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Borrowed Legitimacy: Using the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict to Strengthen Nationalist Claims in Northern Ireland

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Abstract

While researchers have paid extensive attention to how political entrepreneurs selectively appropriate the local past to create ethnic boundaries, the case of Northern Ireland reveals the surprising ways that entrepreneurs can also reach sideways, not just backwards, to reinforce those boundaries. Through a process of borrowed legitimacy, Unionists and Nationalists strategically mobilize expressions of international solidarity with Israelis or Palestinians, respectively, in order to compete for control of the state in Northern Ireland. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict reinforces the ethnic boundary between Protestants and Catholics despite the Northern Irish peace process. This study examines technologies of borrowed legitimacy such as flags, graffiti, murals, and political speech that reinforce the ethnic boundary as an alternative to violent methods that have become delegitimized.

Keywords: ethnic boundaries, international solidarity, nationalism, Northern Ireland, Israeli-Palestinian conflict

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“*Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent.*”
—Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères* 1969

Ethnic boundaries and the delimitations of nationalism are, at least partially, the result of a group’s engagement with the past. The past is used to legitimate the parameters of ethnic inclusion and define contemporary claims to the nation. Eriksen writes, “Ethnic identities... embody a perceived continuity with the past” (2002: 68). He explains that groups strategically anchor their genealogy, “Instead of tracing one’s group origins back to say, Adam or Noah, one may thus trace it back to one of their respective sons...and thereby argue the validity of present ethnic boundaries” (Eriksen 2002: 69). The past is also actively reimagined in the construction of a national narrative, in Bhabha’s words, “Being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation...” (1990: 311). While the *vertical* lineage of the “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) and ethnic solidarity are well documented, *horizontal* measures that reach across states to bridge ethno-national narratives remain understudied. In this paper, I explore expressions of international solidarity that contribute to the maintenance of ethnic boundaries and the construction of ethnic national narratives.

I seek to answer the following question: When violence is no longer a legitimate means for resistance yet dissatisfaction persists, how do ethnic groups mobilize to compete for control over the state? I argue that the pivot away from violence puts an emphasized role on the use of rhetoric and other non-violent means of boundary maintenance. Through expressions of international solidarity, identification with a foreign nation’s nation-building narratives can be used to reconstruct and legitimate local narratives in order to claim moral entitlement to the state.

The severity of violence in Northern Ireland that once characterized three decades of the Troubles, an ethnic conflict with deep historical roots, came to an end with the signing of the Good Friday peace accords in 1998. Despite the agreement to end the violence, ethnic divisions

remain intact and the terms of peace remain unsettled in contemporary 2014. The shift away from violence introduced new strategies of ethnic boundary maintenance, making non-violent expressions particularly salient.

The mainly Protestant Unionists and the predominantly Catholic Nationalists express solidarity with either Israelis or Palestinians, respectively. Unionists and Nationalists expand the scope of their local conflict and incorporate international nation-building narratives through expressions of international solidarity. Unionists believe that if they can advocate for the Israeli cause while drawing similarities to their own struggle, they can fortify their claim to the state of Northern Ireland. Meanwhile, Nationalists believe that demonstrating that they suffer a common injustice with the Palestinians will confer legitimacy to Nationalists' local anti-colonial construction of a national narrative. In Northern Ireland, ethnic groups do not only reach *backwards*, but also *sideways*, through international identification strategies that maintain the ethnic boundary and reinforce ethnic nation-building narratives.

I call the strategic use of expressions of international solidarity *borrowed legitimacy*. Borrowed legitimacy is the process by which ethnic groups deliberately adopt outside "collective memories" and narratives associated with an unrelated population to justify local politicized positions and narratives for the purpose of universalizing locally advocated beliefs.

Jenkins states that the focus on ethnic boundaries has lead scholars of boundary maintenance to neglect the role of international solidarity (2014: 810). Jenkins identifies Barth's (1969) scholarship as the juncture that contributed to the neglect of international solidarity because scholars have focused mainly on the ethnic boundary to define groups and not the "cultural stuff" that the boundary encloses, international solidarity being part of that "cultural stuff." Jenkins emphasizes the affective display of real emotions and powerful feelings that result

from “shared histories and symbols,” which he claims, “can not be reduced to an epiphenomenon of boundary making and maintenance” (Jenkins 2014: 810). Borrowed legitimacy engages these two points—the affective display of powerful feelings and the phenomenon of boundary maintenance. Without negating authentic emotions that surface through expressions of solidarity, borrowed legitimacy illustrates how expressions of international solidarity acknowledge that even authentic emotions can be strategically invoked as “individuals behave strategically” to construct ethnic boundaries (Wimmer 2013: 5).

Establishing the Ethnic Boundary in Northern Ireland

The ethnic division between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland is colloquially referred to as *sectarianism*. While the term sectarianism denotes religious difference, it also encapsulates ethnic, political, cultural, and, for some people, even phenotypical distinctions. As defined by Liechty and Clegg, sectarianism can be understood as “a system of attitudes, actions, beliefs and structures at personal, communal and institutional levels, which always involves religion and typically involves a negative mixing of religion and politics” (2001: 102). Cairns says that religion is often “the colouring, not the essence, of sectarianism” (2000: 438). And, McVeigh and Rolston have shown that in Northern Ireland, “sectarianism continues to profoundly structure where people are born, where they go to school, where they work, where they socialize, what sports teams they support and where they are buried” (2007: 16). In this paper, the sectarian division in Northern Ireland also denotes an ethnic division.

The ethnic boundary between the two groups tends to be clearly defined, but individual politicized identifications are less so. Individuals who identify as British are mostly Protestants and tend to subscribe to Unionist or Loyalist beliefs. Meanwhile, those who identify as Irish are usually Catholics and are often designated as either Nationalists or Republicans. According to

the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey (2013), 15% of Northern Irish respondents believe that Northern Ireland should reunify with the rest of Ireland, most explicitly overlapping ethnic and national claims (variable NIRELND2). A sizeable percentage of Protestants and Catholics, about one-third of the population, do not identify as either Unionist or Nationalist, many of whom are interested in a non-sectarian political identification (NILT 2013: variable NINATID).

Because of the population's complicated allegiances, and in order not to conflate ethno-religious identifications with ethno-political ones, this paper uses the terms *Unionists* and *Nationalists* to refer to the political beliefs of British-identifying Protestants and Irish-identifying Catholics. Loyalist and Republican labels are subsumed respectively. Meanwhile, the terms Protestant and Catholic are reserved to identify members of ethnic groups in Northern Ireland, but not political entrepreneurs who make claims on behalf of their ethnic group.

The ethnic boundary can be traced back to the early 1600s when English and Scottish settlers founded the plantation of Ulster, establishing a settler-colonial relationship between the British and the Irish. The Irish experienced subordinate status under British rule, harshly exemplified by the Great Irish Famine that some argue was “the historical wrong that sealed the fate of the unhappy Union between Britain and Ireland” (Gráda 1995: 1). The British governed the entire island of Ireland until negotiations with the Irish culminated in partition under the Government of Ireland Act 1920. The state of Northern Ireland was created.

