

## The Poetics of Narrativity

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DOI:

[10.1093/jsh/shz004](https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shz004)

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*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Nasar, S & Schaffer, G 2019, 'The Poetics of Narrativity: Understanding Trauma, Temporality and Spatiality 40 years after the Birmingham Pub Bombings ', *Journal of Social History*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shz004>

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SAIMA NASAR AND GAVIN SCHAFFER

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## The Poetics of Narrativity: Understanding Trauma, Temporality, and Spatiality Forty Years after the Birmingham Pub Bombings

### Abstract

*This article explores the social history of the Birmingham Pub Bombings (UK). In addition to individual losses and injuries, the bombings triggered widespread anti-Irish prejudice and violence, wrongful convictions and community tensions. The resultant disharmony within the city of Birmingham lasted for generations, while the voices of communities not directly involved in the events of November 21, 1974, have mostly remained silent. This article offers new lessons in the historical construction of trauma and how we make sense of traumatic events. Using original oral history interviews and witness seminars, it explores the layers of trauma that have been transmitted socially, politically, spatially, and intergenerationally. It begins by first focusing on the temporal and spatial dimensions of this local history, which reveal how the reconfiguring of temporalities can be used to locate an inner voice for British postwar, urban, social history. Then, it contextualizes individual and collective experiences of the Birmingham Pub Bombings in order to reveal the ways in which traumatic experiences are placed within a narrative form that orders and facilitates the integration of past trauma within the present. As such, we argue that the poetics of narrativity—or the narrative framing of how and when trauma memories are told, heard, and negotiated—has the potential to pull together a richer, more inclusive, community history.*

“Everything in my memory is now black and white, just like an old war film.”  
—Robyn Tighe<sup>1</sup>

On November 21, 1974, Birmingham’s city center was rocked by two explosions. Two popular pubs located near the city’s bustling shops and prominent Odeon cinema, The Mulberry Bush and The Tavern in the Town, shook as IRA bombs ripped through them. Another bomb was later found in the doorway of a branch of Barclays Bank on the Hagley Road. It had failed to detonate approximately two miles away from the other explosions. The subsequent scene at the heart of Britain’s second city was harrowing: there were twenty-one fatalities, over two hundred people were injured, and buildings were reduced to

rubble. Leaving behind a trail of devastation, the Birmingham Pub Bombings were at the time the deadliest act of terrorism ever carried out on the British mainland. In an attempt to make sense of the event's personal and historical significance, Robyn Tighe, one of the survivors of the blasts, recounted what she had experienced in an oral history interview conducted over forty years later. During the interview, Robyn compared her memory to "an old war film." With further prompting, she testified: "Everything just stopped, it went black. You couldn't hear anything clearly—the force of the bomb was such, it was massive and it gave you a body shock."<sup>2</sup>

Robyn's recollections help to insert the otherwise absent voices of those affected into the historical record. As Cathy Caruth explains, very little rigorous historical literature exists that gives voice to traumatic experience.<sup>3</sup> Guy Beiner suggests that this lacuna reflects the general state of studies on trauma histories, in which an increasing profusion of disparate writings do not do enough to engage with each other.<sup>4</sup> This is certainly true in the context of the Birmingham Pub Bombings (BPB).<sup>5</sup> In the immediate aftermath, an unnatural silence blanketed the city as victims, the emergency services, and onlookers found little comfort in what the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka has termed "the solidarity of the shaken."<sup>6</sup> Given political sensitivities, access to historical data has been severely restricted. As a result, the history of this event and its impact, especially from the viewpoint of those involved, has been difficult to gather. As Dori Laub asserts, "To not return from this silence is rule rather than exception."<sup>7</sup> As we witness what Jay Winter has described as "the memory boom," however, Robyn's reflections reveal the ways in which dormant memories can be used to rejuvenate and confer social and historical importance to these events.<sup>8</sup> In particular, they show how trauma memories link two salient points concerning the historicizing of the BPB and the dialectic of time, space and trauma narratives.

