The Troubled Past and Contested Future of Northern Ireland's Maze Prison/Long Kesh

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Abstract

As Northern Ireland's landmark Good Friday Agreement approaches its 20-year anniversary, one site looms particularly large in the memories and perspectives of men and women who lived through the civil conflict known as the Troubles. The remains of HM Maze Prison stand unoccupied and unused while Northern Ireland debates how this polarizing historical landscape figures into the population's recovery from historical violence.

The Maze Prison/Long Kesh housed paramilitary prisoners from 1971 to 2000. A brief review of the prison history suggests that far from being placed "out of site, out of mind," its prisoners, employees, and administration retained an active role in the violence of the Troubles. Today the Maze Prison/Long Kesh serves as more than a reminder of a dark era; it is also a hotly contested cultural landscape. In the debate over the future of what remains of the prison campus, competing political perspectives have yielded proposals that prescribe drastically different approaches to the community's recovery. The prison site, perceived variably as a threat to the peace process, a minimum requirement for peace, a historical obligation, and an economic opportunity, waits in limbo for a political agreement regarding the extent to which the landscape should be put to recreational, commercial, historical, and civic use.

Author Biography

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In May of 2015, over 100,000 visitors traveled to Lisburn, Northern Ireland for the Balmoral Agricultural Show. The Royal Ulster Agricultural Society calls its annual three-day fair a show of "healthy competition, good sportsmanship, family fun and community spirit," drawing crowds from Belfast, the rest of Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland (O'Toole 2014). Exhibitor spaces for sheep-shearing, pig handling, and showings of horses, cattle, and poultry attract the biggest numbers. The event's convivial atmosphere quickly dissipated in the evenings of the 2015 show, however, as visitors waited in exiting traffic for up to two and a half hours. Amidst intermittent tirades of abuse, parking attendants directed creeping lines of cars to the country roads leading from the grounds (Black 2015). Balmoral Park lacked the infrastructure to accommodate the 30,000 nightly visitors it had received, and the reason was simple: the surrounding roads were not designed to host a large public exhibition center.

On the contrary, for decades this corner of Lisburn was developed specifically to keep the public out. In 1971, the British government closed its Royal Air Force airfield on the site and redeveloped the facilities into the Long Kesh detention center. In response to the growing civil conflict in Northern Ireland, commonly known as the Troubles (1969-1998), it would later become HM Prison Maze, a high-security prison whose infamous legacy of sectarian violence remains hotly contested today.

As a symbol of an era of history that many witnesses would like to re-write, the Maze presents today's Northern Irish society with a tremendous challenge: the task of responsibly dealing with a landscape of trauma. A thorough historical understanding of the Maze/Long Kesh is necessary in order to understand this task as both a burden and an opportunity. This article illustrates how the prison landscape played a unique role in the conflict in Northern Ireland, one that has rendered it a possible – but deeply contentious – platform for promoting global peace and aiding reconciliation between Northern Irish communities.

Historical Context: The Troubles

A growing body of work on the Maze that delineates the site as contested ground requires us to consider the roles of memory, interpretation, and eradication in dealing with troubled pasts (McAtackney 2014, Dowell 2009, Flynn 2011). However, these important discussions are best held with a detailed eye to the specifics of the Maze's history. To focus only on the mere facts of "pain and shame" (Logan and Reeves 2009) during the conflict ignores what William Sewell Jr. terms the "eventful temporality" (Sewell Jr. 2005) of the historical circumstance – in this case, Northern

Ireland's Troubles and the defining episodes of the Maze. Sewell defines an event as a product of an established social structure or structures, which in some way transforms the structure from which the event deviates (2005, 227). Although Northern Ireland's civil conflict during the latter half of the 20th century is generally understood as a thirty-year affair, the social structures and unrest that bred it—and that bred the Maze Prison—are centuries old. The oscillation between periods of violence and relative peace in Ireland saw the Cromwellian confiscation of Gaelic land in the 1600s, the Protestant Ascendancy, economic restrictions and penal codes, eras of rebellion, concessions, the abolishment of Irish Parliament in 1801, the campaign for Home Rule over a century later, and the Ulster Covenant justifying the use of force if Home Rule became a serious threat. By the time Ireland partitioned in 1921-22, three centuries of English residency in Ireland had divided populations of the northern counties who considered themselves British-Irish, or considered themselves simply Irish. This divide split Northern Ireland along several identity lines: national (Irish/British), religious (Catholic/Protestant), political (Separatist (Nationalist)/Unionist), and sectarian (Republican/Loyalist). Census records show correlations, but not absolute 1:1 relationships, between citizens' religions, their constitutional politics, and extralegal military activity. On the heels of Irish independence in what is now the Republic, many citizens of the upper counties considered the partition to be vital to the retention of their "distinctive Protestant heritage and British way of life" (Ryder 2000, 122). In the decades following partition, Unionists frequently expressed their Irish identity in terms of Protestant landowning history, the planter tradition as a foundation for industrial development in the north, a struggle to resist the sprawl of the Catholic Church, and voluntary involvement in World War I (Boyce 1996).