Historically, the Northern Irish state has held a vested interest in promoting the ethnic boundary between Protestants and Catholics. Partition along religious lines created a Catholic minority of 34.4 percent in the North (Coakley 2004: 6); thus, “from its birth in 1921, the Northern Ireland state was a sectarian society” (Conway 2009: 307). The state's first prime minister, James Craig, proclaimed in 1934 that Northern Ireland was a “Protestant state” with a

“Protestant parliament” (O’Clery 1999: 83). The Protestant majority enjoyed hegemonic status and the Catholic minority suffered discriminatory policies. In 1969, Catholic protest and government backlash sparked the start of the Troubles.

Sectarian violence led to an increased British military presence. Tit-for-tat killings executed by state and non-state actors ushered in decades of violent unrest. The Irish minority faced imprisonment without charges or trial, curfews, poor living and employment conditions, and restricted movement while members of the Unionist community feared bombings by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) (Cochrane 2013; Lowry 1976). Approximately 3,500 people died, and 50,000 were injured, from 1969 to 1999 as a result of the Troubles (Abunimah 2013).

After the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998, the state put forth a new Northern Irish category to subsume Protestant and Catholic identities under a more unified Northern Irish designation. No longer an overtly “Protestant state,” state-sponsored institutions invested in mechanisms to bridge the divide between Protestants and Catholics. Most prominently, the GFA initiated power-sharing governance supported by British and Irish governments. The Northern Ireland Assembly, the North/South Ministerial Council, and the British-Irish Council worked together as governing bodies to promote cross-community representation. The agencies faced considerable challenges, however, notably the prolonged suspension of the Assembly on several occasions. The GFA also promised a Bill of Rights, a Human Rights Commission, an Equality Commission, and established an expectation for Northern Ireland to adhere by standards outlined in the European Convention on Human Rights (Lundy and McGovern 2001). Community-building initiatives such as *Re-imagining Communities*, which uses public art to “tackle sectarianism,” and the *Consultative Group on the Past*, which was commissioned to recommend reconciliation strategies, were also established to foster amity.

The signing of the GFA mustered broad support with 71.12% of Northern Ireland voters in favor of ending the violence, but the peace process was unable to garner continued consensus among the citizens of Northern Ireland regarding cross-community integration (BBC History). Fifteen years after the GFA, the legacy of institutionalized difference divorces Protestants and Catholics in almost every aspect of daily life. Over 90 percent of schools segregate Protestant and Catholic children (Hansard 2012). Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland, is home to 99 “peace lines,” which are barriers as high as 25 feet, often made of iron, brick, and steel, that barricade one community from another (Belfast Interface Project). A 2012 survey found that while 27% of the general population of Northern Ireland “would like Peace Line(s) to come down now,” 49% of the general population would like the barriers to come down at some time in the future *but not now* (Byrne, Heenan, Robinson 2012: 20). Meanwhile, “41% of Protestants compared to 10% of Catholics believe that without the peace wall their community would disappear” (Byrne, Heenan, Robinson 2012: 29). While most of the violence came to an end with the GFA, animosity remains characteristic of an unsatisfactory peace.

Ethnic Boundary Maintenance

Following Barth, “the ethnic boundary... defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (Barth 1969: 15). Barth shifts the focus from cultural practices associated with ethnic groups to the construction of difference between groups. According to Barth, the ethnic boundary results from a disparity in judgment and value assessment between groups. In Northern Ireland, differences between Unionists and Nationalists take on deeply moral connotations due to violent confrontations. Blame and absolution for a violent and discriminatory past are placed along the ethnic boundary.

Because there is no consensus as to the terms of a peaceful compromise, there remains little willingness to give up primacy over the state. The state and the resources it controls are still at stake, as “the state...is not simply an arena or an instrument of a particular class or ethnic group...the state is itself the greatest prize and resource, over which groups engage in a continuing struggle” (Brass 1985: 29). GFA initiatives introduced concessions beyond what Unionists and Nationalists deem acceptable and access to a range of resources continues to be designated along the ethnic boundary, incentivizing ethnic divisions.

This lack of consensus regarding governance and the distribution of resources and opportunities maintains the ethnic boundary (Wimmer 2008b). Without “overlapping interests,” Unionists and Nationalists have little incentive to converge strategies of boundary making that would promote an inclusive Northern Ireland (Wimmer 2008b: 1008). Wimmer explains that nation building fails when “nation building strategies [are] not supported by the population at large, who refused to identify with the imagined community of the nation” (2008a: 1033). Without consensus, the ethnic boundary remains a vehicle through which political entrepreneurs can advocate on behalf of their ethnic group for disparate ethnic interests.

Nation building after the GFA, “transform[ed] the institutional structure, which in turn provide[d] incentives to pursue new strategies of boundary making while letting go of old ones” (Wimmer 2008b: 1005). Ethnic groups in Northern Ireland have agreed to “let go of” the use of violence, which was delegitimized by the GFA. This shift introduced new opportunities for boundary maintenance. In the post-GFA context, Unionists and Nationalists are competing for the construction of one sectarian past that can legitimate their ethnic claim to Northern Ireland.

Rhetoric, symbols, and other means of non-violent expression have taken on a more central role as salient nation building strategies in place of violence. Homi Bhabha writes,

“Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye” (1990: 1). Bhabha explains that the narrative construction of a national past finds a strategic balance in the symbiotic relationship of collective remembering and forgetting: “Being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it and, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification” (Bhabha 1990: 311). Renan says, “Forgetting... is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation...(Renan 1990/1882: 11). Regarding the massacres of the past that threaten to obstruct nation formation if remembered, Renan writes, “It is good for everyone to know how to forget” (1990/1882: 16). The nation’s ability to balance aspects of the past that are collectively remembered and forgotten is necessary for the creation of a shared national narrative.

In addition to actively remembering and forgetting the past, political entrepreneurs also rely on the past to anchor contemporary claims of ethnic and national legitimacy. Smith considers the link between ethnic groups and nations. He writes, “the myth of a common and unique origin in time and place... is essential for the sense of ethnic community, since it marks the foundation point of the group’s history...” (Smith 1981: 66). Interpreting the past, particularly the foundation point that Smith refers to, can be used to expand or contract the parameters of an ethnic group. Eriksen asks, “How many generations should one feel compelled to go back in order to find a starting point for one’s present ethnic identity?” (p. 69). The point of demarcation that creates the parameters of an ethnic group is a social construction.

When the past is uncontested, or contestation is limited, collective memories provide legitimacy in the present. Many post-conflict regions characterized by a contested past have relied on truth and reconciliation commissions to settle the past, establish blame, and in the process, provide at least a modicum of justice. But without such commissions in Northern

Ireland, and without an official and accepted construction of the past that assess blame and absolution, local political entrepreneurs continue to compete for the legitimized construction of past events. An emphasis on the ethnic boundary reiterates adversarial constructions of the past. Speaking specifically about Northern Ireland after the signing of the GFA, Cochrane writes, “one person will use *their* history to defend *their* community against *the other...*” (2013: 2). In Northern Ireland, two opposing national narratives exist in one state and the local past, neither Unionist nor Nationalist, can provide unquestioned legitimacy for either ethnic group.

