

The Cultural Politics of Remembrance: Sport, Place and Memory in Belfast and Berlin

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Introduction

‘What we see isn’t what we see but who we are’

(Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, p. 371).

According to Yael Zerubavel (1994: 118), ‘ the study of the cultural interplay of “history” and “legend” reveals the transformative character of collective memory and its susceptibility to conflicting views that turn the past into a contested arena’.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in societies with particularly troubled histories and nowhere are the issues contested more vigorously than in relation to the use of space for remembrance. This article examines the cultural politics surrounding the monumentalization of social space in two such cities – Belfast and Berlin. More specifically, the article considers the ways in which sporting spaces become implicated in the politics of memory, focussing above all on the proposal to build a new ‘national’ stadium for Northern Ireland alongside an International Conflict Transformation Centre on the site previously occupied by HM Prison Maze (or Long Kesh as it was known by its inmates) on the outskirts of Belfast. The article argues that, long after physical conflict is over, remembrance and the spaces used to construct and reproduce collective memory continue to be contested.

‘Space and place’, according to Yi-Fu Tuan (1977: 3), ‘are basic components of the lived world; we take them for granted’. That said, space is only natural in part for, as Henri Lefebvre (1991: 77) observes, ‘social space contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information’. It is in this respect that ‘the city is a place, a center of meaning, par excellence’ (Tuan, 1977: 173) – a symbol in itself and also the location of numerous highly visible symbols. Not surprisingly, therefore, social spaces such as cities are hugely important in the construction and reproduction of memories and identities. In addition, within those social spaces, sporting sites *and* sights perform an important role in identity formation and consolidation not least as repositories of collective memories (Bale and Vertinsky, 2004).

Huysen (2003: 11) claims that ‘one of the most surprising cultural and political phenomena of recent years has been the emergence of memory as a key cultural and political concern in Western societies, a turning toward the past that stands in stark contrast to the privileging of the future so characteristic of earlier decades of twentieth-century modernity’. Memory itself can best be understood as a social activity inasmuch as ‘the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society’ (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 51). According to Johnson (2002: 294), ‘the concept of social memory has been linked to the development of emotional and ideological ties with particular histories and geographies’. ‘Together’, as Hoelscher and Alderman (2004: 348) argue, ‘social memory and social space conjoin to produce much of the context for modern identities – and the often – rigorous contestation of those identities’. One specific site of contestation concerns the use of public spaces and the erection of monuments as mechanisms for remembering. In fact, the concept of public

space is itself contentious. For Doreen Massey (2005: 159), ‘multiplicity, antagonisms and contrasting temporalities are the stuff of all places’. Thus, the analysis of social space, Lefebvre (1991: 226) argues, ‘involves levels, layers and sedimentations of perception, representation, and spatial practice which presuppose one another, which proffer themselves to one another, and which are superimposed upon one another’. As for public spaces, according to Massey (2005: 152), ‘from the greatest public square to the smallest public park these places are a product of, and internally dislocated by, heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting social identities/relations’ (p. 152). Despite, or arguably because of, their potential to provoke controversy and dissent, however, politicians and policy makers are often intent on manipulating such public spaces not least for the monumentalization of memory. As Connerton (1989: 3) comments, ‘concerning social memory in particular, we may note that images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order’. An example of this can be found in the redevelopment of Beirut in the 1990s, a process which, according to Nagel (2002: 718), ‘has represented not only rehabilitation of physical infrastructure, but, equally, an attempt to reinterpret Lebanon’s tumultuous past – and, indeed, to create a new collective memory for the Lebanese “nation”’. The success of such efforts, not only in Lebanon but also in other post-conflict, divided societies, depends, of course, on the extent to which the collective memory is inclusive. This is no easy matter when the past and with it the present (and the future) remain contested.

