

“Meme-Ing” Peace in Northern Ireland: Exploring the Everyday Politics of Internet Memes in Belfast Riots

IVAN GUSIC*
Uppsala University, Sweden

MARTIN LUNDQVIST
Lund University, Sweden

How do Internet memes about political violence in postwar Belfast speak to or against the peacebuilding process in Northern Ireland? Our findings demonstrate three dominant ways in which memes engage with such violence: (a) *poking fun at violence*, (b) *poking fun at rioters*, and (c) *normalizing violence*. Memes poking fun at violence destabilize the banal nationalism underpinning the conflict in Northern Ireland, whereas memes poking fun at rioters position the sectarian (and/or socioeconomic) “other” as inferior. Memes that normalize violence do not necessarily entail a defeatist resignation to political violence—even if that might often be the case—as they also provide comic relief by constructing a shared identity in an otherwise divided city.

Keywords: political violence, Internet memes, humor, everyday peace, Belfast, postwar

“The Troubles”—which the war in Northern Ireland is euphemistically called—ended in 1998. Yet the peace agreement that marked its end did not transcend the conflict lines of war, which remain entrenched and continue to shape both Northern Ireland and its capital Belfast (the latter is our main focus) through educational and residential segregation, “peacewalls,” politicization of everyday life, economic inequality, de facto parallel services, and—most importantly here—political violence (Demirel, 2023; Gusic, 2019). We understand political violence as violence for or against the political system of any given sociopolitical entity. It is thus violence motivated by principled goals, such as defending a state’s political setup and territorial integrity or attacking the same to gain autonomy or independence (see Bernstein, 2013; Boyle, 2014; Wieviorka, 2009). Political violence tends to happen between people on different sides of this principled divide, which in our case means between Catholics and Protestants, who have different goals for Northern Ireland and Belfast. While political violence, as we understand it, endures and is most serious in Belfast’s physical spaces—at intersections between Catholic and Protestant areas, in the city center, close to police stations, or in parks (Gusic, 2019)—the conflict has also “gone digital” (Hoey, 2018). This means that instigations, responses, and critiques of political violence happen on the Internet too. The recent riots in Belfast—triggered in April 2021 by tensions over

Ivan Gusic: ivan.gusic@statsvet.uu.se

Martin Lundqvist: martin.lundqvist@kom.lu.se

Date submitted: 2022-12-19

Copyright © 2023 (Ivan Gusic and Martin Lundqvist). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

Brexit—are illustrative. As cars burned and clashes took place in the streets, antagonisms also played out online, mainly as Internet memes (henceforth, memes) engaging with these riots. The riots of 2012–13—sparked by the Union Jack no longer constantly flying from Belfast City Hall—also provoked ample memetic engagement.

We aim to theorize and explore the role memes play in postwar contexts by using Northern Ireland's contentious political landscape as a case study, focusing on Belfast. This topic is understudied in media and communication studies, as virtually no previous research has explored the everyday politics of memes engaging with political violence in postwar contexts—neither in Northern Ireland nor in similar postwar contexts.¹ While there is research on memes following disasters and terrorism (e.g., McCrow-Young & Mortensen, 2021; Merrill & Lindgren, 2021), there is little knowledge on memes in postwar societies where political violence is entrenched and routinized. This is an important distinction since postwar societies are contested by previously warring antagonists or those who follow in their footsteps (Elfversson, Gusic, & Murtagh, 2023). This means that everything tends to be politicized, rendered zero-sum, and/or analyzed through conflict lenses, making "ordinary" services or responses, such as reconstruction, policing, education, health care, and emergency relief, highly contested (Gusic, 2019). Disasters and terrorism—when happening in settings not experiencing postwar contestation—are in contrast (relatively) isolated events that are responded to technically, sometimes even bringing societies together (Merrill & Lindgren, 2021).

Memes studies in peace research are also rare, even if some researchers address the impact of social media on conflict, noting that online practices may drive polarization and assist in peacebuilding (see Al-Rawi, 2016; Noderer, 2020). Peace research is thus beginning to study social media, but it has not focused specifically on memes, which is problematic since memes are a vastly popular digital communication genre (Wiggins, 2019) with their own distinctive logic and frequent deployment during episodes of political violence (Reilly, 2021). Both fields thus have research gaps that we seek to address by exploring the roles that memes play vis-à-vis political violence in postwar societies. These research gaps, however, are limited to *postwar memes*—with media and communication studies neglecting postwar contexts and peace research neglecting memes. The other lenses through which we approach memes, such as everyday life and humor, are in contrast well researched in both fields and serve as our theoretical entry points.

To ameliorate both research gaps, we ask: *How do memes on political violence in postwar Belfast speak to, or against, the peacebuilding process?* Analyzing such memes enables us to understand how they are positioned vis-à-vis the political violence of the past, its re-eruption in the present, and its potential return in the future. We narrow on memes that speak to and from political violence in the postwar period—which we understand as the period when war has ended, but the sociopolitical ordering of any given entity remains contested between previously warring antagonists who pursue competing

¹ Ataci's (2022) work on memes in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide is an exception. Yet it neither looks at memes on the Internet (it observes people who create them), memes in relation to on-going violence (it focuses on genocidal violence), or memes in a postwar period (Rwanda's sociopolitical order is not contested), meaning that our two studies address slightly different research gaps.

peace(s; Gusic, 2022). This applies to Belfast and Northern Ireland, as both entities have experienced war, no longer do, but remain contested between groups that pursue different territorial endpoints and struggle over political, economic, and social power. We specifically analyze memes engaging with the 2012–13 and 2021 Belfast riots. It warrants mentioning that this is an exploratory study in which we focus on how memes in postwar societies can be analyzed and understood through Belfast as a case study. Given the limited scholarly focus on how memes engage with political violence in postwar settings, it is difficult to expand our insights to other contexts or draw parallels from other studies. Our results are therefore limited to postwar Belfast. Yet, we maintain that our article has wider relevance because it focuses on memes engaging with political violence in postwar settings and provides an outline for how such memes might be researched and understood elsewhere.

We proceed as follows. First, we present our theoretical points of departure, which conceptualize memes as humorous expressions of everyday politics and—in extension—everyday peace and conflict. Second, we contextualize postwar Belfast. Third, we outline our research design. Fourth, we analyze memeing practices around the 2012–13 and 2021 Belfast riots. Finally, we discuss our findings and suggest avenues for future research.

Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework draws on the literatures on memes, humor, and everyday peace. We initially theorize memes by exploring what they are and the political roles they (might) play in society. We then theorize humor, as memes predominantly tend to materialize through it. We lastly discuss the potential roles memes—through the constructiveness and destructiveness of humor—can play in everyday peace and conflict practices.

Memes as Everyday Politics

Memes are media objects—images, image macros, videos, GIFs, phrases, emojis, and short texts—that spread and multiply through remixing (Mina, 2019, p. 18). They are inherently intertextual—as memes use popular culture references—and draw on imagery from music videos, TV shows, video games, photos, and films in their compositions (Denisova, 2019; Milner, 2018). While a relatively recent phenomenon, memes have quickly become one of the most common modes of online communication (Wiggins, 2019), even if they are also associated with fringe online message boards—like 4chan and Reddit—within secluded online subcultures, where the key purpose of memes is to portray what cannot be said in “politically correct” mainstream channels (Tuters & Hagen, 2020).

This opens up for seeing how memes bring new modes of communication to topics that are otherwise difficult, sensitive, taboo, shameful, or dangerous to discuss in postwar societies (see Ataci, 2022; Sheftel, 2012; Zelizer, 2010)—such as the Belfast riots or almost any issues involving previously warring antagonists in Northern Ireland. This is possible because digital platforms provide “a forum for those who are silenced or marginalized to express their views publicly in ways that would not otherwise be available” (James Gillet, as cited in Al-Rawi, 2016, p. 59). In Northern Ireland, there is an unwillingness and/or avoidance to talk about “the Troubles” and its continuation as (among other things) riots in the present day.

Many find it somewhat "embarrassing" and want to distance themselves physically and narratively from this violent period and its postwar continuity (Mannheimer, Reinders, & Brandellero, 2022, p. 7), while others actively avoid discussing past and present political violence. In the latter case, people may want to avoid offending others (e.g., in mixed workplaces) or are afraid of negative consequences when discussing such matters with the "wrong" people (Interview with former police officer, 2015; see also Gusic, 2019, 2022).

In this study, we treat memes primarily as vehicles for expressing everyday politics, which we understand as people positioning themselves politically in their daily lives (Shifman, 2013).² This understanding is well established in media and communication studies, with Shifman (2013) arguing that memes constitute a distinct communication genre characterized by (a) their political messages, which are (b) often cloaked in layers of humor, and (c) easily spread across the Internet by relying on popular culture references. Regarding the latter, popular culture references establish distinct meme templates that other users can use to make their own versions, thus adding further remixes to the same corpus of memes (Shifman, 2013, pp. 51–53). It is this incessant remixing that differentiates memes from other viral online content, which rarely changes when spreading, while memes are *by definition* constantly altered (even if only in small ways and relying on the same template). Memes' reliance on popular culture and remixing creates a shared symbolic space for users that can generate online communities. "Meme-ing"—the practice of producing, reading, remixing, and sharing memes—might thus create a space in which people who share political and popular culture references come together (Lindgren, 2022, pp. 30–31). Previous research has shown that this space can be "more or less digital" (Merrill & Lindgren, 2021, p. 2404), meaning that communities forged via memes may spread beyond the Internet. Cases in point are the Occupy Movement—which relied on memes to draw support (Milner, 2013)—and the Arab Spring, where "protestors used online platforms such as YouTube and Facebook 'as a virtual battleground' . . . and 'the revolt in the streets [was] nurtured by feedback and mobilization through the internet' and vice versa" (Noderer, 2020, pp. 265–266).³

Humor

Mememes commonly have a humorous tone, which calls for a focus on humor when analyzing them. Humor can perform different functions in human interaction, but three principal ones are (a) *imposing superiority* (where humor is associated with hegemony through mockery or derogatory jokes), (b) *giving relief* (associated with the psychological release of tensions, anger, fear, or anxiety through laughter), and (c) *providing incongruity* (where humor disrupts and challenges dominant perceptions and generates new ways of thinking) (Ataci, 2022; Noderer, 2020; Raskin, 1985; Zelizer, 2010). The key here is that the "humorous mode" (Mulkay, 1988) allows for playing with misunderstandings, absurdity, and/or contrasts, as there is no demand for coherence or truth in humor—everything is, after all, "only a joke." Humor thereby emerges as effective in engaging themes that may be difficult, controversial, taboo, problematic, shameful, or even dangerous to address in any "serious" or "genuine" way (Goldstein, 2013). It offers people the possibility of resisting marginalization and generating

² Not all memes are political, but they often have a political inclination or undertone (see Denisova, 2019; Mortensen & Neumayer, 2021; Shifman, 2013).

³ Quotes by Dina Matar and Blanca Camps-Febrer, respectively.

“alternative, sometimes subversive, versions of dominant narratives and official history” (Hernann, 2016, p. 59). Yet the same dynamics allow those in power to deflect responsibility, deny intentionality, and escape critique when they—through humor—repress or ridicule (Noderer, 2020; Wedeen, 2013). The playing around associated with humor should thus not be misunderstood as humorous engagements being unserious or harmless—while they may seem like that, the “it’s only a joke” dimension of humor allows users to be *more* serious and harmful than otherwise possible (Sheftel, 2012; Zelizer, 2010). The reason is that its supposed lack of gravitas or earnestness allows humor to “transcend boundaries that more straightforward political discourse cannot as easily penetrate” (Sheftel, 2012, p. 159)—be it the marginalized using humor to resist *or* those in power using it to repress.