However, the minority Nationalist community in Northern Ireland—that is, citizens in favor of an Irish Ireland—protested Unionists' preferential treatment, particularly better housing and job opportunities and voting laws that favored rich homeowners (Gudgin 1999). This sense of alienation and oppression reignited an escalation of violence reminiscent of the unrest that followed Irish partition and Civil War. Between the late 1960s and early '70s, ethno-nationalist groups such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA, synonymous with militant Separatism) and the Loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) ordered targeted hits and car bombings, retaliations and counter-retaliations—all of which contributed to a culture of urban violence, exacerbated by riots and random shootings.

In response to this heightened paramilitary activity, British troops arrived in Northern Ireland in 1969. The Troubles would see many more years of civil

disruption. Civilians and sectarian groups established sanctuaries and no-go zones, barricading and partitioning residential areas. Children in Northern Ireland, as in other embattled cities, became accustomed to running through contested neighborhoods (Cairns 1987). The Provisional IRA targeted commercial British-Irish business in protest of what it termed an "artificial economy of the six-counties (Bell 2000)." No sooner would Separatists be granted concessions by the British government than Loyalist paramilitaries would target British infrastructure in protest. The UVF received a tremendous amount of intelligence from allegedly neutral British police, and so were aided in carrying out attacks on Separatists' families; the IRA became infamous for its attacks on civilians in British governmental or police employment (Edward and Bloomer 2008; Fay 1997). Ultimately political violence, incurred by Republicans, Loyalists, and British/Northern Irish security forces, resulted in nearly 3,500 deaths in the thirty-year conflict (McKeown 2009; Sutton 1994). The amount of people harmed by the Troubles, including both casualties and injuries, is of course, much greater—an estimated 2% of the Northern Irish population.

As attacks and retaliations between opposing paramilitary groups upended civilian society, chronic unemployment and a severe housing shortage plagued the most populated parts of Northern Ireland, augmenting and feeding the crisis (Cameron 1969; Gudgin 1999). In north and west Belfast, residents in contested areas risked losing their homes to arson. In some cases, the educated or wealthy residents of a city relocated to adjacent suburban counties rather than risk the uncertainty of urban warfare and redevelopment (Plöger 2004, 16). As the Loyalist/Unionist majority and Republican/Separatist minority inflicted greater and greater damage, the British government and Irish security forces faced a province at a breaking point.

Long Kesh and the Maze Prison

In 1971, three years into this culture of violence and instability, Northern Irish Prime Minister Brian Faulkner intensified the use of the Long Kesh military camp to serve as a paramilitary prison. In a sprawling, shadowy culture of political violence, difficult to monitor and even more difficult to eliminate, the prison was likely intended to isolate paramilitary members—particularly those of the IRA—from a society easily disrupted even by "low-level terrorism" such as car bombings and single murders (von Tangen Page 1998, 48-53). Faulkner's government designed "Operation Demetrius," August 9-17 1971, a major arrest operation intended to detain as many suspected paramilitary members (mostly Republican) as possible in a span of hours.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) rounded up individuals suspected of paramilitary activity in a performative fashion intended to intimidate potential threats to British control. They reportedly made their arrests loudly in the middle of the night, and transported detainees to the Maze with a processional flair. The British Army and RUC cited most of those detained (an estimated but poorly-documented 350 men) on suspicion of conspiracy, terrorism, or possession of a weapon. Approximately 20% of detainees, however, were wrongfully arrested; that is, they were later found innocent of their original charge (von Tangen Page 1998, 54). Operation Demetrius had been carried out based on questionable intelligence gathered by the RUC Special Branch, which later admitted to the use of "speculation and guesswork" (Ryder 2000, 74). Irish security also arrested dozens of former IRA members and unaffiliated family members on the basis of their shared last name with a paramilitary member left at large. Under these circumstances, Long Kesh Detention Centre quickly filled past capacity. Over the coming months, authorities added structures to the compound in order to serve as a high-security prison, albeit ostensibly a temporary one.

The Dirty War

1971 also saw the implementation of tactical intelligence training courses for RUC members, employed almost immediately in Long Kesh. Suspects thought to hold anti-Loyalist information received dramatically different treatment than anti-Loyalist prisoners between the 1920s (that is, Irish partition and Civil War) and '60s. Edgar O'Ballance writes that this later generation of prisoners underwent:

> "Sensory deprivation," wherein the brain is deprived of the constant supply of oxygen and sugar it must have to function; "bread-and-water diet" to weaken physically; being "hooded" to confuse the senses; being deprived of sleep to tire the brain and body, and to lessen physical resistance to interrogation; and such apparatus known as the "Wind Machine" and the "Music Room" (Feldman 1991, 21).

These techniques became known to RUC detectives as "deep interrogation," and served as a component to Prime Minister Faulkner's program to develop counter-insurgency expertise in the RUC. Outside the barbed-wires of the Maze, paramilitaries (particularly the newest IRA splinter group, the Provisional IRA) would in turn train high-profile members, as well as any active members soon to be in danger of capture, in anti-interrogation techniques.