As Leib (2002: 289) suggests, ‘one place where the power to control the landscape ideologically is most obvious is the placing of public monuments commemorating the past in public spaces’. The debate surrounding the location of a statue of the late African American tennis star and human rights activist Arthur Ashe, in his native city

of Richmond Virginia, is a case in point (Leib, 2002). Perversely united on this occasion, were traditional white southerners and African American activists who objected, albeit for very different reasons, to erecting the statue on Monument Avenue close to a memorial to Confederate General Robert E. Lee. As Leib (2002: 307) notes, ‘the intensity of the Ashe debate illustrates the importance of iconography and landscape in society’. Similar debates have taken place in relation to the naming of streets in American cities in honour of Martin Luther King, Jr (Alderman, 2005). But nowhere has discussion about the relationship between space and memory been more intense than in Berlin.

Space, Memory and Monuments in Post-Unification Berlin

Since 1995, according to Huysen (2003: 31), German has been gripped by ‘a relentless monument mania that may not subside until every square mile has its own monument or memorial site, commemorating not some counterworld of love but the real world of organized destruction and genocide...’. To be precise, as Koonz (1994: 260) starkly portrays, ‘when Germans erect monuments and establish concentration camp museums, they commemorate victims of their grandparents’ and parents’ government’. None of this is meant to suggest that monuments were new to Berlin in the post World War Two era. Both the Brandenburg Gate and the *Neue Wache*, for example, pre-date the rise of National Socialism, although it should be noted that the meanings attached to them have undoubtedly reflected the vicissitudes of twentieth-century German history. Commenting on the evolution of the *Neue Wache* from national war memorial, to sacred space for Nazi heroes, to anti-fascist site of memory and, finally (so far) to a post-unification memorial to the dead of ‘the two World Wars

and the two dictatorships', Till (1999: 275) notes that 'public sites of memory like the *Neue Wache* gain their meanings through the interplay of historical narratives, official cultural politics, local interests, media representations, expected interest group representations and cultural productions'. This is equally apparent in debates surrounding the post-1945 monumentalization of Berlin.

One area of contestation concerns the role played by communism in the struggle to overthrow the Nazis and the status of communism more generally. Streets still bear the names of Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg and others. A statue of Marx and Friedrich Engels stands close to the city centre and not much further to the east in the Prenzlauer Berg district is a monument to Ernst Thälmann, leader of the German Communist Party during much of the Weimar era, who was arrested in 1933, placed in solitary confinement and subsequently shot in 1944 in the Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald. For many, an even more bizarre echo of the past is the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park, further to the east. Ostensibly a memorial for 5,000 of the 80,000 Soviet soldiers who died in the Battle of Berlin in April-May, 1945, this complex can easily be read as a tribute to Stalin whose words are recorded, in both German and Russian, on stone obelisks that border both sides of the walkway leading to a statue of a Red Army soldier holding in his arms a German child rescued from the scourge of Nazism. The dilemma created by such evocations of the past is that, whilst few modern Germans would seek to valorise National Socialism, to associate the defeat of Nazism with the triumph of communism and the subsequent Soviet influence in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) arguably contributes little to the construction a new unified German collective national identity, centred as it is on the values of late capitalism and bourgeois democracy.

According to Till (2005: 5), ‘the “New Berlin” represents the promise of Germany’s future’. But as Ladd (1998: 235) reflects, ‘a building or monument might be able to display the wounds of Berlin’s past, but it can do little to heal or even hide them’. Indeed, in the case of that area of the city most directly associated with the Nazi leadership, the Topography of Terror has been consciously left as an open sore, ‘a historic site of perpetrators that would confront and document the history of National Socialism’ but also ‘a place through which activists, educators, and directors imagined a postnational future’ (Till, 2005: 105). More monumental in scale and arguably in ambition are the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, designed by Peter Eisenman, and Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum, reflecting on which Howard Jacobson (2007: 2) comments, ‘remembering the Holocaust is an activity fraught with metaphor and melodrama’. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the enlisting of former concentration camps to the cause of remembrance. In the case of Berlin, the specific example is Sachsenhausen, postunification debates about which, according to Till (2005: 206), ‘demanded a working through of Eastern and Western histories and memory cultures by planners, politicians, historic preservationists, artists and architects, international and national survivor groups, and local residents from both Germanys’. Similar demands have emerged in relation to other former camps, most notably Buchenwald, with its considerable symbolic significance for the communist leadership of the GDR not least as the site of Thälmann’s ‘martyrdom’. With reunification came the desire on the part of the new German government to situate the camp differently in relation to the collective consciousness. As Azaryahu (2003: 16) documents, ‘taking almost a decade to accomplish, the “reorientation” of the Buchenwald memorial site was a prolonged process of replacing memory that

involved the exchange of a discredited East German national shrine with what was officially hailed as a historically more sound and morally correct memorial site'. The heritage industry associated with the concentration camps is particularly relevant to Northern Ireland but, before elaborating on its relevance, it is worth considering the relationship between sporting space and memory in the Berlin context.