In concrete terms, Nationalists refuse to allow Unionists the privilege of forgetting police brutality and state sponsored violence that gave Protestants hegemonic control over Catholics. Nationalists hold Protestants accountable for Catholic suffering by actively remembering Bloody Sunday and the hunger strikers (Conway 2009). They anchor their legitimate claim to the land as an indigenous population that was exploited by the British colonizers (Geoghegan 2008). Meanwhile, Unionists refuse to forget the use of non-state actors and paramilitary force that made terrorism synonymous with the IRA (Novosel 2013). On the contrary, Unionists remember Protestant experiences of fear and the threat to the British state and, through their remembering, hold Nationalists accountable for the past.

The socially constructed past creates a *vertical* lineage to the present. But, because that vertical lineage is too contested to provide unquestioned legitimacy, Unionists and Nationalists turn to a *horizontal* strategy of boundary maintenance to supplement vertical ones. Unionists and Nationalists express international solidarity with Israelis or Palestinians, respectively, reaching *sideways*, not just *backwards*, to reinforce local struggles with international nation building narratives and symbols. I call this process *borrowed legitimacy*. Borrowed legitimacy is the process by which ethnic groups strategically adopt outside collective memories and narratives

associated with an unrelated population to universalize and thereby justify local politicized narratives.

Throughout the urban landscape, in murals, flags, posters, graffiti, and in political and artistic speech, Unionists and Nationalists reinforce ethnic values and judgments. These expressions of solidarity appear within as a subset of “technologies of memory,” which are collective memories that are “embodied in genre such as films, books...and the like...that give a future...to the past by allowing it to be transmitted from one generation to the next” (Conway 2009: 309). I refer to expressions of international solidarity that are intended to invoke ethnic collective memories as *technologies of borrowed legitimacy*. Unionists and Nationalists use technologies of borrowed legitimacy in a globally connected world to emphasize narratives of victimization and triumph adopted from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Experiences associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not just local histories, are actively “remembered” in order to reinforce the ethnic boundary and re-build the nation.

Establishing a Connection: Why Rely on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?

A framework of shared commonalities between the Israeli-Palestinian and Northern Ireland conflicts facilitates borrowed legitimacy. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not holistically adopted, but is instead used to reinforce existing ethnic narrative constructions of the Northern Irish past. The Northern Irish past is the scaffolding upon which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is “remembered.” The first point of comparison between the conflicts is rooted in a settler-colonial foundation under British rule. The second major commonality is territorial partition—the partition of Ireland in 1920 and the UN-mandated but failed partition of Palestine in 1947. Lastly, violent inter-communal struggles lead to parallel debates over the distinction between what constitutes a liberation struggle versus what constitutes terrorist activity.

Politicians and intellectuals were the first to invoke the Israeli-Palestinian comparison by remarking upon the settler-colonial similarity, going back to the years when Britain facilitated the emerging Jewish state. The first governor of Jerusalem, Sir Ronald Storrs, alluded to the similarities between British partition of Ireland and the role of the British Mandate in the creation of the state of Israel. In his memoirs, Storrs wrote, a “Jewish homeland... will form for England ‘a little loyal Jewish Ulster’ in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism” (Storrs 1937: 364). Noting British efforts in the colonization of Palestine, Irish university lecturer Owen Sheehy Skeffington stated in 1936 that, “the Arabs are fighting for their liberty against British Imperialism which is using the Zionist movement as a willing instrument” (Miller 2005: 8). For Skeffington, as for others who would later make a Nationalist-Palestinian connection, British involvement in both conflicts yielded a common adversary.

The partition of Ireland fueled Nationalist-Palestinian sympathies. In 1948, the Irish Minister of External Affairs was asked to “grant official recognition of the State of Israel and its provisional government” (Miller 2005: 5). Ireland granted de facto recognition of Israel in 1949 but avoided de jure recognition until 1963. Miller writes, “one must view this negative Irish attitude towards the partition of Palestine in terms of Irish identification with Palestinian Arabs who were (at least in the Irish perception) forcibly partitioned” (2005: 7). Indeed, much of Ireland’s resistance to grant Israel recognition was rooted in its experience with British imperialism and the partition of their own state.

During the Troubles, key Nationalist actors spearheaded pro-Palestinian solidarity in the late 1970s and broader sympathy developed after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon (Rolston 2009). Experiences of an oppressive state regime and the tactics employed to resist colonial domination strengthened ties between Nationalists and the Palestinian cause. In the 1970s,

members of the Provisional IRA engaged in joint training sessions with Al Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (Rolston 2009). Israeli intelligence assisted the U.K. in thwarting efforts to import arms into Northern Ireland. In the 1970s and 1980s, relationships between the Irish National Liberation Army and the PLO led to the bombing of a NATO-linked radar station in County Cork and more joint training efforts (Rolston 2009).

Strategies of non-violent resistance also create a connection between Nationalists and Palestinians. One example revolves around the efforts of Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Nobel Peace Prize winner and co-founder, with Betty Williams, of a grassroots peace movement that brought together 35,000 people to petitioned for peace between Republican and Loyalist factions (Hopkins 2000). Corrigan Maguire is a vocal supporter of Palestinian rights. In 2010, Corrigan Maguire and several others boarded the *MV Rachel Corrie* to deliver humanitarian aid and break the Israeli blockade on Gaza. Both Corrigan Maguire and Williams are also supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israeli goods (official BDS site).

Vocal Unionist support for Israel was established in response to Nationalists' pro-Palestinian position after the second *Intifada* (Palestinian uprising) in 2002 (Hill and White 2008). But, Unionists rallied with Israelis against terrorism throughout the Troubles, curiously Loyalist paramilitary groups were not a part of the anti-terrorism narrative. The experience of violence perpetrated by non-state actors and the continued fear of future attacks affirmed and justified the state's use of force. Hill and White explain that "loyalists perceive themselves to be involved in a struggle that pits a legitimate state—Northern Ireland—against those who wish to bring about its dissolution, and who have been ready to resort to terrorism to achieve this, so Israel finds itself... in a similar position" (2008: 36). An excerpt that appeared in the *Belfast Telegraph* (2002) explicitly intertwines the Unionist and Israeli experiences; it reads, "Israelis

are fighting the allies of the IRA” (Hill and White 2008: 36). The opposition to terrorism not only delegitimizes non-state actors’ use of violent resistance but also affirms the sovereignty of the state and the state’s legitimate means to impose violence.

As it currently stands in Northern Ireland, community members pervasively adopt the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to varying degrees, and allegiances are distinctly allocated along the ethnic boundary. Both Unionists and Nationalists compete for legitimacy by delegitimizing the adversary’s claims and emphasizing the universality of their respective ethnic truths. The Unionist community adopts the Israeli struggle to emphasize the importance of state sovereignty, security, and the threat of terrorism to the nation-state. Some Unionists also draw parallels to the Israeli settlement narrative by propagating the story of the Protestant settler that cultivated a barren land by the grace of God (Miller 2005). Meanwhile, the Palestinian struggle resonates with the Nationalist community and highlights shared experiences of colonization, state sponsored violence, and international human rights and humanitarian expectations. The experience of British imperialism and shared tactics of resistance to occupation deepen Nationalists’ reliance on the Palestinian narrative.