First, Robyn's testimony disrupts the assumption that there has been a natural process of collective overcoming or even that some movement toward healing and forgetting has since occurred. As a closer reading of trauma narratives as well as the paucity of historical literature on the BPB indicates, many of those involved have for the last forty years been afflicted by a collapse into an internal anomic conflict. Prevailing silences might suggest that on some superficial level the "body shock" of the bombings has been absorbed; however, for those who experienced it, the waves of physical, psychological, generational, individual, and collective trauma generated from its force are real and indelible.<sup>9</sup> To fully engage with the history of the bombings therefore requires, as suggested by Dawson et al., an examination of multiple and diverse understandings of truth and justice, the remaking of identities, and the "memory wars" that emerge in the wake of traumatic events.<sup>10</sup>

Second, given that in Robyn's testimony the invasion of past trauma (i.e., the Second World War) is used to understand traumatic experience, it can be observed that trauma narratives importantly extend into time and space, containing "layers of the past and seeds of the future."<sup>11</sup> While the vividness and familiarity of Second World War imagery that occupies Robyn's narrative offers a sense of intelligibility, it is important to recognize that the rhetorical conflation is limited: wars end, they have defined objectives, and they are often publicly and nationally remembered or memorialized. This does not mean that the presence of the bombings is no longer felt, but instead suggests that important

sociopolitical, spatial, and temporal arcs have yet to be recognized.<sup>12</sup> As the bombings transformed civic spaces into sites of political contestation, the accompanying trauma narratives invoke images that construct a poetic of survival. In so doing, the collision of 1970s Britain with World War II Britain in Robyn's narrative hints at the reconfiguring of the temporality of history and shows that trauma lives on in forms that disrupt historical chronologies. In memories of trauma, narrative organization is thus constitutive of diachronic time. Robyn expresses this disorganized temporality in the exteriorization and the fictive experience of time, as, for example, something "in the distant past" or as an "old war film." This alternate sequencing, to use the words of Jean- François Lyotard, involves the "staging of a recollection that is a remodelling or re-appropriation with an achronological affect."<sup>13</sup> In this way, a dialogue develops between memories of trauma and the spatial and temporal dimensions of historical reflections: these narratives are determined by the politics and specificities of remembering and forgetting, time and being, and the occupation of space. We argue that the historical unpacking of this dialogue is of special importance to those who seek to understand the impact of traumatic experiences and that it is through these narratives that difficult histories can be more brightly illuminated.

This is important because the term *trauma* is Greek in origin and means "wound." As explained by Caroline Garland, *trauma* was originally associated with an act that serves to disturb or pierce the corporeal boundaries.<sup>14</sup> Referring to a critical event that impacts a person's body or psyche, the meaning attached to *trauma* in its contemporary usage has expanded to "incorporate the emotional insult or shock to the mind resulting from physical and/or emotional injury."<sup>15</sup> Aaron Denham argues that it is possible for trauma to have an etiology in multiple experiences, "as the accumulation of mild stressors over time, or as a single traumatic event."<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, we must understand trauma as a "double wound": a wound that can afflict both the body and the mind, over time and space.<sup>17</sup>

It can thus be said that the silences that exist in connection to the BPB are the result not of an absence of historical material but of a critical occlusion.<sup>18</sup> After all, given the short historical timespan between then and now and the plethora of media through which the BPB were captured and recorded, it would be somewhat perverse to assert a historical absence. As well as individual losses and injuries, the bombings triggered widespread anti-Irish prejudice and violence, wrongful convictions, and community tensions, all of which has added to a widespread disinclination to remember. Inheriting this deafening silence, the resultant disharmony within the city lasted for generations, while the voices of communities not directly involved in the events of November 21 have mostly remained silent (or have been silenced).<sup>19</sup> As such, the poetics of narrativity—or the narrative framing of how and when trauma memories are told, heard, and negotiated—has the potential to pull together a richer, more inclusive, community history. It offers a place from which we can understand how the past can shape a continuously troubling present.