Sport and Memory in Berlin: the Berlin Olympic Site

Whilst a visit to An der Alten Försterei, home ground of 1. FC Union Berlin, allows plenty of scope to reflect on the industrial landscape of the outer limits east Berlin, it is at the Olympic Stadium in the west of the city that one might anticipate that the elision of sport, space and memory would be most apparent. Indeed, the Olympic grounds have been described as constituting the largest memorial in Berlin (Tietz, 2006). Designed in the 1930s by Werner March, in addition to the stadium itself the site consists of the Bell Tower, Maifeld and the Langemarckhalle. Although plans were already afoot to build a stadium, centred around an existing arena designed by March's father, Otto, in order for Berlin to host the 1936 Summer Olympics, the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 necessitated modifications both in style and ambition. As Tietz (2006: 14) describes it, 'reconstruction of the stadium was to become ideology written in stone, conforming to the context of the Nazi regime's neo-classicist monumental buildings'. Of special significance in this regard was the Langemarckhalle, a memorial to the German soldiers who had died in the First World War (Brey Mayer and Ulrich, 2006). There is considerable disagreement as to the extent of Adolf Hitler's influence on the stadium's architecture (Ladd, 1997). Tall

stone columns and towers are accompanied by equally monumental sculptures, the *Rosseführer* by Joseph Wackerle and the *Diskuswerfer* by Karl Albiker, ‘wonderfully naked, muscular and over-proportional’ (Tietz, 2006: 17). Arguably the latter are ‘the most unambiguously Nazi forms on the site’ (Ladd, 1997: 143). One is tempted to add, however, that these sculptures differ little from those that are to be found in the grounds of Stockholm’s Olympic Stadium, built for the 1912 Summer Games and outside the nearby *Gymnastik - och idrottshögskola*, reflecting a general *Jugendstil* approach to body culture as opposed to fully fledged Nazi ideology (see Nielsen, 2005).

As for the Berlin stadium, as Ladd (1997: 143) observes, ‘all judgments of the architecture are filtered through knowledge of the Nazis’ symbolic use (or misuse) of the 1936 Olympics. It is ironic, therefore, that this monumental site, so closely associated with Hitler’s rise to power, retains far less ideological power than most of the other memorials discussed earlier. Inevitably though debates about the future of the stadium were suffused with concerns about what should and should not be remembered and about if and how sites of remembrance should be maintained (Tietz, 2006). In the end, home to Bundesliga club Hertha BSC, the stadium was central to Berlin’s unsuccessful bid to host the Olympics in 2000 and was used during the 1974 World Cup and again, after substantial refurbishment, for the 2006 finals. One can legitimately argue that it now owes more to the commodification of sport in general and of football in particular than to the wilder fantasies of Aryanism. To that extent, it might even represent a model for other stadium planners, not least in terms of ease of public transportation facilitated by an adjacent railway station with multiple platforms. Before considering plans for a new stadium in Northern Ireland, however, let us first

examine the general relationship between space and memory in the city of Belfast and its environs.

Space, Memory and Monuments in Contemporary Belfast

The relationship between space and Irish identity has commonly been discussed in relation to the countryside and to rural landscapes (Smyth, 2001). However, as Curtin et al 1993: 14) point out, ‘the contests over space, power, history and image in the urban areas of Ireland are inextricably linked to the ways people adapt to the perturbations of their urban environments’. In Dublin, for example, ‘the cultural landscape came to act as an emblematic site of power and resistance (Whelan, 2003: 5). Monuments and street names have played their part there as they have in Belfast where it seems, in the words of Ciaran Carson, poet and chronicler of the city’s urban scene, that ‘every inch...has been written-on, erased and written-on again: messages, curses, political imperatives, but mostly names, or nicknames – Robbo, Mackers, Scoot, Fra – sometimes litanized obsessively on every brick of gable wall, as high as the hand will reach, and sometimes higher, these snakes and ladders cancelling each other out in their bid to be remembered’ (Carson, 1989: 52).

