Commemoration as Conflict
Space, Memory and Identity in Peace Processes

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Commemoration as Conflict

Space, Memory and Identity in Peace Processes

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This project involved long periods away from home conducting research in societies emerging from or still enmeshed in violence. We are therefore indebted to our families for helping us make this research feasible. We would, therefore, like to thank (and apologise to!) our respective husbands Gary and Stephen, and very young children Thea, Jane, Emilie and Daniel, the latter who are unfamiliar with life without Commemoration as Conflict.
## List of Acronyms

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>DUP</td>
<td>Democratic Unionist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>ETA</td>
<td>Euskadi Ta Askatasuma</td>
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<tr>
<td>GOSL</td>
<td>Government of Sri Lanka</td>
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<tr>
<td>INLA</td>
<td>Irish Nationalist Liberation Army</td>
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<td>IRA</td>
<td>Irish Republican Army</td>
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<td>JNA</td>
<td>Jugoslav National Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>LTTE</td>
<td>Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam</td>
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<td>OHR</td>
<td>Office for the High Representative in Bosnia and Hercegovina</td>
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<td>PAC</td>
<td>Pan African Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLO</td>
<td>Palestinian Liberation Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSNI</td>
<td>Police Service of Northern Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>RUC</td>
<td>Royal Ulster Constabulary</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDLP</td>
<td>Social Democratic and Labour Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Sri Lankan Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>UFF</td>
<td>Ulster Freedom Fighters</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UVF</td>
<td>Ulster Volunteer Force</td>
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Introduction

In the context of conflict resolution, remembrance is a crucial element of the healing process. It recognises that, as individuals and communities, we are and indeed live out our histories. What we remember is what we are. Equally important is the need to recognise that addressing our conflicted past is a long-term, complex and difficult task. We need to be aware of what remembering can and cannot deliver. The challenge for us, therefore, as individuals and as a society is not about the need to remember, but rather how to find creative ways of remembering that enable us to go forward as a society.

On 31 August 1995, a list of names of all those who had been killed in the Northern Ireland conflict was shown on an electronic advertising screen at a busy traffic junction in Belfast’s city centre. Throughout the day, around 3500 names continuously scrolled along the screen in chronological order, commemorating those killed over the course of almost 30 years of ethno-nationalist violence. The exhibit, however ephemeral, was a stark contrast to the deliberately neutral or forgetful landscape being forged elsewhere in the centre of Belfast at that point in an effort to attract financial investment and tourism (Switzer and McDowell 2011). Originally labelled *Counting the Cost*, the exhibit had toured Ireland for much of the previous year following the announcement of the paramilitary ceasefires and subsequent cessation of violence (Leonard 1997). The date was significant, marking the first anniversary of the paramilitary group – the Irish Republican Army (IRA) ceasefire – and the birth of the peace process. For the cross-community worker responsible for the exhibit, the paramilitary ceasefires signified the end of the Troubles (a term employed locally to describe the conflict in Northern Ireland), their first anniversary seeming an opportune moment to represent the losses incurred and memories associated
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with them. In hindsight, the conflict was not ‘over’ at that point; the ceasefires did not hold and violence continued until the signing of the Belfast Agreement in April 1998 (and thereafter, albeit on a much lesser scale).

The Counting the Cost exhibit, later named Taking Account, did much more than simply provide a list of fatalities. As one of the memorials in a public space to collectively commemorate the dead, it was significant for a number of reasons and had important ramifications for the practices and processes of commemoration. By re-labelling the exhibit Taking Account, the memorial was signalling that the society had a duty not only to remember and acknowledge the Troubles but also to perhaps assume some form of responsibility for them. The enormity of the screen, its capacity for advertising and its prime location forced passers-by to confront the human costs of violence whether they wanted to or not. By locating the memorial in the arena of public space – a busy traffic junction – the exhibit was deliberately charging an arguably ‘neutral’ space with a distinctly political message. In referring to the victims by name only, the memorial attributed an equal status to all those killed, something which many families of the dead refute. By not distinguishing between victims and perpetrators, the exhibit arguably presented all those who had died as victims.

