violent and tragic consequences?

Our Oral Narratives and Narrators

The six interviews informing this article emerged from a much larger AHRC-funded oral history project entitled 'Conflict, Memory and Migration: Northern Irish Migrants and the Troubles in Great Britain',[11] which was conducted by the five authors of this article between April 2019 and December 2022. The research team collected the personal narratives of over 70 Troubles-era Northern Irish migrants in three city regions – London, Manchester and Glasgow – and utilised their memories of migration to explore how the meanings of conflict in Northern Ireland have been articulated within British culture, while also probing how such migrants were received and culturally imagined against the backdrop of ongoing political violence. Nineteen of these interviews were conducted with participants based in Glasgow. During the fieldwork, Glasgow emerged as a distinctive site of diasporic subjectivity, a place where historical,

---

10   See D.A.J. MacPherson, 'The emergence of women's Orange lodges in Scotland: Gender, ethnicity and women's activism, 1909–1940', *Women's History Review* 27:1 (2013) 51–74; Mark Boyle, *Metropolitan anxieties: On the meaning of the Irish Catholic adventure in Scotland* (London and New York 2011); Joseph M. Bradley, 'Sport and the contestation of ethnic identity: Football and Irishness in Scotland', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32:7 (2006) 1189–1208.

11   Grant reference AH/R008426/1.

geographical and cultural proximity fostered a sense of shared understanding and familiarity.

The six interviews featured here offer a snapshot of how that close historical relationship influenced subjective testimonies. Given that these interviews represent less than a third of our nineteen Glasgow-based interviews, and only a handful of the project's overall total, they should not be viewed as representative of the broader Northern Irish migrant experience in Great Britain.[12] Likewise, this article does not purport to be a comprehensive review or analysis of all our narratives. Instead, we attempt to address important historiographical issues that have been overlooked or under-analysed by past migration scholars and which, we suggest, are best explored through detailed qualitative readings of a small selection of interviews that illuminate the diversity of historically formed diasporic subjectivities.

All of the Glasgow-based interviews were conducted online (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) in 2020 and 2021, utilising a semi-structured, life-history approach.[13] One might assume that these online interviews would lack the conversational dialogue of those recorded in-person. Certainly, remote interviewing was an unfamiliar and at times uncomfortable experience for us as researchers. The unconscious cues of eye contact, body language and handshakes that we routinely use to establish rapport suddenly disappeared, leaving some conversations strained and stilted. Yet, other online interviews showcased the inverse. After recording had concluded, at least two interviewees confided that they felt comfortable narrating precisely *because* they were physically alone in the comfort of their living room. Far from being a barrier, the screen of a computer, smartphone or tablet served as a comfort blanket, allowing these participants greater freedom to recollect and narrate. Perhaps if those same interviewees had been conversing with a stranger sitting opposite them, their comfort levels would have been somewhat reduced. Interestingly, the authors of a 2022 *Oral History* article on pandemic interviewing found that, compared to those interviewed in person, remote interviewees made lengthier and more candid disclosures.[14] Having been confined indoors and restricted from travelling to Northern Ireland, our participants had the time and opportunity to contemplate their relationship with their origins at length; indeed, some noted that 2020 was the first year in decades that they could not visit the

---

12   In total, there are 69 interviews and 71 participants. Two interviews were conducted jointly with two participants.
13   Lynn Abrams, *Oral history theory* (London and New York 2010) 15.
14   Tracey Loughran, Kate Mahoney and Daisy Payling, 'Reflections on remote interviewing in a pandemic: Negotiating participant and researcher emotions', *Oral History* 50:1 (2022) 37–48.

North. Collectively, although our online interviews are undoubtedly different to our in-person recordings, they are neither superior nor inferior, with the circumstances of the pandemic having provided a unique moment of reflective pause.

Of the six interviewees featured here, three come from Catholic-nationalist backgrounds and three from Protestant-unionist backgrounds. All grew up in the eastern portion of Northern Ireland, four of them in Belfast. Our three Catholic-nationalist interviewees were raised in working-class families, with two of those growing up in the republican heartland of West Belfast. Street-level militarisation and sectarian territoriality were everyday features of this part of working-class Catholic Belfast. Our third Catholic-nationalist participant grew up in the predominantly Protestant town of Carrickfergus and regularly experienced sectarian discrimination due to his background. In contrast, our three Protestant-unionist interviewees came from predominantly middle-class households, with two growing up in more affluent Belfast suburbs. Despite these upbringings, both of those participants experienced intense Troubles-related trauma, witnessing threats and violence against themselves and members of their family. Our third Protestant-unionist interviewee grew up in Portadown – a town with well-known and deeply embedded interreligious tensions – and therefore also witnessed a great deal of sectarian acrimony. The varied class backgrounds of this interview cohort demonstrate the pervasiveness of conflict and social division. Living in a more affluent neighbourhood or economically secure household was no guarantee of safety or protection, a point emphasised by the universality of sectarian tension and impending violence across all six narratives.

This article combines the 'evidential' and 'theoretical' models of oral history interpretation. Here, oral testimony serves as primary evidence of how links between Scotland and Ulster have shaped the subjective experiences of departure, migration and settlement. However, informed by theoretical conceptions of home, our research also illuminates how the socio-political contexts of both places have shaped subjective memory reconstruction. Memory is invariably influenced by social contexts and discourses, as well as by individual and collective identities, all of which can shape how stories are told and retold. We use these narratives to explore the rich, textured migration journeys of a small cohort of emigrants in an under-researched diasporic location, while also probing how cultural and place-based specificities shaped narrative constructions of memory.

Home in Migrant Narratives

Scholars of memory and migration have increasingly turned their attention to the importance and meaning of 'home' within narrators' physical, temporal and emotional migration journeys. As Chamberlain and Leydesdorff contend, migrant selves evolve through 'their memories of their birthplace, their homeland, those left behind – interruptions in their life narratives that require resequencing, remodelling and reinterpreting as the newcomers incorporate and surpass their pasts'.[15] In her pioneering conceptualisation of home in the migrant experience, Sara Ahmed notes how narratives of home are indelibly linked to memory reconstruction. Arguing that they represent 'the discontinuity between past and present', Ahmed fundamentally challenges the artificial binary commonly imposed between home and away.[16] Rather, the two are indelibly linked. Instead of being a 'pure, safe and comfortable' space 'with boundaries that are fixed', Ahmed ascribes much more fluidity to the concept of home, the interpretation of which evolves with one's life journey.[17] Assessing narrators' relationships with home, both as a physical location and as an affective space, helps us to probe their incorporation within a new community, analysing the extent of adaptation and the evolution of both individual and collective identities before and after departure.

For migrants in the West of Scotland, extensive cultural crossover between the 'old' and 'new' homes prompted mnemonic coalescence between both locations, disrupting more linear conceptions of migration. An analysis of home, as a place of belonging and a site of memory within this unique diasporic context, illuminates how migrants conceive of their social, emotional, physical and temporal migration journeys. Ahmed urges scholars to recognise such convergences, advocating 'the non-opposition between home and away'.[18] Our case-study substantiates this drive away from simplistic notions of migration as definitively severing the link between past and present. The narratives of our Glasgow-based interviewees disrupt the binary conceptions that Ahmed critiques, where migration is assumed to constitute a severance between one's place of birth and one's place of settlement as an emigrant, before and after, or then and now. Several of our narrators describe their settlement experiences in Glasgow as requiring specific adaptation techniques,

15   Mary Chamberlain and Selma Leydesdorff, 'Transnational families: Memories and narratives', *Global Networks* 4:3 (2004) 227–241, 228.