Despite these efforts at resistance, internment and the claustrophobic prison setting gave RUC authorities access to information they could not have tapped on

the outside. A broader network of intelligence-gathering developed, spanning across the prison boundaries, in what Martin Dillon (1988) and others have called the "Dirty War". Prison information-collecting systems not only mimicked the outside confusion of interrogations and infiltrations, but also served as the center where informants were made of combatants, and where political forces used false informants to create panic and paranoia in opposing sects. Most famously, the British government infiltrated the Crumlin Road IRA prisoner's alliance, which then mistakenly fed the IRA members being held at the Maze a list of alleged "informants" who were actually legitimate IRA members. This led to the abuse of IRA members by other prisoners of the same group, and the ensuing days of prolonged interrogations, false admissions, and administrative hysteria nearly led to the collapse of several important branches of IRA hierarchy (Dillon 1988, 74-83). A culture of paranoia and mistrust escalated into violence even more easily within the confines of Northern Irish prisons than in the outside realm of low-level terrorism.

A "University of Terrorism"

Despite the sudden disruption of Republican activities that resulted from internment, and despite the RUC's upper hand and efficiency in interrogation and information-gathering within Northern Ireland's prisons, the prolonged imprisonment of such a large number of Republicans was untenable at best. The consolidation of so many insurgents and alleged insurgents rendered attempts to keep them isolated from one another useless. In addition, there was no mixed housing of paramilitaries, for the safety of the guards and prisoners; internees associated with each of the Ulster Volunteer Force, Ulster Defence Association, Ulster Freedom Force, Irish Republican Army, and the Irish National Liberation Army were housed with their own affiliates.

Without the staffing numbers or space to prevent it, the Maze became a "university of terrorism" (Ryder 2000, 50-51; 119). As the secretive "low-level" insurgency attacks continued outside the gates, the British government pressured its law enforcement to continue making arrests—often for unproven crimes, or for security breaches such as carrying, but not firing, a firearm (McEvoy 2001, 354). Within months of Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) members' internment in 1971, their experienced leadership implemented a system of lecturing and militant discipline in order to recruit, radicalize, and train younger or unaffiliated internees. Young idealistic Separatists were arrested and, once inside the Maze, radicalized. Prisoners even recounted forging fake weapons to be used for instructional

purposes. The Maze prison lacked the design and staffing to enable officials to fully monitor, much less control, its prisoners.

The fact that prison served as a systematic breeding ground for Republican (and to a lesser extent, Loyalist) extremism suggests more than the complications the Northern Irish authorities met in the counter-insurgency struggle. It also exhibits the institutionalization of terror in Northern Ireland during this era of conflict. The consolidated, classroom-like setting through which violence spread in this closed space brings into sharp focus the methodological practices of sectarian groups, and the role of recruitment and instruction in armed groups' penetration into social establishments in the outside world. In a decade where ethno-nationalist groups controlled businesses, small banks, and even streets throughout Northern Ireland, the notion that a terrorist "school" could thrive even on regulated prison grounds hardly seems an aberration. Instead of "squeezing them out of society and into prison," as Secretary of State Roy Mason would later put it (McEvoy 2001, 231), the RUC and British government created a new, over-concentrated and under-regulated space for the most dangerous actors in the Troubles to converge.

Paramilitary Activity Outside the Wire

The insurgent activity within the Maze was by no means purely theoretical. Considerable violence was conceived within the Maze and executed outside. From behind the prison walls, leading faction officers continued to design and delegate paramilitary orders. Furthermore, the RUC's intensified usage of high-security prisons provided PIRA with easily accessed targets: prison officials and their families. Republican prisoners became invaluable for obtaining personal information about potential targets. In one 1973 collaboration between the "inside" and "outside," a letter bomb was sent to the home of a warder, and opened by his mother (Ryder 2000, 127). Paramilitary officials in the outside community also took action upon the prison itself, in correspondence with those inside. From outside the prison walls, paramilitary members threw pipe bombs over the wall, placed bombs along the gated perimeter, and smuggled ropes and other tools inside, reportedly with help from citizen allies in the Belfast area (McEvoy 2001; Dillon 1988).

The Maze's entrance consisted of three automatic gates, which only opened and closed one at a time and so had to be traversed in slow succession. Watchtowers stood erect on the perimeter, between segments of barbed and electric wire. And yet, the prison was a permeable area. When Republican officers developed militant orders amongst its members in prisons for distribution, they smuggled documents outside in the shoe linings and tampons of visitors (often coerced civilian family

members, or IRA members in disguise) (Dillon 1988). As long as the imprisoned ranks of paramilitaries kept open their communication vessels with the outside sections, they remained a functional part of the resistance against a British Ireland. This of course was possible in part because of the Maze's proximity to Separatist Belfast communities. When Long Kesh originated as a military camp, it was reasonably built near the Northern Irish capital; when it was redeveloped into a detention center in 1971 and a high-security prison in 1976, it was not geographically suited to its new functions.

Special Category Status and Protests

In addition to the use of "deep interrogation" techniques, as well as grievances such as poor food quality and insufficient medical care, prisoners and their supporters protested the 1976 cancellation of paramilitary prisoners' "Special Category" status under Secretary of State Merlyn Rees and chairman Lord Gardiner. The British government stripped paramilitary men of the right to wear their own clothes, to be excused from prison labor, to associate freely with other prisoners, and to receive regular mail and visits from family.

