

# Re-framing conflict and conflict resolution as ‘migration’, and schoolchildren as ‘migrants’: teaching ‘The Troubles’ in Northern Ireland

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## **Introduction**

It is a paradox of the Northern Ireland peace process that it has been relatively successful in spite of the fact that there is still ‘no common understanding of the conflict’. That was the finding in January 2009 of the Independent Consultative Group on the Past. Set up in June 2007 by Peter Hain, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and chaired by Lord Eames and Denis Bradley, the Group had been asked to ‘consult across the community on how Northern Ireland society can best approach the legacy of the events of the past 40 years’ and to make recommendations ‘on any steps that might be taken to support Northern Ireland in building a shared future that is not overshadowed by the events of the past’. By 2010 none of its recommendations had been accepted, let alone implemented. Its report was followed by that of the Saville Inquiry in June 2010, which brought to a close the investigation begun in 1998 into the events of the Bloody Sunday, January 1972. Its Report was well received by the families of the victims, but it also served to highlight the continuing absence of any systematic, comprehensive approach to ‘dealing with the past’. This was further emphasised by the publication two months later of the inconclusive Police Ombudsman’s Report into the Claudy Bombing of July 1972, which brought to a close the investigation begun in 2002. In the current situation, where there is no shared understanding of the nature of the recent conflict or agreed strategy for dealing with its legacy, teaching ‘The Troubles’ in Northern Ireland is no less problematic for educators than during the pre-peace process violence. The purpose of this article is to outline the way in which conflict and conflict resolution has recently been re-framed in terms of ‘migration’, with particular reference to DIPPAM (Documenting Ireland: Parliament, People and

Migration) - a new teaching resource, which is an initiative of the Museums, Libraries and Archives and the two universities of Northern Ireland.

Regarding the teaching of 'The Troubles', the Consultative Group warned of the urgency of the situation:

The past continues to infect our public life. For many people it remains the one thing which, if not properly tackled, could drag us back into the abyss (Eames Bradley, 2009, 73, 75).

It observed gloomily that 'for young people one of the key messages of the conflict has been that life itself has little value' and that 'even if young people claim not to be well educated or interested in the past they are actually finding their own ways (on-line social networks, following certain football teams) to re-enact the age old conflict'. It is important to resist, the Report argued, 'the urge to allow the past to dominate the future, and in doing so, to render the future no different from the past'. It therefore recommended the development of 'education programmes, to inform young people, in a balanced way, about the nature and impact of the conflict (see pages: 27, 38, 49, 73, 74, 75). This of course begs the question of where educators should go for a balanced view of the nature of the conflict in order to develop such education programmes, when there is still 'no common understanding of the conflict' (Lambkin 1996, 5). What is intended here is a contribution to the contentious process of 'dealing with the past' by proposing 'migration' as a key theme or tool for re-framing our understanding and approach to the teaching of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'.

### **Thinking about conflict metaphorically**

The term 'divided society' – the key term of the conference in which this collection of papers originated - provides one way of 'framing' conflict, based on the idea of a wall or barrier of separation. Barriers may be physical, as in the case of the Berlin Wall, or metaphorical, as in the case of the newspaper headline that greeted the opening of Lagan College in 1981, Northern Ireland's first planned, integrated school for Protestants, Catholics and others: 'Ulster parents break down a fifty-year barrier'. There are other ways, for example when sectarianism – a prime cause of conflict – is framed as an 'evil spirit' which has to be 'confronted', as when the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland said 'I would love to be part of a public discussion ... as to how to *face* this *demon* in our midst (emphasis added, *Belfast Telegraph* 8 June, 2010). However, the most widely used device for framing the Northern Ireland conflict and its resolution is the idea of 'journey'. At the heart of the

Good Friday / Belfast Agreement 1998 is that the conflicted parties have agreed to go on a journey together: to leave 'the tragedies of the past behind'; to make 'a new beginning' and 'a fresh start'; and 'to strive in every practical way *towards* reconciliation'. Prime Minister Tony Blair had popularised the idea of a 'journey' by speaking more vividly about a 'peace train', as for example when he announced in September 1997 that 'the settlement train is leaving next week. I hope everyone will be on it'.