Ireland as whole abounds in urban monuments and memorials, not least those that commemorate the dead of the First World War (Jeffery, 2000). In addition to official acts and sites of remembrance, the Great War and more specifically the Battle of the Somme have been absorbed into the ideology and supportive imagery of Ulster loyalism (Graham and Shirlow, 2002). A subject for paramilitary memorials and murals, the Somme became ‘an identity artefact’ (Graham and Shirlow, 2002: 893) in

a society in which displaying identity was assigned such huge importance (Jarman, 1997) and urban landscapes were imprinted, in the words of novelist Eoin McNamee, with ‘textures of brick, rain, memory’ (McNamee, 1994). ‘In Belfast, unlike most divided cities in the European Union’, as Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: 15) note, ‘the most acute and perceived spatial divisions are not simply those of class or race but those of national identity’. One of the main mechanisms for marking the putative collective meaning of specific residentially segregated areas is the monumentalization of social space.

Some of the city’s monuments are intended to serve official purposes. One thinks, for example, of the Garden of Remembrance and Cenotaph in the grounds of Belfast City Hall where one can also find a monument to the victims of the sinking of the RMS Titanic in 1912 and a memorial to James Magennis, Northern Ireland’s only recipient of the Victoria Cross during World War Two. Far more common, however, are memorials to the dead of the main republican and loyalist paramilitary organisations. Amongst the former is a memorial, at the junction of the Falls Road and Andersonstown Road in west Belfast close to Casement Park, to the ten republican hunger strikers who died in Long Kesh in 1981. Not far away is the Andersonstown Garden of Remembrance to the Fallen Volunteers of the 1st Battalion, Belfast Brigade Irish Republican Army/IRA (Oglaigh na hEireann), to the United Irishmen and to the victims of the Great Hunger (more commonly known as ‘the Famine’). On the Lower Falls Road, a short walk from the city centre, is the Falls Garden of Remembrance to the Fallen IRA Volunteers of ‘D’ Company, 2nd Battalion, Belfast Brigade, to deceased Prisoners of War and civilian casualties from the area and in Twinbrook, a housing estate situated in the hinterland between west Belfast and the adjacent city of

Lisburn, there is a memorial to the 1981 hunger strikers and to fellow republican hunger strikers, Frank Stagg and Michael Gaughan.

As for loyalism, monuments to the fallen volunteers of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) are to be found in various districts of the city, most notably in the east.

Numerous individual members of both the UVF and the Ulster Defence Association have also been celebrated over the years with murals and in the naming of flute bands.

Other loyalist memorials, however, are intended to create an impression of being semi-official in status. Thus, the revitalisation of the loyalist Mount Vernon area of north Belfast includes a war memorial to soldiers from Northern Ireland *and* the Republic of Ireland who died in the two world wars. A memorial garden created in 2003 on the Lower Newtownards Road in east Belfast is named in honour of James McCurrie and Robert Neill, Protestants killed by the IRA in 1970. The Shankill Memorial Park in loyalist west Belfast commemorates members of the British armed forces from the area who died in the two world wars and also the nine victims of an IRA bomb on the Shankill Road in 1993.

