
Silence on the Border in Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* and Brian McGilloway's *The Nameless Dead*

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ABSTRACT

Since the North-South partition in 1921, Northern Ireland has been deeply influenced by the inter-state border and the border that divides the Catholic and Protestant communities within the state. Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* and Brian McGilloway's *The Nameless Dead* depict the border's two dimensions. The former shows the psychological boundary marked by silence during sectarian conflict, whereas the latter examines the temporal border drawn by the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, a British-Irish-Northern Irish agreement that aimed to quell and end the conflict. Adopting Henri Lefebvre's triad of spatial production and Slavoj Žižek's conception of violence, the first part of this essay explains how, in *Resurrection Man*, objective violence is imposed on the space of Belfast through naming and how Victor Kelly, who finds himself spatially and socially marginalized, turns to serial killings (for Žižek, a form of subjective violence) to change his position within this order. Victor's atrocities reinforce the silence of the city, which strengthens its communal boundaries as a result. The silenced border persists into the post-Agreement period. The second part of the essay illustrates how *The Nameless Dead* contrasts the spatial and temporal borders and underscores the impassability of the latter. Contrary to the inter-state border that can be secretly crossed, the temporal border drawn by the Agreement becomes the limbo that traps society in suspension and oblivion.

KEYWORDS *Resurrection Man*, *The Nameless Dead*, Northern Ireland, border, silence

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The troubled history of Northern Ireland has produced a literary tradition of thrillers in which the writing of the border—inter-state or communal, geographical or psychological—is a prominent feature.¹ The Irish border was set up after the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, when the Irish Boundary Commission was formed to decide on the partitioning of Ireland. Since then, the political border between the North and the South has caused confusion and many disputes over both sides' jurisdictions, so much so that the borderland has become an area where border-crossing is not uncommon.² As for the northern state, it is crisscrossed by ethnic, religious, and ideological borders, which mainly derive from the distinct identification of the two communities with two nations across the border of the Irish Sea—the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. Marisol Morales-Ladrón notes the close connection between the thriller genre and the border issue in contemporary Irish literature:

[T]he evolution of the thriller has paralleled a growing trend within contemporary Irish literature (North and South) that concerns itself with the destabilization of binary notions, problematizing and blurring categories with regard to all kind of boundaries. (204)

The literary features of the thriller in particular make this genre apt to register the turmoil of the North. As Eamonn Hughes contends, Northern Ireland is a “border country,” a country defined and deeply influenced by its borders (Introduction 3). Because the thriller often “moves to a closure that projects a closed but always unresolved system,” it serves as an appropriate literary form to depict Northern Irish experiences that are overwhelmingly dominated by the “always-unfinished business” of the border (Hughes, Introduction 6).

The border in Northern Ireland emerges as a political and territorial divide, each one of its sides registering different communal, religious identities. However, as Nick Vaughan-Williams suggests, “borders are not natural, neutral nor static but historically contingent, politically charged, dynamic phenomena that first and foremost involve people and their everyday lives” (1). Or, as Thomas Nail points out, “the border is not a logical, binary, or sovereign cut, its processes often break

¹ According to Aaron Kelly, “four hundred thrillers have been produced over the last 35 years in response to the current phase of political upheaval in Northern Ireland” (1). Marisol Morales-Ladrón also notes that the thriller is “the most popular form in Northern Irish literature” (202).

² The partitioning of Ireland has been a “long gestation” before and through the Anglo-Irish Treaty (Ferriter 1). That said, the border is still an equivocal presence between the North and the South. As Diarmaid Ferriter reads in a geographical study from 1950, “no clear boundary exists,” and the 1938 Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland suggests that there are “no less than 180 roads cross[ing] the border” (10).

down, function partially, multiply, or relocate the division altogether” (8). Instead of a dividing line, the border is the interface between two entities that can be both mobile and static, interactive and restrictive. In other words, the border can be considered an in-between space, in which various forces—be they ideological, discursive, political or economic—counter and encounter one another. As Homi K. Bhabha contends, “the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing* in a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond” (7).³ Therefore, instead of a static reading, this essay will unravel the confrontation and contestation occurring on the spatial, temporal, and psychological border. How the border influences the psychological landscape of the community during the Troubles and the perception of the troubled past after the Agreement will be addressed.⁴

On the land defined by the border, codes of silence are inscribed. Residents of one side tend to remain reserved when living next to unknown or hostile neighbors on the other side. Silence hence marks the psychological boundary between two antagonistic factions. The symbiotic relationship between border and silence is particularly evident in Northern Ireland. Seamus Heaney acutely notes “The famous/ Northern reticence,” insinuating the mistrust and fear prevalent between the two communities (53). As Maria Beville and Sara McQuaid contend, “silence in its own right is a unique and important route to understanding the complexities of modern Ireland in cultural, contemporary and historical terms” (1). In the Northern Irish context, silence functions as a device of “social control,” on the one hand, and a way of “binding communities together in resistance to external authority,” on the other (Beville and McQuaid 11; McAteer 15). British authorities maintain confidentiality in order to protect the source of information on any sectarian attack (Beville and McQuaid 11). Both communities and their paramilitary groups impose silence to “rally and discipline a civilian population” (12). The inclination for silence persists after the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, which marked the end of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Although the Agreement promises to honor Troubles-related victims “through a fresh start,” it has been

³ In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha discusses the experience of “living on the borderlines of the ‘present’” in relation to migrants and minorities in postcolonial, postmodern times (1). Concepts related to the border are “in-betweenness” and “liminality,” which Bhabha uses interchangeably throughout his work (5, 21). Although Northern Ireland’s postcolonial status after the reduction of the British Army since the Agreement is beyond the scope of this research, Bhabha’s dynamic view of the border and its concurrent phenomena helps us examine the diverse representations of border experiences in Northern Irish thrillers.

⁴ The Troubles refer to the time of sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. During this period, violence such as bombings and shootings occurred between the paramilitary groups of Catholic and Protestant communities. The strife also caused serious civilian casualties.

criticized for being wishful thinking and rhetorically avoiding the past (“The Agreement”). Given the peace and prosperity promised by the Agreement, what replaces communal silence is silence toward the conflictual past, the reluctance to face the troubled times. As Birte Heidemann suggests, the post-Agreement period has turned into “a state of paralyzed temporality” in which the collective memory of the conflict is more than willingly removed from the future-oriented socio-economic discourse (8).