The 'peace train' was well pictured by *Irish News* cartoonist Ian Knox, particularly on the front cover of Fionnuala O'Connor's book *Breaking the Bonds: Making Peace in Northern Ireland* (2002), where an amphibious vehicle (peace train) containing the leaders of all the main political parties (Gerry Adams, David Trimble and Mark Durkan driving at the front; Ian Paisley, Peter Robinson and Jeffrey Donaldson sitting at the back) is emerging out of a dark swamp (the conflict) onto solid, sunlit ground (peace), having broken free of the chains (ancient hatreds) that were restraining it. A striking feature of the 'swamp' is the steeple of a submerged church emerging from the water. This is a reference to the well-known speech made by Winston Churchill to the House of Commons in 1922 about the 'cataclysm' of the First World War and the intractable nature of the Ulster conflict: '... But as the deluge subsides and the waters fall short, we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again'.

The basic idea that Knox's image represents is that of 'journey' – defined simply as movement from a point of departure to a point of arrival. Although there may be no shared understanding of what the conflict was about, at least this way of thinking about the nature of the peace process seems to be shared. Description of Northern Ireland as a society which 'fell into the abyss of violent conflict' and is now 'emerging from' or 'moving out of' conflict is not contentious. Without agreement on the need to 'leave the past behind' and 'move on' there would have been no peace process. What remains, however, is the problem of agreeing on the final destination of the peace process 'journey', where a 'shared future' will be enjoyed by all, and the related problem of reaching a common understanding of why in the first place Northern Ireland fell into the abyss.

### **Re-framing conflict and conflict resolution as 'migration'**

Accepting that most people frame the Northern Ireland problem metaphorically as a journey 'into' and 'out of' conflict, the idea of 'journey' can be interrogated more productively when it is recognised that the journey is of a special type: 'migration', defined simply as 'moving home'. All

migration involves a journey, but not all journeys involve migration. Although the restoration of the *status quo ante* (as for example when a house that has been burned down is rebuilt on its original site) can be thought of as a 'journey', it cannot be thought of convincingly as 'migration' because the essential criterion of 'moving home' is not met. If the Northern Ireland peace process had been based on a proposal only to restore things to the way they had been before 1969, it could not have succeeded. Pressing the analogy with migration, it may be helpful to show that the conflict and its resolution can be seen in terms of a migration sequence: the move from the 'old world' of pre-1969 relative peace and stability into a horrific 'new world' of violent conflict; and the move out of the 'old world' of conflict, as it had become after protracted violence, into the 'new world' of peace, marked by the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement. The hermeneutical and pedagogical point to be made here is that the better the understanding we have of migration in the real world, the better equipped we are to develop the way we think metaphorically about the peace process as migration.

If we are to develop our thinking about conflict and conflict resolution in this way, it is important to insist from the outset on the simple definition of migration as 'moving home' because of the way in which migrants are sometimes understood only in the restricted sense of those who change place of residence across international frontiers. As Everett S. Lee makes clear in his classic definition, distance is not the key issue:

Migration is defined broadly as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence. No restriction is placed on the distance of the move or upon the voluntary or involuntary nature of the act, and no distinction is made between external and internal migration. Thus, a move across the hall from one apartment to another is counted as just as much an act of migration as a move from Bombay, India, to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, though of course the initiation and consequences of such moves are vastly different ... No matter how short or how long, how easy or how difficult, every act of migration involves an origin, a destination, and an intervening set of obstacles (Lee 1966, 49).

Migration or 'moving home' therefore involves the three dimensions of time, space and community. With regard to time, migration is distinguished from other movement, such as a holiday or temporary business visit, by being sustained (permanent or semi-permanent). With regard to space, it is distinguished by the crossing of a significant boundary or border that involves a changed relationship to the physical environment. With regard to community, it is distinguished by a social transition that involves a change of status or a changed relationship to the local, regional or national community.