Methods

Evidence for this study was gathered through participant observation, ethnography, and archival work. As a visiting scholar to Trinity College Dublin’s Irish School of Ecumenics, I lived in Belfast, Northern Ireland for six months in Unionist and Nationalist parts of the city. Traveling between Belfast and Derry/Londonderry, I observed murals, flags, graffiti, and posters invoking the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at personal residences, places of business, and on public buildings. While this article does not rely primarily on interview data, it is worth noting that I conducted informal unstructured interviews with over 30 activists, scholars, artists, and students.

I sought out vocal activists through purposive sampling and relied on snowball sampling to conduct further interviews. Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to three hours in length. I also relied on purposive sampling when I spoke to residents and business owners that displayed images invoking the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I engaged in participant observation in selective settings such as solidarity rallies and activist meetings, but also in everyday contexts through grocery shopping, jogging through neighborhoods, and riding public transportation. This allowed me to find references to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in unusual places like on benches, lightposts, and on the back of bathroom stalls. Through formal tourism, sometimes known as peace tourism, I documented oral histories in which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was invoked in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Additionally, data was collected at various NGO institutions, such as Corrymeela, including lectures given by ex-paramilitary members.

I followed up on these observations through on-line social media tools like blogs, Flickr, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. I also used a Twitter service provided by nearbytweets.com, which allows users to search Twitter by location and keyword. I was able to find unpublished expressions of solidarity originating from Northern Ireland and not readily available through mainstream search engines like Google. These and other online sources also allowed me to trace ongoing changes in visual content, like flags and murals, which are no longer on display. I collected relevant data available between April 2011- September 2014.

Finally, I conducted a thematic analysis of all available texts discussing the case of Moyle, a city that initially voted to establish (and later repealed) a political partnership with Gaza City. The texts, 37 in all, included official city council minutes, a third party statement of support, newspaper archives, news websites, blogs, personal letters, personal webpages, partisan webpages, entertainment threads, and Facebook posts from March of 2011 to July of 2014.

Northern Irish, Irish, or British constituencies produced most of these websites, though a couple texts originated on Palestinian or Jewish websites.

As a participant observer, my own ethnic background allowed me privileged access and provided important insight. I was introduced with pride to a neighbor in West Belfast as “a Palestinian refugee,” despite being American. When inquiring about the Black Taxi Tours, a guided political tour through Belfast, the booking agent exclaimed, “She’s Palestinian” over the phone and promised to get me “the best tour guide.” On one occasion, asking for directions led me to explain that I was on my way to hear Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, a known political activist, speak about the Irish hunger strikers. The man I was speaking with hailed me a cab and handed me 20 pounds sterling after learning about my Palestinian heritage. He said, “I might not be to help the people of Gaza, but at least I can do this for you.” In other contexts, I was encouraged to hide my ethnicity. “If anyone stops you, just tell them you’re Jewish,” one woman advised when she learned I would be jogging in North Belfast as tensions escalated around the July 12 parades. Note that even the suggestion that I should misrepresent myself as Jewish hints at a gravitation towards the dichotomy of ethnic identities because I could have easily identified as an American.

Technologies of Borrowed Legitimacy

Existing constructions of Unionist and Nationalist pasts facilitate comparisons to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that fortify local collective memories. Four themes emerge in contemporary 2014. First, Unionists and Nationalists fly Israeli or Palestinian flags to lay claim to the land and demarcate ethnic neighborhoods. Second, through the use of murals, Nationalist communities depict the Palestinian experience of state sponsored violence and resistance to that violence. Third, political entrepreneurs employ rhetoric from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to

construct innocence—the focus is often placed on either victims of terrorism or those who are in need of humanitarian aid. Finally, both groups, but mainly Nationalists, rely on transnational strategies such as boycott to engage the power of supranational support and international human rights expectations. These expressions of solidarity, and the technologies through which they are presented, overlap often.

Demarcating Neighborhoods and Claiming the Land:

Flags demarcate communities, declare sectarian loyalties, and broadcast ownership of the land. Along with the Irish tricolor, the Unionist banner, and the British flag, Israeli and Palestinian flags can also be spotted throughout Northern Ireland. The Republican newspaper *Phoblacht/Republican News* reported (2002): “Nationalist areas in the Six Counties have taken to flying the Palestinian flag alongside the Tricolour in solidarity with our oppressed brothers and sisters who are bravely holding out against the siege by the Israelis. Loyalists have retaliated by flying the Israeli Star of David flag” (Hill and White 2008: 33). Popular Unionist support for the Israeli experience has been largely in reaction to historically Nationalist support for Palestine. Hill and White (2008) claim that Israeli support became visually prevalent in 2002 during the second *Intifada* when Unionists began to fly Israeli flags and paint their curbs Israeli colors.

On several occasions, the Palestinian flag was burned as part of an annual Protestant cultural affair. On the 12th of July, Unionists take to the streets of Northern Ireland to celebrate their cultural history. The event is rooted in the victory of King William of Orange over Catholic King James in the Battle of the Boyne. As communities prepare for the Twelfth, they build massive bonfires. Some Unionists burn Irish national symbols including the Irish tricolor, images of Nationalist leaders, and the papal flag. On some occasions, the Palestinian flag is also burned along side other Nationalist symbols, but this is not a mainstream practice.

In a creative show of support, one flag that appears in Unionist areas combines the Israeli flag and the *red hand of Ulster*, the oldest symbol of Unionism (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tetreault 2003). The mythology behind the red hand of Ulster speaks to the shared settler narrative. As legend has it, two chieftains competed for possession of Ulster; the land would be given to the man who touched it first. When the chiefs neared the island by sea, one of them cut his hand off and threw it ashore, making him the first to touch land and, consequently, become king (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tetreault 2003). Some Unionists have superimposed the Star of David onto the Unionist flag. The red hand of Ulster is centered inside the Star of David and the British crown hovers above the two symbols creating a forceful narrative of international breadth.

Images of State Sponsored Violence and Resistance:

Nationalist areas commonly feature murals that criticize state-sponsored violence, depict Palestinian suffering, and express support for shared tactics of resistance. Murals are “not merely inanimate objects in space, but a dynamic element in the political process” (Rolston 2010: 3). The most recognized Nationalist mural in Derry/Londonderry, a city so politicized that even its name denotes sectarian alliances, reads “You are Now Entering Free Derry.” The emblematic mural commemorates Irish civil rights in bold black letters against a white wall. This mural was reimagined several times in support of the Palestinian struggle to reflect multiple conflicts between Gaza and Israel throughout the years. In 2005, the white background of the Free Derry mural was replaced with a Palestinian flag. The pro-Nationalist message remained the same, visually intertwining the Irish and Palestinian struggles. In 2009, the Free Derry mural read, “You are now Entering Free Gaza.” A drawing of an Israeli jet dropping bombs on a baby carriage was included to represent the killing of children in the densely populated area of Gaza. The 2014 war with Gaza was also broadcast on the Free Derry mural. “End Genocide in Gaza”

appeared in red next to a partial drawing of a Palestinian face with bloody tears. The Free Derry mural continues to be a particularly meaningful site used to express solidarity with the Palestinians because it commemorates Nationalist resistance and the start of the Troubles. Invoking the Palestinian struggle on the Free Derry mural reignites Nationalist memories by keeping the Nationalist past and shared struggle against state violence viscerally pertinent.