Perhaps the most surprising recent addition to the monumentalization of space in Belfast is a sculpture in Writers' Square opposite St Anne's Cathedral in the city centre to honour the memory of Irish veterans of the International Brigades who fought on the republican side during the Spanish Civil War. One might hypothesise with reference to this particular memorial that the ending of widespread paramilitary violence and the creation of a power-sharing form of devolved government have proved an opportunity for some people at least to abandon introspection and reflect on other people's histories and conflicts. Yet, as Shirlow and Murtagh (2006: 181)

remind us, ‘despite the cessation of most paramilitary violence we are left with a situation within which the creation of territorial division and rigidified ethno-sectarian communities means that fear and mistrust are still framed by a desire to create communal separation’. Monuments, like landmarks, are what Jane Jacobs (1992: 384) describes, as ‘prime orientation clues’. But in that role they not only help us to navigate the physical space of cities but also to read the social and cultural meanings that are attached to particular neighbourhoods (Bairner, 2006). Unlike memorials set apart from where people live and demanding calculated visits, Belfast’s monuments, characterised in Bachelard’s (1994:183) words by their ‘intimate immensity’, are part of people’s daily experience, taken for granted perhaps but still capable of helping to reinforce the desire for communal separation. Nowhere has this desire been more apparent in the past than in the world of sport and it remains the context in which debates about the plan to create an International Centre for Conflict Transformation alongside a new national sports stadium for Northern Ireland can best be understood.

Sport, Space and Identity in Belfast

In terms of the relationship between the physical landscape of the city, sport and national memory, no structure in Ireland is more iconic than Croke Park, headquarters of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and spiritual home to the entire Gaelic games movement. Indeed, as Carey (2004: 41) notes, ‘Croke Park is as much about memory as it is about live action’. The stadium itself was named in honour of one of the GAA’s first patrons, the fiercely nationalist Archbishop Croke of Cashel. The Cusack Stand commemorates the pioneering activities of the Association’s founder,

Michael Cusack, who had accurately predicted that the GAA would sweep the country 'like a prairie fire' (cited in de Búrca, 2000: 15). More poignant was the naming of the Hogan Stand for Michael Hogan, a Tipperary footballer shot dead by British servicemen during a match between his county and Dublin on Sunday 21 November, 1920, 'Bloody Sunday' as it is known in the historiography of Gaelic games. Political struggle, given material meaning by the rubble from the Easter Rising of 1916 having been used to build the stadium's Hill 16, 'was embedded in the fabric of the stadium' (Fulton and Bairner, 2007: 61). The practice of naming grounds and clubs after nationalist and republican heroes has long been widespread within the GAA (Cronin, 1998) with Casement Park in west Belfast being an obvious and, for the purposes of this article, highly relevant example. The son of an Ulster Protestant landowning family, Sir Roger Casement had arrived in Ireland on a German submarine on 21 April 1916 with the intention of trying to postpone the nationalist Easter Rising. But through his earlier efforts, as English (2006: 267) recounts, he had 'been instrumental in producing the militancy which lay behind the famous rebellion'. Casement was hanged in London later that year having been convicted of treason. His memory lives on, however, in the name of the foremost Gaelic games venue in the six counties of Northern Ireland.

Sport has been long recognised as a marker of identity in Northern Ireland (Bairner, 2002) . The sports that one plays and watches and the places that one chooses to do so testify, far more often than not, to communal loyalty centred on national identity and social space. Even participation in physical activity more generally has been greatly influenced by feelings of fear and mistrust (Bairner and Shirlow, 2003). Sports stadia such as Casement Park and Irish league soccer grounds, including Windsor Park, the

Oval, Seaview and Solitude, although unimpressive when set against the high standards of arenas such as Berlin's Olympic Stadium, are vitally important inscriptions on Belfast's cultural landscape. Even though the composition of the teams that play at these soccer grounds may evolve over time, most of the fans who attend their games remain constrained by the cultural myopia that underpins conflict (Lowenthal, 1994). The same can be said of most of those who attend football and hurling games at Casement Park. Thus, attending sports matches is often about affirming either explicitly or, at the very least implicitly, one's political allegiance.

In many respects, Northern Ireland's most contested sporting space is Windsor Park, situated in the south of the city and home to Linfield Football Club as well as the Northern Ireland national soccer team. With the same name as one of the British royal family's residences – Windsor Castle - an image of which appears on Linfield's club badge – the stadium symbolises the constitutional position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. That it is located in what has been until relatively recently a traditional working-class Protestant area of Belfast adds further to its iconic status as does the fact that it is home to the club that has historically been most readily identified with Ulster unionism and to a 'national' team which, arguably more than any other institution today, testifies to the persistence of Northern Ireland as a distinct political entity. Given these various inter connected factors, it is scarcely surprising that the idea of Windsor Park as a 'national' stadium has been contested over time at a variety of different levels.