The exhibit also made a series of assumptions about collective memory in Northern Ireland. As Halbwachs (1992) notes, collective memory is a current continuous thought which selectively preserves from the past only that which is important to the group. The exhibit assumed the existence of a collective memory, implying that all groups/elements in society had an agreed interpretation of the Troubles and would want to interpret them in the same way. It presumed that everyone would want to commemorate their own private and individual grief in a collective fashion in a public space. It assumed that people were ready to remember and wanted to remember and would agree that everyone killed throughout the Troubles were somehow victims. The location of the exhibit and the manner in which it was presented was also a major source of contention. The choice of a large advertising screen in a busy traffic junction was read by some as an inappropriate medium through which to commemorate the dead. The timing was also important; with a fledgling peace process and no indication of a feasible political settlement, the exhibit was in many ways premature. The IRA bombing of Canary Wharf in London in 1996 illustrated the volatile and changeable nature of peace processes and presented two more names for the exhibit’s list of the dead. Taking Account therefore underscores some of the key
challenges and issues inherent to the commemoration of conflict more generally such as:

- The possible tensions of using space to represent the past where memory can become either accepted or act as a focus of resistance;
- The sometimes complicated nature of choosing an adequate form of commemoration and the trauma it can evoke;
- Questions/disputes surrounding the ownership of memory;
- Divergent definitions of victimhood and other issues of inclusion and exclusion;
- Tensions between private and public grief;
- The dichotomy between individual and collective memory; and
- The difficulty in commemorating the past within a rapidly shifting political landscape.

Northern Ireland at that particular point in time (1995) was at the beginning of what would become a very long and difficult political process which continues to present challenges; and where commemorating the past, contrary to reconciling differences and paving the way for a shared future, has often exacerbated the conflict, and thus impacted the peace process, in some way. Equally, the fragile and at times transitory nature of that process has had a significant effect on the ways in which the conflict has been and continues to be remembered and commemorated: the past and memories of the past are invariably linked to the present, and more specifically, to the politics of the present (Ashworth and Graham 2005; Lowenthal 1996).

Key questions

The debates, themes and issues raised by the specific example of the *Taking Account* exhibit are central to this book which questions the relationship between commemoration and conflict in divided societies that are attempting to or that have previously attempted to engage in some kind of peace process. Peace processes have become increasingly commonplace in our modern world. They differ from an armistice in being an on-going process that may begin with covert negotiations to suspend violence and ‘end’ (often at a much later date) with post-conflict peace-building. The progression may not be continuous as peace processes often stall or regress, not least because they involve painful compromises in fulfilling Yitzhak Rabin, the former Israeli prime minister’s aphorism made just before his death in 1995 that ‘one does not make peace with
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one’s friends’. The challenges facing those who negotiate treaties, settlements and plans to achieve a lasting peace remain as difficult today as they were back at Versailles in 1919 when the Allies came together to ensure that the horrors of the Great War would not be repeated. Memories of the past appeared to unite all those present at Versailles to strive towards a solution that would prevent a return to war. Their solution was to weaken Germany’s core through a range of economic and military sanctions as well as transitional justice mechanisms such as enforced accountability. In a letter to the delegates, Brockdorff-Rantzau outlining the German response to the treaty’s terms and urging its revision appeared to ominously predict a dark future: ‘whenever in this war the victor has spoken to the vanquished at Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest the words were but then the seeds of future discord...only the cooperation of nations, a cooperation of hands and spirits can build up a durable peace’ (cited in Finch 1919: 541). Despite the promises made at Versailles and an affirmation to ‘never again’ revisit the horror of war on that scale, the world was once again propelled into unprecedented violence with the outbreak of World War II only two decades later.