The most famous Nationalist murals run along a stretch of West Belfast's Falls Road. These images likely garner the most views due to their central location and continued maintenance and re-creation. The Nationalist-Palestinian connection is cultivated through shared narratives of resistance to state violence. A 2012 mural illustrated the use of administrative detention, also known as arrest without trial. The image revealed two hands reaching through the barred windows of separate jail cells. The arm to the left was clothed in the Irish tricolor and the sleeve on the right was fashioned from a Palestinian flag. The Irish and Palestinian figures reached toward one another and interlocked fingers. The Arabic word for solidarity was written above the phrase "Solidarity P.O.W.s."

Artists have created, enhanced, and re-created Palestinian murals that express support for Palestinians while bolstering Nationalist political sentiments. One image, painted in 2008 and later updated in 2009, depicted two Palestinian children. The initial image showed a young boy sitting on his knees with his back to the viewer. A young girl with shoulder-length black hair faced passersby; she clasped a key in her hand that symbolized Palestinian refugees' right to return. The boy looked out onto the horizon and guided the viewers' eyes to a developed Israeli metropolis. A drawing of the "Wall," a barrier similar to the peace-lines in Northern Ireland that was built by Israel to separate the West Bank from the Israeli state, quickly invited the viewers' attention. The image was largely barren and the subjects were painted in light, reminiscent, colors

creating a sense of nostalgia. It read: “Free Palestine from 60 years of *Nakba!*,” which is an Arabic term that refers to the exodus of 700,000 Palestinians in 1948. Along the Wall, “We Will Return!” was painted in white. A description conveying the Palestinian exodus appeared at the bottom of the image: “Palestinians were ethnically cleansed...Palestinian villages were depopulated... refugees are illegally denied their right to return.” This original image told the story of Palestinian refugees living in the West Bank, unable to return to pre-1948 areas.

As the number of Palestinian victims grew due to the Israeli Cast Lead Operation in Gaza in 2009, the mural took a more outraged stance against Israel and provided a new, updated, message to its Nationalist audience. No longer primarily nostalgic, the new caption read: “End this Barbarian Israeli Aggression!” Written in red, not white as the text appeared earlier, “This is a war crime!” replaced, “We Will Return!” As the death count continued to rise in Gaza, so did a tally on the mural. “390+ Slaughtered” became “700+ Slaughtered” and then “1300+ Slaughtered.” The young girl in the mural held a sign that read, “Zionist New Year message to the world. Happy War. Christmas is Over,” alluding to the December timing of the war. The updated painting put keys in both children’s hands—symbols of the refugee right to return. This emphasis on homeland may be reminiscent of support for a unified Ireland or an Irish homeland.

Another re-created mural that initially criticized the US-led and British-supported invasion of Iraq was later updated with a new message condemning US and British support for the Israeli attack on Gaza in 2009. The original image read, “America’s Greatest Failure,” with a depiction of President George W. Bush against the backdrop of an American flag. His hand clutched a wad of cash and dollar signs emanated around his head. In his mouth was a siphon that extended to another mural of a demolished Iraqi landscape. A tattered American flag waved over the Iraqi rubble, prominently displayed hovering above skeletal remains as lyrics from the

Star-Spangled Banner ironically alluded to American greed and imperialism. A painting of a hook carried the siphon from Bush's mouth to an Iraqi oil well. It read, "British Support Hook." This embellishment was meant to recognize British involvement in the U.S. led war in Iraq.

The re-imagined mural built upon the relationship between the two original murals. The image of President Bush, representing American involvement in the Middle East, remained intact. In the second image, Iraq was transformed into Palestine, signaled by the Palestinian flag that waved in the place where the American flag originally stood. In the foreground were two civilians. One man carried another who was visibly wounded with blood stains on his upper body. The headline read: "US Support= Childrens Slaughter [sic]." The lyrics of the *Star Spangled Banner* were altered to emphasize Palestinian resilience against Israeli aggression: "Despite the rockets red glare, Bombs bursiting in air... *we are* proof through the night, that our flag *is* still there!!!—Free Palestine."

While some murals are used to convey Palestinian resilience, others paint Palestinians as destitute victims. A 2007 mural of an armed Israeli soldier with his back to the viewer read, "Palestine... The largest concentration camp in the world!!! 3.3 million innocent people tortured, denied their...freedom!" The soldier in the image was in a civilian neighborhood pointing his gun at an aged Palestinian woman. An Arabic translation of a Republican slogan read, "Our Day Will Come." On either side of the mural appeared the peace/victory hand signal. The hand to the left was drawn with a Palestinian flag in the background while the hand to the right was drawn against an Irish tricolor. This image reminded the Nationalist community of their experiences with the British army and Unionist police force, which resulted in control over movement, administrative detention, and civilian casualties.

The war between Israel and Gaza in the summer of 2014, termed Protective Edge Operation by Israel, led to an increase in the number of murals in support of the Palestinians. One mural on the Falls Road was inspired by Nick Ut's Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of young Vietnamese villagers fleeing a napalm bombing entitled "The Terror of War" (1972). Adopted to depict the conflict in Gaza, the mural showed a young girl in a bloodstained hijab running from a fiery background with other confused and distorted children as Israeli soldiers gleefully chased them. One boy's shirt read, "Where is the world?" and the mural called for the, "Immediate expulsion of all Israeli diplomats from *Éire*," the modern Gaelic word for Ireland. The Gael Force Art also produced a series of Palestinian solidarity murals that depicted the following scenes: the targeted bombing of a Gazan child holding a toy stuffed animal, the image of a young Palestinian man throwing a rock at an Israeli tank, a fist painted with the colors of the Palestinian flag, and a painting of the map of Palestine that illustrated the loss or confiscation of land over time. One mural in the series showed a Palestinian child wearing a kafia, the traditional Palestinian scarf, holding up a peace/victory sign. The mural read, "Its [sic] not those that can inflict the most but those that can suffer the most who will conquer." Through a recognition of Palestinian suffering, Nationalists can remember and reignite their own suffering.