Personal testimonies can help us to rethink and question the history of trauma and narrativity. Accordingly, this article uses oral history interviews in order to examine the testimonies of those present on the night, as well as of the families of victims, the emergency services, and the Irish citizens of Birmingham. We collected these "survival stories" around the fortieth anniversary of the

bombings in order to examine individual and collective experiences, using one-on-one interviews alongside witness seminars and witness circles. An open call was put out for the witness seminars in the *Birmingham Mail*. Altogether, over forty audience members were in attendance. The seminar consisted of a panel that spoke about first-hand experiences as well as the long-lasting impact the bombings have had on their lives. In addition, smaller witness circles were conducted with Irish community organizations in Birmingham. The aim of these witness circles was to tease out the everyday experiences of the Irish population during a time of intense scrutiny and suspicion.

This article is set out in three broad sections. It begins by historicizing the BPB and explores its impact within Britain. While trauma memories do not always have a cohesive plot, we recognize that the ways in which traumatic experiences are placed within a narrative form can order and facilitate the integration of past trauma within the present. This, we argue, has both personal and historical significance. The article then turns to the temporal and spatial dimensions of this history. It reveals how the reconfiguring of temporalities that occur within these narratives can be used to locate hitherto silenced voices for British postwar, urban, social history. Specifically, it sets out the ways in which spatial and temporal representations of the BPB speak to broader histories of race and the politics of trauma in postwar Britain. The final section considers how trauma can shape individual and collective identities. In order to do so, this article draws on the testimonies of: Robyn Tighe and Maureen Mitchell, survivors of the blast; Alan Hill, David Pithie, and Eric Noble, members of the emergency services who attended to the crisis; Julie Hambleton, Paul Thrupp, and Bill Craig, relatives of victims and campaign members of Justice4the21; Ristèard Sinclair, an Irish citizen of Birmingham; and of volunteers and members of Birmingham's Irish community organizations that attended witness circles. Ultimately, this article addresses the historical construction of trauma and how individuals and communities make sense of traumatic events. It explores the layers of trauma that have been transmitted socially, politically, spatially, and intergenerationally in the wake of the BPB. It argues that traumatic memories of the BPB coexist within a spatial and temporal afterlife and that their narrative imprint provides the conditions for new responses to personal, historical, and physical landscapes of trauma.

### Connecting History and Trauma

The BPB took place within the political and social crucible of the Northern Ireland conflict, which had a profound impact on, and lasting legacy in, Britain.<sup>20</sup> Commonly known as “the Troubles,” tensions between a loyalist/unionist (predominately Protestant) majority that wanted to remain part of the UK and a nationalist republican (predominately Catholic) minority that desired unification with the Republic of Ireland resulted in a decades-long violent struggle, underwritten by a disparity in power between the British state and republican dissidents. Altogether, approximately thirty-six hundred lives were lost, and fifty thousand people were injured, as paramilitaries on both sides wrought terror, while British armed forces strove to control the region and impose the will of Westminster. Across Ireland and Britain, many more suffered the psychological effects of the conflict as relatives, friends, service personnel, and witnesses.<sup>21</sup>

Birmingham's first encounter with militant IRA activity was in March 1939, when bombs exploded in the residential area of Balsall Heath.<sup>22</sup> This was part of the IRA's "S-Plan," or Sabotage Campaign, in which the IRA carried out a series of militant attacks across Britain. Two Irishmen, Gerard Lyons and Pat McAleer, accidentally set off the bombs and were later found in possession of two hundred sticks of gelignite and seventy-six pounds of potassium chlorate. Although there were no casualties on this occasion, from 1973 to 1997, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) embarked on a number of coordinated campaigns of political violence in Britain.<sup>23</sup> As documented by Carl Chinn, Graham Dawson, Sarah O'Brien, Barry Hazley, and Lesley Lelourec, cities including London, Manchester, Coventry, Guildford, Aldershot, Yorkshire, Bristol, Warrington, Liverpool, Southampton, Brighton, and Birmingham suffered as a result of the PIRA's campaigns.<sup>24</sup> According to Gary McGladdery, over five hundred incidents were recorded, resulting in 115 deaths and 2,134 injuries. The campaigns cost the British government billions of pounds.<sup>25</sup>

The Troubles cannot be understood merely as an intercommunal dispute between unionists and nationalists, given that Britain was a key protagonist. Yet the role of the British state and the impact of the Troubles in Britain remain deeply contested and underresearched. Indeed, British engagements with the conflict have been limited. As observed by Dawson et al., "public lacunae continue to operate in ways that seal off from wider visibility and understanding the historical and current experiences of those groups and individuals most seriously affected by the Troubles."<sup>26</sup> Unlocking these processes of silencing is key to opening up unaddressed legacies of the conflict in Britain. We respond to this task, which has started to gain increased scholarly attention in recent years, by first critically engaging with the composition of trauma narratives in the context of the BPB and the historical treatment they have received.