Shephard (2010: 1) assumption that ‘neither war nor peace is the natural state of the world’ invites us to reconfigure the meaning of such processes. Our world, he suggests, exists somewhere in the middle of peace and conflict. This conceptualisation of a peace process as something perhaps infinite with no clear and obvious ‘end’, at least in a quantifiable sense, points to the intractable nature of many modern conflicts. Furthermore, it presents peace and conflict as shifting states of being susceptible to change. If we accept that many conflicts are zero-sum in nature and therefore cannot truly be ‘resolved’ in a way that satisfies the needs and aspirations of each actor, perhaps it would be more favourable to interpret a peace process as something which works towards achieving a middle ground such as non-violence, tolerance and an opportunity for change. But in order to find that middle ground, peace processes must look to the past – to the violence, division and origins of conflict – and construct (or deconstruct) it in such a way as to allow society to move forward. Yet the past in all its many guises – as memory, as heritage (defined as the negotiation of the past in the present), as commemoration embodying a range of practices such as performance, ceremony, written word and art, and as memorialisation (that is, the physical marking of memory through memorials, monuments and street names) – can be problematic, particularly within the context of peace-building. But can memory and its many uses threaten to undermine or derail a peace process in any real or tangible way? This
book explores the impact that memory and its multidimensional uses in the present as heritage and commemoration might have on the practice of making peace and asks whether there is any merit in the idea that it can often serve to undermine the journey forward to some middle ground.

While the literature has gone some way in identifying the issues that could potentially undermine what is a tentative process in transitional societies, we suggest that it has sometimes fallen short somewhat of considering the influences of memory and its cognate identity in any real detail, which are often integral components of conflict in the first instance. This book questions whether there is leverage in the idea that commemoration and memorialisation which involve both intangible representations and tangible material forms, and which speak both internally in cementing cultural belongingness within communities and externally in what is often an act of resistance, can propagate or even reactivate conflict and division through maintaining territorial claims and identity homogeneity, often constituting a ‘war by other means’. This key question is informed in part by the fact that just because the actors in a conflict and their supporters are prepared to disengage from violence does not necessarily mean that they are willing to shelve their political objectives or that their antipathy towards each other has diminished (MacGinty 2003). If a peace process is to be regarded as a transition from conflict – often stemming from ethnicity – to democratic structures and accountability and a means of – if not reconciling – at least accommodating different cultural identities, the participants have a philosophical and practical challenge. They have engaged in violence in pursuit of particular ideological aims, they have visited death, destruction and suffering upon many in the name of that ideology, but a negotiation with the ‘other’ requires that those beliefs be compromised without, however, jeopardising bedrock political support in a situation in which it is no longer acceptable to keep supporters ‘in line’ through threats of, or actual, violence.

Commemoration and memorialisation may offer one such *modus operandi* which allows on-going fealty to the ‘cause’, often predicated on assumptions of victimhood, while also serving in its material manifestations to mark out the territorialisation upon which political support generally depends in conflictual and ‘ethnocratic’ societies (see Yiftachel and Ghanem 2005). Can physical violence then be replaced by a different form of conflict, often symbolic and inexorably bound to memory and identity, in which ‘confrontation is sought after...and maintained, deliberately’ (Raento, 1997, 2002)? Based on the premise
that material cultures have the specific capacity to mobilise and shape action (Hoskins 2007), we ask whether commemoration in particular as a dynamic yet disparate political resource can sometimes undermine efforts to reify peace through perpetuating or even reactivating conflict both intentionally or unintentionally in certain contexts and contingencies.

At the very least, warring parties in a peace process face considerable challenges in reconciling their partisan practices of commemoration and material landscapes of memorialisation, aimed at enhancing ethnic or group solidarity and integrity and territoriality, with the more pluralist context of a peace process. While they may not intend to wage or represent a ‘war by other means’, do they as a minimum perpetuate divisions through attributing blame or legitimating past violence? Space and place as we know are never neutral – they are socially constructed and will always embody political power, values and symbols, and, moreover, these will be contested between different voices and interpreters. Practices and sites of memory and heritage can often serve as contested icons of identity and spatialisations of memory that transform neutral spaces into sites of ideology. Indeed, armed conflict can often involve military attempts to eradicate memory through the physical destruction of the memoryscape. A further and crucial point is that the practices and processes of memory in peace processes may also intersect with the criminality of the past, of the killings by some in the name of all that may demand legally constituted punishment.