Constructing a New Stadium

In October 2001, a ministerial advisory panel (of which the author was a member), charged with considering the future of association football in Northern Ireland, was set up by Michael McGimpsey MLA, the then Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in the devolved power sharing Executive. Amongst its numerous findings and recommendations, the panel noted that ‘Northern Ireland does not have a sports stadium that meets all the expected standards for hosting international football’ (Armstrong et al, 2001, p. 73). As a consequence, the panel supported the idea of a large venue for association football in Northern Ireland to cater for international games, major European club matches and major domestic games such as the Irish Cup Final. The panel expressed an awareness of ‘previous discussions on the feasibility of establishing a national stadium’ (ibid.). Indeed, a National Stadium Working Group had been set up under the auspices of the Sports Council for Northern Ireland in 1999 but no further progress had been made. Thus, the panel argued that ‘Government, in conjunction with the governing body [i.e. the Irish Football Association - IFA] should act quickly to end the uncertainty by making a firm commitment to establish a national stadium’ (ibid.). Fundamental issues that would need to be explored included the question of which other sports, if any, ‘would be accommodated in the stadium’ (ibid.). And so the gauntlet was thrown down to politicians, to governing bodies and to the civil servants responsible for framing cultural policy in general.

Almost all the panel members agreed that a new stadium was needed for practical reasons. If international football is to continue to be played in Northern Ireland, a better facility is required in order to meet increasingly stringent international rules

concerning health and safety. A majority of panel members also saw the need for a new stadium in terms of the wider context of Northern Ireland society. It had long been an acknowledged fact that few northern nationalist are willing to watch the 'national' football team preferring instead to support the Republic of Ireland (Fulton, 2005). Numerous explanations for this can be offered, amongst them the unionist sentiments of most, if not all, of those who have governed the game in the north of Ireland, the traditional association of Northern Ireland games with Ulster loyalist songs and rhetoric, the playing of the United Kingdom national anthem ('God Save the Queen') before matches, the relatively poor performances of the team in those years when the Republic of Ireland side was achieving greater success and the fact that the very term 'Northern Ireland' is anathema, reflecting as it does what for nationalists is regarded as the unacceptable partition of the island of Ireland.

In addition, it was evident to some panel members that any hope of attracting nationalists to Northern Ireland games is currently dampened by the negative image of Windsor Park, where the Northern Ireland team currently plays its home matches, based on its location and its direct association with an Irish League club which over the years has been seen as epitomising Ulster unionism at play (Bairner and Shirlow, 1998). Even those panel members who felt that there is little chance that nationalists are will support Northern Ireland even if a new stadium is built nevertheless argued that the fact that Windsor Park is Linfield's stadium has tended to put off Protestant supporters of other Irish league clubs, most notably Glentoran, who play their home games in the east of the city, Glenavon and Portadown (see Magee, 2005).

At the time of writing, the British government has decided that the most appropriate location for a new 42,500-seater stadium is the site of the former Maze Prison (Long Kesh as it was known to generations of loyalists and republican prisoners who were housed there from the 1970s until 2000) (Hassan, 2006; Bairner, 2007). To date, all of the relevant parties have agreed to support the initiative in principle. However, the choice of location has caused controversy for a variety of reasons, all of which shed further light on the intimate relationship between sport and politics in Northern Ireland.

The government's decision has been prompted in no small measure by the fact that it already owns the land, thereby alleviating the fear of excessive costs which could be associated with building the new stadium closer to Belfast city centre. However, selecting a site which is ten miles outside the city is clearly at odds with strategies aimed at linking sport and leisure to urban regeneration and civic boosterism. It would also depend on major developments in the transport infrastructure and arguably a review of both the Regional Development Strategy and the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (Amalgamation of Official Northern Ireland Supporters' Clubs, 2006).