Historical traces of the BPB and the event's poetics of narrativity are subtle but ubiquitous. There are potent if muted reminders of this painful local history across a range of places and cultural forms. We can, for example, find echoes of the BPB in Jonathan Coe's satire *The Rotters' Club*. Intended as a panoramic story about life in 1970s Birmingham, the historical fiction describes The Tavern in the Town as a "cosy, welcoming place" located below street level.<sup>27</sup> Just as Lois, one of the protagonists, and her fiancé Malcolm are "the closest to happiness two people could be," thirty pounds of gelignite explode.<sup>28</sup> Lois survives the blast, but Malcolm does not. The shocking bereavement renders Lois speechless, and she is left troubled, silenced even, for years to come.

The novel offers a radical reworking of dominant forms of engagement with the BPB by highlighting the racial antagonisms that characterized postindustrial urban centers like Birmingham.<sup>29</sup> Depicting the double-bind of working-class, racial politics, Coe captures the anti-Irish hostility that emerged even before the BPB, when the "Association on British People" put up an announcement on a factory noticeboard stating: "IRISH BASTARDS KILLED 12 PEOPLE ON MANCHESTER BUS YESTERDAY REFUSE TO WORK WITH IRISH BASTARD MURDERERS."<sup>30</sup> The Association's reactionary racializing of the IRA can be viewed as an attack on Irish diasporic communities in Britain as, to use the words of Laura O'Reilly, "the distinction between the Irish community and the PIRA was blurred."<sup>31</sup> Matters of recovery and reconciliation are also central to the narrative; as Coe explains, "you can never recover from something

like that, never reconcile yourself to it.”<sup>32</sup> Writing during the peace process, Coe made apparent the personal and public wounds of the BPB, which extend beyond the primary site. The novel was subsequently serialized by BBC Radio 4, adapted into a TV series on the BBC, and performed at the REP theatre in Birmingham, in April 2016.<sup>33</sup> Coe’s novel, alongside these poignant adaptations, has served to keep alive a social and political awareness of the BPB.

Attempts to represent the BPB have also been made elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> Journalist Brian Gibson retold the story in a sensationalist docudrama, and then in book form, from the point of view of the Birmingham police.<sup>35</sup> Chris Mullin and others wrote about the pub bombings as part of a broader campaign for judicial review of the case of the Birmingham Six, a campaign that had its origins in an earlier Birmingham-Irish intervention, “The Birmingham Framework,” which cast doubt on the convictions as early as 1976.<sup>36</sup> A journalist, and later a Labour MP, Mullin published *Error of Judgement* in 1986, following research for ITV’s current affairs program, *World in Action*, in 1985.<sup>37</sup> In his book, Mullin exposed the wrongful imprisonment of the six Birmingham-Irish residents who were charged with carrying out the atrocity. This piece of investigative journalism had profound consequences: it challenged the forensic evidence used to prosecute the case and disclosed the brutality with which the police force extracted their confessions. More recently, James Moran’s 2010 book, *Irish Birmingham*, explored the BPB in the context of major events in Birmingham that have shaped the Irish diaspora and their migratory experiences. Similarly, in *The Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain*, Graham Dawson, Jo Dover, and Stephen Hopkins investigated the PIRA’s activities on the British mainland and the subsequent scenes of terror and grief. These publications sit alongside community-driven historicization and commemorations. In 2012, a community project carried out by the Birmingham Irish Association, a local Irish welfare and heritage organization, interviewed residents about the bombings as part of a broader oral history project on Birmingham-Irish lives, funded by Heritage Lottery.<sup>38</sup>