Eoin McNamee’s *Resurrection Man* (1994) and Brian McGilloway’s *The Nameless Dead* (2012) will be the focus of this article (abbreviated as *RM* and *ND*, respectively, hereafter in citations). The former is McNamee’s debut novel, which “sees how a society already accustomed to so many boundaries and borders . . . lends this type of fear a special intensity” (Tobin 132). *The Nameless Dead*, the finale of McGilloway’s Devlin series, portrays “the actuality of the border” and “question[s] both its practicality and at times aspects of its reality” (Baraniuk 73). Given their shared interest in the border, this essay proposes to investigate their depiction of the border’s two dimensions. McNamee shows the psychological boundary marked by silence during sectarian conflict, whereas McGilloway examines the temporal border drawn by the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, a British-Irish-Northern Irish agreement that aimed to quell and end the conflict. In the first part, I show how silence and the communal border in Belfast are mutually reinforced. Adopting Henri Lefebvre’s triad of spatial production and Slavoj Žižek’s concepts of objective and subjective violence, this part explains how objective violence is imposed on the space of Belfast through naming. Victor Kelly and his family, whose quasi-Catholic surname disaccords with their Protestant affiliation, are socially marginalized and remain taciturn to avert enmity. To change his position within this order, Victor turns to the subjective violence of serial killings. Victor’s atrocities reinforce the silence of the city, which then strengthens its communal boundaries. The silenced border persists into the post-Agreement period. In the second part, I illustrate how *The Nameless Dead* contrasts the border’s spatial and temporal dimensions and underscores the impassability of the latter. Contrasting the inter-state border that can be crossed, albeit in secrecy, the temporal border drawn by the Good Friday Agreement becomes a limbo that traps Troubles-related victims and the Northern Irish society in suspension and oblivion. Digging into remnants of the past, Devlin finds that victims during the 1970s, overshadowed by the vision of peace and prosperity promised by the Agreement, have lain silenced, waiting for recognition and justice. As will be explained later, their silence illustrates Heidemann’s idea of “liminal permanence.” The collective memory of the conflictual past is suspended in a liminal state between oblivion

and recognition, past and present, while a future-oriented socio-economic discourse dominates Northern Irish society during the post-Agreement period.

Resurrection Man: Silence on the Border of a Divided City

Published in 1994, McNamee's *Resurrection Man* traces the formation and transformation of the serial killer Victor Kelly in Belfast. As critics have noted, the novel is inspired by journalist Martin Dillon's account of murders committed by the Shankill Butchers in *The Shankill Butchers: A Case Study of Mass Murder*, first published in 1989 (Tobin 131; Reimer 68; Gray 57). Operating around the Shankill Road, in Belfast, the Shankill Butchers was a gang of UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) members notorious for a series of kidnappings, tortures, and murders during the 1970s. Its leader, Lenny Murphy, is the inspiration for Victor Kelly. In a poetic, grim style with anatomical precision, the novel follows the trajectory of Victor and his gang, the Resurrection Men, around Belfast and, along with their murders, delineates the city's socio-political landscape. Brought up in a family on the margins of the community, Victor secures the communal border by enforcing silence through fear and includes himself within the sphere of terror he is perpetuating. Following Victor's murders, we see a vicious circle of communal violence and individual atrocities. While sectarian divide leads to Victor's ruthless killings, his killings impose fearful silence on the community, fortifying the dividing line in turn.

Victor's atrocities can be attributed to the dislocation of his family in the city. In Northern Ireland, where surname is one of the "social cues" of one's religious and political allegiance, Victor's family are put in a parlous state, for they own a quasi-Catholic name while identifying themselves with the Protestant community (McKeown 7). Moreover, Victor's father, James Kelly, shares his forename with the deposed Catholic king James II, with whom Catholics often sympathize. Under the shadow of his father's ambiguous name, Victor was bullied and called "Pat" by other kids during his childhood simply because "Kelly sounds like a Taig name" (RM 6).⁵ Unable to find a secure neighborhood without raising suspicion, the Kellys have "moved house so often" that it has caused "a disturbance to Victor's childhood," as Victor's mother, Dorcas, admits in retrospect (RM 3).

Victor's parents do not help their son "donate stability to his life," either (RM 7). Victor feels further isolated when his silent father fails to comfort or stand up for him. As Dorcas complains, "[James] was so backward and shy he needed to stand up twice before he cast a shadow" (RM 3). Unable to counter discrimination,

Silence
on the Border

⁵ "Pat" is another nickname for Catholics.

James Kelly “protect[s] himself by effacement” since “silence was a condition of survival” (RM 4). On the night before James’s death, Victor sits face to face with him, showing anger to the latter. “There never was an expression the equal of the one on Victor’s face as he looked at his father. It was a stare of exact hatred for the wrongs that man done his family” (RM 186). James’s impotence as father pushes Victor to the extreme and sends him in the direction of surrogate father Billy McClure, which leads to Victor’s final destruction. If James does little to protect his son, Dorcas inculcates into her son conservative Protestantism, which is later radicalized via Victor’s acquaintance with McClure and paramilitary groups. Dorcas’s role in Victor’s religious education is explained in a mildly ironic tone:

Dorcas would maintain that Victor did not learn bigotry at her knee even though she herself had little tolerance of the Roman persuasion. She believed that all he really wanted to be was a mature and responsible member of society, loyal to the crown and devoted to his mother. (RM 3)

Even if Dorcas can deny her hand in Victor’s sectarian violence, she cannot deny that, similar to James, she remains quiet about Victor’s deviance: “[if] Victor was involved in the protection of Protestants [Dorcas] asked no questions but sometimes there was a pain like an accusation from worry” (RM 143). She either turns a blind eye to or stays acquiescent to Victor’s misdeeds, only showing concern for her son’s safety.

The difficult relation between the Kellys and the community can be further explained via Fran Tonkiss’s study of spatial and social relation. In *Space, the City and Social Theory*, Tonkiss elucidates the mutually influential relationship between urban space and social relations. Sharing Georg Simmel’s understanding of space, Tonkiss suggests that “urban spaces can be seen as structuring social relations and processes, and in turn as shaped by social action and meanings” (2). Communities in the city, she contends, refer to “the formal and informal means (meeting places, institutions, conventions, codes, and values) through which social groups organized and reproduced themselves in particular spaces” (15). They offer “local spaces of identity and belonging” against “the disintegrating and isolating currents of urban life” (17). Although the models of Tonkiss’s study are derived mainly from “liberal capitalist cities” in North America and Western Europe, which differ from Belfast in economic scale and social climate, her work is still of value in underscoring the peculiarity of spatial and social relations in Belfast. Like Tonkiss’s case studies, communities in Belfast also offer a sense of belonging based on shared culture and values. Nonetheless, instead of defending itself against

currents of urban life arising from consumerism, capitalism, or migration, communal identification dominates and determines the life of Belfast to such an extent that “the city is, indeed, a form of hell for ideologies which promote a tribalistic knowing your place as the only way of knowing yourself” (Hughes, “Town of Shadows” 153-54). In Belfast, one’s identity bespeaks one’s neighborhood, and vice versa. Estranged from their community, the Kellys are spatially unstable, which in turn exacerbates Victor’s sense of isolation. “He suffered from incomprehension,” Dorcas contemplates after her son’s death (*RM* 3).