16   Sara Ahmed, 'Home and away: Narratives of migration and estrangement', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2:3 (1999) 329–347, 343.

17   Ibid., 339.

18   Ibid., 340.

negotiating the thorny issues of community background and religious identity that had similarly punctuated their upbringings. The convergence between supposedly dichotomous old and new homes complicates our understanding of the disruptive nature of migration, instead imbuing these narratives with fractured continuity.

Increasing academic analysis of 'home' in migration studies has prompted greater analytical nuance and sophistication. Regarding queer migrations, Anne-Marie Fortier has begun decentring the classic model of home as a necessarily 'desired site of familiarity, comfort and belonging', instead highlighting the ambivalence and contradictions that characterise memories of home.[19] However, the scholarly temptation to romanticise home as a site of unquestioned belonging has persisted. For example, writing about Vietnamese refugees in South Carolina, Etsuko Kinefuchi contests that remembering home 'invokes our belonging, desire, memory and a firm point of return, comfort, safety, and intense emotional relationships'.[20] Kinefuchi's depiction exemplifies a tendency to interpret home exclusively as a site of continual allure. Others, however, have described the 'duality' of home as both a place of emotional comfort and an unsafe site one must leave.[21] This ambivalence resonates particularly strongly with migrants from conflict zones and divided societies. In her 2015 book, *Refugees and the meaning of home*, Helen Taylor considers the relationship of Greek and Turkish Cypriot refugees to their homes in Cyprus against the backdrop of the country's bitter and divisive war. Emphasising that home is far more than a mere physical space, Taylor argues that home is also constructed temporally, materially and relationally. Identifying the contradictions that often characterise memories of war-torn societies, Taylor highlights how conflict can lead to reconstructions of home as simultaneously connoting 'nurture, safety and security' as well as 'oppression, subjugation and violence'.[22]

Taylor's description of duality corresponds with similarly complex and oscillating narratives deployed by many of our interviewees, who sometimes struggle to reconcile their happy memories of childhood and family in Northern Ireland with a society marred by ongoing civil conflict. Many of our narrators describe the idyllic, mountainous scenery of the Ulster countryside

---

19   Anne-Marie Fortier, '"Coming home": Queer migrations and multiple evocations of home', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4:4 (2001) 405–424, 410.
20   Etsuko Kinefuchi, 'Finding home in migration: Montagnard refugees and post-migration identity', *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 3:3 (2010) 228–248, 231.
21   Magdalena Nowicka, 'Mobile locations: Construction of home in a group of mobile transnational professionals', *Global Networks* 7:1 (2007) 69–86, 77.
22   Helen Taylor, *Refugees and the meaning of home: Cypriot narratives of loss, longing and daily life in London* (Basingstoke and New York 2015) 4.

or carefree childhood memories of playing football with friends. Yet, the same narrators also reference a sense of claustrophobia and insularity, presenting Northern Ireland as a place where behaviour was policed and everybody knew one another's business.[23] In her seminal study of emigration from the North of Ireland, *Leaving the North*, Trew discusses how the Troubles exacerbated a pre-existing culture of social conservatism and religious bigotry, which during the conflict 'set in with a vengeance and there was little room for difference of any kind'.[24] This article expands Trew's analysis, by highlighting how communal introversion formed one side of a mnemonic dichotomy, where home was celebrated as the site of collective stoicism and cohesiveness, but simultaneously laid bare the trauma of conflict. Although some of our interviewees praised the sense of togetherness that characterised their upbringings, this communality was ultimately sustained by entrenched social and religious segregation. Close-knit collective identities were a product or a function of division and polarisation. Conversely, Glasgow harboured far less structural segregation than urban areas of Northern Ireland. There, aspects of religious intermixing, such as mixed marriage between Protestants and Catholics, integrated education and residential diversity, illuminated subtle differences between the two societies, in spite of cultural and historical overlap.

The following section outlines the ways in which our participants relate to Northern Ireland as home during the interview, probing how these narratives exist within their broader migration journeys. We argue that constructions of home in Northern Ireland serve as an imaginative space in relation to which migrants narratively construct and project themselves within the interview. Framing their decisions to depart, interviewees emphasise the violence and trauma of their upbringings in Northern Ireland, portraying emigration as a means to move beyond conflict and parochialism. Retrospective accounts of the chaos of home thus serve both to justify the decision to migrate and to rationalise the ensuing personal and emotional growth. Re-acquaintance with similar arguments and imagery in Scotland often forced interviewees to relive the uneasy and sometimes distressing memories engendered by the conflict. These parallels affected their subjectivities by prompting a dialogue of comparison with 'home' in Northern Ireland and compelling interviewees to assess their lived experiences of Protestant-Catholic sectarianism in both places. Our narrators often draw upon contemporary political discourses to suggest that,

23   Jack Crangle, Fearghus Roulston, Graham Dawson, Liam Harte and Barry Hazley, 'Somewhere bigger and brighter? Ambivalence and desire in memories of leaving the North of Ireland during the Troubles', *Irish Studies Review* 30:3 (2022) 259–279.

24   Trew, *Leaving the North*, 108.

despite possessing many of the same characteristics, sectarian structures and rhetoric in Northern Ireland remain more entrenched, endemic and substantive than in Glasgow.

Northern Ireland and the Ambivalence of Home

According to Dubow et al., childhood exposure to war, political violence and ethnic conflict can cause lifelong deleterious consequences, including 'wide-ranging effects on children's psychological and social functioning'.[25] During the latter half of the twentieth century, when most of our interviewees were born, Northern Ireland could be a very difficult place to grow up. Introducing a 2004 special issue of the *Journal of Social Issues* about childhood and the Troubles, Orla Muldoon notes that 'more than a generation of young people in Northern Ireland have been exposed to unchecked and pervasive sectarian prejudice', with profound material, social and psychological implications.[26] Some of our participants witnessed harrowing violence and were placed in situations of extreme danger, often as children. Others struggle with their mental health in adulthood, recalling the everyday violence that permeated their upbringings. As Madeleine Leonard highlights, the conflict and militarisation of the Troubles entrenched division between two 'closed, bounded communities' underpinned by dichotomous and oppositional identities.[27] Home life was sometimes characterised by fear of paramilitary intimidation or of harassment by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and British Army. Thousands of individuals continue to endure familial silences from parents, siblings or relatives who were unwilling or unable to talk about the conflict. Several interviewees cite this atmosphere of repression and communal introversion as a key reason for their departure. Thus, our narrators offer further evidence that the childhood home – especially in relation to conflict zones – cannot necessarily be viewed as a comfort blanket of safety and stability.

25   Eric F. Dubow, L. Rowell Huesmann and Paul Boxer, 'A social-cognitive-ecological framework for understanding the impact of exposure to persistent ethnic-political violence on children's psychosocial adjustment', *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 12:2 (2009) 113–26, 121.