Arguably, all of these contemporary interpretations of the BPB focus on Birmingham’s Irish in terms of notions of responsibility and victimization, as communities navigated stances “between victim and perpetrator” in a racialized and painful environment.<sup>39</sup> Moving beyond this framing by placing the event within a history of trauma will, it is hoped, enable an alternative version of Irish, as well as non-Irish, experiences that stands out from those either depicted on the front pages of tabloid newspapers, elevated in campaigns and community actions, or buried in awkward silences. In terms of its historical significance, trauma is not simply a pathology; it is a story of a wound or, as the case of the BPB shows, a series of stories, told and untold in a variety of forms. We argue that these narratives can help mark a conjuncture in the transformation of the BPB from a traumatic event in history to a subject of history. In so doing, we suggest that the untapped salience of the BPB is plural: at once political, social, and potentially cathartic. Although some might object to bringing trauma into the realm of professional history, which has its own agendas and prejudices, the absence of history risks abandoning to silence the experiences of those who have struggled to find their voice, or to make space for their specific narrative, in the period after the bombings.<sup>40</sup> As Caruth explains, the inability “to be a witness to

oneself . . . is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one's history is abolished, one's identity ceases to exist as well."<sup>41</sup> Instead, as Michael Roth explains, historical trauma demands representation and commemoration,<sup>42</sup> work which may enable, in Laub's thinking, a "reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that affected and contaminated the trauma victim."<sup>43</sup> In this way, professional history may enable a traumatic past to articulate a plurality of voices, incorporating the many that had hitherto been marginalized by what De Capra describes as the "melancholic feedback loop" of the dominant, unregulated few.<sup>44</sup> The following sections of this article therefore seek to address the paucity of historical analysis by connecting the BPB to the history of trauma in postwar Britain. By exploring the temporal and spatial afterlife of the BPB, we argue that we must begin by listening attentively to the subtle regenerative politics of trauma memory, including its silences, in order to understand its historical impact and legacy.

### The Temporal and Spatial Afterlife of the BPB

As George Lett and Lucy Harrison found when exploring the unwritten memories of the Dockland bombings in 1996, trauma associated with the BPB transformed the built environment and altered people's relationships to other individuals as well as to the past.<sup>45</sup> The wider repercussions of this trauma were felt for decades to come as witnesses experienced a gulf between the world they knew prior to the event and another after it.<sup>46</sup> In the BPB's aftermath, the city attempted to regroup and rebuild. Family and friends sought out loved ones, and Birmingham's residents contributed to the relief effort. While the emergency services responded to the crisis as efficiently as possible, the roads to the city center were closed off, and ambulances could not immediately reach the affected areas. This meant that the city's taxis played an especially important logistical role in transporting the injured to nearby hospitals. As the city ground to a halt, ordinary citizens therefore saved many lives. At the same time, however, a groundswell of anger and prejudice manifested itself in a number of ways. As a continuation of postwar, anti-Irish antagonisms, widespread violence and discrimination became commonplace. In the days following the bombings, petrol bombs were hurled through windows, and properties with an Irish connection were damaged.<sup>47</sup> For those who experienced the BPB, directly or indirectly, the resultant trauma was felt as both an internal and external force, shaping their consciousnesses and the urban spaces in which they lived their lives. Our interviews demonstrate how narratives can order, situate, and provide meaning for these troubling experiences.<sup>48</sup> This section therefore sets out the ways in which trauma narrativity and the production of meaning can be found in historical interpretations of the past, present, and future and in geographies of urban space. In doing so, it reveals that spatial and temporal recollections provide an important template for organizing trauma and a cognitive conduit for negotiating social and political life.

When the first bomb exploded in The Mulberry Bush at 8:17 p.m., Maureen Mitchell was in the pub with her partner, Ian. Maureen begins by plotting her trauma into the everyday. She recounts being lifted off the ground and being physically, mentally, and emotionally decentered.