We are concerned, therefore, that while the re-remembering or reshaping of a divided past is not necessarily a blueprint for a peaceful future, the significance of memory, memorialisation and commemoration and their interconnections with space and place as manifested through territoriality often receives insufficient attention not just in the literature but in peace processes themselves. Governments are more inclined to focus on politically attainable outcomes and on normative factors such as economic regeneration. In this sense, peace processes may largely elide the roles of culture and its cognates, memory and identity, and also the symbolic realm of meaning which, ultimately, is the force that validates the notion of citizenship and thus the legitimacy of any polity. While the book’s primary purpose is to ask whether there is any merit in these ideas, we are also open to and acknowledge the limitations of commemoration: of its ability to lose ‘impact’ as time moves forward; of its relative unimportance for some sections of society that are preoccupied with more pressing day-to-day challenges. We suggest that in some contexts memory and heritage are initially crucially important
only to become more muted and sometimes irrelevant (or even a source of discomfort or embarrassment) as situations change. We also accept the argument that its physical manifestation through memorialisation is not always dynamic – it is not always engaging (or intended to engage) and does not always incite action or even interest from those who interact with its physicality on a daily basis. Lastly, we recognise the many positive and important functions of memory and commemoration, as a tool for symbolic reparation, as a means of healing through remembering and as a method by which communities engage in a dialogue about the past that is both meaningful and transformative.

The case studies

In exploring these questions and issues, *Commemoration as Conflict* adopts a case study approach in order to tease out cross-cultural and political similarities and differences. Our mutual interest in this topic stems from studying the roles of commemoration and memorialisation in the Northern Ireland peace process, from which the opening example is drawn from, but we do not in any way claim that this is a role model for or a parallel for other societies that have experienced conflict. It does, however, provide a comparator. Dealing with and commemorating the past have proved difficult and have at points threatened to destabilise and disrupt political relationships. Despite a range of residual problems and the continued contestation over how best to commemorate the past, Northern Ireland’s peace process is generally heralded as a success. It then forms the first case study. Developing from the comparator of Northern Ireland where the recent peace process largely elided any consideration of memory or identity, *Commemoration as Conflict* has an inherently international character and draws on examples from a diverse range of conflicts and their peace processes to support the central argument. These are: Sri Lanka; Israel/Palestine; Euskal Herria; the former Yugoslavia; and South Africa, all of which have in recent years engaged in some sort of a peace process with varying degrees of success. The examples here have been selected as being representative of some of the various phases that a peace process may encompass (at least at the point of writing). It has been argued by Darby (2001) that there are four phases in peace-making: pre-negotiation – where the actors in a conflict agree to engage in some form of political dialogue (often covertly); ceasefire – where there is a cessation of violence by those who are committed to that dialogue; negotiation – when a settlement or agreement is worked out; and consolidation – perhaps the most
elusive stage when the settlement is implemented and the most difficult to quantify in any real sense. If they are regarded as a continuum – a device that allows the idea of regression as well as progression – each of the six regions has been identified as being representative of various positions on that continuum (depending on one’s perspective). Indeed the place of some of the case studies on that continuum has changed throughout the writing of the book, further reinforcing the fragile and changeable nature of peace processes.