26   Orla Muldoon, 'Children of the Troubles: The impact of political violence in Northern Ireland', *Journal of Social Issues* 60:3 (2004) 453–468, 457.

27   Madeleine Leonard, *Teens and territory in 'post-conflict' Belfast: If walls could talk* (Manchester 2017), 78.

For our participants, childhood memories often constitute the most dislocating and disruptive chapter of their oral life stories. Yet, despite being punctuated by the Troubles, their recollections of these formative years are also narrated around the more familiar motifs of familial bonds and youthful innocence, with memories of innocuous playfulness sometimes incongruously woven into traumatic episodes. Childhood memories of Northern Ireland, recollected and narrated by migrants living in different locations in Scotland and England, thus emerge as a complex tapestry of feelings, which encompasses familiarity and fear, freedom and oppression. Barbara McKee – introduced at the beginning of the article – encapsulates this oscillation between childhood innocence and conflict-based trauma. Barbara was born in 1963 and raised in the Protestant village of Carryduff on the outskirts of Belfast. Early in the interview, Barbara is asked a routine question about her memories of primary school. Instead of recalling experiences with friends, play or school life, Barbara immediately describes an incident where she and her brother were confronted by a man with a gun:

> I remember walking to school one day with my little brother and meeting a masked man and a, not a masked man, a balaclava, a man with a balaclava and a rifle and I think he'll have been a unionist, he'll have been UVF or one of those organisations and he met my brother and told us to go home, that we weren't to go to school that day, that they'd closed the village down and, and I can, a really strong memory I have is of saying well, I've got mum at home and she's told me to go to school, you know, I don't know who I'm more scared of, a man with a gun or going home to my mum and saying we're not going to school today.[28]

By weaving this encounter with a gunman into her discussion of her mother's parental authority, Barbara narratively intersperses her experience of conflict with her domestic life, expressing the mundane reality of Troubles militarisation. While the confrontation with a paramilitary gunman clearly affected Barbara, she does not present it as an especially unusual or extraordinary event. Indeed, she later states that her school was regularly disrupted by bomb scares, thus further emphasising the banality of conflict.

The most traumatic events of Barbara's childhood occurred when her father, a local business owner, was called to attend late-night bomb scares near his premises in Belfast. Barbara's father insisted that she accompany him to these incidents, which regularly featured shootouts between the army and

---

28   Interview with Barbara McKee.

paramilitary snipers. Her father later confessed to effectively using Barbara as a human shield, telling her as an adult that 'I always figured that as long as I had a small child with me they would never shoot'. Here, Barbara's narrative emphasises how the acute dangers presented by the Troubles could permeate and contaminate even the safest, most intimate of spaces, in this case her father's family business. The fact that she was only told later in life of the immense danger she had faced due to the actions of her father meant that she was compelled to re-evaluate, as an adult, the conditions of her upbringing and the instability of her home life. For people such as Barbara, these ostensibly homely spaces never functioned as places of security, instead evoking feelings of displacement and unsettlement. Barbara's description of a chaotic homely space evokes Ahmed's conception of homes as 'complex and contingent spaces of inhabitance', defined by 'movement and dislocation'.[29] The residual trauma of these incidents continues to affect Barbara, who has since received treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Barbara's PTSD diagnosis, along with the events that triggered it, forms a key narrative component of her interview, allowing her to articulate and make sense of prior trauma. In a reappraisal of his pioneering 1980s oral history work with Australian First World War veterans, Alistair Thomson documents how PTSD treatment can equip sufferers with 'a medical and cultural narrative' to articulate within the interview. Barbara – like Thomson's most prominent interviewee, Fred Farrall – is an eloquent and self-conscious narrator who constantly reinterprets the significance of past events through her PTSD diagnosis.[30] For Barbara, her journey through trauma, emigration and ongoing recovery serves as a metaphor for a broader life-story of personal growth. The discourse of PTSD mediates how she recalls, narrates and gives meaning to the past, allowing her to retrospectively contemplate the distressing fact that her own father had put her in harm's way. Unlike the First World War, the violence of the Troubles took place in civil society rather than on a military frontline. As a result, Barbara's distressing memories are interspersed with much more everyday recollections. In addition to depicting violence and conflict, Barbara remembers attending Brownies and Girl Guides, playing tennis, going to the cinema and attending discos. She also describes secondary school as her 'safe place', a haven from the violence and uncertainty of the outside world.[31] Conflict-based disruption is thus firmly intertwined with more typical,

---

29   Ahmed, 'Home and away', 340.
30   Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac memories revisited: Trauma, memory and oral history', *Oral History Review* 42:1 (2015) 1–29, 19.
31   Interview with Barbara McKee.

quotidian childhood experiences. Strikingly, Barbara identifies a public space, her school, as her primary childhood site of nurture and safety rather than the domestic space of home, which was more readily contaminated by the conflict. Here, the familial home and, by extension, the family business, were the places in which Barbara remembers experiencing fear and trauma. Her place of refuge and escape, paradoxically, was the much more public setting of a state school, once again upending homely connotations of security and nurture.

Although he was raised in a working-class republican area in West Belfast, Brendan Connolly's memories of growing up during the Troubles are strikingly similar to Barbara's. Born in 1965, Brendan was four years old when the Troubles began. When asked about his childhood memories of Belfast, Brendan's recollections are similarly punctuated by references to conflict and tension. Although he grew up in overwhelmingly Catholic West Belfast, Brendan's family lived just two streets from the Protestant Suffolk estate, making his neighbourhood a flashpoint for sectarian tension and disorder. Describing his local neighbourhood, Brendan immediately comments that 'there was always that element of that rivalry or that underlying current, that was always there as you grew up'.[32] He then recounts pervasive tension between young people from either side of the sectarian divide:

> On the right-hand side was Catholic, the left-hand side was Protestant and, yeah, quite often there was stone-throwing over either side, if you walk along you need to keep an eye out and your wits about you because there would have been, you know, people getting jumped on or given a kicking or whatever.[33]

Brendan's narrative captures the atmosphere of street-level sectarianism and violence that pervaded working-class areas of Belfast. Through his determination to 'keep an eye out and your wits about you',[34] Brendan demonstrates his hyper-consciousness of Northern Ireland's place-based 'territorial complexities' which, as Trew has argued, often condition memories of the Troubles.[35] In her 2017 study of territory and youth culture in Belfast, Leonard argues that the Troubles facilitated a divided urban environment where 'segregation fuels fear, which feeds distrust and promotes prejudice'.[36] By describing the strict spatial demarcation between Catholic and Protestant neighbourhoods, divided down

---

32   Interview with Brendan Connolly, by Jack Crangle, 3 September 2020 (online).
33   Ibid.
34   Ibid.
35   Trew, *Leaving the North*, 18.
36   Leonard, *Teens and territory in 'post-conflict' Belfast*, 53.

the middle of a single street, Brendan vividly exemplifies the negotiation of these seemingly invisible but locally known territorial boundaries.