This de-classification of prisoners, particularly in the IRA, threatened to remove them from the political sphere in which they claimed to now have a foothold. Sara McDowell paraphrases Foucault to argue that criminalization is a means to depoliticization (2009). A "Special Category" prisoner, essentially a prisoner of war, serves time for fighting for his beliefs and the unarmed civilians represented by his cause. A criminal is an isolated individual, as much a murderer as a freedom fighter. The government's decision to downgrade paramilitary categorization suggested an effort to negate the prisoners' legitimacy in the public eye, just as outside the Maze, the state treated paramilitary conflicts as a local, and not a national issue. The use of the army was withheld whenever possible, and Secretary of State Rees referred to the civil conflict not as a second Troubles or a guerrilla war, but as a period of "Ulsterization" (von Tangen Page 1998, 57-59). Both inside and outside the Maze, the national government treated Northern Ireland's paramilitary violence and imprisonment as a criminal, not a political, problem. With their efforts for political recognition already tenuous, the Republicans protested what they believed to be an attempt by British parliament to render Republicans irrelevant in the public eye.

When appeals to prison guards, and eventually to Margaret Thatcher, for political status went ignored or denied, an open subculture of Republican resistance formed inside the Maze prison—geared not toward the sole aim of a united Irish Ireland, but of political status. Claiming Unionist authorities had tyrannized prisoners out of both

political power *and* civil rights, Republican prisoners began a series of formal protests. The protest began with the "Blanketmen", prisoners who, denied the Special Category right to their own clothes, in turn refused to wear the prison uniforms provided to them. They went naked or wrapped in a blanket. As one inmate, a member of PIRA recalls:

> The suit itself didn't mean an awful lot. It was just material. The suit of clothes doesn't make the prisoner, but it was symbolic. We were refusing point-blank then and there to put a uniform on which would give anybody a visual of us being different whatsoever (Feldman 1991, 153).

When Maze officials prohibited Blanketment from using the toilets unless they put on their uniform, the situation escalated into a "dirty protest," in which Blanketmen lived in their own feces-covered cells rather than put on a uniform, be taken to a toilet, or have their cell cleaned.

Prison officials adopted more severe tactics to "clean" their prisoners, including throwing pails of boiling water into the cells of naked men, using cleaning sessions as access to beat prisoners, and requiring an invasive "mirror" inspection of dirty protest prisoners' rectums, as prison guards washed the cells. RUC doctors or psychologists provided their own rationalizations for these actions, but one former Maze Welfare Officer phrased his reasoning in the following way: "The quicker we break the men, the quicker we can bring in a humane system" (Feldman 1991, 186-190). Other police guards later admitted to a sense of retribution in their behavior at the Maze; that is to say, prisoners were likely mistreated by officials who later reported insurmountable psychological stress, poor work environment, insufficient pay, the constant threat of one's family becoming a PIRA target, and a dearth of alternative options, given the economic and unemployment patterns of the decade that led many employees to the prison in the first place (McEvoy 2001).

Republican prisoners' formal protests culminated in two hunger strikes in the Maze, the second of which resulted in ten deaths. Bobby Sands, sentenced to 14 years in the Maze for possession of a firearm alleged having been used in an IRA attack, led the strike, refusing food for 66 days in 1981 (Bew, Frampton, and Gurruchaga 2009, 89). More than any other single event in Maze, his strike resounded with the outside world. When a rare Catholic-majority seat in Parliament opened five weeks into the protest, Sands was astonishingly elected as Northern Ireland's youngest MP, from within prison (O'Day 1995, 20). Bobby Sands died not just a martyr in the eyes of his sympathizers, but a martyred member of parliament.

Nine more men would starve to death over the next months. Each of the strikers, under Sand's leadership, strategically began to fast at two-week intervals. Republican recruitment and paramilitary activity spiked during the hunger strike. During this era of the conflict, Nationalist areas began to create the famous murals of Northern Ireland, and the visage of Bobby Sands appeared throughout sympathetic neighborhoods. When the body of Bobby Sands, MP, was brought out from the Maze, an estimated ten thousand people attended his funeral. One week later, as the nightly violence answering Sands's death began to temper, another writer and the second of ten total hunger strikers died, reigniting the public response. Rioting, without official organization from the IRA or PIRA, struck up across Northern Ireland. The fine line between supporting IRA political status and propagating criminal activity blurred as the protests became dangerous, with government automobiles torched, passengers inside. The protests of self-infliction and starvation inside the prison, and the more established Separatist groups outside—both peaceful and violent—came to sustain one another.

The 1981 Hunger Strike shifted the familiar points of conflict associated with the IRA and PIRA from enemy lines and government establishments to the bodies of individual victims, and the shift secured a positive opinion from parts of the Northern Irish, English, and American public (a public unlikely to support the IRA's combatant activities, but one that followed the cause for political status in newspaper reports). During the series of formal protests, the well-reported invasion and deterioration of the Republican prisoner body also became a strong rallying and recruiting tool for Separatists outside the Maze, appealing to the current Republican constituency to continue the pursuit of human rights for their captured IRA members and the IRA's ideology of a united Ireland. Although the Maze prison held members from Loyalist as well as Republican paramilitaries, the latter built a campaign around their particular experiences of trauma.