Quite legitimately, specialists in international emigration and immigration, such as that between India and the United States, and even specialists in internal migration, have found the idea of including moves between apartments in the same block impossibly elastic, stretching the meaning of migration so far that, for their purposes, it becomes unserviceable:

First, we will expect migration to be a *significant* movement. By this we mean that it has demographic consequences such that the move has involved a shift across a definite administrative boundary. This will of course mean that we will not consider as migration moving Grandad into a 'granny flat' in the same village or small town, so some quite significant moves will be missed out. However, every move to another town or across a country or district line we will include as migration (Jackson 1986, 4).

While migration specialists may choose to exclude such things from their consideration, the fact remains that moving Grandad into a 'granny flat' in the same town or village can still usefully be thought of as 'migration' by those interested in understanding that process because it conforms to the basic definition of migration – a change of residence. Bearing in mind this broad sense of migration eases its application to thinking metaphorically about the conflict in Northern Ireland where its resolution has been less about the physical migration of people to 'new world' and more about mental migration to a 'shared future'.

The most recent study of the phenomenon of migration in Irish history (Fitzgerald and Lambkin, 2008), introduces a new analytical framework in which migration is seen as a combined process of three stages (leaving, crossing, arriving); three ways (in, within, out) and three outcomes (segregation, integration, modulation). The framework can be simply illustrated by reference to the two outdoor museums in Northern Ireland that highlight the theme of migration (Ulster-American Folk Park, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum) and new migration-related educational resource developed by a partnership between the two universities (QUB, UU) and the museums (NMNI), libraries (Libraries NI) and archives (PRONI) of Northern Ireland: DIPPAM (Documenting Ireland: Parliament, People and Migration).

### **Migration as a three-stage process**

The structure of the outdoor museum of the Ulster-American Folk Park, Omagh (illustrated at <http://www.nmni.com/uafp/About-Us> ) is based on the three stages of leaving, crossing and arriving. Visitors model the migration experience by going round and 'leaving' the exhibit buildings of the 'Old

World' area to 'cross' through a life-size replica of an emigrant sailing ship and 'arrive' in the 'New World' area. In this museum, where the focus is on transatlantic emigration, the 'Old World' is that of Ulster, and the 'New World' that of colonial America and the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the Ulster Folk and Transport, Cultra (illustrated at <http://www.nmni.com/uftm/Visiting-Information/Museum-Maps>), the focus is not so explicitly on migration but the underlying theme that connects the two main parts of the Folk Museum is that of rural-urban migration: the 'Old World' is that of the 'Rural Area' of the Ulster countryside and the 'New World' that of the 'Town Area' of the towns of Ulster, particularly Belfast and Derry/Londonderry, at the beginning of the twentieth century (with the Transport Museum specialising in carts, cars, buses, trains and planes as the various means of 'crossing' between and within them).

### **Migration as a three-way process**

The three ways or directions of migration (in-within-out) are observable in both the Ulster-American Folk Park (UAFP) and the Ulster Folk Museum (UFTM). The 'Old World Area' (UAFP) and 'the Rural Area' (UFTM) both beg the question of in-migration or immigration: where did the ancestors of the people living there come from originally? The Ulster Museum (UM), which is the third of these three main sites of the National Museums of Northern Ireland (NMNI), has as one of its themes the history of immigration to Ulster. (Unfortunately, the Ulster History Park, Gortin, opened in 1990 to complement UAFP as an outdoor museum telling the immigration story of Ulster from the earliest inhabitants c.8,000 BCE to about 1650 CE, was closed in 2002 but plans are in hand for it to reopen.) Migration 'within', or internal migration, especially rural-urban migration, can be seen at work in both the 'Old World' and 'New World' of UAFP, as the visitor moves from a rural house, such as that of the Mellon family in Tyrone, to the urban environment of the Ulster Street quayside, and from the urban quayside of the American Street to the new Mellon house in rural Pennsylvania. As noted already, internal or rural-urban migration is what the visitor models at UFTM when moving from the 'Rural Area' to the 'Town Area'.