An additional complication arises from the fact that the former prison itself has such a significant place in the history of the troubles, not least as the site of the republican hunger strike in 1981 which led to the deaths of Bobby Sands and nine other prisoners. Calls for the preservation of at least one of the prison's so-called H-Blocks have been partly answered in the preliminary plans for the new stadium. These propose that, in addition to restaurants, offices, a multi-screen cinema and a hotel, the surrounding site should also include an International Conflict Transformation Centre with one of the

old H-Blocks (H6) where arguably the seeds of the hunger strike were sown (O’Hearn, 2006), being preserved along with the prison hospital where the hunger strikers died. One former prison in Northern Ireland, the Crumlin Road Gaol in north Belfast, is in the process of being renovated for use as a centre for a variety of artistic activities. The prison’s recent history was, however, considerably less controversial. Nevertheless, discussions about the future of the Maze site have inevitably become subsumed within broader debates about the treatment of victims of the troubles and issues of peace and reconciliation currently being examined by a Consultative Group on the Past led by Lord Eames, former primate of the Church of Ireland.

In the only significant analysis of the spatial aspects of the Maze debate, Graham and McDowell (2007) focus exclusively on the proposed Conflict Transformation Centre, making no reference at all to the fact that it will be located on the same site as the ‘national’ stadium. Thus, they argue that ‘the debate on the future of the Maze has been driven by Sinn Féin which evolved as the political wing of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA)’ (p. 344). Highlighting the extent to which academics so often underestimate the social significance of sport, the authors ignore the fact that the initial catalyst for making use of the Maze site was the demand for a ‘national’ soccer stadium to replace Windsor Park with relative cost then becoming a major consideration that led politicians and civil servants to opt for land already publicly owned.

Graham and Mc Dowell make telling points about the Conflict Transformation Centre, noting correctly that ‘while the maze site *could* be interpreted through...essentially global manifestations of the contestation of heritage (alternatively, it could be

demolished), it also possesses a particular resonance within the specific context of Northern Ireland, the Belfast Agreement [which led to the formation of a power-sharing executive] and the negotiation of alternative visions of society beyond sectarianism’ (p. 346). With this in mind, they argue that ‘the debate on the Maze is taking place through the prism of a republican/nationalist-loyalist/unionist binary and its supporting narratives’ adding that ‘the outcome is clearly far more important to republicans’ (p. 350). Indeed, they argue that ‘among the potential stakeholders in its future, only the republican movement seems focused on making a claim to the Maze as a cultural heritage site that supports its claim to victimhood’ (p. 359). Thus, they conclude that ‘the Maze is essentially a zero-sum heritage site’ (p. 363). ‘It represents a singular claim within a republican narrative of resistance’, they believe, ‘and appears to have little potential as a site of atonement or reconciliation’ (ibid.).

There can little doubt that Sinn Féin has sought to manipulate the debate about the Conflict Transformation Centre for its own ends. At least as important is the fact that this is how their contribution to the debate has been viewed by unionist politicians such as Sammy Wilson of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) who argued against ‘the provision of a shrine to hunger strikers at the Maze – something which is already happening and which is being promoted by Sinn Fein’

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/northern_ireland/6916048.stm). Comments such as these have undeniably put pressure on the current Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Edwin Poots MLA, a fellow DUP member (http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/northern_ireland/6231566.stm).

An alternative view is offered by Hassan (2006) who believes that the entire project is particularly problematic for northern nationalists. ‘Put simply’, he writes, ‘some northern nationalists are indisposed to support the new “national” stadium for Northern Ireland because of the involvement of the IFA’ (p. 341). More generally, he rightly notes that the very idea that the project is referred to as a ‘national’ stadium for Northern Ireland is contentious. His suggestion, however, that it is the responsibility of nationalists to support the project as part of a more general commitment to the Good Friday Agreement ignores the extent to which nationalists, arguably rather more than unionists, have already supported the peace process and the fact that the spirit of the Agreement appears in any case to militate against integration, thus allowing people to make their own sectarian choices about how they live their lives (Bairner, 2004). In addition, when Hassan (2006: 341) writes of northern nationalists that ‘whereas their continued reluctance to move forward, to be progressive and embrace a new beginning might well be based on genuine cases of injustice, it is questionable whether such disinclination remains as valid at the beginning of the twenty-first century’, he is in danger of ignoring longstanding unionist unwillingness to support any new order and, more specifically, the trenchant criticisms of the stadium project itself from predominantly Protestant/unionist supporters of the Northern Ireland football team. Indeed, it is their critique, rather than any concerns expressed by the GAA, which raises the more fundamental issues about ownership, both material and symbolic, and the economic benefits, if any, that might accrue from the construction of the stadium (Bairner, 2007).

