The past is not dead. It's not even past.
William Faulkner

Men make their own history... but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.
Karl Marx

In Belfast violence and fear are part of everyday life - for some of the people, some of the time, in some of the space. They are part of the city’s historical legacy of national and religious conflict, part of the structured circumstances in which men, women and children live their lives, make their history. And the nightmare can dominate - but not for all of the people all of the time. This divided city also has a relatively low crime rate, wide swathes of it appear peaceful most of the time. Compared to the new ‘gated communities’ and the paranoid discourse of crime in many contemporary cities, Belfast can seem tranquil and carefree for most of its population.

In trying to understand the social significance of communal violence we have to steer carefully between sensationalist exaggeration and complacent understatement, aware that there are interests vested in both distortions. We must distinguish between the ‘normal’ violence typical of many modern cities and the violence of ethno-national conflict - we have to differentiate between what Belfast people ironically dub ‘ordinary decent crime’ and the presumably much more serious variety emanating from a conflict expressed in sectarian religious terms deeply rooted in the past. As with many national or ethnic conflicts, we also have to recognise that the effects of communal violence are both very general throughout the divided society
but also very specific. With particular locations in space and time, the violence tends to be highly selective in who is directly involved or to what extent, with wide variations by social class, gender, age group and so forth. But indirectly everyone experiences its effects to some degree and in different ways - even if only as vague fears because of vague rumours. Communal violence and fear are difficult to understand and assess for they operate at a variety of levels in terms of severity and experience, motives and causation.

At one level national conflicts such as Northern Ireland’s are conflicts over state territory and sovereignty. In the Northern Irish case, religion is the main marker of political identity but that is because Roman Catholic is popularly equated with Irish nationalism and republicanism, Protestant with British unionism and loyalism. Many of the historical reasons for this, most notably the sectarian character of the British state and British nationalism, are largely outdated, and the fit between religion and politics is far from perfect – though it was actually a much worse fit in the 1790s when it was some of Belfast’s Protestants who initiated Irish republicanism. Nevertheless, in Northern Ireland today most people’s national affiliations are defined in the sectarian terms of religious belief or background. But while religion still provides some on both sides with a motive for conflict, and religious institutions remain important political players, the conflict is primarily, as it always has been, a conflict over statehood - British unionists, predominantly Protestant, wishing the region to remain part of the British state, Irish nationalists, predominantly Catholic, aspiring to some form of re-united Ireland. However, on a day-to-day basis such national conflicts are typically played out in microcosm at more local levels, rather than at often distant state borders. Local conflict is a proxy for the wider national conflict, and the local is not only a function or reflection of the wider conflict, it is an integral part of it and is sometimes capable of determining national outcomes at state level.

Linking or cutting across these interrelated levels of national conflict is the concept of territoriality which both structures the conflict and mediates its social effects. Territoriality entails the use of bordered geographic spaces to include and exclude, to control, influence and express relationships of power. It is seen most strongly at national state level but also within regions and more informally or unofficially in local communities and neighbourhoods. Territory can be a ‘sanctuary’ or a ‘prison’, imposed by peaceful or violent means. In situations of communal division (whether national, racial, cultural or otherwise), territories are claimed and labelled through conflict and in turn people are labelled by territory. Territoriality ultimately depends on violence, or more immediately the threat rather than actuality of violence, for the enforcement of claims to territory and the exclusion of the ‘enemy’ may require relatively few violent episodes to induce the necessary fear. Some of it is highly ritualised and predictable and thus avoidable, while an element of unpredictability generally heightens fear, though consciously introducing unpredictability in one’s own behaviour patterns is one way of coping with potential danger. In parts of Northern Ireland, and most markedly in Belfast, the sectarianised territoriality of predominantly ‘Protestant’ and ‘Catholic’ areas is reinforced by rival paramilitary organisations, particularly in working-class residential neighbourhoods, and by their supporters’ confrontations and civil disturbances at ‘interface’ or ‘border’ areas. Some of these have immediate local causes, or may be triggered spontaneously by quite trivial occurrences; but all have to be seen in the context of the long-established national conflict. No matter how trivial they may appear, all are imbued with a national significance, not least by the direct participants but by others as well.

However, in assessing the significance of communal violence, its most substantial social impacts are to be found not in the realm of national statehood or sovereignty, or even in the direct experience of spectacular acts of violence to people and
property. Instead they are to be seen in the wide range of indirect, mundane and often unremarked effects which the conflict has on the mass of so-called ‘ordinary’ people. They have to navigate their way around or through politicised territories and negotiate the ‘spaces of fear’ in their everyday lives. In their coping strategies and spatial behaviour - as residents, consumers, workers, managers, policy-makers, school-students, pensioners, parents, job-seekers, leisure-seekers - all are ‘making history though not in circumstances of their own choosing’.