This potential of humor to transcend boundaries, break taboos, or deflect responsibility is accentuated in war or postwar contexts, where the risks of nonhumorous engagement include imprisonment by repressive regimes (Ataci, 2022; Noderer, 2020), death from armed groups (Al-Rawi, 2016), and the reliving of trauma (Sheftel, 2012). Humor allows an escape from these risks, or at least partly so given that humorous engagements can also be dangerous. Humor in the context of political violence may thus fulfill different functions for different people (Al-Rawi, 2016; Noderer, 2020; Sheftel, 2012). This variation includes using humor to vent aggression or express superiority, which can “reinforce the divide” (Noderer, 2020, p. 264) between groups, establish dominance, and generate tension (Hodson & MacInnis, 2016; Zelizer, 2010). Yet humor can also be used to cope (Wedeen, 2013). As humor helps us release “negative emotions such as stress, anger or fear,” it can be a “coping mechanism that helps individuals deal with difficult situations through the cathartic function of laughter” (Noderer, 2020, p. 257). This applies to both war and postwar contexts. Laughter, jokes, and “dark” humor can ease the tension, fear, and anxiety people experience when in the midst of war (Zelizer, 2010). Humor thus emerges as a direct and short-term remedy. However, it can also be used in more abstract or long-term ways to help people “maintain their sanity” (Zelizer, 2010, p. 5) during sieges, bombardments, losses of loved ones, destructions, and abnormalities of war (Noderer, 2020; Sheftel, 2012). This remedy materializes as everything from people joking with friends about their suffering to war-related humor shows, such as *ISIS Karokee* on Twitter during the terror in Iraq and Syria (Al-Rawi, 2016) or the *Sarajevo Survival Guide* (Sheftel, 2012) and mock-reporting of *Toplista Nadrealista* during the siege of Sarajevo—all of which joked about the absurdity of war, mocked their own misery, countered “abuse with laughter” (Noderer, 2020, p. 258), and made “something funny out of something tragic” (Sheftel, 2012, p. 151). The potential results can subvert people’s victimhood (Sheftel, 2012, p. 151), undermine the attacker’s authority (Noderer, 2020), foster cohesion and solidarity between victims (Sheftel, 2012; Zelizer, 2010), and make some “sense” of everything.

Similar dynamics are found in the postwar period, with jokes used for “overcoming tragedy” in the aftermath of war (Noderer, 2020, p. 258) and countering divisive politics—through satire, ridicule, and jokes—by remembering the coexistence(s) of the past and thereby “offer[ing] an alternative mnemonic paradigm that resists . . . divisive historical narratives” (Sheftel, 2012, p. 147). Humor can also be used in postwar settings to create bonds between victims—within the in-group *and* across conflict lines (Zelizer, 2010)—as “humorous anecdotes can serve as a form of bonding among people who have survived similar things” (Sheftel, 2012, p. 159). In the context of political violence, it can also be a direct response to official discourses, prescribing audiences particular reactions (e.g., condemning *or* supporting the Belfast riots).

Here, humor can function as resistance against hegemonic narratives—resistance that can be reactive when expressing "frustrations towards the shortcomings of the political, religious, or social system" (Al-Rawi, 2016, p. 59; see also Ataci, 2022) *or* proactive when used to present "alternative visions" of politics and mobilize people (Wedeen, 2013, pp. 865–866; see also Noderer, 2020; Sheftel, 2012). In violent contexts, humor may thus perform many different functions: It can build community across conflict lines of war and foster solidarity between victims as well as mock the injured and dead or the policies that they are associated with—so-called "hate humor" (Billig, 2001). The role of humor in war and postwar settings is thus contradictory and multifaceted (Zelizer, 2010, p. 1). The strength of our study is that we look at the role of humor in "meme-ing" peace as an open question—potentially healing *and* generating division, supporting *and* challenging peace processes.

Everyday Peace

Memes are often theorized as vehicles for the humorous expression of everyday politics. While agreeing with this, we also need an additional entry point to capture the roles memes may play in *postwar* societies. Everyday political positioning in such societies is connected to past—as well as present and future—conflict, making it necessary to think of meme-ing as mundane or routine ways to position oneself in relation to peace and conflict. The idea of everyday peace (Mac Ginty, 2014) comes in handy here. Everyday peace is constituted by "the practices and norms deployed by individuals and groups in deeply divided societies to avoid and minimize conflict and awkward situations at both inter- and intragroup levels" (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 553; see also Berents, 2015; Mac Ginty, 2021; Ware & Ware, 2021). These different everyday peace practices have immense width about how they relate to peace and conflict: from those aimed merely at coping and survival to more activist practices that seek to "challenge the norm that conflict and division are the only modes of intergroup activities . . . and undercutting political elites and positing alternative sources of legitimacy" (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 560). More activist practices can be understood as "everyday diplomacy" because they seek to bridge divides, find pragmatic solutions, and generate coexistence (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 560).

While seemingly mundane or routine, these everyday practices emerge as politically significant when understood in relation to the political context, with "place-making, symbolic practices, and competing narratives and performances" examples of everyday practices that may contribute to subverting divisive political structures (Marijan, 2017, pp. 68–73). Everyday practices, however, are "neither progressive nor regressive" but include "inclusionary, exclusionary, and ambivalent practices" (Marijan, 2017, p. 67). This inherent ambiguity of everyday peace dovetails well with our discussion on humor serving different purposes and contributing to both division and healing. The everyday peace literature likewise aligns with our discussion of memes as everyday politics because both literatures locate political agency in everyday practices. Everyday peace still adds another dimension here, as it acknowledges the specific "everydays" of postwar societies: Steeped in the legacy of war, its continuous re-eruption in the present, and its potential return in the future. We will use this theoretical framework to explore how "meme-ing" materializes as everyday peace (and conflict) practices. However, before doing so, we need to contextualize postwar Belfast.

Contextualizing Postwar Belfast

The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (GFA/BA)—Catholics call it the former and Protestants the latter—did not end antagonisms, transcend conflict lines, or reconcile previously warring groups. The period after 1998, however, must be contrasted to “the Troubles,” as the GFA/BA generated substantial progress by bringing people together into shared political institutions, lowering levels of violence, removing military checkpoints from streets, ending widespread discrimination against Catholics by a Protestant-dominated state, spurring a progressive civil society, and generating economic redevelopment. In many ways, Northern Ireland and Belfast have completely changed. However, there remain numerous remaining problems that were either not addressed in the GFA/BA, have been exaggerated by it, or simply proved too cumbersome to change. Belfast’s physical layout, with its defensive infrastructure fragmenting the city, demonstrates remarkable continuity with “the Troubles” (Gusic, 2019). Areas are still divided, permeability hampered, and little is done to change this (Morrow, Mackel, & Dickson Fitzgerald, 2011; Sterrett, Hackett, & Hill, 2012). Different services—health care, education, unemployment training—are often provided in parallel, while much of the nonpublic sphere is organized along identity lines made salient by war. Cultural centers, bars, sporting associations, taxis, and businesses are thus often for one or the other side (Murtagh & Shirlow, 2006). People also tend to live in what is locally termed “single-identity communities,” meaning that areas are segregated into Catholic and Protestant ones (Graham & Nash, 2006; Nolan, 2012). There is also continuity in membership in organizations like the Orange Order or the Gaelic Athletic Association, which are formally for the preservation of in-group culture but also tend to be informally sectarian. While some divisions have been transcended, these improvements are often marginal, as 93% of kids still go to segregated schools (Milliken, 2021), most people live in single-identity communities (Murtagh & Shirlow, 2006), and one-sided political parties⁴ sit in 44 of 60 seats in Belfast City Council. This is also reflected in Stormont (the regional parliament) being repeatedly blocked since 1998.