Although a new tactic for this era of Republicans, the hunger strike as a general practice has a deep-seated history in Catholic Ireland, commonly attributed in part to a Celtic pride in the mission work of Saint Patrick, the nation's patron saint, and other early Christians. More importantly, the 1981 strike echoed Ireland's more recent nationalist traditions of martyrdom, such as the deaths of Wolfe Tone, leader of the failed Irish Rebellion of 1798, and of the executed leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising – another movement against British Ireland (Ford 2001, 66; Beiner 2014). The legacy of Bobby Sands hinges upon his status as a martyr, augmented by the explicit ties his prison writings make to Christianity, Irish nationalism, and to mythologized figures, including Wolfe Tone and 1916's Patrick Pearse. In the first entry of his

hunger strike diary he recorded: "I believe and stand by the God-given right of the Irish nation to sovereign independence, and the right of any Irishman or woman to assert this right in armed revolution. That is why I am incarcerated, naked and tortured" (Sands 1997, 219).

Maze/Long Kesh and the Public Consciousness

It bears mentioning that little of what transpired inside the Maze could have significantly infiltrated the outside world if the prisoners had not written and ultimately published their accounts from within the prison walls. The Republicans built an entire propaganda series around Maze prisoners by writing and smuggling out letters, poems, and instructions. Although the Maze functioned as a high-security prison, it failed to put Republicans out of sight, out of mind. The quick mass internment, the blanket protests, the dirty protests, and the hunger strikes all kept the prison in the minds of the neighborhood, the Belfast community, and Northern Ireland.

The physical landscape of the prison became another advantage of the Republican's campaign, one they could not have orchestrated themselves. The prison stood on a 360-acre complex in Lisburn, a Loyalist Belfast suburb. The site consisted of large wings of cells that formed the "H-blocks", a chapel, control center, and the hospital. Like other prisons, it had imposing watchtowers, wire over tall walls, and multiple gates that only opened or closed one at a time. Northern Irish civilians never saw the inside of the prison, but the sprawling campus stood fewer than 15 miles from Belfast International airport and a few thousand feet from Motorway 1, the leading highway on the route from Belfast to Dublin. From the arterial roads around Belfast the Maze lights at night made a glow on the horizon, the way a small city would (McAtackney 2014). In the height of the prison's presence in Northern Irish and international news, aerial views of the H-blocks were commonplace. In short, the site, although originally adapted from Long Kesh in order to "squeeze" prisoners out of society and the public eye, was a highly visible entity.

The violence and trauma associated with the Maze/Long Kesh shaped much of the Troubles of the 1970s and '80s. This review of the circumstances and sub-events that comprise the Maze's role within the conflict illustrates William Sewell Jr.'s contention that historical actors, an event's subjects, "are willful, they vary, and are profoundly shaped by their cultures" (2005, 211). In other words, the armed struggle that took place in Northern Ireland did not inevitably *happen*; people of that time and place affected it. The events that transpired in and around the prison in particular helped to radicalize paramilitary membership, establish political leadership symbols,

feed sectarian tensions, and influence popular opinion on the conflict itself. As a place of interchange and conflict between Loyalists and Republicans, between combatants and prison officials, and between civilians and political actors, the site is ripe for contestation regarding the memory and lessons of 1969-1998.

1998-2015: Contesting the Future

The list of contested episodes at the Maze Prison extends beyond the era of the hunger strikers: IRA infiltration within Maze security, a large-scale Republican breakout in 1983, and the 1997 murder of an imprisoned Loyalist leader. The Troubles ended in 1998 when political parties, in consultation with paramilitary leaders, reached The Good Friday Agreement. It was largely exhaustion, rather than a civil reconciliation between sides, that made possible a successful peace agreement after years of hostility. After the agreement, British security infrastructure—watchtowers and security points—began to come down (McAtackney 2014, 185-195). It was, perhaps, a minimum requirement if signatories expected the paramilitaries to disarm. The Maze, too, gradually emptied as part of the peace talk agreement, and the last prisoner was released in 2000.

As the five-year anniversary of the prison's closing passed, and then the ten-year anniversary, the defunct Maze stood intact in Lisburn. The site was declared a public asset in the early 2000s, and its ownership passed from the Prison Service to the Northern Ireland Executive in 2004. This ensured that executive powers and formal jurisdiction over the future of the Maze site would be shared between the Democratic Ulster Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin; it would not, in other words, go up for private auction. As the major Republican political party of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and a close political associate of the IRA, Sinn Féin claims a powerful interest in the Maze prison. It rose to political power following the popular support for the hunger strikers of 1981, and its president Gerry Adams served several years in the Long Kesh detention center after being suspected, but never convicted, of IRA activity. At the same time the politically Unionist DUP also claims a stake in the Maze, being closely aligned with the British government and sympathetic to the Loyalist cause.

A broad web of stakeholders—including leading political parties, former prisoners, guards, victims of political violence and their descendants, professionals in cultural tourism and public history, and citizens invested in the legacy of the Troubles—shapes the recent past and the future of the site. The Maze's role in Northern Irish memory has redirected to different purposes at different times, as today a less-terrorized Northern Irish society debates the fate of the structure itself.

An early Unionist proposal claimed that the defunct prison should serve a practical use as a recreational complex, which would benefit Belfast as well as compensate the residential community in the Maze's immediate vicinity, largely Unionist. Certainly, the Lisburn City Council welcomed the economic promise of a 42,000-capacity multipurpose stadium slated for the site. However, the stadium would require the redevelopment of almost all the prison grounds. The early plan, in short, was to eradicate most of the Maze Prison from Northern Ireland's physical landscape.