But what sort of ‘history’? Here the everyday takes on wider political significance for the conflict is the more intractable for being structurally and territorially embedded in ordinary life. Any resolution of the conflict has to include this dimension. Territoriality can be useful in containing or managing conflict, and it is used by the state for this purpose; but it is a crude and contradictory policy instrument which generally makes it more rather than less difficult to resolve conflict. Official territoriality reinforces unofficial territorial rivalry, local and national; and territorial rivalry, as we shall see, directly feeds the ‘zero-sum’ thinking typical of national conflict – more for one side is less for the other, and vice versa, in a flawed symmetry of mutual misery. In fact, despite the often ‘tit-for-tat’ nature of conflict, it is also characterised by asymmetries, and these too make resolution more difficult. As for territorial rivalry, if people on different sides simply accept and cope with the ‘spaces of fear’ - which is sometimes all they can do - the inevitable tendency is to reproduce sectarian structures and territorialities, changing them perhaps but changing to stay the same. So, rather than simply reproducing structures of conflict for yet another generation, how can ordinary people become active agents in making ‘their own history’ - how can they transcend, reduce or remove the ‘spaces of fear’?

Questions, Problems and Approaches

To begin to answer this deceptively simple question, our research addresses five related questions. Its main focus is Belfast seen in its Northern Ireland and wider Irish and British contexts. Its central concern is the contemporary period since the paramilitary ‘cease-fires’ of the mid-1990s and the effects of continuing violence despite the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Three questions - dealing with the past, the present and the future - are directly on the theme of how people as agents shape and are shaped by the structures in which they find themselves; and two are more general questions - a substantive one about the roles of geographic territory in political conflict, and a methodological one about studying violence and fear:

1. What are the main structures of sectarian division and conflict inherited from the past: how in general terms were they produced, and in particular how did violence shape the city’s residential areas and workplaces?

2. What are the behaviour patterns of today’s citizens within these inherited structures: how do they cope with contemporary violence and the threat of violence, in what ways are they constrained by sectarian structures, and to what extent do they maintain or reproduce these structures in their everyday behaviour as residents and workers, consumers and producers?

3. How have sectarian structures and patterns been changing recently and what are the local and national possibilities for superceding them in the future?
4. What general theoretical lessons can be drawn about the roles of geographic space and territoriality in generating, managing or resolving political conflict?

5. How are such slippery concepts as communal violence and fear best approached, explained and understood?

Violence and fear of violence are elusive phenomena. The experience of violence varies greatly in form and severity, from killing and torture to minor scuffles and verbal abuse, from directly suffering physical injury or personal threats to indirect experience by observation, other people’s accounts, news stories or rumours. Subjective fear responses diverge greatly from one person to the next, and may be conditioned by historical factors, previous experience or imagination. Both violence and fear may be generalised or highly place- and/or time-specific. Both could indeed be considered ‘chaotic concepts’ whose diverse manifestations and social meanings defy simple measurement, straightforward discussion or easy solution. But contrary to common rhetoric, violence is rarely simply ‘mindless’. Its intentionalities and meanings may be contested but they are highly dependent on their social context and relate to issues of ideology and representation, to culture, politics and economics, to class and state. That is certainly the case with the communal violence of national conflicts.

One approach to these problems is to delimit and focus on particular types of violence, narrowing down the range of intentions, meanings and contexts to more manageable proportions. Another is to attempt to gauge the significance of violence by looking not so much at violent acts themselves, or at subjective fears, but instead approaching them indirectly by looking at their social effects on behaviour and their material consequences in society. This is not to deny the importance of subjectivity in studying violence, or to neglect people’s perceptions and interpretations, but it is to shift the main focus on to actual behaviour patterns and dimensions which are in some respects more tangible and accessible to research. Focusing on structural and behavioural effects of violence is perhaps particularly appropriate for trying to understand the dynamics and social significance of communal violence/fear, as distinct from other forms such as domestic violence for instance. Generally unlike the latter, communal conflicts tend to produce (and be re-produced by) a materiality which is both highly spatialised and institutionalised. As we have seen, they involve territoriality as a mode of communication and control which is itself a generator of further conflict. These features are typical of inter-community conflicts whether defined by race, religion or some other ethnic category, and they are especially marked in the case of national divisions where local struggles are a metaphor and proxy for a wider national conflict.

The chosen approach therefore involves analysing how different sorts of people in different social contexts cope with complex time-space configurations of violence and fear. It involves assessing how these configurations to varying degrees constrain and shape their movements and activities. Previous research has mainly approached communal divisions by looking at the static patterns of residential segregation, but while these still constitute the main ‘spaces of fear’ we need to move beyond them. We need to see both how they affect social segregation and mixing - not necessarily the same thing as spatial segregation/mixing - and how people behave in other social settings such as the world of work which tells yet another story. On the evidence of residential patterns it is widely believed that segregation has worsened rather than improved since the mid-1990s ‘cease-fires’, but the evidence of employment patterns suggests the opposite. Our approach therefore entails studying activities centred on the home and the workplace and the extent to which they are structured by spatial
and social segregation in residential areas and labour markets. The main concentration is on people as members of various residential communities and how they cope with fear in their daily lives. But this is related to issues of employment, and there is a supplementary focus on institutions and managers in the public and private sectors who have to operate within the 'spaces of fear', carrying out various conflict-management responsibilities, or responsibilities of service-provision which have to be carried out despite the violence and fear. By indirectly approaching violence through its impact on a range of everyday activities we can get a better idea of its social significance.