The vigilance required to navigate these spatial borders further destabilises the concept of home as an unproblematic source of reassurance and site of safety. As Ahmed argues, traditional connotations of safety overlook the fact that one can encounter 'others' or 'strangers' *within* the home, as well as outside of it.[37] This proves especially pertinent to Northern Ireland during the era of the Troubles, where two opposing, segregated communities occupied the same territory but rarely encountered each other in everyday life. Brendan's clear demarcation of Catholic and Protestant urban spaces highlights how his childhood home involved living parallel to, but not alongside, communal strangers. As with Taylor's study of contested boundaries in twentieth-century Cyprus, the spatial limitations of sectarian geography created no-go areas constructed along 'arbitrary dividing lines'.[38] Later in the interview, Brendan recalls a range of harrowing incidents, including when masked IRA men commandeered a neighbour's house, using it to conduct a police ambush.[39] He also describes one of his classmates being 'kneecapped' – shot in both knees – by local paramilitaries as punishment for selling drugs.[40] The routine nature of death, destruction and casual violence imbues Brendan's narrative with an aura of tension and menace that pervades his memories of 1970s and early 1980s Belfast.

Yet, as with Barbara, this phase of the interview also contains more convivial memories where Brendan describes the solidarity and collectivism that characterised his close-knit community. Brendan points out that, despite ongoing violence, his childhood also featured elements of normality and stability, stating that 'the community aspect of the neighbour, neighbourly aspect of the whole thing, when everything was going on there was a real understanding as such that the kids needed to get some elements of normality with everything that was happening'.[41] Football tournaments and sports days are standout memories of this community cohesiveness, with Brendan describing such occasions as being almost akin to street parties:

> There was a real, the wee residents' association had put together, and we had street sports every year, which I loved, and actually got quite big, you know, so we took over one whole street and, you know, there was all the usual races, free football tournaments, games and all that sort of stuff, so

37   Ahmed, 'Home and away', 340.
38   Taylor, *Refugees and the meaning of home*, 37.
39   Interview with Brendan Connolly.
40   Ibid.
41   Ibid.

> from that point of view we had a, I was going to say I had a pretty happy childhood for me, you know, we played a lot.[42]

Brendan's childhood memories thus juxtapose the fear, tension and violence of Troubles-era Belfast with more positive family- or community-based depictions of everyday life.

Others exemplifying the duality of home include Don Palmer, who encapsulates this dichotomy within a single narrative extract. Don begins this passage by recalling simple leisure activities, remembering that 'I loved playing football, I would play it at school and play it with friends, you wouldn't go too far away or you'd hang out at your friend's house and play board games or watch TV or something like that'.[43] Within a couple of minutes, Don transitions into describing an ordeal during which armed paramilitaries broke into his childhood home and held his mother captive. Like many of these narratives, Don's storytelling lays bare the precarious vulnerability of women and children in homely domestic spaces during the Troubles:

> They held my mum and I up as hostage, my mum fainted on the spot and they tied her legs and she was lying on the ground with her legs tied but she was out for the count and one of the guys took me, took me to the phone and he says OK, I want you to read this card out to your father, and he pointed a gun right there at my head and I had to read to dad.[44]

The jolting abruptness of this narrative shift, where Don segues from discussing neighbourhood football matches to harrowing recollections of being held hostage, epitomises the duality of growing up during the Troubles, particularly in urban interface areas. Furthermore, in the audio recording, Don's narrates this traumatic event with a very dispassionate tone of voice, perhaps reflecting an attempt to rationalise or make sense of his psychological distress during this period of acute uncertainty.

The above narratives demonstrate the sometimes contradictory meanings that our narrators, from both sides of the divide, affix to their childhood homes in Northern Ireland. In some respects, their memories conform to the more traditional conception of home as a place of nurture, comfort and safety, although the shadow of sectarianism is never wholly absent. Happy recollections of playing football, of attending school and of supportive families and communities remind us that Troubles-era Northern Ireland was not a place

---

42   Ibid.
43   Interview with Don Palmer, by Jack Crangle, 10 August 2020 (online).
44   Ibid.

of relentless misery, violence and destruction. Yet, rather than idealising their childhoods, participants are willing to lay bare the fear that characterised their Northern Irish upbringings, thus highlighting the 'dualism' of home.[45] By inter-weaving memories of mundane childhood experiences with recollections of harrowing sectarian violence and personal trauma, these narrators illuminate the ways in which the conflict became part of the fabric of everyday life. As the following sections outline, migrants who moved to Glasgow found that much of the same politically charged imagery, arguments and symbolism that characterised the landscapes of their childhoods were reproduced in their new places of settlement. Such reverberations between their pre- and post-migration physical environments prompted emigrants to once again confront the sometimes uncomfortable discordances and dualities of their upbring-ing, evoking feelings of both familiarity and unease. We argue, therefore, that migrants' experiences of Glasgow prompted a sense of uncanny *déjà vu*, add-ing a layer of dissonance to the already dislocating process of migration, and eliciting a complex cocktail of emotions.

FIGURE 1   Orange Order parade in Dumbarton Road, Glasgow, 1996. Virtual Mitchell C3722. ©CSG CIC Glasgow Museums and Libraries Collection: The Mitchell Library, Special Collections.

---

45   Nowicka, 'Mobile locations', 77.

Orange Walks and the Old Firm: Sectarian Imagery in a Scottish Context

The parallels and connections between Northern Ireland and the West of Scotland are easily visible. Journey into Glasgow during the summer marching season, especially on its 12 July centrepiece, and you will likely encounter Orange parades – their banners proudly on display – marching to the beat of a Lambeg drum. At similar parades in Northern Ireland, thousands of Scottish accents evidence the sheer number of Scottish Protestants who make the annual pilgrimage to Northern Ireland. In 1970, for example, the *Irish Times* reported that 4,000 Scottish Orangemen travelled to Belfast for the 12 July weekend, booking out all available air and ferry journeys across the Irish Sea. Although the author expressed concern about potential anti-social behaviour, it is clear that marching with one's 'Orange brethren' possessed a powerful allure.[46] In his seminal ethnographic study of the Orange Order in Northern Ireland, Neil Jarman describes how 'the rhythmic repetition of sounds, whether liturgy, singing, chanting or music helps to create a sense of a collective identity' that both unites and excludes.[47] For participants, spectators and opponents alike, the sights and sounds of Orange walks remain compelling.

Crossing the Irish Sea in the other direction, Catholic and Protestant football fans travel from Northern Ireland to Scotland to follow their respective sides in the Old Firm football rivalry between Celtic and Rangers. At matches featuring either of these sides – particularly when playing one another – thousands of fans can be witnessed singing traditional songs about the history of Ireland and Ulster, as well as, more troublingly, chanting sectarian slurs. After attending one such Old Firm match in 1999, Belfast sports journalist John Laverty wrote that 'Belfast has nothing on Glasgow when it comes to sectarian hatred. Over [in Belfast] covert tolerance for 11 months of the year is replaced by overt bigotry in the month of July. [In Glasgow], it remains closer to the surface'.[48] While it is an overstatement to suggest that Glasgow harboured more sectarian bigotry than Belfast, for our interviewees, showpiece events such as football clashes and Orange walks served as highly evocative symbols and microcosms of shared Scottish-Irish culture. For many Northern Irish emigrants, these events elicited a sense of uncanny continuity, linking the past with the present and their old homes with their new ones. This cultural

---

46 *Irish Times* (11 July 1970) 8.
47 Neil Jarman, *Material conflicts: Parades and visual displays in Northern Ireland* (Oxford 1997) 10.
48 *Belfast Telegraph* (4 May 1999) 2.

and geographical proximity left Northern Irish migrants in Glasgow facing specific and distinctive challenges compared to those living elsewhere, even those residing a mere 100 miles across the border in England. An analysis of our Glasgow-based narratives highlights the diversity of Irish diasporic experiences across different locations.