Part of this critique is clearly political but also echoes some of the sentiments expressed by Graham and McDowell (2007). According to the Amalgamation of

Official Northern Ireland Supporters' Clubs (2006: 25), 'although the SIB (Strategic Investment Board) assured us that the site would be a neutral space, it is hard to believe that the site will not be honoured as a place of martyrdom turning into a ghoulish tourist attraction. This is unlikely to endear the site to an average sports fan who is not interested in such controversial and divisive symbolism'. In truth, there are few sports fans in Northern Ireland who are wholly apolitical and what is likely to please one faction is almost certain to anger another. Whilst the former prison itself, and thus the International Conflict Transformation Centre, could come to represent an important element in republican remembrance of the armed struggle, a stadium that is perceived globally as home to the Northern Ireland soccer team is scarcely likely to play a similar role. Indeed, from the perspective of some policy makers that makes for an ideal outcome – the creation of a site on which one major project appeals emotionally to a particular section of the community and the other to their former adversaries. However, as Korkiakangas (2004: 150) notes, 'the images, hopes and expectations regarding the function of a certain space held by planners on one side and by town dwellers on the other, do not necessarily always meet'.

Conclusion

What emerges from this debate is what Zukin (1991: 6) has described as the 'landscape of economy and culture'. The proposal for an economically viable sporting facility set alongside a place of remembrance demonstrates clearly 'the spatial and temporal effects of market practices on a "sense of place"' (Zukin, 1991: 6). According to Gray (2007: 203), 'the increasing emphasis that has been placed upon the "need" for arts and cultural policies to demonstrate that they generate a benefit

over and above the aesthetic, has become a major development within political systems'. It can be contended that arguments for and against the provision of sports facilities increasingly focus on similar concerns. For Gray (2007: 212), 'the results of developing an instrumental approach to arts and cultural policies have serious implications both for what is produced and how it is produced in these sectors'. Arguably the implications become even more serious when policy makers seek to bring together for specific instrumental purposes, a cultural project, with culture here being relatively narrow defined, and one that involves sport.

That said, although one can argue that Graham and McDowell (2007) were wrong to ignore the stadium project in their examination of the Maze site, the Conflict Transformation Centre inevitably adds complexity to what would be a problematic issue seen only in terms of sport. The stadium itself is as yet not part on any community's collective memory. A museum located on the site of a former prison is another matter. As Bonnell and Simon (2007: 65) point out, 'museums function as institutions of social memory with a potential public role in constituting what members of any given society understand as their cultural heritage'. Commenting on what they call ' "difficult" exhibitions and intimate encounters', they argue that 'exhibitions that offer the possibility of intimacy solicit visitors into a "difficult" engagement with the experiences of others that radically calls into question the adequacy of one's concepts to tie down the significance of lessons of the past' (p. 81).

As Gillis (1994: 3) claims, 'the core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity'. In some societies national

stadia and national memorials help to foster collective memory and group identity. In the case of divided, or formerly divided, cities such as Berlin and Belfast, however, these become contested domains. Opposing groups express very different ideas about what should be remembered and how and, in the words of David Lowenthal (1994: 53), ‘myopia as well conflict plagues us’. There is a failure to empathise with the memories of others or, in certain instances, a felt need to block out those memories.

From the outset, the aim of policy makers in relation to the new stadium was the creation of a neutral sporting (or leisure) space. This in itself is something of a contradiction in terms given the intrinsic competitive character of all sports and the rivalry that can exist between them, particularly when issues of cultural identity are also involved. At the very least, if the stadium is built, it will inevitably be contested like all public space in Northern Ireland. How vigorous that contestation becomes will depend on factors over which the policy makers themselves will have little control.

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