However, there remain substantial problems with this choice of approach. While subjective feelings are not the prime concern, they can hardly be ignored where fear is a motivating factor. Attitudes had to be explored through in-depth interviewing, and the complexities of the issues required a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. As already indicated, the effects of violence are highly varied, elusive and deep-rooted, a matter of structural factors frozen in time as well as contemporary threats. They are both generalised throughout the divided society and specific to particular times and places, selective in who is most affected, and highly dependent on social context. In dealing with the complexities of these effects in various contexts, there are inherent dangers of getting lost in the necessary but cumbersome specificity, unable to see the wood for the trees.

**Linking Themes**

To cut through the detail and link the various contexts, a number of general themes were identified from the empirical research and theoretical concerns. We have already seen that territoriality links local with national conflict and mediates its effects; that it is connected with social segregation or mixing; and that both violence and the behavioural strategies for coping with it can be seen in terms of predictability and unpredictability. We saw that conceptually the conflict involves structures and agents, sectarian factors specific to the conflict and more general or 'normal' ones, and also symmetries and asymmetries between the different sides in the conflict. The latter three points in fact gave us our first three conceptual themes to which we added three behavioural and three territorial or spatio-temporal themes. All are expressed as pairs of concepts which signify alternative explanations, dichotomous or contradictory relationships, or a spectrum between polar opposites. Used flexibly, these themes can be applied to understanding different issues which do not automatically lend themselves to easy summary. Loosely interlocking rather than mutually exclusive, the themes are a means of organising answers to our five related questions.

Here they are listed and briefly discussed:

**Conceptual Themes**

1. **Structure - Agency**
2. **Normal - Sectarian**
3. **Symmetry - Asymmetry**

**Territorial/Spatio-temporal Themes**
4. National - Local
5. Segregation - Mixing
6. Stable - Unstable

Behavioural Themes
7. Regulation - Self-Regulation
8. Predictable - Unpredictable
9. Recognition - Anonymity

The conceptual themes

As already suggested, these themes concern appropriate, and by implication inappropriate, ways of explaining or understanding communal violence.

Structure/Agency points towards it being socially produced and re-produced - and hence capable of being transcended and ended - rather than stemming timelessly from the 'essential' nature of the participants, as essentialist sectarian 'explanations' generally suggest. And rather than accepting explanations which posit a 'culture of violence', it points to the need to explain such a 'culture', to the extent it exists, in terms of political agency and other economic and social factors.

Our empirical research showed that conflict is in part sustained by mutually reinforcing foundational discourses based on essentialist notions that there are innate or 'natural' differences between Catholics and Protestants; and that their respective identities are somehow fixed and irreconcilable, rather than sectarian conflict being recognised as socially, spatially and temporally contingent. There is a teleological understanding of history and memory in which conflicting identities and territorialities are represented as 'inevitable' and 'fated', rather than having to be socially produced and reproduced. In fact, far from being fixed or 'natural', as essentialism suggests, it was evident that the divisions and identities are relatively unstable and contested and have to be continually worked on in order to be reproduced, and this helps explain why sectarianism is so virulently active in the present rather than being simply some 'hang-over' from the past. Some people work hard to maintain the 'nightmare'. It also became clear that essentialism as received 'commonsense' can percolate the thinking not only of so-called 'ordinary' people but also some policy-makers, not to mention academics, which makes deconstructing or exposing its fallacies all the more important.

Likewise, notions that a 'culture of violence' explains the conflict have to be challenged – the alleged 'culture' has itself to be explained: how and when did it arise, why here when not elsewhere, why does it persist, what sustains it, how might it be stopped? In the absence of answers to such questions – or the absence even of the questions - cultural interpretations can all too easily descend into or provide a gloss of sophistication for essentialist 'non-explanations'. Typically, these involve such terms as 'atavistic', 'tribal', and 'time-warp' - the notion that the Irish, on both sides, are 'obsessed with the past' and uniquely predisposed to violence. In fact there is little evidence for the assumption that the Irish are particularly interested in
violence or history, and while ‘the past is not past’ the conflict is in no sense unchanging or ‘timeless’, and the disputed issues are here and now, not there and then. Rather than following culturalist or other arguments which convincingly begin or end with the notion that violence and hence its immediate perpetrators are ‘irrational’ (thereby excusing everyone else of responsibility), it is more fruitful to accept (at least as a working hypothesis) that communal violence is a form of rational collective action (particularly when it involves masses of people over many decades). Following Charles Tilly, it is best seen as part of a continuum of political action and protest, rather than something separate, its timing and severity basically determined by political context and perceived costs and benefits. In contrast, on the Irish evidence, culturalist understandings of violence, even when they get beyond stereotyping, are at best partial descriptions masquerading as explanation. They give too much emphasis to local cultures or sub-cultures (comfortably distanc[ing the problem from official state contexts]); and they take inadequate account of the fact that the conflict is not primarily ‘about culture’ (any more than it is ‘about religion’), but is instead about fear of political subordination or terminal defeat by the other community - that basically it is about politics and has to be interpreted as such (see McGarry and O’Leary 1995, 215, 232-243, 253-264). More specifically the conflict is about territorial politics because both communities share the belief, common to nationalisms and national states in general (e.g., to the USA or France) that the survival of their national community depends on having their own exclusive territory and state. And of course where territory is shared as in Ireland such exclusivity is impossible except by one group dominating the other. Hence the political conflict, intractable within the dominant terms of nationalism.