Henri Lefebvre’s spatial triad and Slavoj Žižek’s discussion of violence help clarify the violence the Kellys face in Belfast as well as the violence Victor resorts to. According to Lefebvre, the production of space consists of three levels: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. Spatial practice is “a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, ‘private’ life and leisure)” (Lefebvre 33). Such a practice ensures “continuity” and “cohesion.” It signals one’s relationship to the space he or she lives in. One’s “spatial competence and performance” depends on how much he or she coheres with that space (38). In the Kellys’ case, their constant movement illustrates their limited performance in spatial practice, while Victor’s sectarian violence portrays his desperate effort to seek cohesion with Belfast.

As for representations of space, they are “tied to the relations of production and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose” (Lefebvre 33). In other words, they concern the ordering of space, which involves the workings of knowledge, signs, codes, and ideology (Lefebvre 33, 41). Given Tonkiss’s explanation that representations of space are “templates of power that rationalize the spaces of the city and the normal conduct of bodies and things within them,” Žižek’s notion of objective violence may well come into play (Tonkiss 3). Žižek divides objective violence into two groups: symbolic and systemic violence. Symbolic violence is “embodied in language and its forms.” It can also be systemic because it comprises “the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (Žižek 1). In a city where language and its variants (e.g., street names, place names, and road signs) play a substantial part and where cultural, economic, and political systems are interlaced, it is not unusual for objective violence to occur. In Belfast, a city with “dense tribal histories attached to a name” (*RM* 35), the ordering of space through signs and codes can be seen: “The city itself has withdrawn into its placenames. Palestine Street. Balaklava Street. The names of captured ports, lost battles, forgotten outposts held against inner darkness” (*RM* 3). The streets are inscribed with the history of Britain’s involvement

in the establishment of Palestine after World War I. Balaklava, originally referring to a battle of the Crimean War, easily connects with “balaclava,” the typical gear of Protestant paramilitary groups (McCarthy 138). In addition, names of various sorts—surnames, street names, and names of schools attended—register absolute signifiers for both individual and collective identification (McKeown 7). The Catholic journalist Ryan contemplates how overwhelmingly naming works in the city when finding himself immediately under suspicion in a bar: “It was a question of assembling an identity out of names: the name of school attended, the name of the street where you lived, your own name. These were the finely tuned instruments of survival” (RM 34). Color codes are also used to mark the territory of certain communities. “New estates with street kerbing painted red, white and blue and loyalist slogans on gable ends” pervade the daily life of Belfast citizens (RM 98). The relations of urban space are so deeply defined by the signs and codes of the two camps that decoding becomes a necessity in everyday life. As Ryan ponders, “[i]nhabitants of the city were adept at deciphering the clues to religion and status contained in an address” (RM 85). Such representations of space in Belfast easily inflict symbolic and systemic violence on the Kellys, whose surname does not accord with this order.

Facing objective violence in representations of space, Victor shows his resistance at the level of representational space. As Lefebvre contends, representational space is a realm that “the imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (Lefebvre 38). Less coherent and cohesive than representations of space, representational space is a lived space “linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life” (33). Since “non-verbal symbols and signs” are often used to grasp “images and memories” of a space, representational space is usually the product of imagination and artistic representation (39, 50). It is the realm where the individual can intervene, so Victor uses violence, instead of art, to fit into that space. The non-verbal sign he uses, his *modus operandi*, resembles the subjective violence Žižek discusses. Subjective violence is the most visible mode of violence perpetrated by “social agents, evil individuals, disciplined oppressive apparatuses, fanatical crowds” (Žižek 10). Criminal activities or terrorist attacks belong to this category. Accordingly, this mode of violence tends to draw popular attention, whereas objective violence recedes into “the background of a non-violent zero level” (2).

Victor shocks the public through horrific crime scenes. Investigating the Berlin Street killing, Ryan is informed by the police that “[the victim] had these long cuts all over his body. . . . [H]e was alive when they cut the throat” (RM 22). Another time Ryan examines Darkie Larche’s body in a bath and sees that “the man’s throat was cut and that his blood had run to the bottom of the bath and into the plughole,

the whole scene composed like an anatomical plate devised for instruction with parts exposed and parts covered" (RM 213). This unique *modus operandi* serves as Victor's blunt statement against the name-centered communities. By silencing his victims, he voices his outrage at the discrimination against his family because of their Catholic-sounding surname. He turns from a victim of sectarian division into a victor in the brutal killings he conducts. Victor's statement is so strong that he not only cuts the victims' throats but also leaves several incisions in their bodies, as if leaving his message there. When Victor's lover, Heather, sees the photographs of his victims, "[s]ome had the neck severed and many were marked with knife-wounds on the torso and limbs, the marks regular, like the *script* of some phantom tongue used to record inventions that might be found on the lips of those about to die" (RM 197; emphasis added). As Dermot McCarthy notes, Victor "attempts to write himself into presence by inscribing himself in his victims' flesh" (McCarthy 146). In this respect, these victims, by bearing Victor's unique signature, consolidate his identity. Same way as resurrection men secretly exhume corpses and sell them to medical schools and researchers, so does Victor resurrect his identity through his victims (McCarthy 146).

When the first knife killing is revealed, Ryan and his colleague Coppinger notice the peculiarity of the case:

There was someone out there operating in a new context. They were being lifted into unknown areas, deep pathologies. Was the cortex severed? They both felt a *silence* beginning to spread from this one. They would have to rethink procedures. The root of the tongue had been severed. *New languages* would have to be invented. (RM 16; emphasis added)

On his victims' bodies, Victor leaves his signature to assert his existence. With the language of silence, he creates a new context where he can be situated. In this case, how is the silence of Victor's victims different from the silence of James, who uses it as a way of survival in the divided city? Aaron Kelly's allegorical reading and Žižek's discussion of violence offer insights into this question. According to Kelly, Victor's troubled family can be seen as an allegory of "Unionist hegemony" (73), since the family serves as a center or base on which the two main political allegiances in Ireland are founded: "the dominant ideologies in Ireland [Unionism and Irish nationalism] are constructed around the filiative, supposedly natural bonds and attachments, for which the family is a paradigmatic organizational unit in reproducing order, authority, and continuity" (15). Like the Protestant community responsible for James's silence, so does Victor, the child of a dysfunctional

family, generate silence in his victims. In this aspect, there seems to be no difference between James and Victor's victims, since both suffer sectarian violence in a general sense. However, some nuances exist between the two, as James's reticence signals a submission to the objective violence, while the silence of Victor's victims is intended to declare his Protestant identity, to resituate himself in the space of Belfast. Kelly points out that, in the family as well as the community, "force and violence are not interruptive of the organic order of Unionism's filiative model of society but are rather deeply ingrained within it" (73). In Žižek's analysis, objective violence "has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seem to be 'irrational' explosions of subjective violence" (2). In line with Žižek's view, Kelly's allegory can be further elaborated to show that Victor, the victim of objective violence, replicates such violence and turns James's submissive silence into a weapon, a language with which he declares his existence. Violence engenders another form of violence. Thus, the two kinds of silence differ in that James's silence is the result of objective violence while the victims' silence is the manifestation of Victor's subjective violence in response to communal prejudice.