Framing Innocence: Victims of Terrorism and Victims in Need of Humanitarian Aid

Jonathan Bell, Member of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly and representative of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), began a 2010 speech to the Assembly with an expression of support for Israel: "I rise to bring my party's solidarity with the state of Israel. This is a state that has been under systematic terrorist attack since its inception" (Democratic Unionist Party, Youtube Channel). Bell described Hamas as terrorist aggressors dedicated to the dissolution of Israel and the targeting of Israeli children in direct comparison to a statement

about Israel's humanitarian goals. Referencing the Gaza flotilla incident, Bell asked, "Is it not the reality that Israel provided a way forward whereby any humanitarian aid could come in?" Bell's proclamation assigned moral legitimacy to the state of Israel by depicting Israelis as innocent children, victims of terrorism, and willing humanitarians.

Bell continued: "The hypocrisy will not be lost on us, that those criticizing Israel for humanitarian issues, these same people who were quite happy to take a mother of ten, to strip her, to torture her, to murder her... and these are the people who are telling us about humanitarian aid." His accusations call into question Gerry Adams, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and Sinn Féin leader in the Nationalist movement at the time, who was accused of murdering a 37-year-old widow named Jean McConville. In this quote, Bell made an explicit link between Palestinian and Irish terrorists, claiming that Nationalist assessments of Israeli behavior cannot be trusted.

When Adams responded to the allegations, the leader of the House asked that the discussion stay "on topic." However, for Bell, the topic of terrorism remained salient because the terrorist actors (Hamas, Palestinians, Gerry Adams, and IRA members) were made interchangeable. The Israeli-Palestinian topic allowed Bell to present controversial local politics in Assembly through thinly veiled analogies. When Bell made the assessment that Israel has a right to defend itself against Palestinian terrorists, he was also engaging Unionist collective memories, claiming that Ulster, too, had the right to defend itself against Irish terrorism.

The terrorist label invites justifications of state-sponsored violence. Jim Allister, MLA and a representative of the Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV), intertwined the Unionist-Israeli experiences when he claimed that Sinn Féin and the IRA were apologists for Palestinian terrorists. In a 2009 posting, Allister wrote, "I greatly admire the tenacity and courage of Israel in

defending its people from relentless rocket attacks and in hunting down the Hamas...” Allister interpreted terrorism as the main obstacle to peace and, consequently, justified Israel’s use of violence. “...The raw truth is that if Hamas laid down its arms there could be peace, but if Israel laid down its arms it would be annihilated” (official TUV website). Similar endorsements of state-sponsored violence, particularly Israeli violence, appeared throughout Unionist political rhetoric. A piece of graffiti in a Unionist area read, “Go on Sharon, K.A.T” (Kill All Taigs), which is derogatory slang for Catholics (Hill and White 2008: 37). In this example, Sharon and violence against Catholics were explicitly weaved together to show support for Israel and a violent means of state-sponsored control. Another reference in the *Belfast Telegraph* (2002) read, “The Loyalists back the Israelis because they envy the way in which they [the Israelis] strike at Palestinian terrorist bases. There are [those] in Northern Ireland who believe that the Government should have ‘rooted out’ the IRA, even if it meant sending... planes to bomb Republican strongholds” (Hill and White 2008: 36). Because defending the state against terrorism has become a viable justification for violence, Unionists benefit from reiterating the threat of Palestinian terrorism in the Israeli case and drawing comparisons to their own experiences with paramilitary groups.

A particularly clear example that illustrates the framing of innocence appears explicitly throughout the impassioned debate regarding the Moyle district council’s (MDC) decision to twin with Gaza, and the subsequent repeal of that decision. Located in county Antrim, MDC represents a population of approximately 17,000 people (official MDC website). The MDC case is particularly useful because it presents a debate in which Unionists and Nationalists directly responded to premises posed by the oppositional party regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Moyle case revolved around two political actors. Councillor P. McShane (Independent and

Irish-Identifying) advocated from the Palestinians while Councillor McIlroy (DUP) supported Israelis. In 2011, P. McShane proposed twinning between Moyle and Gaza City in a plan that would create a beachfront project in Palestine. He explained, “links could be set up between schools from both areas and... important specialist knowledge could be shared” (MDC minutes Dec. 13, 2010). P. McShane reiterated that support for Gaza City was a humanitarian project, requiring minimal costs (MDC minutes March. 28, 2011). The debate that led to the twinning was heated and voting patterns indicated a divide along sectarian lines. Still, twinning passed on March 28, 2011.

The Twinning Agreement read, “...In the pursuit of the ideas of peace, solidarity and friendship... between the Palestinian people and the Irish people...WE solemnly DECLARE on behalf of our citizens the willingness to enhance friendship ties between the people of Moyle and Gaza...” Note that the Twinning Agreement referred to the citizens of Moyle as “the Irish people,” in direct disregard for the fact that many of Moyle’s constituents did not identify as Irish. After the twinning agreement passed, the mayor of Gaza, Rafiq Mckky, responded with appreciation: “This agreement is an expression of existing solidarity and friendship between our two communities...and will show our people that they are not forgotten under this brutal, inhuman siege and closure” (July 31, 2011). The vote to twin with Gaza garnered attention throughout Northern Ireland, but Unionist members were unhappy with the agreement.

Unionists negated the need for humanitarian aid by using rhetoric that emphasized Hamas over the Palestinian people and explicitly defined Palestinian authorities as terrorists. In order to garner support that would overturn the motion, opponents of twinning referenced the Terrorist Asset Freezing Act 2010. Under EU regulations, the city of Moyle could have been held liable for cultivating relations with Hamas. Some Unionists insisted that Nationalists’ humanitarian

intentions were disingenuous and politically motivated. Opponents of twinning also suggested that creating links to Gaza City would negatively affect tourism, which is a main source of revenue in the region. These two arguments against the twinning proposal were enough to repealed the act on March 12, 2012. Still, P. McShane continued to lead collaborative efforts through a program called *Antrim to Gaza*.

Supranational Strategies: Boycott and Human Rights

While violent resistance is usually exerted against state actors, non-violent resistance can rely on supranational mechanisms to subvert state control. The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement has garnered support among many citizens in Northern Ireland and around the world by engaging in economically consequential global campaigns. While this is not a paper about the International Solidarity Movement in support of Palestine, such expressions of support bolster the maintenance of the ethnic boundary between Unionists and Nationalists.

In 2006, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) established Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPP), which was founded by the Northern Ireland Committee. In 2007, ICTU pledged to “actively and vigorously promote” the boycott of all companies that profit in or from the occupation of Palestine (official ICTU website). The ICTU reinforced support for Palestinians in 2009 when it approved of a motion to allocate time for officials that would promote BDS. In 2011, ICTU committed to holding divestment seminars and developing civil society involvement. The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA), Northern Ireland’s largest trade union with approximately 46,000 members, also established an “Israel/Palestine global solidarity committee” in 2009 to support medical aid and relief programs in Palestine (official NIPSA website).

In opposition to ICTU and NIPSA, a group known as the Northern Ireland Friends of Israel (NIFI) expressed disapproval of the BDS movement. Established in 2009, NIFI is a much smaller force but claims that over 6,500 people have attended their events. To dissuade BDS supporters, NIFI painted the BDS movement as an extremist initiative that threatened to increase terrorism. NIFI wrote, “The Boycott is intended to demoralise, weaken and isolate the one western-style democracy in the Middle East. Therefore it will strengthen those who wish to destroy Israel...” (official NIFI website). NIFI explicitly exclaimed that support for the BDS movement leads to increased intolerance in Northern Ireland.