This is not to deny the political importance of culture, or of different local sub-cultures within the opposing national communities. After all, it has long been recognised that nationalism is simultaneously a political and a cultural phenomena. But this is mainly a case of culture as a basis for political definition and mobilisation, culture in the service of politics rather than the other way around (Anderson 1986). Furthermore, in the case of political phenomena such as national conflict, the so-called postmodern ‘cultural turn’ is generally a turn for the worse. While it can be liberating and enlightening in some respects, especially in politicising some previously ‘non-political’ subjects such as positivistic psychology or economics, when applied to overtly political topics like nationalism which need no politicising there is a reverse ‘de-politicising’ effect. Thus we need to distinguish between cultural issues as important aspects of the conflict, and culturalist approaches which are inadequate for understanding them or violence more generally. Similarly, studying issues of ethnicity and identity does not mean we should adopt the frameworks or assumptions of ‘identity politics’. On the contrary, as we shall see, these frameworks and the institutionalisation of ethnicity in official conflict-management, are ultimately a hindrance rather than a help in finding a solution to conflict. As in the related emphasis on respecting the ‘two cultural traditions’ - as if there are only two - the ‘solution’ is part of the problem.

While cultural structures along with political and economic ones are crucial to ‘spaces of fear’, they are crucial as ‘circumstances’ and it is the active agency of people, individually and collectively, in various groups and classes, working within these circumstances, which is the key to change (or the lack of it). Most immediately, the agents are groups organised on a sectarian basis who have created and maintained the segregated ‘spaces of fear’, largely by violence or threat since the 19th century. Local segregation in Belfast has tended to increase incrementally, especially in successive periods of heightened violence which have generally coincided with periods of increased national tension, such as the First Home Rule Crisis of 1886, Ireland’s Partition in 1920, and the onset of the recent ‘Troubles’ in the late 1960s-
early 70s. The agents include paramilitary groups and recently there has been a orchestration of ‘rioting’ at some of Belfast’s ‘interface’ areas which both serves to increase general political tension, signals opposition to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and so forth, and at the same time sets back progress on local cross-community co-operation and reasserts a sharp sectarian divide. But most of those involved in this are working class people, and classes are central to the structure/agency theme, not least because the most noteworthy attempt in modern times to transcend the sectarian divide was united working class action against unemployment in the 1930s. The other classes too are agents whether by action or default - it is widely believed for instance that ‘middle class unionists’ have opted out of politics - and state institutions are clearly key agents in the conflict.

However, so too are less obvious groups and institutions such as ‘developers’ and employers’ organisations. Although not directly involved in conflict, they can and do alter some of its basic structures. Through restructuring the urban fabric and the labour market for example, they provide new threats or opportunities for other agents, and bring us to our second theme, Normal/Sectarian. Unfortunately this pairing could all too easily be read as saying sectarianism is ‘normal’ in Northern Ireland which indeed it is, but in fact this theme addresses the problem that much of what happens in conflict situations, rather than being conflict-specific, is actually normal in the sense of including such general phenomena as suburbanisation or gentrification, de-industrialisation, de-skilling and re-development. Elsewhere they happen quite independently of conflict and this needs to be emphasised because in conflict situations the ‘normal’ tends to be forgotten, and of course it is complicated and obscured. In Northern Ireland ‘the normal’ often has an extra sectarian dimension, and the effects of normal processes such as re-development are often wrongly ascribed to the conflict - in our case sectarianism: there is a marked tendency for people (including some of our respondents) to give exaggerated and sometimes unwarranted sectarian ‘explanations’ or ‘sectarian readings of sectarianism’ (Anderson and Shuttleworth 1994). We also encountered the converse problem where some ‘managers’ preferred to ignore the sectarian dimension altogether and ‘treat things in the normal way’ in what seemed a bogus ‘neutrality’, or at the very least a questionable means of appearing ‘even-handed’ - for instance, faced with inequality a sure way of perpetuating it is to treat everyone ‘equally’. But whether the problem is that sectarian factors are exaggerated or ignored, we have to try and differentiate them from normal ones, though in practice the two sorts of causation intertwine making it difficult to filter out what is the result of conflict from what is not. In order to try and see how the two are intertwined and assess the effects which can validly be ascribed to sectarian violence and fear, specifically sectarian processes, factors and types of violence have to be distinguished from the normal socio-economic processes and factors (e.g., the costs of de-industrialisation, the interests of class, the prevalence of crime).