Cultural links between Scotland and the North of Ireland date back several centuries. During the Ulster Plantation – established early in the seventeenth century – thousands of English and Scottish Protestants colonised and settled in Ulster, which was at that stage Ireland's 'strongest Gaelic region'.[49] Native Irish Catholics were stripped of their rights and excluded from civil society and had their existing social order upended. Plantation-era persecution had profound consequences for the later character of Irish nationalism, pitting Irish Catholicism firmly in opposition to British Protestant colonialism.[50] Longstanding Ulster Catholic grievances simmered during the following centuries and often fuelled violence against Protestants. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the West of Scotland, and Glasgow in particular, witnessed large-scale Irish immigration, both Catholic and Protestant. By 1951, there were approximately 90,000 Irish-born people living in Scotland, roughly half of whom came from Northern Ireland and half from the Republic.[51] In 2001, around 16 per cent of the Scottish population identified as Catholic – the vast majority of whom were of Irish descent – with this figure rising to 29 per cent in Glasgow.[52]

Migrants from the North of Ireland brought with them a unique experiential perspective on sectarianism. In addition to the bloody conflict, Northern Irish sectarianism manifested in unique and distinctive ways. To a much greater extent than in Scotland, overt anti-Catholicism was state-sponsored and embedded in Northern Ireland's institutions. After Irish partition in 1921, the newly-created Northern Ireland was governed by a devolved parliament in Belfast. Elections were fought almost entirely around the issue of Northern Ireland's constitutional status. Protestants voted overwhelmingly for the Ulster Unionist Party, which favoured Northern Ireland remaining in the UK, while Catholics voted for the Nationalist Party, which campaigned for Irish reunification. As Protestants outnumbered Catholics in 1920s Northern Ireland by roughly two to one, the Unionist Party remained in continuous power for

49   Hiram Morgan, 'The end of Gaelic Ulster: A thematic interpretation of events between 1534 and 1610', *Irish Historical Studies* 26:101 (1988) 8–32, 8.
50   Richard English, *Irish freedom: The history of nationalism in Ireland* (London 2007) 59.
51   Delaney, *The Irish in post-war Britain*, 17.
52   Bruce et al., *Sectarianism in Scotland*, 87.

50 years.[53] The ruling Unionist elite were deeply immersed in the fraternal Protestant culture that helped foster sectarian prejudice, with all of Northern Ireland's prime ministers also being active Orangemen. Decades of Protestant hegemony bred anti-Catholic discrimination in areas such as employment, housing, elections and policing. Such ill-treatment sparked the 1960s Civil Rights Movement which eventually precipitated the Troubles.[54] Sectarian polarisation was both zero-sum and existential. Protestant-unionists viewed nationalists as a threat to their place in the Union and therefore their British cultural identity, while Catholic-nationalists refused to accept the legitimacy of what they perceived as an artificial and discriminatory statelet. The factors underpinning Northern Irish sectarian polarisation were therefore so fundamental that the region has remained socially and culturally segregated throughout the era of the peace process, with Catholic-Protestant acrimony dominating politics and society. Disputes around issues such as parades and the flying of flags are fought with an existential zeal that differentiates Northern Ireland from places such as Scotland, where such disputes over emblems and symbolism are more peripheral.[55]

Widespread Irish immigration nonetheless transplanted many of those social and religious divisions that characterised the North of Ireland onto the West of Scotland. Catholic-Protestant discord became a feature of Scottish society, particularly in Greater Glasgow, prompting frequent comparisons with the situation in Northern Ireland after partition. However, superficial similarities between the two places belie significant differences. While politics in Northern Ireland was, and remains, dominated by Orange and Green concerns, political sectarianism failed to manifest seriously in Scotland, where ideology followed a more conventional left-right axis.[56] Social, cultural and economic segregation has never been witnessed on anything like the scale in Northern Ireland. Yet, twenty-first-century Scotland witnessed a re-emergence of debates about religious and sectarian strife.[57] In the academic sphere, a range of Scottish historians, sociologists and political scientists have contended that Scottish sectarianism is largely superficial, confined to performative arenas such

53   Graham Walker, *A history of the Ulster Unionist Party: Protest, pragmatism and pessimism* (Manchester 2004) 55.
54   Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, *The dynamics of conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, conflict and emancipation* (Cambridge 1996) 93–94.
55   Rosie, *The sectarian myth in Scotland*, 145.
56   Graham Walker, 'Sectarian tensions in Scotland: Social and cultural dynamics and the politics of perception', in Devine (ed.), *Scotland's shame?*, 125–134, 127.
57   One such debate was prompted by renowned Scottish composer James MacMillan in a 1999 speech at the Edinburgh Festival, where he scathingly denounced sectarianism as 'Scotland's shame'.

as parades and football games. Armed with a substantial body of evidence, Michael Rosie, Steve Bruce, Iain Patterson, Tony Glendinning and others argue that Scotland is not afflicted by significant institutional sectarianism.[58] Others, such as Walls and Williams, contend that such analysis overlooks structural class inequalities that continue to disadvantage Scottish Catholics, particularly in employment.[59]

Given their extensive coverage elsewhere, the purpose of this article is not to engage directly with these debates about the extent of sectarianism in modern Scotland. Our oral history interviews were not designed to test the pervasiveness of discrimination or bigotry. Regardless of the 'true' extent of sectarianism, our interviews reveal how Glasgow's heritage of imported traditions from the North of Ireland continues to influence aspects of the city's culture, guiding the social codes, attitudes and behaviour of some of its residents. We aim to highlight some of the most evocative ways in which emigrant narratives portray Glasgow as a 'home away from home', in both positive and negative terms. For our interviewees, cultural and political echoes of their Northern Irish home environments serve as mnemonic triggers to a conflict that they felt they had left behind. The sights and sounds of Orange bands, of Celtic and Rangers football jerseys, of Union flags and Irish tricolours – visual and aural markers that characterised their earlier lives in Northern Ireland – were not just momentarily unsettling or mildly disconcerting. Rather, such mnemonic triggers could provoke destabilising emotional reactions, such as fear, anxiety and anger, and in some cases reopen psychological wounds and revive repressed traumatic memories.

Orange walks are one of Glasgow's most visible flashpoints for sectarian tension and disorder. These spectacles continue to be well-attended. For example, in September 2021, a 10,000-strong Orange Order parade marched through the centre of Glasgow, during which fourteen people were arrested for anti-social behaviour and sectarian chanting.[60] Many of our narrators were simply exasperated that the petty, parochial tribalism that they had apparently escaped once again permeated their social and cultural lives. All Glasgow-based interviewees were asked to describe their encounters with Scottish sectarianism. Inevitably, most frame their experiences around the theme of the so-called 'summer marching season', which serves as the brashest legacy of Scottish-Northern Irish links. Several participants describe hearing the music of a

---

58   See Rosie, *The sectarian myth in Scotland*; Bruce et al., *Sectarianism in Scotland*.

59   Walls and Williams, 'Sectarianism at work', 657–658.

60   Sarah Vesty, 'Police arrest 14 during Orange Order marches in Glasgow', *Belfast Live*, 21 September 2021, https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/belfast-news/police-arrest-14-during-orange-21631983 (29 July 2022).