Derivative of objective violence, Victor's brutality often becomes ritualistic, which makes him more Protestant than other Protestants. When discussing the cases, Protestant barflies consider Victor and his fraternity "Defenders of the faith and all" (RM 19). Victor is portrayed as "an evangelist with burning eyes," "a seeker after fundamental truths," since he seems to be "[s]tripping away layers with a knife to arrive at valid words" (RM 24). The bodies of his silenced victims become palimpsests on which Victor inscribes his scripture. Like Lenny Murphy, Victor turns into a "super-Prod . . . more anti-Catholic, anti-Nationalist, and anti-Republican than even the most bitter man on the Shankill Road" (Dillon 11). The religiosity of Victor's atrocities is reinforced by other gang members. Heather notes of his associates Big Ivan and Willie Lambe in the sense of "the huge faith they had invested in Victor. A devotion almost religious in its intensity" (RM 93). Victor embodies and stirs religious fervor in the Protestant community, which in turn recognizes his Protestant affiliation.

After a series of merciless killings, different communities in Belfast are stunned, shrouded in silence. Coppinger explains the difficulty of gathering information about the cases: "It's like everybody's frightened, the peelers and all. Even the hard men's worried. Word is you mention the subject to them they go buck mad. Like don't remind them. Hard enough to find out things as it is but this one's buried far as everybody's concerned" (RM 35-36). Silence pervades every social sphere. In the news, "the essential details of an attack . . . were missing" and "[p]oints . . . were being omitted from eyewitness accounts" (RM 58). The "silence of the media" is

louder than any other word in the city (RM 133). “[A] new species of information” is also found in the public realm: “Politicians issued ambiguous statements of condemnation. In court unidentified witnesses gave evidence from behind screens. The facts were equivocal” (RM 83). Victor’s horrendous crimes disrupt the city to the extent that it can only respond with ambiguity, anonymity, and equivocality. While Victor makes a strident declaration through killing, the community responds with “cautious silence”—the evading or equivocating of Victor’s atrocities (RM 152). Instead of names, he marks the boundary of his turf through silence built on fear and anxiety. With the new language of violence, Victor circumscribes a territory that belongs to him, turning the city into “terror-tor[y]” (Kelly 101). When driving along the street, Victor sees that “he had created a city-wide fear and put it in place and felt it necessary to patrol its boundaries” (RM 202). When recounting the murders he has committed, Victor realizes that “he had produced an itinerary to accompany a journey through a trackless region whose borders were disputed between the living and the dead.” He has created “a strange other topography, surveyed and mapped and returned to silence” (RM 222).

In Victor’s remapping of the city, how do the terror-tories, or the representational space he creates, differ from the representations of space in Belfast? Does he replace the boundaries of Belfast marked by naming with new boundaries marked by his atrocities? Does the Protestant community react differently to Victor’s violence when other forms of sectarian violence are already part of their everyday life? From the passages quoted above, there seems to be no huge difference between the two. Instead of being marginalized, Victor situates himself in the city, so “[t]he city become[s] a diagram of violence centred about him” (RM 11). Similar to the representations of space, he rewrites the city with another ordering of space. In the early stages of his murdering spree, the marks he leaves on the victims are “regular” (RM 197). He knows “how the city operated, that at its heart there was a set of mechanical principles, requirements to be fulfilled, and that they were within his grasp” (RM 76). Before Victor’s rise to notoriety, “silence was the great gift of the city, an enduring monument shaped in a mute effort of years” (RM 152). Victor reinforces it with atrocities. To borrow from Lefebvre’s and Žižek’s concepts, Victor’s subjective violence in his representational space may only differ from the city’s objective violence in scale and degree of brutality. The former is committed by the individual while the latter works systemically and symbolically at the collective level. At some point, the two even overlap when the name of his gang is inscribed on the streets: “He was impressed by the *graffiti*. It was a rumor of approval in the narrow streets. Resurrection Men 1. Taigs 0. It confirmed that he was on the right track. It was the first *sign* of a legend taking shape, a dark freight in the

soul of the city” (RM 133; emphasis added). With those marks celebrating the gang’s feats, Victor’s subjective violence turns symbolic when it is embodied in signs, the language of the city.

Victor’s remapping, nonetheless, goes astray when he shows signs of disorientation near the end of the story. The forensic reports of the latest knife murders detail the marks of “frenzy, repeated slashing,” which indicate that “the rudiments of control had been lost” (RM 145). His disorientation mainly results from a growing paranoia about traitors. As he and his gang gain more notoriety, Victor shows “authentic fears for his safety” and starts to suspect those around him (RM 172). Once he doubts that “information was escaping from the Pot Luck,” a pub he frequents, so he tortures the gofer Flaps McArthur to death in “the Preacher’s formal madness” (RM 164-65). Later, Victor also kills Darkie Larche, the owner of the Gibraltar bar, after McClure warns him that Larche might have turned on Victor (RM 204). The distrust between Victor and the community then alienates him from the city, which he finds more and more difficult to read:

But sometimes on one of these runs [Victor] would say, where are we? He sounded surprised as if he had suddenly discovered that the streets were not the simple things he had taken them for, a network to be easily memorized and navigated. They had become *untrustworthy*, concerned with unfamiliar destinations, no longer adaptable to your own purposes. (RM 163; emphasis added)

Victor betrays “topographical disorientation” in which the diagram of the city, also drawn by him, does not match his perception (Kennedy-Andrews 126). As Elmer Kennedy-Andrews notes, Victor’s disorientation reveals “a deep uncertainty about identity, the authority of the self, and relation between self and world” (126). Victor’s fear of betrayal severs his tie with the community he strives to join in the beginning.

Victor’s disorientation, when contrasted with the order McClure tries to maintain, illustrates the substantial difference of his representational space from the representations of space in the city. In a loyalist pub, Victor gets to know McClure, who has “links with the British Intelligence establishment” and is “active in Protestant paramilitary circles but not thought to be a member of any organization” (RM 154). Like a father figure, McClure listens to Victor’s complaint about “the discrimination he had suffered from” and shares the “detestation of Catholics” (RM 64). Later he even joins Victor’s gang to commit a shooting at a Republican pub. There is “a warm feeling between [McClure] and Victor,” and Victor has “a sense that this was a patient methodology coming intact through generations.