The problem addressed by our third theme, Symmetry/Asymmetry, is that while there are strong, and often consciously intentional, ‘mirror-imaging’ (‘copy-catting’ as well as ‘tit-for-tating’) tendencies in the opposing sets of agents in conflict, symmetry cannot be assumed. Symmetries may define the conflict at a superficial level – whether, for example, in acknowledging faults in one side and then imputing them to the other side as ‘just as bad’ (whether justified or not), or in complaints from both sides about the lack of symmetry in how they themselves are being treated compared to ‘the other’. But, in reality asymmetries are at least equally if not more important. For one thing, there are usually more than ‘two sides’ in any serious conflict even if they are not openly acknowledged or declared as active participants. For instance in the Northern Ireland conflict the British state likes to present itself as ‘disinterested’ arbitrator when in reality it is a major player with its own particular
interests and priorities which may or may not coincide with those of the two main sets of local players. But staying with the latter for the sake of the argument against assuming symmetry, there are usually marked asymmetries between the different communities (‘dominant’ and ‘subordinate’, or ‘majority’ and ‘minority’), in their methods and norms, in their relationships to the status quo, and in their rival aspirations. Ignoring these asymmetries can in fact be simply a more sophisticated version of trying to appear ‘even-handed’ by implausibly ignoring the sectarian dimension altogether. The sort of unthinking reflex of some liberal commentators who loftily announce a ‘both tribes equally guilty’ verdict where the blame is not in fact symmetrical, is a case of bogus ‘neutrality’ meets bogus ‘objectivity’, a stance whose main effect is to establish themselves in a ‘morally superior’ position. Asymmetries are particularly significant in that an official policy of ‘equal treatment’ is rendered problematic as we have seen, and difficult to implement in practice (e.g., ‘provocative’ local marches are traditionally much more important and numerous on the loyalist side and ‘equal prohibition’ is not a practical policy option). Asymmetries constitute a serious obstacle to resolving conflict through ‘compromise’ or any straightforward exchange of concessions: where ‘apples’ have to be exchanged for ‘oranges’ who decides the rate of exchange - a further bone of contention?

The territorial themes

These themes concern issues of spatio-temporal location related to territoriality and territories changing in character over historical and cyclical time. Geographic space - how it is occupied and particularly how it is used as bordered territories for the benefit of some and the detriment of others - plays a crucial role in the creation and maintenance of national identities and conflicts. This is the focus of the National/Local and Segregation/Mixing themes, and both involve historical processes of change and resistance to change at various temporal scales, from the long-term measured in decades but particularly more recent contrasts before and after the mid-1990s cease-fires. However, we also need to consider the location of activities in the cyclical time of daily, weekly and seasonal routines, and short-term changes in territorialities in terms of a continuum of Stable/Unstable territories.

Territoriality classifies, communicates and controls through the use of space, the drawing of borders whether formal or informal, and the regulation of access into and/or out of specified areas (Sack 1986). It is at its strongest in national states, and national conflicts about statehood are often played out - partly in symbolic, partly in material terms - in the National/Local dialectic of territorial rivalries as already outlined. Local internal ‘borders’ between opposed groups serve as a proxy for the disputed state border (Anderson and Shuttleworth 1998). The ‘local’ is shaped by the ‘national’ but in turn shapes the latter - indeed localised action may be the only form available to most protagonists most of the time. It is a means of mobilising political support for national agendas and it can on occasion have a crucial impact on state policies. Loss and gain of territory on a street-by-street basis is equated with ‘losing’ or ‘winning’ in the overall conflict over national territory. Thus does local territoriality help reproduce identity but also it helps perpetuate violence and threat.

Territoriality has many social advantages including simplifying issues of control, establishing clear boundaries with symbolic markers ‘on the ground’ (literally on Belfast kerbstones painted ‘red, white and blue’), and giving relationships of power a greater tangibility or ‘permanence’. These advantages help explain its ubiquity and persistence, but in circumstances of conflict advantages tend to become disadvantages which generate further conflict. In general, territoriality oversimplifies and distorts social relations in its assumption of a direct equation between the
'spatial' and the 'social'. It reifies power and de-personalizes social relationships; communicating clear boundaries is not necessarily a good thing if they obscure and negate a much more complex reality. In short, conflict is rendered more intractable, and particularly by the direct encouragement of 'zero-sum' thinking where a 'plus' for one side is typically seen as a 'negative' for the other, and vice-versa.

'Goods' like democracy, development, wealth, etc., - which may motivate rival claims to territory and statehood - do not have a fixed 'sum' or finite total and hence it is possible for all sides to gain from an expanding whole. In contrast, territory is generally finite and more for one side really does mean less for the other(s), and thus territory, as a material object and a symbol of communal conflict, directly leads to and reinforces a 'zero-sum' game. The 'game' can be played at different spatial scales, and territory is both a 'container' mediating conflicts, and a generator of the 'zero-sum' thinking which reproduces violence and segregation.

In the case of sectarianism, the main 'ethnic markers' of religion - Protestant of Catholic - can lack visibility and are susceptible to change, and there is a general absence of other markers, such as linguistic or racial differences. Because of this, territoriality and the labelling of people by segregated residential locality are also pressed into service. It became clear that the lack of stable 'markers', the close spatial intermingling of religious groups and the pressures and opportunities for social mixing, have, perhaps paradoxically, contributed substantially to the intractability and virulence of the conflict. We noted that some people have to work hard to maintain sectarian divisions and borders which are always in danger of being breached or crossed; it is this effort of reproducing the divisions as much as the legacy of the divisions themselves which drives the contemporary conflict.