Glasgow Orange band for the first time as an alarming aural throwback to Northern Ireland. Brendan Connolly, whose memories of a West Belfast childhood feature above, had not long moved to Glasgow in the late 1990s when, early on a Saturday morning, he heard an Orange band practising outside his apartment:

> I remember lying in bed on the Saturday morning and going what the hell is that? And you know, whatever, it was eight o'clock on a Saturday morning, that sounds familiar, and literally got up, opened the window and there's the Orange band walking up the high street in the middle of Glasgow, and I went frigging hell.[61]

Brendan's reaction to this encounter is characterised not by fear, but by a creeping realisation of how the cultures of his old and new homes had converged. As he also commented, 'there's some parts [of sectarianism] you couldn't escape'.[62]

Other narrators denounce Glasgow's Orange culture more forthrightly. J. Mark Percival, from Portadown, moved with his family as a teenager in 1980 to Irvine in North Ayrshire before resettling in Glasgow as an adult. Mark deploys a very similar narrative of his first Orange encounter to that of Brendan, recalling being awoken one Saturday morning in the 1990s by a band practising. That both Brendan and Mark narrate encountering Orange walks through a story of being awoken in bed hints at the suffocating pervasiveness of these audio-visual mnemonic reminders of home. According to Stephen Millar, central to the sonic emotiveness of Orange parades is the bands' ability to reach not just active participants or spectators, but mere bystanders or (in the case of Mark and Brendan) sleeping local residents. Millar argues that this 'lack of control' over exposure to Orange music is a key factor in provoking fear and hostility, encapsulated in Brendan's description of sectarianism as something you 'couldn't escape'.[63] For Brendan and Mark, the ability of Orange bands to infiltrate their safest and most intimate of spaces – their own bedrooms – highlights this inability to free themselves from such ominous echoes of their upbringings in Northern Ireland, long after they had crossed the Irish Sea.

---

61   Interview with Brendan Connolly.
62   Ibid.
63   Stephen Millar, 'Musically consonant, socially dissonant: Orange walks and Catholic interpretation in West-Central Scotland', *Music and Politics* 9:1 (2015) 1–23, 11.

Writing about Orange walks in nineteenth-century Scotland, Elaine McFarland notes that, in addition to constituting cultural expression, such parades were a means of Scottish Protestants 'claiming physical space', a symbolic demonstration of power that also entrenched their ideological and 'political ascendency'.[64] Brendan and Mark perceive an encroachment of sectarian rituals into their everyday lives in much the same way as sectarianism and the Troubles had permeated their childhoods. In contrast to Brendan, Mark's principal reaction is of anger:

FIGURE 2   Bridgeton Republican Flute Band parade in Glasgow city centre, 1990s. Glasgow City Archives, TD1435/3.

---

64   Elaine McFarland, 'Marching from the margins: Twelfth July parades in Scotland, 1820–1914', in T.G. Fraser (ed.), *The Irish parading tradition: Following the drum* (Basingstoke and New York 2000) 60–77, 61.

> The marching bands would practise up and down Maryhill Road for like many weeks before the actual Twelfth, so I'd be sort of like sleeping on a Saturday morning and then I'd hear the marching drums and think oh those bastards, I came here to get away from you and you're like one hundred yards away from my front door now.[65]

Witnessing an Orange parade in Glasgow city centre, Mark recalls that: 'I could feel the tension in my chest and my throat from watching them and the anger rising'.[66]

Mark is from Portadown, the historical birthplace of the Orange Order and a town where antagonism surrounding parades is especially intense. Describing Portadown as 'the Vatican of Orangeism', journalists Chris Ryder and Vincent Kearney note how centuries of rancour culminated in the 1995 Drumcree standoff, a flashpoint that made international headlines.[67] Despite departing Portadown fifteen years before the Drumcree dispute, Mark's palpable anger is tied to the distinctive context of his Portadown upbringing, displayed most viscerally in his description of Orangemen as 'those bastards'. His frustration underscores how cultural crossover between Scotland and Northern Ireland, in this case related to Orangeism, could evoke unwelcome and unpleasant memories. Yet, there are contradictions in Mark's narrative. Directly stating that emigration was an opportunity 'to get away' from sectarianism, Mark frames his departure from Northern Ireland as a means of escaping conflict and division. However, Mark actually departed the province while still a child and therefore had no choice in the decision to migrate. Indeed, Mark earlier states that he was reluctant to leave his childhood friends in County Armagh, declaring emphatically that 'I didn't want to go [...] I was pretty upset about the whole moving business'.[68] This contradiction hints at Mark's desire to reclaim autonomy over his migration journey. Instead of being something that simply happened to him, Mark frames migration as a conscious journey of escape from conflict and division. However, sectarianism frustratingly re-emerged in Glasgow, disrupting Mark's linear narrative. Mark's disjointed narration of childhood movement between two places, featuring comparable markers of sectarian division, hints at an unresolved tension surrounding his departure from home, an ambivalence that characterised a great many of our interviewees.

---

65   Interview with J. Mark Percival, by Jack Crangle, 21 August 2020 (online).
66   Ibid.
67   Chris Ryder and Vincent Kearney, *Drumcree: the Orange Order's last stand* (London 2001) 23.
68   Interview with J. Mark Percival.

We must point out that allegations of sectarian behaviour and bigotry are by no means confined to Protestants. Scottish Catholics have similarly been accused of spreading sectarian vitriol. As Mark Boyle has documented, the West of Scotland's Irish folk and 'rebel music scene' has often served as a magnet for 'drunken' Catholic youths sporting IRA memorabilia and expressing sectarian hostility.[69] Although less frequent than Orange walks, Irish republican organisations have also paraded across the West of Scotland, attracting controversy and a heavy police presence. There is often a disconnect between the organisers of events, such as Orange walks and concerts featuring 'rebel' music, and the attendees who seek a 'permissive environment' to 'indulge in anti-social behaviour'.[70] Similarly, fans of both Celtic and Rangers have been condemned for daubing threatening sectarian graffiti across the city.[71] For our interviewees, there is little attempt to blame one side or the other for Scottish sectarianism. Instead, most imply that a certain level of bigotry, perpetuated by both sides, was simply intrinsic to certain arenas of Scottish culture. According to Charles McErlean, a Catholic from Carrickfergus who moved to Glasgow in 1970, Scottish sectarian bigotry was largely the preserve of 'complete nut jobs' from both sides, where 'the old die-hard get themselves wound up and ready to cause mayhem'.[72]