Something perhaps that a father could offer to a son" (*RM* 137). Unlike Victor's parents, who remain silent to their son's misdeeds, McClure approves of Victor by saying, "Ulster needs men like you. Leaders" (*RM* 204). From McClure, Victor obtains the recognition and company he fails to find in his family. In contrast to Victor, McClure is a mysterious figure, most likely a double agent, who has access to the police, civil servants, and Unionist paramilitary groups. Instead of inhabiting the margins, McClure is deeply integrated into communal networks. As a witness and sometimes participant of violence, he knows the rules of the game, namely the rules of the representations of space. Once he tells Victor, "[p]eople's looking for control. . . . They want somebody to take over, decide things for them, what to do with their lives. They'll hand over their life and cry tears of fucking gratitude that somebody else'll take it on for them" (*RM* 65). Although the representation of space in Belfast has been pervaded with the objective violence caused by sectarian division, its citizens have learned to cope with it. In Lefebvre's words, there is "the 'order'" in turmoil (33). "There's a cultivated boredom out there. Another bomb, another dead UDR man. People's learning to switch channels when they hear it" (*RM* 156). Belfast's citizens have taken turbulence as part of their daily routine. As R. B. Tobin suggests, "a new kind of discipline has finally been established" (139). A standard operation procedure has also been set up, including "electronic surveillance, body-heat detectors, helicopters with nitesun searchlights . . . the confidential telephone" and "seven-day detention orders" (156). As for the paramilitary groups, they "cultivated the carefully selected victim, economy of movement, the well-aimed single shot to the head" and "were in control of their hatred" (21). As Žižek says of the objective, systemic violence, "the more subtle forms of coercion . . . sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence" (8). A certain extent of control is exerted to accommodate a certain extent of violence.

When Victor goes beyond "acceptable levels of violence" and becomes "too unpredictable," the community gets agitated (*RM* 156). Wittingly or not, McClure reveals to Ryan what may happen to Victor: "[Victor's] gone spare so he has, finally lost the rag. There's a few people in a high state of concern about his activities. Reckon he's got bad for business in the town. Word is he's going to be took out" (*RM* 209). Ironically, Victor is betrayed by McClure, who encourages him to visit his ill father and has him ambushed outside his home. To some extent, this is not unreasonable since McClure is the one who knows and plays by the rules. The novel ends with Heather contemplating the bodies of Victor and other victims: "That they would carry news of the city and its environs. The Pound. Sailortown. The Bone. That their news would be awaited. That they would test their quality

against the dark and take their place among the lonely and vigilant dead” (RM 233). Lying among the other deceased, Victor will be reduced to news footage that will be viewed and dismissed from the city residents’ daily conversation thereafter. The city remains in the dark and, as Ryan envisages, possesses “a sense of the future indefinitely postponed” (RM 121). Does Victor’s death mark the end of violence in the city? The situation suggests otherwise when the community, whose border is cemented by the fear Victor fuels, is likely to reproduce another outburst of subjective violence. The future is almost unthinkable for a city suspended in endless sectarian strife.

The Nameless Dead: Silence on the Post-Agreement Border

The suspension continues forty years later, following the passage of the Good Friday Agreement. Set in 2012, nearly one and a half decades after the Agreement, *The Nameless Dead* begins with the search for the corpse of Declan Cleary conducted by the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains (ICLVR) on Islandmore, an island in the middle of the river Foyle, on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic.⁶ As the dig continues, more remnants of the past are unearthed. Declan Cleary is found to have been involved in a scandal at St. Canice’s Mother-and-Baby Home thirty-five years ago. The accidental discovery of an infant’s remains at the same site brings to light a long-buried tragedy at St. Canice’s.

At the center of an array of crimes, Islandmore serves not only as a “geographical limbo,” “the island [that] belongs to both and neither,” but also as the societal limbo state of post-Agreement Northern Ireland (ND 5). While *Resurrection Man* probes into the invisible, psychological border in Belfast, *The Nameless Dead* turns its attention to the geographical border between the North and the South, two political jurisdictions, revealing the actuality of life there. Islandmore sits in the Foyle between Lifford and Strabane, two border towns. The fact that Lifford is a town of Donegal underlines the “double exclusion,” or borderness, of this county (Baraniuk 73). Donegal is one of the three Ulster counties excluded from the formation of Northern Ireland. Besides, its eastern area, “the Laggan” near the river Foyle, is culturally excluded from the South in that it shares more in common with the North than with the South in the history of the seventeenth-century Plantation,

⁶ The Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains (ICLVR), a government-funded organization established by “an intergovernmental agreement between the Irish and British Governments” in 1999, aims to locate the “victims of paramilitary violence (The Disappeared) who were murdered and buried in secret during years of conflict” (*Independent*).

an organized settlement in Ulster by migrants from Scotland and England (Baraniuk 73). On this borderland, however, McGilloway portrays “the border not as a dividing line, but as a meeting place between neighbors” (Baraniuk 81-82). Although most roads near the border were closed in the 1970s, some “narrow crossing” was allowed between the two sides. This passage “was exploited by smugglers, either running the railway line across the border with illegal goods and produce or navigating the narrow crossing beneath the bridges in rowing boats” (*ND* 5). Trespassing and transgression were not uncommon even at the time when guarding the border was vital for both sides. As Tonkiss remarks, “[t]he making of borders is a ‘shaping of things,’ creating sites of encounter and zones of inclusion at the same time as it draws lines of social division and exclusion” (58). Instead of a clear-cut frontier, the borderland in the novel signals an in-between zone fraught with “movement and multiplication” (Nail 8). Residents on the border, both North and South, live under its influence.

Along the inter-state border, McGilloway depicts those silenced on the margins of the society, including the underprivileged and petty offenders. Regarding the South, the border is where the wreckage of the Celtic Tiger lies. When Devlin visits Christine Cashell, a mother bereft of her child, he finds her family living in “one of a number of ghost estates along the border” (*ND* 77). Rob Kitchin among others has defined a ghost estate as “an estate of 10 or more housing units where 50% or more of units are either vacant or under construction” (1072). These houses were often “left abandoned or unfinished in the wake of the Ireland’s property crash” (O’Callaghan 122). In particular, the border is the area deeply affected by this crash. In 2011, border counties such as Cavan, Sligo, Donegal, and Longford face vacancy rates above 15%, slightly higher than the national rate of 14.5%. Rates of 3-5% are expected in a normal housing market (Kitchin 1073).⁷ In the story, “there were a load of companies and investors involved” during the Celtic Tiger period, but the boom came to its end and “the whole lot collapsed” in the late 2000s (*ND* 139). Investigating one of the deserted houses, Devlin can still sense “the country’s collective economic hangover” (*ND* 167). The geographical border is the area those financially disadvantaged are apt to occupy. Young couples chose to settle down in Island View on the border for its “quiet spots” and reasonable housing prices (*ND* 78). However, after the property bubble burst, the bankrupt developer left, leaving houses unfinished. Without enough savings at hand, buyers had no choice but to live in these estates. Living in this kind of estate,

⁷ This oversupply in the rural area was caused by the Upper Shannon Rural Renewal Scheme, which aimed to promote house building in the counties of Cavan, Leitrim, Longford, Roscommon, and Sligo through a “tax incentive scheme” from 1999 to 2008 (Kitchin 1073).

Christine Cashell and her partner Andrew Dunne find themselves stuck in a “shit-hole” in a poorly constructed neighborhood (ND 78). The situation in the North is not more promising. James Callan, whose son was executed by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) for smuggling guns, lives in a cottage by the Foyle, where there is “little more than floodplains for months on end” (ND 54). Because of the inhospitable terrain, the area is not as developed and overpriced as other parts of Strabane, allowing for shelters for those in straitened circumstances. McGilloway portrays residents on both sides of the border witnessing a bleak economic picture.

