

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: Queen's University, Belfast</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 24 - Anthropology and Development Studies</p>
<p>Title of case study: Displaying the Flag: Transforming Conflict in Northern Ireland</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>In Northern Ireland the display of symbols in public spaces has remained a highly contested and consistent cause of public disorder. The research outlined in this case study is a leading Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister Indicator for effective policies on community relations. Impact is evidenced through the research in five ways. It has (i) altered government policies; (ii) enhanced broader democratic participation in local government debates; (iii) increased conflict resolution opportunities as part of local peace-building schemes; (iv) informed United Nations' work on divided societies; and (v) facilitated mediation networks dedicated to changing the nature of public space. It has been carried out according to a government brief for the whole Northern Ireland population, thereby encompassing the maximum scope possible for impact within the legal jurisdiction of the state. The research has been transformative in understanding and tackling the extremely contested issue of how and when flags are used in public spaces in Northern Ireland and it has influenced United Nations' consultations on post-conflict policies.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Anthropological approaches to understanding rituals and symbols can make an important contribution to conflict transformation processes. In Northern Ireland, disputes over flags and parades were centre stage as severe violence erupted in the late 1960s. Identity conflicts have continued to be marked by public symbols. Originating in ethnographic research conducted by Dominic Bryan[1] before and after the 1998 Northern Ireland peace agreement, this case study examines the nature, distribution and effect of displays of political symbols, particularly flags, on the streets of Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Between 2002 and 2006, Bryan held an ESRC award (Grant 1) which explored how public symbols changed in the period after the signing of the 1998 Multi-Party Agreement between the UK and Irish governments. This research demonstrated how markers of public identity altered according to new social and political circumstances in a series of ethnographic research case studies detailing the use of (a) emblems and flags by public bodies; (b) contested spaces and emblems during St Patrick's Day; and (c) at civic/political events.</p> <p>The impact of this work led to a second period of research commissioned by the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland (OFMDFM) from 2006-2010 (Grant 2). Despite public awareness of political sensitivities around display, the research showed that 4,000 flags on average were still placed on the main roads of Northern Ireland every year. Research demonstrated that, on the one hand, socio-political transformations were taking place in new symbols for the Northern Ireland Assembly with a recognition of changing identities e.g. in the new badge for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) but that, on the other hand, contestation in certain areas around the public flying of flags, increased levels of conflict [2, 3, 4]. The research was graded 'good' by ESRC peer reviewers who commented that, 'the quality of analysis was generally excellent', 'generating new knowledge and insights that in turn are subject to rigorous social scientific analyses'. These research findings have been referred to in Government reports, discussed in 4.1 below, as key indicators of the changing nature of conflicts over symbols and space, first identified in the 1998 Multi-Party Agreement.</p> <p>This 2006-2010 (OFMDFM) research specifically analysed the demarcation of ethnic territory through displays of flags and emblems in public spaces. Bryan developed (a) a mechanism for surveying all the arterial routes in Northern Ireland over a 5 year period; (b) survey questions to test public attitudes annually; and (c) five ethnographic case studies to give more nuanced understandings of who puts flags up, when and why [5, 6]. The research evaluated the on-going effectiveness of the Government's <i>Shared Future</i> (2005) policy document and the multi-agency</p>

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Joint Protocol in Relation to Displays of Flags in Public Areas (2005) led by the PSNI.

The research [7] provided clear evidence of how public space was controlled using displays of flags, organised by young men with a relationship to paramilitary groups. It showed that Government policy had little impact on the numbers of flags displayed on main roads from 2006-2010; and that consistently over one-third of flags visible in July remain flying after September but that there had been some reduction in the display of paramilitary flags. The attitude surveys suggest that over 50% of people think that both the Union flags and the national flag of Ireland are put up on lampposts by paramilitaries and that this makes people less likely to use services and businesses in those areas. Importantly, the research showed that flying of flags on lampposts does not have widespread community support and that there is a commonly held sense of threat around the displays. Results from this research were confirmed by a more local level project carried out in Armagh City in 2012 funded by the Community Relations Council (CRC) (Grant 3).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1]. Bryan, D. 2000. *Orange Parades: Ritual, Tradition and Control*. London: Pluto Press.
- [2]. Bryan, D. and G. Gillespie (2005) *Transforming Conflict: Flags and Emblems*. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies.
- [3]. Bryan, D. and G. McIntosh (2005). 'Symbols: Sites of Creation and Contest in Northern Ireland' *SAIS Review of International Affairs* Vol. XXV, No.2 pp127-137.
- [4]. Bryan, D. and G. McIntosh 2007. 'Symbols and Identity in the 'New' Northern Ireland'. In P. Carmichael, C. Knox and R. Osborne (eds) *Devolution and Constitutional Change in Northern Ireland* Manchester: Manchester University Press. Pp. 125-137.
- [5]. Bryan, D. 2007 'Between the national and the civic: Flagging peace in, or a piece of, Northern Ireland'. In Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Richard Jenkins (eds) *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*. London: Routledge. Pp. 102-114.
- [6]. Bryan, D. and C. Stevenson 2009. 'Flagging Peace: Struggles Over Symbolic Landscape in the New Northern Ireland'. In Marc Howard Ross (ed) *Culture and Belonging in Divided Societies* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Pp.68-84.
- [7]. Project reports published in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 can be accessed at <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/equality/equalityresearch/research-publications/gr-pubs.htm>