Yet the post-1998 development is also clearly class-based, with peace dividends depending on whether the focus is on middle- and upper-class or working-class—or even “non-working class” (Interview with a local politician, 2014)—areas (see Gusic, 2019; Neill, 2004; Sterrett et al., 2012). Peace dividends are the benefits of transitioning from war to peace *as well as* how these benefits are distributed (i.e., who postwar investments, job creation, decrease in violence, and better access to services benefit). In Belfast, these dividends are both significant and unequally distributed, with the dividing line often running between classes *rather than* between Catholics and Protestants. This duality—where one part has well-paying jobs, educational attainment, physical and social mobility, and high life expectancy, and the other part suffers from deprivation, unemployment, immobility, and health problems—has made Belfast a “twin city” (Murtagh & Keaveney, 2006), where socioeconomic groups live in two different worlds:

It is the same as ever: the working class lost it. For them the peace is pretty meaningless. If you go around the housing estates in west Belfast and north Belfast, around the Shankill and the Falls, not much has changed there. . . . This part of the city [the center], and the middle-class . . . are the people who have benefited. (Interview with researcher, 2014)

⁴ The parties have to declare as Nationalist, Unionist, or “Other.”

When we explore the paradox of things improving massively yet somehow remaining the same, much of the explanation thus lies in an unequal distribution of peace dividends—with some people living "in peace" and others not experiencing much difference from "the Troubles" (Gusic, 2019).

It is in *these* areas that conflict lines linger on most overtly, political violence still happens (just as it always did), and the continuity between war and peace remains starkest. It is true that political violence—also here—is down considerably; paramilitary groups are much less active; and much fewer—if any—city parts are deemed "no-go areas" by the police (Interview with former police officer, 2015). Yet political violence still happens within and between the previously warring groups—stretching from large-scale events like riots and high-profile killings to isolated altercations between youth, intragroup assassinations among rivaling paramilitary groups, and intimidation. While the paramilitary groups are much less engaged, they are still active, armed, and produce radical splinter groups (Interview with former political prisoner, 2014; see also Mitchell, 2011). They are also still influential in many single-identity communities, where they keep order, force people out, or engage in criminal activities:

The paramilitaries, although they are supposed to be disbanded, they are not really They are still in charge in certain areas. . . . It would be too dangerous for a Catholic to move into a Protestant area, or vice versa, in social housing estates. They would be intimidated out, and intimidation could be rocks thrown at them, or firebombs, or just warnings: "you better get out or you could be shot at." (Interview with Northern Ireland Housing Executive official, 2015)

There is also continuity in the importance ascribed to symbolic activities. The decline in political violence combined with paramilitary groups engaging less in routine violence has meant that the conflict is increasingly fought "with other means" like marches during the "marching season"; spatial marking of areas through flags, curb stones, and murals (Gusic, 2019); and bonfires "dressed up" with flags, pictures of politicians, and symbols belonging to "the other side."

Yet even outside of working-class areas and beyond the realms of paramilitary groups, the conflict continues. The principal problem is that Northern Ireland's—and subsequently Belfast's—political status remains legally ambiguous since the GFA/BA allows for a border poll through which Northern Ireland could join the Republic of Ireland. The GFA/BA thus provided continuity in the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain—a key goal for Protestants—while opening up to "Irish Unification"—a key goal for Catholics. To this end, there is a strong unwillingness to cede any territory to "the other."

Ninety percent of all the areas around here would be politicized. . . . If you go into south Belfast, west Belfast, north Belfast, east Belfast, you are talking about Protestant or Catholic communities, you see? . . . There are very few grey areas. (Interview with Good Relations Unit officer, 2014)

Rather than genuine coexistence between the two sides and agreement over Northern Ireland's future, the conflict lines of war are still active (Nolan, 2012)—which Brexit tensions and outbursts of political violence make clear. It is against this background that contemporary violence needs to be

understood: Northern Ireland is a divided place where territoriality remains important, and many are disenfranchised. Political violence therefore emerges as protests from disengaged and disenfranchised youth (Leonard, 2010), a way to show dissatisfaction vis-à-vis the postwar situation and its unequal peace dividend (Murtagh & Shirlow, 2006), and/or a necessary means to an end—to protect the in-group and its survival in Northern Ireland—provoked by the perceived lack of options for expressing dissatisfaction differently (Mitchell, 2011).

Organization and Methodology of the Study

The objectives of this study are to theorize and explore the roles memes play in postwar contexts using Northern Ireland's contentious political landscape as a case study. We focus on Belfast and ask: *How do Internet memes about political violence in postwar Belfast speak to or against the peacebuilding process in Northern Ireland?* We do so through the following approach. We initially employ digital archival methods to build a corpus of relevant memes. The first research phase (January to June 2022) was dedicated to mapping the online universe of memes that engaged with the Belfast riots of 2012–13 and 2021. To find relevant memes, we followed the hashtag #Belfastriots on various social media platforms, including Instagram and Twitter. We also searched for the phrases "Belfast Riots" and "Belfast Memes" on Google and Reddit and explored meme pages on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram and independent meme pages like Memedroid and Meme Generator. Additionally, we searched for "Belfast" and "Northern Ireland" in the meme encyclopedia Know Your Meme (KYM), which "has emerged as a dominant authority in the definition and categorization of memes" (Pettis, 2022, p. 14). One useful aspect of KYM is that each meme was contextualized by the editors, which proved essential knowledge.

Through this procedure, a corpus of 47 relevant memes, all addressing political violence in Belfast and the riots of 2012–13 or 2021, was built. We chose this somewhat eclectic archival method because it allowed us to search broadly for memes, giving us a larger collection of relevant memes than if we had focused on a particular platform or hashtag. However, we make no claim to having collected every relevant meme, especially since the meme-verse constantly changes (Bainotti, Caliandro, & Gandini, 2021). It should also be noted that while the quality of our corpus has benefitted from a broad search, this also means that we cannot analyze the idiosyncratic affordances of different social media platforms (Lindgren, 2022 pp. 44, 72, 140). In addition to building a corpus of memes, we have also been "lurking" (Lutz & Hoffman, 2017, p. 881) in comment sections on sites where the memes appear to document the discussions taking place.