I can remember what we were talking about, I was telling my partner about a work Christmas party . . . the next thing, the lights went out for a split second and the sensation of being lifted from the chair and floating through the air really. I don't remember landing, I must have gone into shock, I don't remember hitting the ground.<sup>49</sup>

Maureen describes regaining consciousness and being troubled by the scale of destruction, which she could sense from the cries for help from other victims. She thought that she would die. The next thing Maureen remembers is being at the hospital, feeling intense pain, and repeatedly requesting medication. She was placed in the intensive care unit for nearly a week. Maureen's injuries were life changing. During the interview, she points to the scar on her upper arm and visually exposes the presence of her trauma. She also explained that the city experienced as much shock as those directly affected. A public bitterness toward Irish republicanism strengthened alongside the "backlash against the Irish in the city," who were treated as IRA criminals.<sup>50</sup> However, Maureen personally did not see the benefit of harboring any anger toward Birmingham's Irish, especially since her own father was Irish. Maureen's narrativising, in this way, serves to orient her story in the history of the self, the history of 1970s Birmingham, the history of migration, and the history of postwar Britain.

Within the poetics of narrativity, witness accounts like Maureen's invoke both retentions from the past and portents of the future. Indeed, Maureen moves on to describe what followed. In a sudden burst, she conjures scenes of chaos in the city. She sets out her trauma in three successive movements beginning with the event, then its impact, and finally its repression.

When I hit the ground and realized what had happened. It was the screaming that got to me, Ian said it was smell of flesh burning and the people. We knew it was a bomb, but my initial thought was I need to get to the hospital. The sirens sounded close, there was a lot of chaos, but you thought they were never going to get here. . . . the sirens, and you get thinking they're not going to get here, they're not going to get here. You just think this is the end, I'm going, I'm gone. I'm fortunate I was one of the lucky ones; I do realize that.<sup>51</sup>

Maureen's narrative thus evokes an abrupt instruction extended over many chronic frames. Her conclusion focuses on her "luck." Accordingly, the temporal structure of BPB narratives shifts from hindsight and retrospect to the anticipation of future reconciliation—or prolepsis. These memories are processual and relational to then and now. In this way, Maureen's memories reveal the accumulation of temporalities: her recollections are initially of the pain that has engrained itself so indelibly on her memory. She then uses the BPB to construct a present, self-fashioned identity as a survivor. Maureen states:

I remember people coming and going—I was a bit touch and go. I was given my last rites. But I'm here to tell the tale. I guess at the time you see yourself as a victim; you see yourself as a victim, but you're not a victim, you're a survivor. And that took me lots of years to accept that I wasn't a victim.<sup>52</sup>

This sort of self-fashioning is also present in the testimony of David Pithie, an attending firefighter. For David, the BPB is always at the back of his mind. He notes “there was at the time too much going on to have any feelings.”<sup>53</sup> Counselling services were not on offer, which meant that individuals worked through their trauma, mostly unsupported, through narrative emplotment: in the reassembling of memory to move from trauma memories to resilience strategies.<sup>54</sup> By purging troubling experiences, individuals found ways to cope by emphasizing their survival and creating a future from the past—a future where the initial impact of the bombings makes way for strength and resilience. As such, these individual testimonies foreground the difficulty of overcoming grief and loss. So as to minimize distress, trauma narratives transmit strength.<sup>55</sup> This is a palliative measure and can be traced in other examples of trauma narrativity, such as Hazely’s research on the “blitz spirit” that followed the Manchester bombings and the “We are not afraid” sloganizing that followed the London “7-7” bombings.<sup>56</sup> Repeated gestures toward survival ostensibly work toward a management of past trauma. In this way, the narrativizing of trauma uses its very narrativity as a coping mechanism. This is important because it reveals how trauma generated by the BPB has required individuals to construct a coherent story comprised of a pre-event whole self, a traumatized fragmented self, and a future integrated self.<sup>57</sup>

The construction of a future integrated self is not a straightforward process and can lead to evasions and silences. It involves a negotiation between multiple temporal frames that are often in conflict with one another: events and experiences are at one time or another minimized or emphasized. For instance, while it is clear that trauma has remained present for a range of witnesses, such as the firefighter Alan Hill, an emphasis on survival can lead to evasion of traumatic impact:

I can remember every single second, every noise, every smoke, every action, everything that happened, every taxi driver, every ambulance driver, every fireman, I can name everybody.  
 . . . That’s not a good thing to have in your head really.<sup>58</sup>