Euskal Herria or the Basque Country is the second case study. As a minimum, greater autonomy from Spain has been at the heart of Basque nationalism since its 19th-century origins, but the goal of independence gained increasing currency with the formation of the paramilitary organisation Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) in 1959; since then the organisation has killed more than 800 people. Despite various ceasefires and a number of initiatives by successive Spanish governments, attempts to initiate peaceful negotiations were largely unsuccessful until 1998 when, inspired by the Northern Ireland peace process, the then president of the Basque Autonomous Region brokered talks that secured a unilateral ceasefire from ETA in September of that year. Subsequent negotiations failed and the seemingly intractable conflict resumed in December 1999 when ETA renounced its ceasefire. In March 2006, following the success of enhanced anti-terrorist measures by the Spanish and French states and the 2004 Madrid train bombings for which the organisation was initially wrongly blamed, ETA declared a ‘permanent’ ceasefire and entered covert negotiations with the present Spanish Socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. However, after the December 2006 bombing at Madrid–Barajas Airport, which killed two people, Zapatero announced the ending of the negotiations and ETA, its ceasefire. In 2010, ETA engaged once more in a ceasefire and at the point of writing, the cessation of violence continues to hold (yet a political compromise remains somewhat elusive). This particular case study addresses the nature of commemoration in the Basque Country, complicated as it is by the schism between constitutional Basque nationalism and the violence of ETA which invokes the idea of official and unofficial practices and processes of resistant commemoration in peace-making or -breaking. It is at the point of writing at the second stage of Darby’s (2001) continuum.

Israel/Palestine is our third case study. Its current position is difficult to ascertain. It is (debatably) at the second stage, although the numerous attempts of external agents to mediate a peaceful solution would appear to constantly regress into armed conflict (for example, the Israeli assault
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on Gaza in December 2012 in response to Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli settlements catapulted the conflict back into the first stage. Competing territorial ambitions has been at the crux of the conflict in the Middle East, which Ramsbotham et al. (2005) believe has been one of the most protracted and divisive conflicts ‘of our time’. How best to construct a process which might engage both Israelis and Palestinians in a way that is amenable to both has been a priority for the international community since the 1967 War of Independence. Negotiations in Oslo (2003) and Camp David (2007) were tasked with the burden of reaching an agreement that would ultimately address some of the most challenging dimensions of the conflict but failed ultimately to achieve a compromise over the pivotal issues such as the future of Jerusalem whose meaning is contested, the existence of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and ownership of places of cultural and religious importance. Memory, commemoration and place are undisputedly crucially important in debates over the right to belong and the quest for territorial control in this part of the world.

Our fourth case study is the former Yugoslavia. Its dissolution followed a series of bitter and bloody wars occasioned by a plethora of divergent objectives and territorial ambitions, and necessitated a peace process of unprecedented scale and ambition. Ultimately drawing in a range of external actors, the settlement instituted at Dayton in 1995 configured a new map for Central and Eastern Europe. For the various constituents of the former Yugoslavia, coming to terms with its new political, economic and cultural boundaries, bringing with them new structures, hierarchies of power and legal frameworks have proved challenging. International supervision of these new arrangements continues. Commemoration plays an important role. Narratives of the past saturate the streetscape of large parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, while Serbia struggles to marry its past and present. Depending on one’s interpretation, these constituents have perhaps reached the third or even fourth stages of the continuum, although this differs from country to country.

Sri Lanka’s position on the continuum has been decided not through a peace process as such but by military force. The Sri Lankan government had been engaged in a bloody conflict with the Tamil paramilitary groups since the early 1960s, the most formidable being the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam which were formed in 1967 with the goal of establishing independence for the sizeable Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. Like in Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia, competing territorial ideologies are at the heart of this conflict: both the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority view the island as their primordial
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The acquisition of territory, as Kleinfeld (2005: 288) suggests, is bound up in a number of different arenas: it is used for the ‘production of national identity for both groups, as sacred space for the island’s Buddhist population, as protection against the aggressive other, as theatre of war and as a political-economic prize’. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam’s armed campaign has focused specifically on the acquisition of territory in the Tamil-populated areas in the north and east of the island (now the scene of its military defeat). Despite waves of successive peace-making, the most successful being in 2002 following a process brokered by Norway, violence began to escalate in 2007 and came to an end in 2009 following the complete obliteration of the Tamil Tigers by the Sri Lankan Army. The armed conflict, again at the point of writing is over, not by ceasefires or a settlement but by force, and the country is attempting to consolidate its transition to some form of peaceful existence. Its government would consider itself at the final stage of the continuum. Commemoration has been an integral aspect of this conflict, employed as a resource in a heated symbolic battle between the key actors.