Most rural-urban migration within Ulster in the second half of the nineteenth century was directed towards Belfast and Belfast is represented typically in the Rural Area of UFTM by the terrace of six reconstructed houses, originally from Tea Lane (later Rowland Street, now Rowland Way), in the mainly Protestant working-class district of Sandy Row (for illustration see [http://www.nmni.com/uftm/Collections/buildings/Town-Area-\(1\)/Tea-Lane](http://www.nmni.com/uftm/Collections/buildings/Town-Area-(1)/Tea-Lane)). In this setting, the visitor may be encouraged to consider stories of

individual migrants whose trajectories took them from cottages in rural Ulster, such as the Drumnahunshin house, to terraced houses, such as those in Tea Lane, and possibly on from there to a more salubrious street elsewhere within Belfast (more internal migration), or out of Belfast to Britain, America or elsewhere in the Irish diaspora (emigration). The three-way nature of migration is further illustrated by the following extracts of related evidence of individual migration stories, collected by searching for the terms 'Tea Lane' and 'Sandy Row' in the new educational resource DIPPAM (Documenting Ireland: Parliament, People and Migration <http://www.dippam.ac.uk/>). This consists of a suite of three databases: EPPI (Enhanced Parliamentary Papers on Ireland; IED (Irish Emigration Database) and VMR (Voices of Migration and Return).

A search of IED for 'Tea Lane' yields no hits but several for 'Sandy Row', including the following:

### Transcript

#### MISSING RELATIVES

WANTED TO KNOW THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE  
FOLLOWING RELATIVES OR FRIENDS:-

SPENCE - Mrs. Maggie (nee Larkin), who  
left ▲wSandy ▲wRow, Belfast, in February, 1889,  
for America. Last heard of in New York in  
1917. Family formerly resided in Tandragee,  
Co. Armagh. Information to Samuel John  
Spence (son), 144 Matilda Street, Belfast.  
KIRKPATRICK - Thomas, who left 133

This extract, from the *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 5 December 1931, reveals part at least of the 'leaving, crossing, arriving' and 'in-within-out' aspects of the migration trajectories of two members of the Larkin and Spence families: Maggie Larkin was born into a family located in the market town of Tandragee, County Armagh ('old world'); she moved to Sandy Row, Belfast ('new world' – rural-urban, internal migration); and then moved on in 1889 from Belfast ('Old World') to New York ('New World - emigration). Her son, Samuel John Spence was presumably born in Sandy Row, which is in south Belfast, and he was still in the Sandy Row area (Matilda Street – but not in Sandy Row itself) in 1931 when he placed the advertisement. We are given no

indication here of the original in-migration or immigration of the Larkin family to Tandragee (taken at face value, the English origin of the family name Larkin suggests that it may have originated in Ulster with the large-scale immigration from Britain of the seventeenth century that followed the Plantation of Ulster). We do have a hint (the son is trying to trace his mother) of the possibility of further in-migration in the form of her return or re-immigration to Belfast, back from New York. Thus we have exemplified the three ways or directions of migration – immigration [including return], internal migration, and emigration.

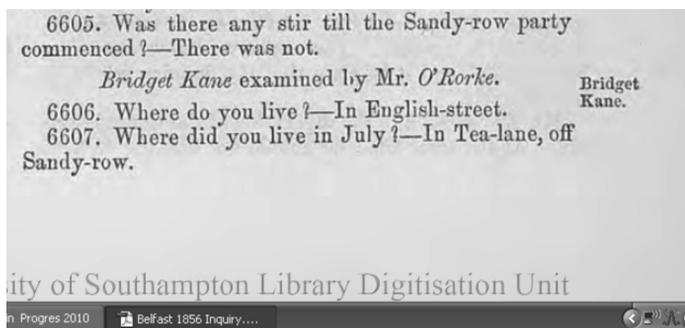
### **Migration as a three-outcome process**

Although the third ‘arriving’ stage of migration might be considered complete on the achievement of physical arrival in, say, Sandy Row, New York or Matilda Street, it might be years before the immigrants (as well as their new neighbours) might think of them as having finally ‘arrived’. Migration may result, broadly speaking, in three different types of outcome, according to the three main coping strategies that are open to migrants, and these can be summarised as ‘segregation’, ‘integration’ and ‘modulation’. New arrivals make key choices about how to establish themselves in their ‘new world’ or have these made for them by default: whether to begin new settlements themselves (segregation) or settle into established communities (integration). In practice the outcome is often not clear-cut: many migrants continue throughout their lives to ‘switch’ or ‘modulate’ between seeing their ‘new world’ as ‘the land of the stranger’ and the ‘land of plenty and sweet liberty’, and ambivalence about the ‘new world’ may persist in the descendants of the migrant generation, making it difficult to determine when exactly the process of migration may be considered complete. Amongst many descendants of the British immigrants of the seventeenth century in Ulster, as amongst many descendants of Irish emigrants around the world, there continues to be a strong sense of being ‘in diaspora’, of being connected with their original British or Irish homeland (Fitzgerald and Lambkin 2008, pages 63, 262, 283).