We also draw on interviews from previous fieldwork in Belfast. While not focused on memes per se, we found that many insights were relevant here as well. The interviews have been conducted in Belfast since 2009 during multiple months across many visits. They were semi-structured with open-ended questions to allow interviewees to adjust foci and use their own words (O'Reilly, 2004) and focused primarily on the period after the GFA/BA. Around 50 interviews were conducted with people across the conflict divide and those working to bridge it (as well as numerous conversations and observations). Interviewees were selected to obtain a wide range of insights, which implied interviewing people until novel perspectives gradually became less frequent. Snowball sampling was used through existing contacts, spontaneous outreach, and unplanned encounters. The interview guide included broader themes to allow adjustment and

new lines of inquiry and consisted of seven to eight broad questions—for example, "How would you describe the current situation in Belfast?" or "Do you think there is peace today?" The interviews usually lasted around one to two hours, and most were recorded.

The memes were analyzed using our theoretical framework to generate different thematic uses of memes. What this means concretely is that we initially interpreted and coded each individual meme regarding (a) how the meme uses humor (e.g., to impose superiority, give relief, or provide incongruity), and (b) how this usage might be understood in a postwar context (e.g., if it is an everyday peace practice that uses memes to cope with postwar violence, challenge dominant narratives, and build bridges or an everyday conflict practice that mocks "the other" and reinforces conflict lines; Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is thus a theoretically grounded interpretation in which we actively ascribed each meme a general humoristic dynamic (e.g., imposing superiority) and a contextual role (e.g., mocking "the other") using the theoretical framework as a guide. We then identified how the individual memes connected to, overlapped with, and differed from each other to organize them thematically with regard to how they related to political violence. This meant that we looked for patterns across different humoristic dynamics and contextual roles, which allowed us to identify dominant themes from these patterns and group the memes accordingly (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The result was both detailed accounts of how memes function in postwar settings (e.g., how joking about violence might help people cope) and an overview of the diverse functions memes can play. This flexible approach was motivated by our ambition and our study's explorative nature to keep the role of memes an open question (understanding them as able to support *and* challenge peace processes). Future studies may benefit from more systematic and rigid analyses. However, given that we operate in quite unexplored academic terrain, we concluded that analytical fluidity and flexibility were both more useful and realistic.

Analytical Findings: Meme-Ing Peace in Belfast

Using our theoretical framework, we found three dominant themes in the Belfast riots memes, which we present and discuss below. Under each theme, we highlight specific memes illustrative of the larger corpus of memes. The identified themes are not exhaustive, but they are the most salient ones, given our theoretical framework and empirical focus.

Theme One: Poking Fun at Violence

We collected many memes that made fun of the political violence and—thereby—challenged the urgency of conflict that the riots represented. Essentially, the memes in this theme portray political violence as silly bickering over insignificant political matters that should not warrant violent responses. This is how humor often is used in postwar contexts (see Sheftel, 2012). Illustrative of this broad tendency to "poke fun" at violence is the meme in Figure 1, where we see Father Dougal McGuire from the sitcom *Father Ted* exclaim: "Ted, you're not going to believe it! There's riots in Belfast because of a massive infringement of human righ ... Oh wait, it's just a flag." This meme references the flag riots of 2012–13 and suggests that no longer flying the Union Jack (as regularly as before) from Belfast City Hall is a nonissue that should not provoke political violence. The meme thus renders the "banal nationalism" (Billig, 1995) of emotional attachment to the Union Jack visible and—importantly—also

laughable. In postwar Belfast, where flags are used to mark neighborhoods, where proxy flags are flown to indicate group belonging (Gusic, 2019), and where flag theft may be treated as a “sectarian hate crime” (*Belfast Telegraph*, 2022, para. 1), such humor takes on a rather subversive tone by destabilizing the dynamics of group belonging (and division) as represented by a key nation-building symbol: the flag. The meme may thus be read as an act of everyday diplomacy, as it “challenge[s] the norm that conflict and division are the only modes of intergroup activities” (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 560). Indeed, we find that humor can posit “alternative, sometimes subversive, versions of dominant narratives and official history” (Hernann, 2016, p. 59). Such “subversive” sentiments also reverberate on social media threads discussing the flag riots of 2012–13—on the sub-Reddit *r/northernireland* we found users discussing these riots, at times stressing how identification with flags is problematic and connecting it to political violence: “Not that I’m particularly attached to there being a union flag either. I’d rather have no flags if it would end the rioting and nonsense” (personal communication, May 10, 2013).⁵



Figure 1. “Down with this sort of thing!” (Know Your Meme, 2012a).

⁵ To keep usernames confidential, we cite Reddit comments as personal communications and refer to meme hosting sites, rather than individual users, when citing memes.

Theme Two: Poking Fun at Rioters

In Figure 2, we see a remix of the *Taken 3* (Megaton, 2014) movie poster, here represented as "Taken 3: They took the fleg"—with a photo of a "flag-less" Belfast City Hall photoshopped in. This meme also speaks to the flag riots of 2012–13, but its humorous qualities are less apparent than above since it relies on local vernacular and contextual knowledge—which humorous engagements often do (Ataci, 2022; Zelizer, 2010). Memes are dependent on contextual information to make sense, and without knowing the cultural and political setting, the joke (and its political message) is often lost on the reader (Denisova, 2019, p. 38). The choice of film poster to remix is thus not arbitrary. It is significant that the lead actor (seen in the poster) is Liam Neeson, a Northern Ireland local deeply affected by "the Troubles" and even featured in a movie where he plays a remorseful man ridden by his violent past in a Loyalist paramilitary group (Irish Central, 2009). Neeson also starred as an officer of the infamous Royal Ulster Constabulary in the Netflix show *Derry Girls* (Lennox, 2018–2022)—which explores the conflict through a humorous (albeit not mocking) framing when following a group of teenagers during the 1990s in Northern Ireland.