Grants

1. ESRC no.L219252112, (2002-2006). £114,000. PI: Dr Dominic Bryan. 'Representing a new Northern Ireland: Sites of creation and contest in devolved governance'. Referees' Evaluation Report: Good.
2. Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, Northern Ireland (2006-2010). £160,000. PI: Dr Dominic Bryan. 'Flags and Emblems Survey'.
3. Community Relations Council/Armagh City and District Council (2012): £5,000. PI: Dr Dominic Bryan. 'Attitudes Survey on Flags in the City of Armagh'.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Contestation over displays of flags in public space has remained a key issue in public debate in Northern Ireland and is an on-going issue in peace-building. This research has provided the basis for the development of public policy; it has had a very high profile in public debates over the use of flags and emblems; it has been at the forefront of discussions between public agencies attempting to engage with symbolic contestation; it has been used by District councils and mediation groups in problem solving; and it is being used by the United Nations as an example of how to develop a strategy for understanding human rights and cultural contestation in divided societies.

4.1 Impacts on Government Policy:

The initial project policy report, *Transforming Conflict* (Grant 2) had its findings incorporated into the Government's *Shared Future* (2005: 19) policy. At the same time, the PSNI and Government departments developed *The Joint Protocol in Relation to the Displays of Flags in Public Areas* (2005). Funded by OFMDFM, the research team produced annual reports (1) from 2006–2011 for

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the Government website as part of their *Good Relations Indicator Set* (2). These reports evaluated changes that might accrue as a result of the policies and *Protocol*. Since 2009, Bryan has been a member of the Flags Protocol Review Group (FPRG—constituted by OFMDFM— along with the Chief Executives of three district Councils and representatives from Community Relations Council, Equality Commission, PSNI, NI Housing Executive and four government departments). In addition, the Community Relations Council (CRC) invited Bryan to assist with the redrafting of policy (3) and in 2012, after OFMDFM were unable to agree on a *Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* policy, Bryan was asked to chair the FPRG under the auspices of the CRC to produce new policy guidelines (3).

4.2 Influencing Government Action:

The research findings were discussed by the First Minister, Peter Robinson, in the Northern Ireland Assembly in September 2009 and by the Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness in November 2009. McGuinness commented, 'Queen's University has been involved in a number of surveys on the issue since 2007. We appreciate the difficulties that the issue presents in communities. Action has been taken to update our approach, and I hope that the work of the review group will pay dividends for all of us.' In September 2011 Robinson further identified the importance of the monitoring process in terms of revising the Flags Protocol. On 11 October 2011 the 'flags issue' was discussed in an emergency debate at the NI Assembly. Five Members of the Local Assembly (MLA), from four different political parties, referred to the research conclusions. Robin Newton, Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) MLA for East Belfast said, 'I, like Dr McDonnell and my colleague Sammy Douglas, want to pay tribute to the work done by Queen's University in its report on the display of flags and emblems in Northern Ireland. Without that piece of work, we would have been unable to quantify the situation or determine what progress has been made'. The impact of this research has led to the redrafting in 2012 (2, 7) of the 2005 multi-agency Protocols. In addition, the North Belfast Task Force, chaired by OFMDFM advisors Gerry Kelly MLA and Jeffrey Donaldson MP asked for a special report to be produced by Bryan and Kelly based on the survey findings (2).

4.3 Changing Local Government Policy and Transforming Public Attitudes:

Bryan worked with District Councils and peace and reconciliation groups to help local groups engage more effectively with this highly contested policy process. In 2012 further survey work and a report undertaken for Armagh District Council and CRC (Grant 3) showed that over 90% of people surveyed do not support flags flying on lampposts throughout the year. The research findings resulted in a change of policy accepted by all political parties in the Council (3). The research has played an important role in community participation, particularly in rural areas (4 a, b, c). Bryan has worked closely with the Rural Community Network (RCN) to engage with a wide range of rural groups, using the research to inform a strategic report on flags that was presented to OFMDFM (4b). 'The most extensive and far reaching of these projects has been the Transforming Conflict: Flags and Emblems Project funded by OFMDFM and delivered by Bryan...at the Institute for Irish Studies at Queen's University' (4c).