The Segregation/Mixing theme is thus central to the conflict and defining the respective 'spaces of fear'. One group's 'space of fear' is another's 'sanctuary'. Thus pressure from local residents was generally the initial motivation for the inaptly named 'peace-walls' in some urban interface areas marked by violence. Segregated territory is typically seen as a means of defence, of escaping or 'containing' the effects of the violence of the 'other side'. But such 'sanctuaries' are two-sided in several respects, underlining the contradictory nature of territoriality. Living in and being identifiable by one's 'sanctuary' means increased vulnerability in being recognisable as belonging to the 'other side', and space has played a key role in the targeting of random victims for sectarian attack, though this in turn generally further intensifies the need to strengthen the sanctuary areas. These areas of course also provided a base from which paramilitaries have launched their offensive actions, either against the 'others' territory' (mainly the case on the unionist side) or against state forces (predominantly the case with republicans), and all the paramilitaries have had to 'secure' and 'police' their base, guarding against informers and ensuring local support whether voluntary or by extortion. But this also leads to the meaning of territory being reversed from 'sanctuary' to 'prison' for at least some of the inhabitants. They are trapped in their 'own area' and at the relative mercy of paramilitaries from 'their own side', whether the issues concern political differences or the unofficial 'policing' of behaviour deemed anti-social', racketeering to raise money for the paramilitary organisation, or drug-dealing and other crime on the paramilitaries' own behalf. In organised crime in 'normal' environments (e.g., London's East End) territoriality generally plays an important role, and in Belfast 'territories' were in a sense provided 'ready-made', greatly facilitating the 'criminal turn' made by some paramilitaries. Here the truth, by its very nature, was impossible to ascertain in particular cases, but we got the distinct impression that the very substantial scaling down of offensive operations since the 'ceasefires' has meant that
'internal' operations and the 'prison' side of the territoriality 'coin' have become relatively more pronounced.

The theme of Segregation/Mixing also raises questions about the distinctions and relations between 'spatial' and 'social' mixing, and related questions of the spatial scale of segregation. For instance, one area we studied which is generally perceived as 'mixed' contained some segregated sub-areas; and even where there was a high degree of spatial mixing by residence, it did not necessarily follow that there was significant social mixing. Conversely, residential segregation did not preclude substantial social mixing in other arenas of work, consumption and leisure. In the case of some 'managers', this theme applied to whether workforces were segregated or mixed, and particularly to the strategies adopted for workers such as rubbish-collectors, postmen or meter-readers who have to travel to and through sectarianised 'spaces of fear' in providing services, where the issue concerned their safety from the public or clients. In the more general context of 'conflict management', there are contradictions between a spatial strategy of 'mixing' or bringing members of opposed groups together (whether explicitly for reconciliation purposes, or happening 'naturally' for 'normal' reasons), and a strategy of 'separation' (or accepting segregation) in order to facilitate social control. The latter policy runs counter to the official ideology of reconciliation but is in line with actual policies of 'consociationalism' with its belief that 'high fences make good neighbours' - and literally 'high fences' in the case of the so-called 'peace-walls' though good neighbourliness is another matter. As this policy paradox suggests, there are contradictions between the strategies of different branches of state, as well as in civil society, and they relate to tensions between trying to solve the conflict or deciding that 'containing' it is the best that can be expected.

Issues of segregation interlock with the theme of a continuum of Stable/Unstable territories, short-term changes in territorialities and the location of activities in cyclical time. Time of day/night has obvious relevance for fear-related issues, but so too do weekdays/weekends, summer/winter, school-holiday periods, and other periodic events, especially in Northern Ireland the Easter to September 'marching season' and its traditional zenith of heightened sectarian tension around the 'Twelfth of July' unionist celebrations. Territoriality as something continually contested is of course always inherently unstable and liable to potential changes or switches of 'ownership', but in fact a large proportion of residentially segregated working-class Belfast has been either 'Catholic' or 'Protestant' for over a century, and some of it has indeed become more rather than less segregated over time. Some territories have clearly been identified with one 'side' (and in some cases, one particular paramilitary organisation) over a long period and are likely to remain so. On the other hand, there are a range of unstable territories popularly seen as either 'neutral' or 'mixed' where sectarian claims or occupation operate at more micro scales and/or are subject to cyclical or short-term switching of label or 'allegiance'. Ostensibly more 'mixed' areas may be (actually, or interpreted as) in a transitional state of changing their 'belonging' which could imply 'invasion' and 'dominance' rather than more harmonious or benign 'mixing'. 'Interface' areas have this potential which further fuels conflict in these contact zones, though they may in practice be seen as 'no man's land' which neither side dares occupy. As already mentioned, the potentially unstable nature of territoriality generates conflict.

There is however another type of unstable territory typically found within 'neutral' spaces such as the city-centre and more in the nature of 'shared' space on a 'time-share' basis. It simply takes on the connotations of whatever group is in short-term occupancy (e.g., in part of a public bar), though an aggressive assertion of temporary occupancy in 'mixed space' may fuel perceptions of a more permanent 'take-over'.
Some respondents claimed to see this happening in the city-centre, though others disagreed. The issue can arise on a larger scale as when Belfast's main Orange march is re-routed through 'mixed' areas and they are decked out in loyalist colours for the occasion.

Our three territorial themes in combination provide a basis for a typology of spaces which both shape and are shaped by people’s behaviour patterns.

The behavioural themes

These proved the most problematical while in some ways the most necessary, in order to make sense of the different aspects of behaviour, its contexts and specificities, and the seemingly endless ethnographic detail of who was involved, and where, and when, and why. By the same token, a large number of potential themes emerged from the data and – continuing in this empiricist vein – the problem became the pragmatic one of finding the minimum set that would do justice to the variety of empirical findings. This involved a ‘trial and error’ process of eliminating possible themes or rather subsuming them within the set finally chosen.