Since the border is where two jurisdictions meet, certain crimes are committed under cover of “the vagaries of judicial jurisdiction” (ND 204). The uncertainty of jurisdiction creates some space for maneuvering and manipulation, revealing the permeability and vulnerability of the spatial border. As Patrick Duffy humorously remarks, “[n]obody was really innocent in the borderlands. It turns us all into petty criminals” (22). One of the petty offences Devlin detects is smuggling. In his essay “Walking the Tightrope: The Border in Irish Fiction,” McGilloway notes that “smuggling and the financial disparity between the two territories is a common feature” (309). People on the border smuggle either to avoid duties or to profit from transactions across the customs barrier. Goods smuggled range from household essentials such as sugar, butter, and tobacco to livestock or “highly organized enterprises” (Nash, Reid, and Graham 34, 54). There are even “green roads”—“unofficial border crossing routes”—for smugglers (34). In the novel, John Reddin, who used to be a fisherman and smuggler on the Foyle, explains to Devlin how he helped his mother evade duties by smuggling sugar and flour from Strabane during his childhood, and how smuggling nowadays has transformed into organized crimes such as smuggling of drugs and oil as a result of the differences in the price (ND 66).

Parents in the North also take advantage of the border’s legal complexities. They will move “on paper, into properties in the south” to scam child benefits from the system in the Republic since it is “markedly more generous” than that in the North (ND 122). “The child benefit would be paid in the North, while the South would top up the difference to bring it to Republic levels” (ND 122-23). In order to meet the needs of benefit-fraud, entrepreneur Niall Martin leases his estates in the South to Northerners so that they can “claim on both sides of the border” (ND 266).⁸ The last crime connected with the border is debt evasion. Devlin finds that,

⁸ McGilloway’s portrayal of child benefit fraud is believed to be inspired by the cross-border welfare fraud in Ireland in 2009. According to *The Irish Times*, border towns in the South saw a significant increase of claimants of jobless benefits from the North (“Welfare Fraud”).

after the death of the Celtic Tiger, bankrupt developers in the South “fled to the North, where he had claimed bankruptcy to avoid having to pay any of the men who had worked on the houses” (ND 77). These crimes, along with smuggling, reinforce the image of the border as a permeable, two-way channel offenders can secretly cross without immediate detection. Instead of a blockade, the vagaries of the border offer them a way out of their quagmire. Moreover, the crimes across the border epitomize “[t]he global . . . in the local,” since they emerge in tandem with global vicissitudes such as “international drug running,” “the Celtic Tiger economic boom,” and the worldwide financial crisis in the post-Celtic Tiger era (Baraniuk 77). Even those on the border are not immune to the changes in the center, but are further financially and socially marginalized amid global turbulence.

In addition to the spatial border, Islandmore serves as a temporal border that proves more impassable than the spatial one. The temporal dimension of the border derives from the link of the island with the Christian tradition. Since the nineteenth century, Islandmore has been a *cillin*, an “unofficial burial site for unbaptized babies,” who were thus “trapped in limbo for eternity according to old Church law” (ND 6, 7).⁹ In the twentieth century, it became the site where still-born infants of unmarried mothers at St. Canice’s were buried. These infants, along with their parents, “find themselves beyond the borders of Christian comfort” (Baraniuk 86). The image of a limbo links the nineteenth- and twentieth-century borderland along a continuum of exclusion, suppression, and stagnation. Victims within are trapped not only spatially but also temporally, unable to move to the present unless they are unearthed and identified. The infants in this limbo become the center of the novel, around which Devlin’s investigation revolves. If criminality can be considered “a ‘figure,’ a trope, by which wider social, cultural and political processes can be understood,” as Bran Nicol, Patricia Pulham, and Eugene McNulty contend, these nameless infants illustrate the conservative milieu that the Catholic Church has created in Catholic communities (6). Both in the South and North, the Church was so dominant that a life could be denied existence simply because it did not conform to the Catholic doctrine.

In addition, the infants exemplify those outweighed and silenced by Troubles-related violence. They had lain unnoticed for years as they stood on the edge of public discourse, preoccupied by religious doctrines and political disputes. These infants buried on Islandmore, including six premature ones and one murdered,

⁹ According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, limbo refers, in Catholic theology, to “the border place between heaven and hell where dwell those souls who, though not condemned to punishment, are deprived of the joy of eternal existence with God in heaven.” Some infants “whose original sin has not been washed away by baptism” may stay in limbo even if they “have died without actual sin” (“Limbo”).

had Goldenhar syndrome, an illness that causes “facial malformation” (*ND* 166). As the ending of the story discloses, their death is connected with a drug trial on mothers at St. Canice’s Mother-and-Baby Home in the 1970s. Niall Martin and his father Alan Martin owned a pharmaceutical company that developed a skin cream for acne. Approved by the government, the cream was tested on the unmarried mothers at St. Canice’s. However, the cream contained “retinoids” that would cause disfigurements and other birth defects on the unborn child (*ND* 257). As it turned out, after the trial, except for one baby alive at birth, six others were still-born. To cover up the failure, Dominic Callan and Seamus O’Hara, then staff at St. Canice’s, murdered the one alive and buried all of them. The Martins then smuggled children from eastern Europe to replace the seven infants and put them for adoption. Without the parents’ knowledge, the Martins used the birth certificates of the deceased children for their business of human trafficking (*ND* 289). The infants at St. Canice’s had been born out of wedlock, incongruent with the conservative milieu on both sides of the border. In an interview with Devlin, Jane Hillen, who got pregnant in her mid-teens and was sent to St. Canice’s by her families, recalls: “They stuck me in there to get rid of me” (*ND* 188). At the peak of the Troubles, the infants and their unmarried mothers are expelled from Christendom and their community, easily exploited by criminal fraternities (Baraniuk 86).

The limbo of the silenced infants symbolizes the temporal border, that is, the limbo state of post-Agreement Northern Ireland. As announced in the Good Friday Agreement, “a new beginning” and “rapid progress” are expected, and British and Northern Irish authorities together would aim for “sustained economic growth and stability in Northern Ireland” (“The Agreement”).¹⁰ The connection between peace, progress, and prosperity is more than evident in the Agreement. As George Legg notes, “[f]rom Major to Clinton, Blair to Obama” (the political leaders involved in the Peace Process), “there has been a diehard—even messianic—belief that peace and prosperity are mutually reinforcing” (7). In reality, Northern Ireland saw increasing investments from the European Union as well as more North-South business cooperation after the Agreement (Ferriter 121-22). The hope for “reconnection and reconciliation” is embodied in the 1999 reopening of the Aghalane bridge across the border, bombed by loyalist paramilitaries in 1972 (Nash and Reid 266).