As others have noted, the obliteration of a historical site serves the political interests of those whose story is not represented by the landscape, or perceived not to be represented (McDowell 2009, Foote 2003). It is important to note, however, that while hardline Unionists and politicians may have been inclined to erase a symbol of embarrassment to their government, not all supporters who called for the demolition of the Maze prison necessarily did so for the sake of erasing nationalist history. McDowell reminds us that the families of prisoners' victims are haunted and grieved by the Maze (2009, 224). Other Unionists as well as Separatists supported the plan as a pragmatic revitalization opportunity, and as a signal to the world that Northern Ireland was taking positive steps to leave its violent past behind. This vision hinged upon the belief that the way forward in Northern Ireland's period of recovery from the Troubles was through economic opportunity, tourism, and civic reanimation. Reconstruction of the site began in 2006.

While much of the Maze prison was bulldozed, the Environment and Heritage Service in the Department of the Environment listed an H-block of cells, as well as the administrative rooms and hospital, for protection (Gordon 2005). The argument that the prison was too vital a piece of physical history, and too valuable a Troubles case study to be destroyed, prevailed at the state level. The Maze stadium plan was ultimately overturned (Bloomfield 2009, 1) when the Sports Minister opted to pursue other options, citing a lack of popular and political support.

The remaining structures were then, for a short-lived period of agreement between the shared executive powers, slated to exist alongside an exhibition space and a peace and reconciliation center, to be designed by Daniel Libeskind (Batty 2010, 1). Libeskind famously designed the Jewish Museum Berlin and the World Trade Center redevelopment, among other buildings commemorating tragic events. In the mid-2000s, plans began for the exhibition space that now hosts Balmoral Park, developed over most of the former prison site, while the protected structures and a new peace center would uphold the historical legacy and lessons of the site. The precise nature of that legacy, the narrative such a center would present, was

unclear, but an arms-length body, Maze/Long Kesh Consortium, assembled to conceptualize the effort.

The peace center complex struck a very different tone from prior proposals. This vision, reached by the joint shared executive, supposed that Northern Ireland's best hope to progress from its civil conflict is through overt engagement with the past. While it would strain credibility to suppose a peace center alone would prevent periods of ethno-nationalist violence in Northern Ireland's future, as others have documented the historical failure of "atrocity heritage as prevention of recurrence", the peace center concept proposed to transform a high-profile site of pain into a venue dedicated to peace and shared progress (Ashworth and Hartmann 2005, 261). The trauma of the Maze's past lent stature to the site in this capacity; as Edward Linenthal has demonstrated (2001), "sacred ground" such as sites of suffering inspires national reflection and encourages citizens to evaluate the past as a means of defining contemporary conceptions of empathy—and perhaps in the case of Northern Ireland, of peace.

Logistically, what remains of the Maze prison site is a suitable physical space for a serious global peace center. It is located near the capital, the government owns the site, and the European Union has previously shown interest in partially funding the project[1]. The acreage is large enough that the peace center could go up within a matter of years of other development at the site, sending the message that Northern Ireland confronts its past while moving forward with programs like the Balmoral agricultural show, which is in fact underway. The peace center is also touted by Sinn Féin as an economic opportunity and cultural tourism jackpot.

However, after the relocation of the agricultural show to the former Maze site in mid-2013, the DUP severed the deal. The party withdrew its support for the peace center, citing the belief that any such center, any forum for competing perspectives, must be developed on politically neutral ground. As demonstrated earlier in this article, the Republican story has claimed the Maze, because the larger Separatist movement carefully crafted an identity associated with the experience of prisoners there. Sara McDowell contends that today's Nationalist leadership aims to continue to use the Maze as a political resource (2009). "Heritage," she paraphrases from Ashworth and Graham (2005, 3), "is widely accepted as the use of the past as a resource for the present," and this does not exclude partisan use (McDowell 2009, 226). Above all, parties opposed to the peace center worry the remaining structures of the Maze will enshrine the memory of Republican casualties. The fear of giving

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[1] This article was written before Great Britain voted to leave the European Union in 2016.

the public a material object or site of reverence is, of course, not particular to the post-Troubles leadership. Historically, governing authorities have taken precautions not to create historical sites through which the public may be reminded of conflicts over ethno-nationalist sectarianism. The same concern led the British government to bury the 1916 Easter Rising leaders in a single grave off a secondary road in Arbour Hill, which today remains off the edge of Dublin tourist maps.

The particular experience of imprisonment, according to much of the DUP and victims' groups, also renders the site unsuitable for any balanced, inclusive forum about the larger era of conflict. This is an important lynchpin of the Unionist argument against interpretation of the Maze. Certainly, no matter how large the hunger strikers loom in public consciousness, the majority of Northern Irish people who suffered from 1969 to 1998 were never prisoners at the Maze. However, to assume that the stories from inside the wire are aberrations, and that the day-to-day stories in the rest of Belfast are the real or representative picture, is a false distinction. Not only were the walls permeable, linking the outside world to the activity inside, but the prison itself existed as part of the greater Troubles, and the society that bred the conflict. "What consequences events will have," William Sewell Jr. writes (2005, 199), "depends on how they are interpreted, and that interpretation can only be made within the terms of the cultural structures in place." In other words, circumstances create historical actors, who then enact a response—be it armed struggle, imprisonment, protests and other resistance, or a state response to violence. Contested areas of Northern Ireland created an abnormal societal environment for years, and landscapes like the Maze Prison grew from that larger, traumatized culture.