A further layer of localization connects the remixed poster to Northern Ireland in how "flag" is written as "fleg." This is how working-class Protestants in Belfast would, supposedly, pronounce the word, making it a rather condescending take on how this group (the main driver of the flag riots) speak, as it alludes to its lack of education and social sophistication (Reilly, 2021, pp. 79–80). While this meme does indeed poke fun at the violence, it does so in a distinctly sectarian *and* classist manner, which in subtle—yet culturally anchored—ways mocks the rioters and their working-class backgrounds. It is thus about poking fun at violence *and* at those rendered supportive of, responsible for, and/or prone to it. The meme thereby expresses superiority vis-à-vis the rioters and may therefore be understood as a form of "hate humor" (Billig, 2001). It thereby illustrates the inherently Janus-faced nature of humor, with the memes undermining the urgency of conflict and reinforcing existing divisions around class, education, and background—with condescending intergroup humor able to "play a key role in delegitimizing outgroups, trivializing their rights, concerns, and right to protection" (Hodson & MacInnis, 2016, p. 70).



Figure 2. "The other Taken 3" (Know Your Meme, 2012b).

Theme Three: Normalizing Violence

Many of the memes we found poke fun at the violence and/or the rioters, yet hardly all of them. A third theme was normalization—rather than ridiculing—of violence. There are myriad memes that position the riots as “business as usual” in Belfast. Figure 3 is illustrative, as it juxtaposes how the Baltimore (United States) riots in 2015 were seen by people from around the world with how people from Belfast saw them. By using imagery from a TV show where judges dole out less than favorable scores for the performance they just witnessed, we learn that Belfast citizens have discerning tastes regarding riots and are not easily impressed by the likes of the Baltimore one. The point is, arguably, that people from Belfast are all too used to riots and thus have become somewhat desensitized to the phenomenon. Interestingly, the imagery of the meme (the people in the street looking appalled) is not from riots in Belfast, but from the riots in Baltimore following the death of Freddie Gray. As such, the meme has been post hoc localized to Belfast and forms part of a global “family” of memes addressing these riots (Know Your Meme, n.d.a). This illustrates how memes are often localized to fit the relevant political setting (Shifman, 2013, pp. 166–170). The same tendency can be seen in Figure 4, where original imagery from the London riots in 2011 is used in memes about the Belfast riots of April 2021. Here, too, the Belfast riots are rendered a normal part of everyday life by being construed as part of the

summer scheme (activities designed to keep young people occupied during the summer). The reference to summer connects with the realities in Belfast, where the "marching season" and bonfires occur during the summer months—both of which are politically divisive and have provoked riots in the past.

How people around the world watched the Baltimore riots



How people from Belfast watched them



Figure 3. "They can take our fleg but they'll never take our freedom!" (Memedroid, 2015).



Figure 4. "Belfast Summer Scheme" (personal communication, April 6, 2021).⁶

Another example of normalizing violence is found in Figure 5. Here, we see a version of the popular meme family "starter packs" adapted to the Northern Irish context. The starter pack meme "illustrate[s] the archetype of a celebrity, company, or subculture through a recommended selection of fashion articles, multimedia and other consumer products" (Know Your Meme, n.d.b). In most starter packs that speak of Northern Ireland, we find references to political violence and rioting as part of its everyday life. In the "Welcome to Belfast" starter pack, we see images of riots, various paramilitary groups, and an Orange Order march. Through this and other memes, the archetype of Belfast as being in a continuous state of violence is inscribed on the reader. It is possible to understand this memetic normalization both as a form of venting of tensions, frustrations, anger, and fear (Ataci, 2022; Raskin, 1985) and as a coping mechanism (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 549; Sheftel, 2012). Through the humorous rendering of the violent present via memes, comic relief may be achieved, which on the one hand normalizes the violence while on the other hand renders it laughable (see Zelizer, 2010). Given how traumatic Belfast's endemic political violence is to people (Mannheimer et al., 2022, p. 7), we might understand why such memes become widely shared: They offer comic relief to their audiences. This

⁶ This meme was posted on Know Your Meme in 2021, however, it was removed in 2023. We thus cite it as personal communication since it is no longer retrievable.

tendency is also apparent in Reddit threads discussing the riots, where the comments with the most upvotes are often those engaging in wordplay or steering clear from the gravity of the violence to forefront its humorous aspects. When such humor is missing from the original post, the most popular comment in one of the observed threads was: "Where is the punchline?" (personal communication, December 20, 2012). This resonates with research on humor in postwar settings, where humor is used to deal with societal legacies and the personal trauma of war (Sheftel, 2012).

The "Welcome to Belfast" Starterpack



Figure 5. "The welcome to Belfast starterpack" (Reddit, 2015).

While we argue that these memes normalize violence, we also suggest that by doing so, they help construct a shared Belfast identity. Given how divided the city is, it is somewhat rare for residents to think of themselves as belonging to the same city. People would rather identify with being, for example, from West Belfast or—more specifically—belonging to Shankill (a Protestant neighborhood) or Falls (a Catholic neighborhood). This kind of hyperlocal identification often plays out between different communities in Belfast, which reifies the conflict lines of "the Troubles" in the present. However, these memes supersede such sectarian identification by portraying Belfast in singular terms, where inhabitants share the same experiences of violence being both a constant threat and a recurring reality. These experiences are hardly positive, but they are shared across sectarian divides and might thus forge a common identity and build ties

across and beyond conflict lines (see Zelizer, 2010). Figure 5 depicts political violence as originating from both sides of the sectarian divide without framing anyone as unilaterally responsible for it, which is otherwise common in deeply divided societies (Reilly, 2021). Blame is rendered ambiguous in a way that might facilitate a common identity as “Belfastians.” More specifically, the blame is rendered “ambiguous” in *sectarian* terms because the meme reinterprets the violence at its core—what the role of violence is, who it targeted by whom, and where conflict lines lay. This moves violence from the “standard” interpretation of being motivated by ethnonational animosities and perpetrated by Catholics and Protestants to being something that a minority of splinter groups, criminals, or antisocial people engage in for reasons no longer deemed relevant by most but still causing problems for all. This represents an interesting appropriation of political violence, which may break down the binaries informing antagonistic “us-them” identities at the core of sectarian violence (Noderer, 2020). It also goes in line with post-1998 discourses in Northern Ireland, which increasingly depict a silent majority wanting to move forward being hindered by a minority stuck in the past (Gusic, 2019). We may thus (counterintuitively) think of normalizing violence via memes as a form of everyday peace practice (Mac Ginty, 2014), given that it holds the potential of undercutting sectarian identities in favor of a shared one (Sheftel, 2012).

Concluding Discussion

Postwar memes are understudied in both media and communication studies and peace research. To ameliorate this shortcoming, we theorized and explored memes about recent political violence in Belfast. Analyzing such memes has enabled us to understand how they are positioned vis-à-vis the political violence of the past, its re-eruption in the present, and its potential return in the future.