Northern Irish society has become so engrossed in the rhetoric of economic progress and future vision that the traumatic past is left unsolved and without

¹⁰ A referendum was conducted on both sides of the border to confirm the Agreement, which involved policies related to the two states. In Northern Ireland, 71.12% voted “Yes” and 28.88% “No.” In the Republic, 94.39% voted “Yes” and 5.61% “No” (Ferriter 117).

consolation. The Agreement claims that “[w]e must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families” and that “we can best honour them through a fresh start” (“The Agreement”). However, Shane Alcobia-Murphy criticizes that statement as “a form of willed amnesia” encouraged by the state in order to end the sectarian strife (84). In Birte Heidemann’s words, the statement shows “rhetorical dismemberment of the violent past” (7). Wittingly or not, the Agreement produces rhetorical violence that accentuates the imperative to agree on the peaceful vision at the sacrifice of those who have not yet healed and who cannot forgive and forget. As Heidemann acutely observes, such tendency for willing forgetfulness “forges the very liminal impasse that Northern Ireland has sought to avoid since the Plantation of Ulster” (9).

Appropriating Bhabha’s notion of liminality, which holds a dynamic, positive view of the liminal state, Heidemann coins the term “liminal permanence” to signal the demarcation of the violent past from the progressive present envisioned in the Agreement (45). In her definition, liminal permanence refers to the moment that “emerges in-between a perpetual past and a suspended present, relegating the post-Agreement period to a realm of ‘no return’” (48). It is liminal in that the progress envisioned in the Agreement is rooted in the desire for immediate closure of and breakaway from the past. Because “[t]he post-Agreement period remains more or less attached to the time of the Troubles which sets a new temporal frame of reference to the period ‘after,’” the present is paradoxically defined by a denial of the past (46). Failing to accommodate the past, the post-Agreement period is suspended in the liminal state between past and present, and the liminal state stays permanent because the Agreement signals “a failed closure” of the past (49). The liminality will last as long as the silence toward the traumatic history is drowned and neglected by the Agreement’s rhetoric of progress. In contrast to the spatial border, which can be crossed clandestinely, the temporal border marked by the Agreement is portrayed in the novel as an impassable barrier. It draws the line between past and present, leaving behind the painful past, whether solved or not. Accordingly, the past of Northern Ireland is trapped in the limbo of oblivion, waiting to be named and recognized. If silence in *Resurrection Man* is indicative of the ambience of Belfast’s territory, in *The Nameless Dead* it emblemizes reluctance and indifference toward the conflictual past after the Agreement. Such a silencing of the past signals “endings which are not endings: events and experiences that are not concluded but remain on in a state of limbo” (McAteer 16).

In addition to the infants, a few characters in the novel are trapped in this limbo. Sean Cleary has been searching for his father Declan Cleary, who disappeared during the Troubles. For the last thirty-five years, he has “been living in a state of . . .

limbo” (ND 32). Declan Cleary’s case repeats the stories of other Troubles victims and their families. Throughout the course of violence, at least sixteen people have gone missing in Northern Ireland. They are called “the Disappeared,” whose bodies the ICLVR aims to recover. Although there is a list of the names of “the Disappeared,” they are symbolically nameless since they are deprived of a proper burial and contours of their lives (dates and causes of their death) are missing. The “nameless dead,” as the title of the novel suggests, names the unresolved conflict after the Agreement. Moreover, the fact that any information gathered by the ICLVR is “treated as absolutely confidential” further eliminates the possibility of closure for the victims’ families (*Independent*). Sean Cleary asks Lennie Millar, who works for the ICLVR: “Will you be looking for who killed [Declan Cleary]?” Millar replies, “[w]e have no powers to gather evidence or attempt to prosecute those responsible for the death of the body we recover. Nor can anything we uncover be used in court” (ND 15). Hearing this, Sean Cleary objects: “That’s not justice. It’s not good enough” (ND 17). Such a controversial policy introduced after the Agreement, as Alcobia-Murphy criticizes, “prevents both forgiveness and justice” (qtd. in Alcobia-Murphy 87).¹¹ Without clarification of the past, or closure, Sean Cleary cannot move on to the next stage of his life. Echoing Heide-
mann’s idea of “liminal permanence,” the nameless dead and their families are suspended between past and present, between endless searching for truth and receding into forgetfulness.

Political activists also enter a limbo state after the Agreement, which puts into question the cause of their battles. Compared with the scandal at St. Canice’s, the crimes connected with the Troubles are relatively sidelined in the novel. The ICLVR is meant to search for missing people who were involved in the conflicts, but it ends up “stumb[ing] upon a nineteenth-century *cillin*” and the bodies of seven infants that have been recently buried (ND 6). What it unearths instead are those muffled by the clamor of sectarian violence. In addition, instead of serving as the prime motive behind atrocities, sectarian tension is manipulated to cover up crimes unrelated to the ideological strife. Declan Cleary, originally believed to be killed by the Provos (the Provisional Irish Republican Party), is actually silenced by Niall Martin to cover up the scandal at St. Canice’s. Upset about the failure of the drug tested on his pregnant partner, Declan Cleary walked into the Royal Ulster Constabulary threatening to blackmail Martin. Meanwhile, Dominic Callan

¹¹ Alcobia-Murphy criticizes the “amnesty and amnesia” promoted by the Inquiries Act introduced by the British government in 2005. This Act “allows for Ministers to decide whether some evidence can be heard behind closed doors” and hence “delimits ‘the potential of such processes to get to the truth’” (qtd. in Alcobia-Murphy 86). Similarly, the ICLVR’s policy of confidentiality prevents access to the truth.

was shot to death by the PSNI for smuggling guns to the North. Martin used this coincidence to his advantage. “Finger Declan Cleary for an informant and let the Provos do the rest” (ND 285). The paramilitary group became Martin’s weapon to eradicate Declan Cleary.

The limbo state is even more evident for the Callans once the meaning of their nationalist movement is belittled after the Agreement. James Callan’s son Dominic “sacrificed his life for the [republican] cause” (ND 229). However, after the Agreement, James Callan finds “[o]ur politicians have failed us, have failed the cause,” as politicians of both sides bring the fight to the negotiation table (ND 229). Their nationalist movement becomes meaningless when both sides reach a consensus on the state of Northern Ireland. Like other Catholics in the North, he feels abandoned. “The English want out cos we’re costing them a fucking mint, the south doesn’t want us cos they can’t even handle the twenty-six counties they do have,” Callan complains (ND 213). Callan’s words resonate with Diarmaid Ferriter’s view on the two governments’ attitudes toward partition. While the British government finds Northern Ireland a “confounded nuisance,” the Irish government offers “precious little help” for Ulster nationalists, who thus consider such a gesture a “callous betrayal” (Ferriter 18, 21). Moreover, James Callan finds that Dominic’s name may be tainted, since Seamus O’Hara and Sean Cleary want to disclose to the press Dominic’s involvement in child murder at St. Canice’s. As he laments, “[h]is life had to mean something. And they want to take that meaning from him” (ND 323). The more corruption at St. Canice’s is exposed, the more Dominic’s presumptive patriotism is downplayed, if not outweighed, by his misdeeds at the mother-and-baby home. Furthermore, Dominic’s early death makes it impossible for him to defend himself, leaving his father in a deplorable condition, having to defend his son’s name by illegitimate means. To protect his son’s reputation, James Callan kills O’Hara and Cleary. The Callans’ tragedy suggests that, after the peace process, ideological obstinacies on either side will be subject to inspection at various angles as more evidence comes to the fore.¹² Moreover, the Callans illustrate George Legg’s notion of boredom in post-Agreement Northern Ireland. Criticizing the overt optimism in overcoming the sectarian past through capitalist development, Legg detects “a boredom created by the cultural and historical amnesia” emerging in the post-Agreement society (2). As he remarks, “[t]he politics of boredom stems from this double movement: the withdrawal of meaning on the one hand,