In practice, boycotts take form at the local level in places like grocery stores. Jaffa Cakes, a popular biscuit in the UK and Ireland, have become a subject of the boycott controversy in which political entrepreneurs ascribe the ethnic divide onto this chocolaty dessert. The snack has been rumored to be the subject of a simultaneous *boycott* and *buycott*. Buycott is the act of patronizing goods or services to offer political support for what these products represent; essentially, a buycott is the opposite of a boycott. Jaffa Cakes are rumored to have gotten their name from the Israeli city of Jaffa, a suggestion that the McVitie parent company denied in correspondence with the author. Jaffa Cakes consist of three layers: a sponge base, a layer of orange flavored jelly, and a coating of chocolate. The orange center has become associated with the William of Orange and the Orange Order, representing Unionist culture. The Israeli-Unionist connection has led some Unionist supporters to buycott Jaffa Cakes to show their support for Israel and Unionist culture. Meanwhile, and to a larger extent, some members of the Nationalist community have boycotted Jaffa Cakes. The extent of this boycott/buycott is not clear, although the practice is not widespread. Still, the term *jaffa* is referenced, and its use by police officials

outlawed along with a series of other slurs against Protestants including “huns, black, and prods,” in a 2008 police pamphlet entitled *The Guide to Appropriate Language* (BBC News).

Boycotts, like broader human rights initiatives, enlist the support of international actors, reaching beyond state institutions. Unionists tend to rely on the established parameters of the legal system that designate the rights of citizens in a sovereign state, which is not surprising considering the breadth of influence exercised by the UK. These parameters may also engage international resources, but tend to remain within the broader nation-state system. Nationalists, however, are more likely to appeal to international human rights narratives and the power of the globalized witness.

During the Troubles, Irish-identifying prisoners staged a series of demonstrations evoking human rights and calling upon the symbolic global witness to recognize prisoner mistreatment (Aretxaga 1995). The prisoners organized to protest the British government’s repeal of Special Category Status, or prisoner of war status that gave prisoners more privileges under the Geneva Convention. Led by Bobby Sands, these demonstrations culminated in the hunger strike of 1981 and the consequential death of ten hunger strikers. In the spring of 2012, approximately 2,000 Palestinians prisoners went on hunger strike for improved detention conditions, access to education, and an end to solitary confinement and administrative detention (Sherwood 2012). The Palestinian hunger strike, led by Khader Adnan, reverberated throughout the Nationalist community and comparison between Adnan and Sands ensued. The *Independent* featured an article entitled, “Khader Adnan: The West Bank’s Bobby Sands.” Adnan was also commemorated in a mural on the Falls Road along with a female hunger striker named Hanna Shalabi. The mural read, “4,400 Palestinian Political Prisoners. 310 Administrative Detention.”

Tommy McKearney, a former hunger striker and member of the IRA, relied on the international community when he made a plea on behalf of Adnan and beseeched “the world” to intervene. He drew comparisons between Irish and Palestinian hunger strikes: “Thirty-two years ago I was on hunger strike for 53 days in the H Blocks. Today Khader Adnan will be 54 days on hunger strike. The world must intervene to save this man’s life in the name of humanity...to save this man and save dignity and humanity in the world” (Gaza TV News, Youtube Channel). McKearney’s genuine support for Adnan and Palestinians frames the Irish and Palestinian causes as one anti-colonial struggle in the name of humanity.

Discussion: Building Beyond Solidarity

Borrowed legitimacy enacts at least four divisive tactics manifested through expressions of international solidarity. The first tactic includes an explicit vilification of the international “other,” which is applied, by proxy, to vilify the local “other.” Second, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is discriminately adopted piecemeal to reinforce preexisting sectarian constructions of the past, not to provide a holistic, and potentially more nuanced, account of the conflict. Third, expressions of solidarity are often insular and intended for an intra-community or inter-community audience, not necessarily for an international one. And finally, when expressions of solidarity no longer contribute to the local narrative, support for Israelis and Palestinians seems to waver in some incidences. These tactics are not present in every technology of legitimacy. Their prevalence, however, reinforces the divisive utility of borrowed legitimacy.

First, expressions of solidarity adopt both an ally and an adversary by engaging both sides of the ethnic boundary between Israelis and Palestinians. Expressions of solidarity that humanize either Israelis or Palestinians are also intended to hold the opposing group accountable for unjustifiable acts of violence. In other words, Israelis are humanized as the victims of

terrorist attacks and, concurrently, Palestinians are maligned as terrorists with little to no rhetorical distinction made between Hamas, Islamic jihad, and the Palestinian people. The most radical example appears in the burning of Palestinian flags in Unionist areas the night before the Twelfth. This anti-Palestinian expression does not include any explicitly positive expression of solidarity with Israel at all. Instead, support for Israel is inferred along the ethnic boundary when the Palestinian flag is burned.

Vice versa, the entire ethnic boundary is also emphasized when Palestinian humanity is depicted in direct juxtaposition to the Israeli state, with little attention being paid to the “cultural stuff” inside the Palestinian “organizational vessel” (Barth 1969). As either victims or survivors, Palestinian subjects endure or resist Israeli oppression and Israel is held accountable in most expressions of pro-Palestinian solidarity. There are, however, few examples that provide a varied or differently nuanced representation of the Palestinian subject. For example, a mural in Derry/Londonderry depicts a portrait of Palestinian woman; the Palestinian flag is woven into her windblown hair. There is no mention of Israel in this mural. Most pro-Palestinian expressions of solidarity, however, note Israeli misconduct. In some cases, support for Palestine takes on an exclusively anti-Israeli message. Councillor P. McShane’s Instagram page, a social media application created for sharing images, includes an image of a figure recycling a swastika against the an Israeli flag background. The graphic uses “hashtags,” a social media categorizing mechanism popularized by Twitter, to clearly indicate the sentiment that Israel is recycling Nazism with the maltreatment of Palestinians: “#nazi,” “#Israel,” and “#fascist.” Borrowed legitimacy can be seen in expressions of solidarity that not only adopt an ally, but also designate an adversary.

Secondly, borrowed legitimacy relies mainly on aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, taken piecemeal, that invoke local ethnic debates and reinforce Unionist or Nationalist pasts—the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not holistically adopted. There is little or no mention of Judaism or Islam, which could potentially derail purely sectarian expressions of solidarity. Especially in a population where the distinction between Protestant and Catholic is often used to excuse discriminatory behavior, the deliberate disregard for religious and cultural differences suggests that solidarity is strategically expressed. Even when religious beliefs are alluded to, like in the painting of hijab in murals that appear on the Falls Road, there is no articulation of difference. Again, the “cultural stuff” is neglected in favor of the utility of the ethnic boundary.