Our findings demonstrate three dominant ways in which memes engage with political violence: (a) *poking fun at violence*, (b) *poking fun at rioters*, and (c) *normalizing violence*. Memes poking fun at violence do so in ways that destabilize the nationalism underpinning the conflict in Northern Ireland, whereas memes poking fun at the rioters position the sectarian (and/or socioeconomic) “other” as inferior. Memes that normalize violence do not necessarily entail a defeatist resignation to political violence—even if that might often be the case—as they also provide comic relief and construct a shared identity in an otherwise divided city (cf. Sheftel, 2012). We conclude that memes about political violence in postwar Belfast are indeterminately situated, as they fill various (sometimes contradictory) functions. While not a surprising finding in itself—societies are both indeterminate and contradictory—it enables meme research to move further into exploring the everyday politics of postwar societies.

Our study contributes to both media and communication studies and peace research. To the former, we contribute by demonstrating how memes are positioned in postwar societies where political violence is entrenched. Regarding peace research, we demonstrate that memes can play political roles in postwar settings, that these roles might move us toward both peace and conflict, and that this warrants a better understanding of how memes might be channeled into constructive rather than destructive outcomes. This is even more important if future research shows that memes can *significantly* shape postwar settings. Furthermore, we developed an analytical framework that can be used to explore other postwar settings. Thus, we lay a foundation for future interdisciplinary research on memes in postwar societies.

We see three distinct avenues for future research. The first is an exploration of the impact of memes. We have demonstrated that memes are used in relation to political violence in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and—arguably—other postwar settings. However, it was beyond our scope to assess how important (or unimportant) these practices are—whether memes impact the wider conflict dynamic or play peripheral roles, if the shared digital spaces they create consolidate or just wither away, and if certain ways of memeing (or certain kinds of memes) play constructive/destructive roles. Thus, we need to assess the impact of memes to understand whether they have *substantive* political potential.

The second avenue is a more thorough exploration of the constructive potential of memes. We suggested that memes can have both positive and negative impact—that they have the potential to both entrench *and* challenge dominant narratives and promote *and* hinder peace. While this resonates with peace research in general, there is a need to explore more thoroughly how attempts to use postwar memes constructively might generate positive effects but also if they can be counterproductive too.

The third avenue is how memes are *received*. In this study, we did not explore how *audiences* responded to these memes (aside from some observations on various social media platforms). What is needed to move the debate on memes as everyday peace and conflict forward is an audience perspective: To understand how people in Belfast (and elsewhere) receive and make sense of memes about political violence. This is generally lacking in the broader meme studies literature too, where the "imagined audience" and "directionality" of memes remain preferred foci over engagement with *actual* audiences (see Wiggins, 2019, pp. 111–112). This limits us to reading memes only as outputs without a deeper awareness of how they are decoded (and potentially acted upon). If there is one thing the literature on audiences shows, it is that audiences rarely (if ever) read media texts fully as "intended" by their authors (see Hall, 1981/1973; Jenkins, 1992). Our article would benefit from a follow-up study in which its conclusions are "tested" against actual audiences. This would also help elucidate whether—and if so how—memes may serve everyday peace (or conflict) functions.

References

- Al-Rawi, A. (2016). Anti-ISIS humor: Cultural resistance of radical ideology. *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 17(1), 52–68. doi:10.1080/21567689.2016.1157076
- Ataci, T. (2022). Memetizing genocides and post-genocide peacebuilding: Ambivalent implications of memes for youth participation and imaginaries in Rwanda. *Information, Communication & Society*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2022.2146984
- Bainotti, L., Caliandro, A., & Gandini, A. (2021). From archive cultures to ephemeral content, and back: Studying Instagram Stories with digital methods. *New Media & Society*, 23(12), 3656–3676. doi:10.1177/1461444820960071

- Belfast Telegraph*. (2022, June 1). PSNI treating theft of Union flag from Co Tyrone Orange Hall as 'sectarian hate crime'. Retrieved from <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/psni-treating-theft-of-union-flag-from-co-tyrone-orange-hall-as-sectarian-hate-crime/41709729.html>
- Berents, H. (2015). An embodied everyday peace in the midst of violence. *Peacebuilding*, 3(2), 1–14. doi:10.1080/21647259.2015.1052632
- Bernstein, R. J. (2013). *Violence: Thinking without banisters*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Billig, M. (2001). Humor and hatred: The racist jokes of the Ku Klux Klan. *Discourse & Society*, 12(3), 267–289. doi:10.1177/0957926501012003001
- Boyle, M. J. (2014). *Violence after war: Explaining instability in post-conflict states*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063o
- Demirel, C. (2023). Re-conceptualising competitive victimhood in reconciliation processes: The case of Northern Ireland. *Peacebuilding*, 11(1), 45–61. doi:10.1080/21647259.2021.1977016
- Denisova, A. (2019). *Internet memes and society: Social, cultural, and political contexts*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Elfversson, E., Gusic, I., & Murtagh B. (2023). Postwar cities: Conceptualizing and mapping the research agenda. *Political Geography*, 105(2023), 102912. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2023.102912
- Goldstein, D. M. (2013). *Laughter out of place: Race, class, violence, and sexuality in a Rio shantytown*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Graham, B., & Nash, C. (2006). A shared future: Territoriality, pluralism, and public policy in Northern Ireland. *Political Geography*, 25(3), 253–278. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2005.12.006
- Gusic, I. (2019). *Contesting peace in the postwar city: Belfast, Mitrovica and Mostar*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave.
- Gusic, I. (2022). Peace between peace(s)? Urban peace and the coexistence of antagonists in city spaces. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 16(5), 619–640. doi:10.1080/17502977.2022.2129330