As well as provoking anger, Scotland's Catholic-Protestant acrimony could evoke trauma in those who had survived Troubles' violence. Interviewees such as Barbara McKee, who experienced significant childhood trauma, were compelled to confront painful memories. As discussed earlier, Barbara was repeatedly placed in dangerous situations by her father during the conflict. Barbara portrayed her departure from Northern Ireland – first to Manchester, then later to Oxfordshire and Glasgow – through a narrative of escape, explicitly stating her desire 'to get away' from Northern Ireland. After years of suppressing the trauma of her childhood, it was only as an adult living in Glasgow that Barbara began to acknowledge and confront these experiences, eventually being diagnosed with PTSD. Barbara's entire interview is narrated as a journey of coming to terms with her past, one where she repeatedly attempts to make sense of her Troubles experiences. Encounters with Glasgow's Orange culture comprise a

---

69   Boyle, *Metropolitan anxieties*, 149, 161.

70   Rosie et al., *Tackling sectarianism and its consequences in Scotland,* unpaginated.

71   Sarah Hilley, 'Celtic and Rangers ultras' graffiti war in East End leads to call for police help', *Glasgow Live*, 11 August 2021, https://www.glasgowlive.co.uk/news/glasgow-news/celtic-rangers-ultras-graffiti-war-21287564 (29 July 2022).

72   Interview with Charles McErlean, by Jack Crangle, 28 October 2020 (online).

key part of this journey, serving as a trigger to reinvoke prior trauma. Like Mark and Brendan, Barbara frames her experience of Scottish sectarianism around witnessing an Orange parade. Her narrative, however, connotes a sense of fear and anguish rather than anger or frustration:

> There was an Orange march walked round the church, the church was surrounded, it sort of sits on a little island and Orange marches walked past us one day, I think it must have been a Sunday, a Sunday afternoon and I can remember just being completely frozen, just really awful for me to be reminded of those noises of a Twelfth, so that was the bands, the whistles that you got, but then they're forced to stop playing the music when they go past a church so there was this, there's just one drummer generally plays the beat, you know, to which they all walk and it was that beat that just really triggered me, just made me very frightened, want to crawl away and hide.[73]

Again, it was the sounds of the parade that served as the most powerful and fear-inducing trigger for memories of Northern Ireland. In his analysis, Millar argues that the tubthumping triumphalism of Orange music 'constitutes something akin to torture' for Scottish Catholics, serving as an inescapable reminder of 'harsh inequalities'.[74] Barbara endured a similar aural experience when an innocuous journey into town was punctured by the unwelcome booming repetition of a Lambeg drum, leaving her terrified and in search of shelter. As Graham Dawson writes in his work on trauma, memory and the Troubles, these types of traumatic 'flashback memories' are frequently provoked by a specific 'sensory impression'.[75] Barbara's sensory triggers were the overlapping aural and visual stimuli of an Orange parade which provided an involuntary – and unwanted – psychic return to the Troubles.

A 'Home Away from Home'

Although the presence of sectarian imagery was often frustrating or traumatising, many interviewees also note a sense of shared understanding between Northern Irish and Scottish people, which again highlights the socio-cultural

73   Interview with Barbara McKee.
74   Millar, 'Musically consonant, socially dissonant', 8.
75   Graham Dawson, *Making peace with the past? Memory, trauma and the Irish Troubles* (Manchester 2007) 135.

closeness of Glasgow as a diasporic location. While many of our England-based interviewees have grown irritated with English ignorance or indifference towards Ireland and Northern Ireland, those living in Scotland are clear that Scottish people had a better and more nuanced understanding of Irish history, culture and the Troubles. Many also reproduce the argument outlined in academic literature, that Scottish sectarianism constitutes a largely superficial, performative type of bigotry, expressed within relatively benign arenas, notably the Old Firm football fixture and annual street parades. This reflects an absorption and reproduction of broader Scottish attitudes regarding manifestations of sectarianism. A 2015 Holyrood report found that the Scottish public identified football and Orange walks as the two most significant contributors to Protestant-Catholic sectarianism in public life.[76] In Scotland, sectarianism is therefore viewed primarily through these performative sporting and cultural arenas, as opposed to the decades of discrimination and violence that characterised the Northern Ireland conflict.

Some of our interviewees emphasise that Scottish people had not grown up in a tense, violent, militarised environment, and therefore could not fully empathise with Northern Irish immigrants. Like most of our interviewees, Linda Cassidy's childhood was punctuated by conflict. Unlike narrators such Barbara McKee or Don Palmer, Linda did not experience any direct Troubles-related trauma. Yet, growing up in the republican neighbourhood of Andersonstown, she describes the monotonous regularity of West Belfast's societal militarisation, depicting army patrols and security checkpoints as 'completely normal' aspects of her childhood. Linda departed Northern Ireland to study at university in Bournemouth, before moving on to London and then finally to Glasgow. Offering her perspective on Glasgow sectarianism, Linda describes being acutely aware of how the tribalism of her Belfast home was replicated across the Irish Sea:

> You are very conscious of it, so in Glasgow you have Orange marches, all the fun of home really [laughs] and there's definitely a sort of sectarian element to interactions between people in Glasgow sometimes, that I pick up on really naturally because I'm from Belfast, that people who weren't from Scotland wouldn't get, […] and things like Old Firm football games, you know, they sort of bring up all that tribal sectarianism so I'm quite aware that there is that undercurrent here.[77]

---

76   Rosie et al., *Tackling sectarianism and its consequences in Scotland,* unpaginated.
77   Interview with Linda Cassidy, by Jack Crangle, 2 June 2020 (online).

Linda's sarcastic observation that Glasgow possessed 'all the fun of home' reveals how her exasperation with Belfast's sectarian divide was wearily reproduced in her new home.

However, Linda also offers a more positive appraisal of the social crossover between Scotland and Northern Ireland, thus highlighting the ambivalence that characterised most interviews. Linda alludes to a sense of shared understanding between people from the two places, suggesting that Glasgow offered a sense of belonging and familiarity that was unavailable in other British cities. She highlights an element of cultural solidarity between Catholics from the West of Scotland and Northern Ireland, stating that 'there are a lot of people who kind of understand what it is to be a Catholic from West Belfast and culturally, you know, get that and probably themselves sing rebel songs and that kind of caper'.[78] Linda also comments on Scottish people's more detailed and nuanced understanding of the Troubles compared to their English counterparts, adding that 'I think because of that connection to Ireland, yeah, and the sectarianism, I think yeah, they do definitely'.[79] This recognition of mutual understanding constitutes the most distinctive feature of our Glasgow-based interview cohort. Our London- and Manchester-based narrators felt that the English public's grasp of the Troubles, both during the conflict and in the present, has been either inaccurate, simplistic or non-existent. Although Glasgow-based narrators stress the different manifestations of sectarianism in Scotland and Northern Ireland, interviewees such as Linda nonetheless recognise that a shared cultural history rendered many Scots cognisant of the dynamics underpinning the Troubles in a way that most English people are not.