Alan discusses being one of the first firefighters to arrive at the scene. He remembers driving the wrong way down the street in order to attend to the crisis. Upon arrival, he saw the second pub, The Tavern in the Town, explode before him (ten minutes after The Mulberry Bush at 8:27 p.m.). It was at this moment that he felt a “fight or flight” reaction and admits that if he had a choice, he would not have been there. Alan “got to work” after witnessing the rubble, the shattered glass, and the injured—some who were impaled on furniture and others with cauterized wounds. He surveyed the scene, scrambled for emergency blankets and first aid kits, and worked with nearby taxis to arrange transport to the hospital. The presence of Alan’s trauma is not something he immediately recognizes. He first claims that the bombings did not change him, before describing his subsequent battle with alcoholism and depression. This is not an erasure or forgetting of the past, which is inescapable, but a working through of trauma, which demonstrates that trauma memories do not translate to veridical accounts. On reflection, Alan acknowledges that the belated trauma of the BPB profoundly transformed him. It is something that he cannot forget.

It is burnt on me brain. Oh God, I don't want these images in me head, just go away, you know. It ruins your life.<sup>59</sup>

Although testimonies are not complete, totalizing statements of the past, they do nonetheless have the potential to bring into contact trauma experiences and the historical narratives they produce.<sup>60</sup> The psychological impact of the double wound is demonstrably long-lasting, and it is precisely through this narrative framing that witnesses are able to mediate and understand the past, while explaining the present and looking to the future. The above interview extracts demonstrate that memory has the ability to cohere events, emotions, and landmarks in the narrative of the self. This is important because, to use the words of Everett Zimmerman, "the self is constructed within history, and history is what can be made of information through narrative."<sup>61</sup> As such, trauma testimonies are framed in landscapes simultaneously rooted in the past, present, and the future. The relationship between trauma and time, as explained by Caruth, therefore attests to the "endless impact on a life."<sup>62</sup> Indeed, according to Shuman, it is possible to observe the ways in which narratives acknowledge and invent patterns as part of a dynamic relationship between chaos and pattern.<sup>63</sup> This suggests that trauma memories are, inherently, historical constructions in that stories are used to impose order on events by "establishing a chronology of events that became a way of framing and understanding experience."<sup>64</sup>

### Urban Space

The belatedness of trauma experience means that troubling events have the ability to disrupt physical spaces as well as temporal continuity. The city is not a neutral landscape in terms of either human activity or historicity. Within landscapes, exists an enduring record of the lives and experiences of past generations.<sup>65</sup> As Alan Hill observed, "the city has never healed after the BPB."<sup>66</sup> Tensions arose and remained in the city as the bombing's shattering force overwhelmed its people and environment. Following PIRA's attacks in Birmingham and cities around the country, Irish communities were deemed a threat, and their buildings and spaces became sites for political contestation. In particular, buildings and physical spaces were radically distorted by the BPB. Mere hours after the bombings, the roof of the Irish Centre was set alight.<sup>67</sup> In the following days, petrol bombs were hurled through windows. Public houses linked to Irish communities, like the College Arms, as well as the Irish Community Centre, were victims of revenge attacks.<sup>68</sup> Irish businesses, schools, and churches did not escape these hostilities: the construction firm J.J. Gallagher and Co. Ltd. and The Holy Family Church based in Small Heath and St Gerard's Roman Catholic School in Castle Vale were targeted by arsonists. Racial tensions were so heightened in the city that the annual St. Patrick's Day parade ceased to take place.<sup>69</sup> It returned twenty-two years later in 1996, as Birmingham's Irish communities slowly regained confidence to assert their place in the city. The impact of the BPB demonstrably extended therefore to the city's social and cultural architecture. Policeman Eric Noble disclosed:

I've seen Birmingham grow as multicultural center and it hasn't always been easy.<sup>70</sup>