- Hall, S. (1981). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language* (pp. 166–176). London, UK: Hutchinson. Original work published 1973.
- Hernann, A. (2016). Joking through hardship: Humor and truth-telling among displaced Timbuktuans. *African Studies Review*, 59(1), 57–76. doi:10.1017/asr.2016.4
- Hodson, G., & MacInnis, C. C. (2016). Derogating humor as a delegitimization strategy in intergroup contexts. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, 2(1), 63–74. doi:10.1037/tps0000052
- Hoey, P. (2018). *Shinners, dissos and dissenters: Irish republican media activism since the Good Friday Agreement*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Irish Central. (2009, August 12). Liam Neeson: I will never get over The Troubles. Retrieved from <https://www.irishcentral.com/news/neeson-i-will-never-get-over-the-troubles-53047712-237654641>
- Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual poachers: Television fans & participatory culture*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Know Your Meme. (2012a, December 4). *Down with this sort of thing!* [Photograph]. Retrieved from <https://i.kym-cdn.com/photos/images/original/000/516/164/6cf.jpg>
- Know Your Meme. (2012b, December 3). *The other Taken 3* [Photograph]. Retrieved from <https://i.kym-cdn.com/photos/images/original/000/514/190/d1d.png>
- Know Your Meme. (n.d.a). *2015 Baltimore Riots*. Retrieved from <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/events/2015-baltimore-riots>
- Know Your Meme. (n.d.b). *Starter packs*. Retrieved from <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/starter-packs>
- Lennox, M. (Director). (2018–2022). *Derry girls* [Television series]. London, UK: Hat Trick Productions.
- Leonard, M. (2010). Parochial geographies: Growing up in divided Belfast. *Childhood*, 17(3), 329–342. doi:10.1177/0907568210369216
- Lindgren, S. (2022). *Digital media & society*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Lutz, C., & Hoffmann, C. P. (2017). The dark side of online participation: Exploring non-, passive and negative participation. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(6), 876–897. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2017.1293129
- Mac Ginty, R. (2014). Everyday peace: Bottom-up and local agency in conflict-affected societies. *Security Dialogue*, 45(6), 548–564. doi:10.1177/0967010614550899

- Mac Ginty, R. (2021). *Everyday peace: How so-called ordinary people can disrupt violent conflict*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Mannheimer, E., Reinders, S., & Brandellero, A. (2022). Game of Thrones tourism and the (re)imagination of the new Northern Ireland. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 25(5), 554–569. doi:10.1177/13678779221081148
- Marijan, B. (2017). The politics of everyday peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland. *Peacebuilding*, 5(1), 67–81. doi:10.1080/21647259.2016.1265046
- McCrow-Young, A., & Mortensen, M. (2021). Countering spectacles of fear: Anonymous' meme 'war' against ISIS. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24(4), 832–849. doi:10.1177/13675494211005060
- Megaton, O. (Director). (2014). *Taken 3* [Motion Picture]. Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox.
- Memedroid. (2015, May 1). *They can take our fleg but they'll never take our freedom!* [Photograph]. Retrieved from <https://images7.memedroid.com/images/UPLOADED118/5542943bcfb6d.jpeg>
- Merrill, S., & Lindgren, S. (2021). Memes, brands and the politics of post-terror togetherness: Following the Manchester bee after the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing. *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(16), 2403–2421. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2021.1942957
- Milliken, M. (2021). Same difference? Shared education and integrated education: Transforming education briefing paper 13. *Integrated Education Fund*, 1–12. Retrieved from https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/93488098/S_I_FINAL.pdf
- Milner, R. M. (2013). Pop polyvocality: Internet memes, public participation, and the Occupy Wall Street movement. *International Journal of Communication*, 7, 2357–2390.
- Milner, R. M. (2018). *The world made meme*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mina, A. X. (2019). *Memes to movements: How the world's most viral media is changing social protest and power*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Mitchell, A. (2011). *Lost in transformation: Violent peace and peaceful conflict in Northern Ireland*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Morrow, R., Mackel, C., & Dickson Fitzgerald, J. (2011). Beyond the shadow space: Architecture as a professional and creative process; during and post-conflict. *The Journal of Architecture*, 16(1), 57–70. doi:10.1080/13602365.2011.547008
- Mortensen, M., & Neumayer, C. (2021). The playful politics of memes. *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(16), 2367–2377. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2021.1979622

- Mulkay, M. (1988). *On humor: Its nature and its place in modern society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Murtagh, B., & Keaveney, K. (2006). Policy and conflict transformation in the ethnocentric city. *Space and Polity, 10*(2), 187–202. doi:10.1080/13562570600921683
- Murtagh, B., & Shirlow, P. (2006). *Belfast: Segregation, violence, and the city*. London, UK: Pluto Press.
- Neill, W. J. V. (2004). *Urban planning and cultural identity*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Noderer, S. (2020). No laughing matter? The potential of political humor as a means of nonviolent resistance. *Z Friedens und Konfliktforsch, 9*, 255–277. doi:10.1007/s42597-020-00042-0
- Nolan, P. (2012). *Northern Ireland peace monitoring report: Number one*. Belfast, UK: Community Relations Council.
- O'Reilly, K. (2004). *Ethnographic methods*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Pettis, B. (2022). Know Your Meme and the homogenization of web history. *Internet Histories, 6*(3), 263–279. doi:10.1080/24701475.2021.1968657
- Raskin, V. (1985). *Semantic mechanisms of humor*. Dordrecht, Germany: Springer.
- Reddit. (2015, October 28). *The welcome to Belfast starter pack* [Photograph]. Retrieved from <https://i.imgur.com/VcFrI7v.jpeg>
- Reilly, P. (2021). *Digital contention in a divided society: Social media, parades, and protests in Northern Ireland*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Sheftel, A. (2012). Monument to the international community, from the grateful citizens of Sarajevo: Dark humour as counter-memory in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Memory Studies, 5*(2), 145–164. doi:10.1177/1750698011415247
- Shifman, L. (2013). *Memes in digital culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Sterrett, K., Hackett, M., & Hill, D. (2012). The social consequences of broken urban structures: A case study of Belfast. *Journal of Transport Geography, 21*, 49–61. doi:10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2012.01.014
- Tuters, M., & Hagen, S. (2020). (((they))) rule: Memetic antagonism and nebulous othering on 4chan. *New Media & Society, 22*(12), 2218–2237. doi:10.1177/1461444819888746
- Ware, A., & Ware, V-A. (2021). Everyday peace: Rethinking typologies of social practice and local agency. *Peacebuilding, 10*(3), 222–241. doi:10.1080/21647259.2021.1997387

Wedeen, L. (2013). Ideology and humor in dark times: Notes from Syria. *Critical Inquiry*, 39(4), 841–873.
doi:10.1086/671358

Wieviorka, M. (2009). *Violence: A new approach*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Wiggins, B. (2019). *The discursive power of memes in digital culture: Ideology, semiotics, and intertextuality*. London, UK: Routledge.

Zelizer, C. (2010). Laughing our way to peace or war: Humour and peacebuilding. *Journal of Conflictology*, 1(2), 1–9.