Thus behaviour could be conceptualised on a spectrum from avoidance to confrontation but this was rejected as a separate theme, because the focus was on potential victims avoiding or minimising the danger of violence. Clearly confrontation is also part of the story both in the sense of confronting the ‘other side’ as a perpetrator of violence or threat, and in the opposite sense of confronting sectarian division. However, we had very little information on the former – being violent or the cause of trouble is not something people talk about freely and in any case our study was not about violence per se or its perpetrators, and of course perpetrators are generally also, indeed especially, among the ‘victims’ and see themselves as such. As for confrontation in the sense of not accepting sectarian divisions, that could be subsumed under the Segregation/Mixing theme with the emphasis on active behaviour rather than the static pattern of resulting territories.

Similarly, while information about violent acts spans the spectrum from direct personal experience as a victim to hearing about them indirectly through rumour, our study was not of actual victims per se, most people received their awareness of violence and danger indirectly, and we did not collect much data on how information spread within communities. For instance, we did not study how news of particular local episodes was disseminated and the exaggerations, distortions and misinformation which may be involved. So this was too was rejected as a separate theme, as was the question of whether or not people had local knowledge of an area. Most residents clearly had very detailed local knowledge of their own immediate areas and of boundaries which are often invisible to the uninitiated.

In fact these issues of information and knowledge or the lack of it can be subsumed under the more general themes of Regulation/Self-regulation and Predictable/Unpredictable, while issues of confrontation versus avoidance can also be subsumed under Recognition/Anonymity.

Following Foucault, local territoriality can be seen as operating through microcircuits of power with communal hegemony maintained through discursive regimes and spatialised processes of Regulation and Self-Regulation. Discursive regimes enable individuals, communities and institutions, including state institutions, to wield power and maintain order and control through processes of definition, legitimisation and exclusion. They render governance strategies 'rational' and 'logical', justifying
how and by whom places are controlled. The contestation of the right to govern that is often at the heart of communal conflict depends on how these processes are played out across different scales (e.g., national, city and local) by different social agents (e.g., state and local authorities, employers, voluntary agencies, paramilitary organisations, community groups and individuals).

Relations of power do not consist merely of acts of domination countered by acts of resistance but are much more complex and are bound up in everyday practices of living. At the level of the individual this involves self-regulation or self-disciplining through internalising, or alternatively flouting, the ‘rules of the game’ as laid down by communal norms, and here perceptions or rumours of violence serve to reinforce the ‘regulations’. If people suffer sectarian attack because they ‘flout the rules’ of their local community, then they have only themselves to blame and are admonished accordingly. There is a collective expectation that individuals should know how to regulate their own behaviour to ensure that their movements and behaviour involve only justifiable risk, though what is considered acceptable risk-taking is debateable. For example, individuals taking up an employment opportunity within opposition territory might be considered justifiable by some members of their own community but too risky and ‘stupid’ by other members. Such group judgements amount to the collective regulation of an individual’s spatial choices, and it often starts with parental instruction and justifiable concerns for the safety of children and teen-agers. Whether territorial boundaries are identified by group emblems and markings or are invisible, it is assumed that local people possess a complex body of knowledge about how to negotiate relatively safe and unsafe territories, and especially how to behave when they have to enter the latter.

This knowledge can be seen as an unwritten ‘territorial rulebook’. It provides information on which to assess the relative dangers of particular spatial decisions and the appropriate use of different types of space. When properly utilised it serves to reduce the likelihood of sectarian attack. The geographical knowledge required can be surprisingly intricate. It includes the micro-geographies of localities – using particular sides of the street, particular places to cross the road, individual bus stops and bus routes, avoiding clumps of bushes or alleyways, and so forth. We talked to individuals who have not crossed to the opposite side of a local street in the last thirty years. The penalties for ‘flouting the rules’ can be drastic – it was, for instance, widely reported that a Protestant killed by loyalist paramilitaries at Christmas 2002 in north Belfast was killed because they mistakenly assumed he was a Catholic because ‘he walked across from the nationalist side of the street’ (Sunday Tribune 29.12.02) – he was in fact walking to his local workplace but it might have been significant that he was a non-local from east Belfast and may not have fully internalised the local ‘rulebook’. It cannot be assumed, however, that ‘territorial rulebooks’ are a simple or fixed list of directives to be followed by any individual going ‘from A to B’. Although consisting of local knowledge built up over time they are also inherently imperfect, unstable and liable to change, continually subject to (re)negotiation with changes in seasonal and political conditions. The ‘rules’ are highly contingent and often specific to particular age groups, genders and other categories – the risks and ‘rules’ for teenage or young adult males can be very different from those for their middle-aged mothers, and the ‘rules’ for the latters’ daughters are different again.