¹² The process of re-examining the Troubles continues today. In 2020, Northern Ireland Troubles-related incident victims payments were introduced so that injured victims would receive annual payments of £2,000 to £10,000 for the rest of their lives. In addition, cases of murder during the Troubles started being investigated, such as the 1976 Dundalk murder and the 1991 Ian Sproule murder, to name just a few (O’Neill; Kane).

and the apparent inability to restore it” (2). For father and son, the meaning of their nationalist fight is annulled when both British and Irish governments decide to “insulate the Northern problem” from their own (Cleary 100). Yet they are unable to restore the meaning as such when their nationalist fervor no longer corresponds with the post-Agreement atmosphere. They, along with the conflictual past, are trapped in the limbo in which society loses interest.

Instead of providing closure, McGilloway ends the novel with another pending case, intensifying the sense of liminal permanence after the Agreement. The body of Sheila Clark, an accomplice of Niall Martin’s, is never found. Devlin suspects that she might be buried in Islandmore. However, “the recovery of her remains would be almost impossible,” since “the recent disruption of the earth [after the dig for the Disappeared] would make geophysical tests unreliable” (ND 335). The ending is not an ending. Unresolved cases lead to more unresolved cases. According to Heidemann, liminal permanence manifests in “non-resolution of such suspended subject positions” at the end of the story (51). Trapped in limbo, communities on the border need a full picture of the conflictual past before embracing the vision promised by the Agreement. When Devlin’s investigation comes to an end, he reflects: “What would happen afterwards was not so clear, whether the island would become isolated once more or, having been received into the community’s collective conscience, remain connected again to the mainland, no longer in limbo” (ND 223). Devlin’s doubt is also one that lingers over post-Agreement Northern Ireland. It would be a myth to believe that the Good Friday Agreement can demarcate violence and peace. While applauding the advent of prosperity and progress, as hinted in post-Agreement discourse, the conflict-inflicted community still needs to receive the painful past into its “collective conscience” in order to extricate itself from its temporal stasis.

Conclusion

Resurrection Man and *The Nameless Dead* unravel different dimensions of border crisscrossing in Northern Ireland. By putting the former novel within the framework of Lefebvre’s spatial triad and Žižek’s discussion of violence, we see how the communal border in Belfast forms and is reinforced by silence. Victimized by objective violence in representations of space, which mark communal bonds and boundaries via naming, Victor’s father, James, resorts to silence as a way of survival. To declare his existence in and identification with the Protestant community, Victor turns to subjective violence, more visible irrational killings, by slashing his victims’ throats. The objective violence in Belfast fosters Victor’s subjective violence,

which turns silence, a sign of submission and self-denial for his father, into a weapon that stuns the communities and “keeps the fear going” (RM 193). Instead of the periphery, Victor becomes the center of the city, whose boundary he patrols. Victor’s “terror-tory,” to borrow Aaron Kelly’s term, takes the place of the objective violence in representations of space. The city, however, is beyond his control when Victor’s suspicion of betrayal grows. He becomes so paranoid and unpredictable that the community decides to eradicate this dangerous, uncontrollable element. After Victor’s death, the city goes back to normal, and Victor is “of the city now, part of its rank” (RM 233). Subjective violence is now quelled, but the objective violence deriving from sectarian divisiveness remains. Whether the city will be perturbed by another unexpected, unruly force is a question no one can answer.

The border persists after the Good Friday Agreement. *The Nameless Dead* revolves around the aftermath of the Troubles by uncovering those silenced along the border. Starting with an excavation on Islandmore, the novel delves into the victims who have remained unnoticed through the Troubles and into the post-Agreement period. As the center of the novel, Islandmore serves as an epitome of the borderland and liminal state of post-Agreement Northern Ireland. A contrast can be detected when the spatial and temporal dimensions of the border are juxtaposed. The spatial border is portrayed as a line that can be clandestinely crossed by smugglers and petty offenders. Although in historical accounts the inter-state border still profoundly affects one’s mobility, McGilloway stresses its permeability, which allows residents to make ends meet by smuggling, evading taxes, or accessing cross-border benefits.¹³ The temporal border, conversely, is relatively impassable. Like an invisible line, the Agreement intends to separate the conflictual past from a peaceful, progressive present. Ignored by such future-oriented rhetoric, the victims, related to the Troubles or not, are trapped between past and present, an area Heidemann conceptualizes in terms of a liminal permanence. They, along with their families, are confined to the temporal border, waiting for closure, either an explanation or justice.

It is meaningful to read *Resurrection Man* alongside *The Nameless Dead*. While the former portrays the (re)production of the communal border, the latter illustrates the temporal border between the troubled past and a progressive, prosperous present. Furthermore, the two works portray different types of violence the border has bred at different stages of Northern Irish history. McNamee shows a vicious circle between collective, systemic, objective violence and irrational,

¹³ Catherine Nash, Bryonie Reid, and Brian Graham’s *Partitioned Lives: The Irish Borderlands* studies the history, politics, and culture of the Irish border. They conduct interviews with residents there, revealing the lived experience of the borderlands. Chapter 4 in particular recounts their difficult lives during the Troubles (73-107).

visible, subjective violence during the Troubles. The text sees faint hope for the circle to end, since objective violence begets subjective violence, which in turn reinforces the structural violence built on the divide. As for *The Nameless Dead*, it illustrates the rhetorical violence embedded in the Agreement, which excludes the past from the imagination of the present and the future. As the communal border may have dissolved with time, or become less conspicuous, the border between past and present after the Agreement is waiting to be crossed, “received into the community’s collective conscience” (ND 223).¹⁴

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¹⁴ Shelley McKeown has noted an increased sense of Northern Irish identity since the late 1980s. The 2011 census shows that “21 per cent of the resident population claimed to have a Northern Irish national identity only” (27-28). This identity achieves its popularity in that it is inclusive without “posing an identity threat to Protestants and Catholics who wish to maintain traditional ideologies” (29). Moreover, though slowly, efforts are being made at the national level to improve communal relationships, such as the implementation of integrated education and cross-community programs (38-47).

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**Ex-position
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