Other realities render the site's capacity for healthy engagement difficult to predict. Northern Ireland is not many years into a period of political stability. As one BBC Ireland Correspondent put it, "the veneer of normality is thin" (Murray 2013). Suicide rates among men who were young during the conflict doubled in 1998 after the Troubles officially ended (Morrissey 1999). In 2015 the threat of riots from both sides of the conflict threatened civil peace during the annual parade season. As we consider the long history of Anglo-Irish relations that preceded the last thirty-year era of civil conflict, we are reminded that no period of peace in what is now Northern Ireland was a guarantee to future decades. Certainly since the turn into the 20th century, in every era of tenuous stability the country was on the verge of unrest. Looking backward from today's comparative peace, Northern Ireland and the greater island face a pattern of stability and violence stretching far enough into the past to

make anyone wary of installing an explicit reminder of the bitter sectarianism that has made the Maze Prison infamous.

Public History Professionals and Interpretive Possibilities

That pattern, however, is in other ways an argument for the peace center. In previous decades, the expertise of public historians did not play a prominent part in the Northern Irish peace efforts. Fortunately, the capacity of truth and reconciliation councils, museum professionals, oral historians, landscape architects, and other trained professionals is much greater today than it was twenty or even ten years ago, and may enhance the ongoing peace efforts with concentrated effort. A tremendous amount of work has been done on the ground already; the peace center would formalize and extend these efforts. Prior to the halting of peace center plans, a three-year consultant project gathered stories and perspectives from Belfast and other Northern Irish communities impacted by the Troubles and the Maze. Meanwhile, longstanding grassroots projects have connected communities to one another in the wake of the greater Troubles, and international consulting partners have already expressed an interest in the future of the Maze site. Among the many relevant organizations are Healing Through Remembering, a collective of community groups in Northern Ireland; Falls Community Council, the host of an extensive oral history archive; and the International Sites of Conscience. A Belfast-based oral historian observed that when it comes to the Maze, "professional discussions have a sense of movement that political discussions don't have" (Hackett 2015). In the event the government picks up again the question of interpretation or public access at the Maze, any agreed-upon program will require public historians to continue their herculean efforts.

As we have seen, the future of the Maze requires input from all stakeholders including politicians, prisoners, guards, their families, residents in the direct vicinity of the site, and crucially, victims' families. Kenneth Foote notes that any commemoration of a tragic past will feature victims and their families at the center of the debate (2003, 342); however, the emotion and tension of any such project will be mitigated by the inclusion of religious leaders, planners, professional designers, and trained historians. Ultimately, it should be the role of the public historian and other mediators to design a flexible mode of inquiry into the conflict, among invested parties and visitors.

This will undoubtedly call for sensitivity and pedagogical creativity. Others have written on the varied purposes of heritage, in particular the educational role. Citing Nelson Graburn, Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996, 38) list the three qualities of

interpretation: auratic (or numenous), didactic (educational), and sociable. The first two are the primary complications of interpretation at the Maze. Unionists will not allow visitors to visit the Maze prison for an awe-inspiring experience in the hospital room where Bobby Sands died. When party leaders declare there can be no "shrine" to the Republican prisoners, they evoke Duncan Cameron's observation that for many years, museums served exclusively as *temples* to their subject, not as forums for discussion (2012). In the late 20th century, he called for museums to facilitate civic dialogue and interactivity with their community, utilizing every opportunity to generate a shared authority over the subject at hand. This approach benefits communities as an alternative to "top-down" education that may or may not resonate with visitors.

The didactic, or educational, function of a peace center or interpretive site is of course a challenging issue. What is the message of the site, and how much control do the content managers have over how it is received by visitors (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996, 28)? A forum seems the obvious goal of any peace center or "neutral" historical site, but what are its structure and parameters? Sara McDowell makes an important distinction (2005, 226) between interpersonal forums that invite visitors to interact with one another to understand other perspectives, and conflict transformation that asks visitors to individually evaluate "their own ideas about the origins, realities, and consequences" of a conflict. The remains of the Maze prison, should they be slated for educational purposes again in the future, will challenge visitors to actively participate in the peace process.

Sinn Féin leader Raymond McCartney has stated to the public, in support of a peace center narrative, "we shouldn't be [afraid] of competing perspectives" (*The Nolan Show* 2013). Certainly, comments such as these are received with skepticism by Unionists (perhaps Sinn Féin leadership, like the DUP, believe that once the visitors are on the grounds the remaining Maze structures will be understood as pro-Nationalist). However, a productive forum might realistically be constructed from these competing perspectives, if leadership over the forum is distributed across diverse political stakeholders, and if this leadership entrusts trained professionals with the process. With the professionalization of public history and the rise in expertise in memory and national trauma, Northern Ireland is perched at a rare opportunity to facilitate public understanding of a multiplicity of perspectives.