Other researchers have previously noted a similar perception of cultural kinship between the Scottish and the Northern Irish. In their research on sectarianism in Scottish workplaces, Walls and Williams write that both Scottish Catholics and Protestants identified 'a semblance of shared understanding' with Northern Ireland. Like our narrators, their interviewees described both similarities and differences in the two places' parallel manifestations of sectarianism.[80] Interviewees such as Linda draw upon a similar discourse, citing centuries of cultural exchange to explain the convergence between her old and new homes. Linda is also a sophisticated and self-aware narrator, who acknowledges that her personal circumstances and background afford her a relative privilege to observe Scottish sectarianism from afar. While she grew up in working-class West Belfast, Linda has since forged a highly successful

---

78   Ibid.
79   Ibid.
80   Walls and Williams, 'Sectarianism at work', 638.

career and, as she acknowledged, now lives in a 'nice middle-class' area of Glasgow.[81] Sectarianism was thus on the periphery of her social world; as she readily admitted, she had never experienced any personal sectarian abuse or victimisation in Glasgow. Her being unaffected by trauma also afforded her an element of critical distance unavailable to narrators such as Barbara. Nonetheless, Linda depicts the crossover between Scottish and Northern Irish culture with a distinctly positive spin, even in relation to social and sectarian division. In highlighting the mutual understanding between residents of both places, she hinted at a broader sense of understanding that derived from a shared experience of Orange and Green tension. This sense of cultural connectivity, informed by centuries of overlapping history, rendered Glasgow closer to home than Bournemouth or London, where she had previously lived.

Despite these commonalities, Linda is also one of several participants to note the subtle differences between sectarianism's manifestation in Scotland compared to Northern Ireland. In particular, she noted the absence in Scotland of widespread residential segregation and a culture of political and paramilitary murals, arguing that the sectarian divide does not get people 'fired up politically' in Scotland.[82] Linda thus concurs with much of the academic literature outlined above, hinting that, despite witnessing some of the same discriminatory discourse that characterises Northern Ireland, Scottish sectarianism lacks durable social and political foundations. Linda's perspective is supported by scholars such as Scottish political historian Graham Walker, who argues that Northern Ireland is uniquely defined by its 'separate political culture', whereas Scotland operated along a more conventionally British left-right axis.[83] Although the late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed anxious speculation about whether Troubles-style violence would permeate Scotland, as Tom Gallagher argues, such conjecture was often propagated by 'journalists looking for a fresh angle on the conflict'.[84] Nonetheless, Scottish authorities clearly began preparing for any potential overspill. In 1974, the City of Glasgow Police compiled a detailed and meticulous pamphlet for local businesses about how to respond in the event of a bomb scare. While the police's primary piece of advice, 'don't panic', was far from reassuring, Scotland never suffered the type

---

81   Interview with Linda Cassidy.

82   Ibid.

83   Graham Walker, *The Labour Party in Scotland: Religion, the Union, and the Irish dimension* (Basingstoke 2016) 10.

84   Tom Gallagher, *Glasgow, the uneasy peace: Religious tension in modern Scotland*, (Manchester 1987), 291.

of bomb attack witnessed in English cities during the Troubles, let alone the street-level paramilitary violence that pervaded Northern Ireland.[85]

Interviewees therefore had legitimate grounds to argue that sectarianism in Northern Ireland during the Troubles was indeed more endemic and substantive than its Scottish equivalent. Brendan Connolly comments on marked differences between sectarianism in Glasgow compared to Belfast, portraying the culture of religious bigotry in his home city as more entrenched and divisive. Commenting on his children's experience of growing up in Glasgow, Brendan emphasises that his son, who supports Celtic, was able to befriend local children who supported Rangers, developing deep and longstanding friendships.[86] The everyday normality of these childhood cross-community interactions in Glasgow contrast sharply with Brendan's West Belfast upbringing. Glasgow's comparative lack of residential segregation and sectarian violence facilitated cordial Catholic-Protestant encounters in a manner Brendan describes as 'one of the real positive things about coming over' to Glasgow.[87] Linda and Brendan had both witnessed at first-hand the intensity of the conflict in Belfast, leaving them well placed to distinguish the difference between religious tension in Scotland and Northern Ireland. While sectarian acrimony in Glasgow exhibited many elements of the Protestant-Catholic hostilities in Belfast, it lacked the segregation, militarisation and violence that defined the Northern Ireland conflict. Thus, interviewees such as Brendan and Linda draw upon and appropriate some of the contemporary discourses surrounding Scottish sectarianism. The West of Scotland is presented as a kind of Northern Ireland-lite. Linda and Brendan thus implicitly reproduce one side of the debate surrounding Scottish sectarianism. Although this article is not intended to intervene in that debate, it is nonetheless striking that our emigrant narrators draw upon such discourses to add nuance to their understanding of both places.

Other participants in our project are drawn to the positive implications of this cultural crossover, describing a shared culture, context and understanding between Scottish and Northern Irish people. Even Barbara McKee, whose encounters with Scottish sectarianism served as a mnemonic trigger for prior trauma, references Glasgow as a comfortingly familiar environment. When discussing why she and her husband chose to move to Glasgow, Barbara recounts that:

85   Glasgow City Archives (GCA), City of Glasgow Police pamphlet, 'Bomb threat – don't panic', December 1974, ref. DTC/7/19/4.

86   Interview with Brendan Connolly.

87   Ibid.

we felt at that stage we were trying to get home, we still called Northern Ireland home […], although I'd never been to Glasgow in my life I kind of instinctively knew that the people there would be similar to the Northern Irish.[88]

Regardless of the painful memories it evoked, Glasgow's function as a 'home away from home' could be consoling. Yet, Barbara's frightening experiences of Scottish sectarianism represent the other side of the coin. For her and other participants, the presence even of a diluted version of tribal sectarian division serves as an unhappy reminder of a conflict that had been left behind. Glasgow's familiarity was therefore as unsettling as it was comforting. This duality confirms the ambivalence that often defines migrant memories of home, which in this case was reproduced in a diasporic setting.

Conclusion

Centuries of human movement, commercial traffic and cultural crossover between the North of Ireland and the West of Scotland meant that Greater Glasgow provided a unique diasporic setting for emigrants from Northern Ireland during the Troubles, one that influenced their subjective sense of self and shaped their relationships with their places of origin and settlement. This long history of regional interconnection also nurtured distinctive yet comparable cultures of sectarianism between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and Scotland, the visual and aural markers of which produced a broad range of emotional and psychological responses in those whom we interviewed for this study. In examining these responses, we have sought to shed light on the different and competing ways in which Glasgow existed as a 'home away from home' for them. Our analysis shows that for some migrants, memories of home are characterised by keenly felt dualities and ambivalences that are amplified by the psychic legacies of the Troubles, and further complicated by the dissonances of living in a city that bears uncanny reminders of the places in which they grew up. For others, the mere *perception* that Glasgow existed as a second or replica home could sometimes destabilise their subjectivities by prompting feelings of unease and reactivating residual traumas. At the same time, however, the interconnected socio-cultural histories of the North of Ireland and the West of Scotland could evoke a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding between native and newcomer. The composite picture that

---

88   Interview with Barbara McKee.

emerges is therefore one of considerable complexity, whereby the attempt to escape violence and prejudice at home could open up fresh possibilities across the water, while also becoming a journey that elicited *déjà vu* emotions in a city that was both homelike and unfamiliar. Our cohort of Glasgow-based narrators might therefore be said to inhabit a liminal space of belonging, where their relationships with home, both as a place and as a state of mind, are multilayered, contingent and prone to unsettlement.