In addition, having worked with St Columb's Park House in Derry/Londonderry, the flags research model was used in Derry, Strabane, Claudy, Limavady and Castlederg resulting in policy reports which have also been submitted to the FPRG and enabled St Columb's Park house to work more effectively on the North West Peace partnership and Peace Walls Programme (5). Bryan has also consistently worked with Mediation Northern Ireland on the issue to inform peace building work in Newry, Down and Ballymena (6).

4.4 United Nations Engagement:

In May 2013, Bryan was asked to review a draft consultative document on the use of flags and emblems produced by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. The research has been utilised in a UN paper *Realising the Human Right to Culture in Post-Conflict Societies*. The UN report quotes the flags research (from reference [6] above) in that it 'recognises the complexity of the local symbolic landscape and the role of the peace process in intensifying 'symbolic contestation' as 'a principal means for the two sides to express their difference' (8). Following on from this United Nation's report, Bryan was invited by the UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural

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Rights, Farida Shaheed, to join a panel of international experts in Derry in July 2013, who provided comments on the UN paper to be put to the UN Council. Experts made reference to the significance of understanding the dilemmas of contested space from a broad public perspective in specific national contexts such as the Northern Ireland case

4.5 Challenging Public Debate:

The research has consistently informed public debate. The publication of the 2009 report led to 226 citations in the press across Ireland and the UK, including the BBC, Ulster Television (UTV), the Irish News and Newsletter and a further 46 outlets after the 2011 report (9). In addition to his many media appearances enumerated in the impact template, Bryan engaged directly with the Minister for Justice in a forty minute radio programme following riots in Ballyclare over the removal of flags (Radio Ulster, 10 July 2013). In addition, Bryan curated an Exhibition (24 May – 10 June 2012) at the Naughton Gallery displaying 38 of the flags collected during the research (10).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- (1). Project reports published in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2011 (e.g.) <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/equality/equalityresearch/research-publications/gr-pubs.htm> and 2010 b). http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/qub_flags_report_may_2010_final_report_.pdf
- (2). Research Office, Equality & Strategy Directorate, OFMDFM. <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/equality/equalityresearch/research-publications/gr-pubs.htm> and <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/a-shared-future-strategy> (see the first Triennial Shared Future plan 2006-2009: 42,43,112).
- (3). Minutes to FPRG and Reference: Research Office, Equality & Strategy Directorate, OFMDFM. CRC PD Committee Minutes, <http://www.community-relations.org.uk/about-us/council-minutes/item/73/may-2005/?keywords=flags+and+emblems> and reference from Chief Executive Officer, Community Relations Council.
- (4). (a) See Reference from Cohesion Sharing and Integration Officer, Rural Community Network. Donnell, N, 2008, *Flags and Emblems - a rural perspective*. Community Relations Council see 3.18. <http://www.community-relations.org.uk/about-the-council/background-info/policy-and-development/rural-issues?keywords=flags+and+emblems>
(b) *Flagging it up: A community conversation on Flags and Emblems across Northern Ireland* (2012) Rural Enabler Network/SEUPB (Special European Union Programme Bodies) http://www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org/DatabaseDocs/doc_277744503.pdf
(c) *Flagging up the Issues: A review of good practice in dealing with community tensions caused by visible manifestations of the conflict in Northern Ireland, and methods of engaging hard to reach groups.* (2010) Lynn Moffett, North East Peace III Partnership.
- (5). Reference from Director, St Columb's Park House. *Flags Audit & Household Survey* (2007), <http://www.stcolumbsparkhouse.org/programme6.htm> 'The team at Queen's... were able to provide guidance on specific research issues such as acceptable sample sizes, selection of sample areas and questions to ask'. St Columb's Park Household Survey Research Findings (2011) <http://www.stcolumbsparkhouse.org/Flags%20PDF%202011.pdf>
- (6). Senior Facilitator, LINC, (Local Initiative for Needy Communities), Conflict Transformation, Belfast.
- (7). Northern Ireland Assembly Hansard: 21/9/2009, p.141; 9/11/09, p129-130; 20/9/2011 p.213; 11/10/ 2011, Volume 67, No 4, pp. 226-234.
- (8). Confidential Draft Paper *Realising the Human Right to Culture in Post-Conflict Societies* (pages 34-46), produced for the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights by Dr Elizabeth Craig. (Confidential paper available). Reference Deputy Director of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.
- (9). QUB Press office logs and visitor numbers.
- (10). <http://www.naughtongallery.org/sites/NaughtonGallery/Exhibitions/ExhibitionArchive/Archive2012/UnionFlags/#d.en.295512>