South Africa is our final case study. It engaged in a peace process to bring to an end to centuries of abject oppression and discrimination and a 40-year-old system of formalised, legalised apartheid. Spearheaded by the then leader of the ANC (African National Congress), Nelson Mandela and leader of the country, President de Klerk, negotiations began in the early 1990s following the former’s release from prison and a settlement was reached. Supported by the majority of the country’s electorate in a referendum in 1994, the South African peace process brought to an end not only the long reign of the National Party but the end of the policy of systemic racism and oppression. It also marked the beginning of the ANC’s governance and a commemorative programme perhaps unparalleled in scale and ambition. The ANC began reimagining Mandela’s vision of a rainbow nation and with it constructed a heritage which had previously been kept out of public space. Its conflict is now deemed to be ‘over’, thus in Darby’s continuum, it is at the final stage.

The writing of this book further reflects the volatile and changeable nature of peace-building. When the study from which the book is based began, the nature of the conflict in four of our six case study regions changed (which supported our initial conceptualisation of peace processes as something which could regress and progress). These pivotal political moments underscored the vulnerability of peace processes and the difficulty of finding a lasting ‘peace’.
Approach

Remembering the past and bringing it into focus whether deliberately or unintentionally can have important implications for societies attempting to make the transition from armed conflict to some form of political accommodation. We suggest that memory-work has had and continues to have varying ramifications for each of the peace processes discussed here. Informed by fieldwork, the book explores how the practices and processes of memory and commemoration such as anniversary parades, days of remembrance and the erection of physical memorials and buildings influence the dynamics of peace-making across a range of very different conflicts. We work to elaborate the conceptual basis of the ‘peace process’ by integrating the ways in which memory-work employed by conflicting parties is part and parcel of the social practices and relations that accompany the transition from armed conflict and question the importance of material landscapes of memory-work in staking out political and territorial claims as part of a peace process. Within contested societies, as Wilson and Stapelton observe (2005: 634) ‘hegemonic struggles for territory, recognition and constitutional status are frequently constituted in appeals to history, culture and tradition’. In thinking about these issues, the book draws on an interdisciplinary literature from the burgeoning field of memory studies, exploring debates and ideas from within cultural geography, politics, sociology, archaeology and sociology. It should be noted that these chapters in many ways only begin to unpack the very complex relationship between commemoration and conflict in each of the case studies; they draw on examples and interactions that reflect specific encounters in time and place.
2 Landscapes of Commemoration: The Relationship between Memory, Place and Space

Introduction

In his discussion of memory, truth and victimhood in post-trauma societies, John Brewer (2006) suggests that the convergence of memory, nationalism and ethnic violence often constitutes an ‘unholy trinity’. Yet, he continues, memory can also dichotomously play a pivotal role in the negotiation and realisation of peace in societies emerging from violent conflict. A wide range of social practices can be employed to make memory ‘functional’ within such societies (Brewer 2006). These include: the correction of distortions which fostered divisions in the first instance; developing a pluralist approach to remembering that incorporates memories of the ‘other’; the recovery of memories that were formally denied or avoided to illustrate unity rather than enmity; establishing new narratives of nationhood to underpin the post-violent society (for example, the report of the Northern Ireland Consultative Group on the Past [2009] advocates the ‘cathartic’ value of storytelling in reconciling former enemies); and the need to forge new collective forms of commemoration. It is that latter factor, the interconnections of peace processes and commemoration, that provides the focus of this book, although we also argue that this can be considered fully only by adding ‘territoriality’ to Brewer’s ‘unholy trinity’. Memory, nationalism and violence mesh together, as in Northern Ireland, in a spatial framework that can perhaps serve to exacerbate identity politics and reify competing territorial ideologies (see for example, Graham and Nash 2006; Graham and Whelan 2007; McDowell 2007). This chapter deals with the key conceptual underpinnings of the book space, commemoration