Whether the critical factors and political decisions will align to this opportunity remains to be seen. Today relations between the power-sharing executives, Sinn Féin and the DUP, are strained by a decade of debate over the future of the Maze. Most of what remains of the peace center discussions is Sinn Féin's embitterment by what

it refers to as a broken DUP promise, one that resulted in the withdrawal of 18 million EU dollars from the project. Sinn Féin leadership has in its turn withheld support for construction of an access road to the Balmoral exhibition space. As we have seen, the Balmoral agricultural show-goers tread on contested ground; in 2015, the annual traffic faced by visitors to the agricultural show proved a stubborn reminder of the political gridlock. Opposition to the interpretation of the Maze up to this point, as much as support for it, may be best considered a healthy, if stagnated, prerequisite to an appropriate compromise. Kenneth Foote suggests (2003, 343) that in the face of a shadowed past, we must treat the debate as part of the grieving process. As of 2016 the burden falls upon Northern Ireland's executive to facilitate, rather than stifle, forward movement in these discussions.

The Maze/Long Kesh in Comparison

From a broader perspective of historical suffering, HM Maze/Long Kesh holds no monopoly on the issues of violence and memory, or on the difficult challenge of managing a site of trauma. In fact, considered in relation to detention camps associated with genocide and indiscriminate state violence, the Maze has been called "a statistical footnote in the global heritage of pain" (Graham and McDowell 2007, cited in McDowell 2009, 224). Furthermore, there seems to be little argument for its culturally aesthetic value, unlike more diverse historical campuses or sites, such as Robben Island, associated with the triumph of human rights (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996, 58).

However, what remains of the Maze site could be tremendously useful to cultural and historical understanding in Northern Ireland. The protected prison structures constitute a rare addition to the historical record. Generally, historians examine the Maze and the larger Troubles through paper documentation—prison writings, photographs of public and prisoner protests, extensive oral history transcripts, newspapers, and governmental reports—nearly all of which filter through some degree of narrative before it reaches their hands. Laura McAtackney emphasizes that "our understandings of how prisons work are guided and constrained by government records and official documents created by the regimes who police and administer them" (2014, 57). And we have already seen the overtly political purposes for which prisoners create their own accounts. There are definitive limitations to our dependence upon written documents. If accessible, the remaining H-block, chapel, hospital, and administrative building add archaeology and material culture to the historical record and to the public experience. If opened to the public, the physical

structures may complement the now-tabled peace center with a dimension of immersion very few formal museums achieve.

The Maze site would also hold a particular position among memorials of Northern Ireland's civil conflict as a purportedly shared site, commemorating a place of daily conflict between historical actors of all Northern Irish stripes: that is, of diverse national, religious, political, and paramilitary identity. By contrast, the high-profile events of parade season serve citizens with distinct identities, to the exclusion (often to the inconvenience) of others. Artists render the famous murals of Northern Ireland in reference to specific combatant groups, or other figures that represent Unionist or Nationalist causes. Furthermore, Neil Jarman observes (2002, 293) that in recent years the murals have undergone a transition from resolved or confrontational images to depictions of sorrow or remembrance; in either case, the murals look pointedly back into the past. A forum-style peace or education center devoted to the Troubles, however, would serve the distinct purpose of looking backwards and forward at the same time, unlike strict memorials. The Maze prison site, although it may not evoke the spontaneous or exclusively citizen-driven commemoration of the murals, has the capacity to offer a more nuanced understanding of a greater multiplicity of perspectives than other high-profile forms of commemoration in Northern Ireland.

As a prospective cultural site, the Maze prison may not compare with the severity of the world's darkest histories, but it is of tremendous value in the context of Northern Irish history and commemoration. What remains of the prison landscape may serve Northern Ireland as a uniquely potent site for public engagement with the memory of the Troubles (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996, 105). Whether it will warrant global attention as a tool for peace depends upon the decisions made and executed regarding its future.

Conclusion

The violent episodes of the Maze—internment, paramilitary and informant activity (both inside and across the prison wire), protests, and public response—illustrate the extraordinary relevance the prison maintained in the era of civil conflict. Rather than being "squeezed out" of Northern Irish society, the inmates of Her Majesty's Maze Prison were effectively engrained, a permeation of the boundaries between the free nation and the men behind the wire. The mutual dependence between Northern Irish paramilitaries inside and outside the camp and the prevalence of the Maze in the public mind manifested in an environment of fear, paranoia, violence, and resistance that reflected the social upheaval throughout greater Belfast and Northern

Ireland. Ultimately, stories of the Maze Prison carry all the more potency because the Troubles have not diminished into historical or ancestral fact. For many citizens today, the conflict is a firsthand memory, the defining event of their lives for many years. The Maze Prison holds a multitude of meanings, as a site of conscience, of mythology, of exhaustion, and of embarrassment.

This is not a history that will die with the last generation of witnesses; the historical facts of the Maze and the Troubles will live on whether or not the state invests in shaping their memory. Anyone who lived through the Troubles can agree that the Maze prison was the historical site of a painful and prolonged era, but can it serve as a productive *cultural* site today? In all likelihood, the answer will hinge squarely on the execution of the project. If Northern Irish communities, their leadership, and trained professionals are able to generate a discussion that not only tolerates but welcomes competing perspectives, the prison site may prove to be an extraordinary untested opportunity.

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