The ‘Missing Relatives’ extract referred to above raises these issues of segregation, integration and modulation: how did Maggie Spence regard her moves from Tandragee to Belfast to New York? How did her new neighbours regard her? Did she feel ‘at home’ in all three places, or not? How did her son feel about his move from Sandy Row to Matilda Street? What kind of relationship did Maggie in New York have with her family in Belfast (there has evidently been some contact over the twenty-eight years since her

departure but when her son actively seeks her in 1931 she has not been heard of for fourteen years).

A search for 'Tea Lane' in EPPI yields the following hit which illustrates in rather more detail the possible outcomes of migration, in a context that is part of the deep history of the Northern Ireland conflict:



This is the testimony of Bridget Kane to the Commissioners conducting the parliamentary Inquiry into the riots that took place in Belfast in July 1857. Specifically, she is being asked about the circumstances that forced her to migrate from her home in Tea Lane, Sandy Row, Belfast to English Street, Belfast. It is worth quoting her story as re-told by Andrew Boyd in *Holy War in Belfast* (1969), virtually the only book about the long history of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland that was available when the recent Troubles began in 1969:

That same evening [12th July, 1857], *Brigid Kane*, an inoffensive Catholic who lived in *Tea Lane* in the heart of *Sandy Row*, heard prolonged cheering outside her house and, on looking out, saw a crowd of people waving flags and bunches of orange flowers and dancing around an immense effigy that was supposed to represent Dan O'Connell, the Catholic leader, who was dead since 1847. She saw them carry the effigy up and down *Tea Lane*, then set it alight outside her front door and dance while it blazed.

*Brigid Kane* accepted the burning of the effigy as a warning. *Next day*, when a friendly neighbour advised her to leave, she packed her belongings and found herself another house in *English Street*, within the safety of *the Pound* (Boyd 1969, 15-16).

Before looking more closely at the migration story described here, it is important to highlight the value of the new educational resource DIPPAM in providing students with online access through EPPI to a searchable facsimile copy of the Inquiry report, which Boyd must have had to consult in its original printed form in a library. In this short extract, five discrepancies are evident between Boyd's re-telling and the original account. Four are relatively minor: Boyd spells her name Brigid, whereas the Inquiry Report gives it as Bridget; he refers to 'orange flowers' whereas the Report specifies 'orange lilies'; he describes the effigy of O'Connell as 'immense' (suggesting something as large as the much-larger-than life-size effigy of 'Lundy' that is burned annually in December in Londonderry) whereas Kane's testimony was that it was 'as large as Mr Rea' [one of the commissioners]; and Boyd says that 'she saw them ... set it alight outside her front door and dance while it blazed', whereas her testimony was 'I heard that it was burned'. More importantly, especially for our migration purpose here, Boyd says that 'next day ... she found herself another house in English Street', whereas her testimony was that she moved 'on the 9th of September', about six weeks after the event. We have here an insight into the circumstances of forced internal migration, cause by sectarian violence, which is distorted in Boyd's re-telling by the dramatic liberties that he takes with his primary source. This extract raises various questions about migration outcomes: How long had Bridget Kane, a Catholic, been living in the heart of the predominantly Sandy Row area? Was she born there or had she moved there from somewhere outside Belfast? How many other Catholics were living in the area? Did she feel safe and 'at home' or 'integrated' there before the riot? (That she was warned by neighbours and did not move out immediately suggests that she might have done.) How did she feel about moving to the relatively 'segregated' safety of English Street in the Pound area of the predominantly Catholic Lower Falls Road? If she felt relieved, did she, as it were, turn her back on her old neighbours in Tea Lane, Sandy Row; did she continue to keep in touch; or did she move out of Belfast altogether? The evidence to answer these questions in this specific case is lacking but there is evidence from the migration stories of others that enables such questions about segregation, integration and modulation to be explored in more detail, as for example in the following extract that was yielded by a search on 'Sandy Row' in the VMR database of DIPPAM:

I think that the biggest aid to peace in Sandy Row and the Shankill and probably Lower Falls and everywhere else was when they built the ring road 'cause they *knocked* all those wee houses *down* to put the ring road in, right?, OK and all those people *were taken* and, the redevelopment as they called it, um, so they *flattened* all those wee houses, so we all had to *go somewhere*, so they *shuffled* us all *off* to Lisburn, and Bangor, and Carrick, and all these places, right?, so you

got all these people *moved from* the Shankill, the Falls, Sandy Row, Newtownards Road, blah, blah, blah, all the way out, and that's the first wee *diaspora* thing, twelve miles away, you know ...

This extract, from an audio interview with 'Gary' who grew up in Sandy Row in the 1960s and 70s, is also about internal migration (this time urban-suburban rather than rural-urban, or intra-urban) in relation to the most recent 'Troubles'. Listening to the full interview it is possible to determine much more about how well Gary felt 'integrated' or otherwise in Sandy Row, how he adjusted to his migration out into part of the Sandy Row 'diaspora', and how he felt about his old home afterwards.

To complete this sequence of extracts, which is intended to illustrate the pedagogic value of acquiring this new analytical (three-stage, three-way, three-outcome) framework and applying it both to the sources contained in the three databases (EPPI, IED, VMR) of the new educational resource DIPPAM and also to an exploration of violent conflict and conflict resolution framed metaphorically as migration, consider the following extract from another audio interview accessible online in VMR through DIPPAM:

In Knutsford I was so miserable and so desperately wanted to *fit in* even though I didn't have the emotional and psychological resources to do so, basically I was one of those wimpy kids *cowering in the corner* instead of trying to make things happen but so it goes. I would listen to BBC radio at night and try and use the radio as elocution lessons. I deliberately tried to *lose* my Irish accent and to speak like a BBC radio announcer. Of course then, they all had awfully plummy voices, you know, so had I succeeded, I would also have been *ostracized* [laughs]. Yes, it worked. Yes, I *lost* my Irish accent. Yes, that's when I *lost* it. Yes.

This comes from the account of 'Michael', born 1950, of the effect on him of his family's migration from Whitehead, County Antrim, to England, when he was eight and half years old. He speaks of his inability to 'integrate' or 'fit in' and his 'self-segregation' and fear of being 'ostracized' (segregated) by others. The predicament he describes will be familiar to many schoolchildren and its application metaphorically to past and present stages of the peace process in Northern Ireland is not difficult (Trew 2009). Secondary school pupils in Northern Ireland will readily recognise that they have 'arrived' in their present school as the result of a 'migration' process: 'leaving' an 'old world' (primary school) and 'crossing' (via the Transfer Procedure) to a 'new world' (secondary school) in which they may be 'segregated' or 'integrated' (according to ability, gender or religious denomination). Bearing their personal experience of migration in mind, students may consider how well

historically Protestants and Unionists with a strong sense of continuing connection with Britain have ‘fitted in’ to Ireland, or how well Catholics and Nationalists ‘fitted in’ to Northern Ireland.

In the new political architecture of the ‘new world’ built by the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement, and subsequent St Andrews Agreement, can Unionists and Nationalists keep their old ‘accents’ or do they have to ‘lose’ them? If conflict resolution is like migration, what guidance can we take from our own experience and understanding of how ‘moving home’ is best accomplished? Teaching about literal migration (moving home) and metaphorical migration (moving school or job; moving into and out of conflict) should make a difference. Use for this aim of the collections of the museums, libraries and archives of Northern Ireland, including use of the EPPI, IED and VMR virtual archives through DIPPAM, should help to inform the choices that schoolchildren will make about migration in their own lives, whether literally to a new home, or metaphorically to a new place of education or employment; or, in this still-divided society, to the ‘new world’, envisaged by the Eames Bradley Consultative Group on the Past, of a post-conflict ‘shared future’.

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