Third, technologies of borrowed legitimacy appear to be intended for a primarily Northern Irish audience, rather than an international one. Even when expressions of solidarity engage an international audience through humanitarian aid or boycotts, these efforts are refracted back to a local audience where they are advocated or scrutinized. Most predominantly, the use of flags, murals, graffiti, and posters is geographically limited to ethnic neighborhoods, therefore, limiting the span of their audience to local communities comprised of Protestants or Catholics.

Unlike in the United States where AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) or ADC (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee) may advocate for their ethnic minority populations, Northern Ireland has not reached a critical mass of ethnic minorities who may pursue ethnic minority interests. In a population of over 1.8 million people, Northern Ireland has a particularly small population of Arabs (274 people), Muslims (3,823 people), and Jews (335 people) (2011 Census). Though the Jewish community is small, it was established in the 1860s and endured the violence of the Troubles without pledging allegiance to Unionists or Nationalists. According to the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, “...many people in the Jewish

community in Belfast would much rather that loyalists did not appropriate symbols in this way” (2002, official website). Expressions of support for Israel and Palestine are led by Unionists and Nationalists and intended for Protestants and Catholics, not spearheaded by Northern Ireland’s own Jewish, Israeli, Muslim, Arab, or Palestinian populations.

Finally, when solidarity is disincentivized, borrowed legitimacy can be seen in the wavering support for Israelis and Palestinians. At one point, the Israeli flags came down when neo-Nazi groups offered their endorsement with a visit to Unionist neighborhoods. Guelke writes, “A visit by members of the BNP [British National Party] to a particular Loyalist neighborhood in Belfast was preceded by a removal of signs of support for Sharon on the assumption that they might upset the visitors” (2004: 171). Hill and White cite a newsheet from the 2002 Lisburn UDA (Ulster Defence Association) which reads, “...Some Loyalist areas have now refused to fly the Israeli flag because they feel a kind of kinship with, or sympathy for, advocates of extreme British nationalism such as the British National Party and Combat 18...” This behavior does not necessarily indicate that Unionists uphold the beliefs of extreme right British groups. It does suggest, however, that the Unionist cause could benefit from international support that promises to legitimize their ethnic interests.

Expressions of solidarity for Palestinians can likewise be overshadowed by other anti-imperialist or anti-colonial endorsements. The Gael Force Art (GFA) was quick to shift their energies from a focus on the Israel-Gaza war as the Scottish vote for independence neared in the summer of 2014. An instillation on the side of Black Mountain that initially read “Viva Palestine” in bold white letters was changed to “Yes Scotland” (GFA official Facebook page). The GFA’s Twitter page also showed a similar shift. From July 10th to August 4th, the GFA posted 82 Tweets in support of Gaza including, “There is no flag large enough to cover the

shame of killing innocent people.” From September 7th to the 14th, 54 Tweets voiced support for Scotland. The dates between these two streams expressed support for a united Ireland, criticism of the shooting of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and sympathy for the Yazidi refugee exodus from Iraq as a result of ISIS (a paramilitary named the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria).

The recognition of international conflicts appears throughout Nationalist areas as exemplified by the International Wall on the Falls Road. However, unlike the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, expressions of solidarity with disenfranchised groups such as those striving for independence in Scotland or Catalonia, those who suffered under South African apartheid, and abolitionists are not as pervasively adopted. It is the urgency of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, characterized by the conflict’s ongoing and violent state, that agitates Northern Ireland’s contested and violent past. Urgency brings the unsettled questions of the past to the forefront of the nation-building process, demanding answers.

In contrast, unlike Unionists and Nationalists, Israelis and Palestinians living in the midst of violent struggle have not adopted the Northern Ireland conflict to fortify the local ethnic boundary. Rare exceptions appear, like in graffiti that reads, “You Are Now Entering Free Dheisheh,” an explicit play off of the Derry/Londonderry mural, spray-painted on a concrete wall that encloses the Dheisheh refugee camp outside of Bethlehem (Author’s observations 2010). Israelis and Palestinians do not have much to gain from borrowed legitimacy because, without the implementation of a peace agreement, violence is still actively used as a legitimized means by state and non-state actors to advance ethnic agendas and maintain the ethnic boundary.

Unionists and Nationalists use the word solidarity to describe their support for either Israelis or Palestinians. International solidarity includes efforts to humanize, advocate for, provide humanitarian assistance to, and raise awareness of an international struggle on behalf of

an ethnic group. But collective displays of solidarity also serve a function beyond a heartfelt expression of support and influential transnational coalition building. The focus on borrowed legitimacy is not intended to disregard the material and symbolic contribution that Unionists and Nationalists offer Israelis and Palestinians. Especially in the case of Palestinians, who do not benefit from the support of a powerful state, international solidarity and the backing of Nationalist groups have offered significant assistance that would otherwise be unavailable. Through the international BDS movement, efforts to break the blockade in Gaza, humanitarian and medical aid, visits to Palestine, and daily acts recognizing the Palestinian struggle, Nationalists provide invaluable support. Israelis have also benefited from the financial and cultural support offered by grassroots organizations and state governments. While the Nationalist-Palestinian connection may be stronger, Unionist groups also maintain connections with Israeli citizens and provide a platform for the Israeli cause (Smith 2012). Borrowed legitimacy exists alongside international solidarity, not in its stead.

Conclusion:

Unionists and Nationalists reach *sideways*, not just *backwards*, through expressions of solidarity with Israelis and Palestinians in order to legitimize ethnic national narratives. In the post-GFA era, non-violent rhetorical and symbolic expressions have become more salient because the peace process has delegitimized violence. However, political entrepreneurs continue to strive for their respective ethnic communities through a process I call borrowed legitimacy. Borrowed legitimacy is the process by which ethnic groups strategically adopt outside “collective memories” and narratives associated with an unrelated population in order to “remember” and justify local politicized positions for the purpose of universalizing locally advocated beliefs.

Expressions of solidarity with Israelis and Palestinians are intended to reveal universal truths that validate one ethnic national narrative over the other. As opposed to local and international narratives, which are evidently positional, universal truths are ostensibly non-positional, non-sectarian, and non-ethnic. By creating Unionist-Israeli and Nationalist-Palestinian alliances, local ethnic groups construct sectarian versions of universal truths that leave the ethnic “other” outside the sphere of moral righteousness. The moral ambiguity surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has generated adversarial allegiances around the world, allows Unionists and Nationalists to advocate for opposing groups and simultaneously claim the moral high ground. Unlike in Lamont and Bail’s (2005) discussion of universalization in which some groups rely on solidarity to broaden ethnic categories under the umbrella of a greater humanity, borrowed legitimacy constructs the universal to differentiate between the morally righteous and those with an unjustifiable, and unrighteous, claim to the state.

In the case of Northern Ireland, the universal plays a divisive role. It is precisely because there is no global consensus as to who the victims and perpetrators are in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that Unionist and Nationalist can rely on strategies of borrowed legitimacy to reiterate their local claims to the state. Unlike in the case of other international struggles in which the global community has designated victims and perpetrators, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict allows Unionists and Nationalists to continue the debate over righteousness and legitimate claim to the state of Northern Ireland in the post GFA era.

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