In some respects the ‘rules’ reflect and ‘work’ because of the predictability of much of the violence and its avoidability at least in principle, though unpredictability is both a further threat and an avoidance strategy. The Predictable/Unpredictable theme covers a continuum both of threats and behavioural responses. Avoidance of relatively predictable threats, often associated with structured or ritualised sectarian behaviour, can in practice be difficult for those living in particularly vulnerable areas
or working in particular jobs (e.g., bus-driving near ‘interface’ areas). However, intentionally more ‘random’ violence induces greater or more generalised fears precisely because of its unpredictability - the feeling that anyone could be ‘in the wrong place at the wrong time’ – and the inadequacy of ‘rulebooks’ in this context. But even here there are degrees or patterns of unpredictability, and in general since the mid-1990s the threat has become more spatially confined and concentrated in particular, mainly working class, localities, though there are still occasional ‘bomb-scares’ and threats in city-centre and other areas. Intentional unpredictability also applies to introducing variety into one’s own behaviour patterns as a strategy for reducing vulnerability and coping with the possibility of being targeted. This applies most obviously to people very directly involved in the violence (e.g., to members of rival paramilitary organisations and also police and prison officers), but it also applies more widely than is often recognised to ‘non-combatants’. For example, when people travel to work or use facilities such as unemployment offices in areas where they are in a minority, their movements may be highly routinised and predictable, and some respondents spoke of their strategies for safe arrival and departure by consciously building in unpredictability in time and space. This could mean varying times of arrival and departure, though this flexibility may not be an option for workers, and they have to use alternative strategies such as varying their routes and/or modes of transport.

To a large extent our interviews concentrated on people’s knowledge of localities and spatial behaviour, and perhaps the single most important element in their coping strategies involved managing and countering levels of visibility, the focus of our last theme, Recognition-Anonymity. The most common assumption underpinning people’s negotiation of space is that their ethnic identities are going to be recognised by the ‘other side’. Perhaps paradoxically, striving for anonymity is often the norm, except for those actively engaged in directly confrontational forms of behaviour, but people generally cannot risk assuming that they have achieved anonymity and in consequence their spatial freedoms are curtailed. More rational and safer to assume recognition and in many cases the assumption is justified.

This theme highlighted just how localised the conflict is in many respects, despite its national, statehood motivations. Residents in our main study areas (admittedly relatively small and interlocking rival communities, chosen for that reason) repeatedly alluded to the fact that they live ‘cheek by jowl’ with their political rivals, though socialising, much less inter-marriage or ‘mixed relationships’, are rare, especially since the onset of the recent ‘troubles’ from the late 1960s - if they occur it generally means the participants have to move away to other parts of the city or elsewhere to achieve anonymity. But within their home districts people often know the people and their families living in the ‘other’ locality through lifetimes of passing them on the road, sharing the same buses and bus stops, shopping in the same shops, using the same post office, seeing them collecting their uniformed school children, and being recognised in turn. Across the micro-geographical divides, named individuals (usually male) may be credited with being members or associates of the rival paramilitary organisations, sometimes correctly, sometimes not. Where inter-locality conflict brings a host of people onto the streets to ‘defend’ their area in bouts of stone-throwing for instance, observed individuals and ‘ringleaders’ may be labelled as ‘UVF-‘, ‘UDA-‘, or ‘IRA-man’ whether they actually are or not - here the typical logic is ‘guilty until proved innocent’ and the dice is loaded against the latter verdict. Thus within small working class districts and immediate home areas people generally work on the assumption that they and their political allegiance will be recognised by the ‘other’ side. One corollary of this is that ‘outsiders’ such as people who commute into the area to work, while they may be at a disadvantage in not appreciating the finer points of the local ‘territorial rulebooks’, may also remain unrecognised by the locals
on both sides, not seen as part of the local conflict, and hence relatively safe from attack.

The question of anonymity becomes much more open when people leave their home areas and go to other residential parts of the city or to ‘neutral’ areas. It is also more achievable for people who live in the larger residentially segregated areas (e.g., the Falls and Shankill districts) which are sufficiently extensive in size, population and services for people to live much of their daily life within ‘their own community’ (which is why we chose not to concentrate on these areas). Yet even in these cases, individuals know that even if they personally are unknown, their political identity may be recognised through various ‘clues’ including, as we have seen, their spatial movements. They may also be ‘recognised’, or feel they will be recognised, through less justifiable essentialist thinking which greatly exaggerates observable differences between Protestants and Catholics (and often ‘gets it wrong’).

The focus on employment and management strategies showed a similar concern with issues of anonymity and recognition with respect to employees and clients. For instance in the case of managers who have to organise workers who travel to homes and workplaces to deliver services (e.g., telephone and electricity services), should they choose to have ‘mixed’ or ‘segregated’ workforces? Protestant and Catholic workers might feel happier working in their ‘own’ respective districts, but on the other hand having workers grouped on religious lines could be very inefficient and it also means that the individuals in the particular groups become more recognisable, less anonymous.

In general people want recognition within their own community - being recognised by local people generally ensures safety within the 'sanctuary' of one's 'own areas' – while outside their own community in 'neutral', unknown or opposition territory people want anonymity. Courting recognition in these territories (e.g., by wearing particular colours, football jerseys, displaying tattoos, etc.) may be an assertion of rights but it is usually seen as confrontational, 'asking for trouble' and flouting the 'rulebook'. More responsible to dispense with or cover up such marks of identity. Here there is the paradox that in a highly segregated school system, pupils have had to wear their instantly recognisable school uniforms throughout the last three decades of low-intensity war, perhaps on the assumption that ‘school kids’ are not involved in it. If so, it was an erroneous assumption inviting attack from rival school pupils and in some cases from adults. Some pupils have to be bussed to school to avoid going through opposition territory, and some have the sense to wear ordinary coats over their uniforms.

In all the arenas of home and school, work and leisure, territoriality has a central role; ideas about behaviour being ‘in’ or ‘out of place’ are a major concern.