As Britain found a new national scapegoat in its resident Irish citizens, the othering of national minorities served to highlight one of the challenges of the postwar order: how to coexist in a multicultural and multiracial nation in which individuals held differing and sometimes competing views and allegiances. In the wake of the Birmingham bombings, anti-Irish sentiment spread beyond the city's environs and became particularly manifest in the workplace. In Staffordshire, one thousand workers from a frozen food factory held an anti-IRA march bringing traffic to a halt, while Irish produce was shunned by food handlers in Birmingham.<sup>56</sup> More dramatically, the National Front rallied workers to demand that all Irish citizens in Britain be declared aliens and organized a general strike throughout the Midlands on November 26 to back parliamentary demands for the return of the death penalty for terrorism.<sup>57</sup> In Birmingham airport, aircrews refused to handle flights flying to or from the Republic of Ireland.<sup>58</sup> At Longbridge, the protests of British Leyland workers reached a climax when fifteen hundred car assembly workers went on strike after fighting broke out between English and Irish colleagues on November 23. Between two thousand and three thousand workers subsequently walked out of the factory.<sup>59</sup> This demonstrates how representations of trauma become sites for the reinscription or contestation of cultural and national fears and fantasies.<sup>71</sup>

For others, what ensued was a reconfiguration of the urban environment dependent on the psychic production of safe spaces. According to Robyn:

Birmingham became an "agitated space." Bags were checked . . . People would rush out of buildings shouting "there's a bomb, there's a bomb."  
Town was very edgy, it was very nerve wracking. You were looking behind you all the time. You were always looking for bags being left.  
I wouldn't put myself in a situation without imagining how I would get out of it. I still consider now my escape routes.<sup>72</sup>

Instead of being limited to a single event, Robyn's experience of the BPB speaks to the longer history of the Troubles in Britain and the negotiation of postwar urban space in 1970s Birmingham. In traumatized societies, as Susan Kingsley Kent notes, traumatic wounds combine to create a mood or an ethos.<sup>73</sup> Narratives of the BPB disclose feelings of brokenness and emotional fracture, which are connected to temporal and spatial cues. For Robyn, it was a sense of stasis, numbing, and separation that overwhelmed her. She had lost a sense of continuity: "it spoiled everything; it spoiled that nice happiness," which was ultimately replaced "by a fear that sat behind everything."<sup>74</sup> In Robyn's trauma memories, it is not just the sequencing of events that is important but the historicity with which Robyn describes the happy days of 1970s Britain being displaced by the BPB as a senseless act of violence. This narrative reproduces Lesley Lelourec's description of accounts of the 1993 Warrington bombings, in which the image of "barbaric PIRA murderers" looms over the city as a hidden menace.<sup>75</sup>

Discussions concerning how and when we remember the BPB within the city of Birmingham have dominated contemporary conversations about its physical imprint. Residents describe the BPB as an attack on Birmingham and its people. A commemorative monument was erected outside St Philips Cathedral in the city in 1998. The decision to have the memorial away from the original

site of the bombings was taken because the lord mayor, John Eames, claimed “history needs to be recorded but it can do damage . . . the council didn’t seek to push it [the BPB] too much in the social life of the city.”<sup>76</sup> In our interviews, however, the memorial has been described as obscure and negligible, failing to capture the poignancy of the BPB or its centrality in the recent history of Birmingham. For many people, it seemed, recognizing the BPB within “the social life of the city” was very much the point. Community organizations, including Irish in Birmingham and Justice4the21, started to advocate for a more prominent memorial on these terms in 2015. They argued that the spatial mapping of the BPB in the present day is important. If we are to understand trauma generated by the BPB as a cultural trauma, as something that is rooted in the social and which shares a collective language, we must then recognize its impact on urban space. Hinting at the entanglement of spatial and temporal projections of the BPB, these calls for a new memorial arguably show how landmarks can serve as interstitial spaces between past and present.

The [current] memorial is nothing . . .

I think it’s highly significant to have a prominent memorial. 40 years have passed and its almost as if the establishment have wanted to keep it dead and buried. Why should their deaths be a dark shadow in Birmingham? Surely, we must remember them as good individuals . . .

Why shouldn’t they be remembered? Why shouldn’t they have a memorial?

What did they do to deserve anything less?

They need to be remembered and never forgotten.<sup>77</sup>

BPB narratives therefore continually seek to remap urban space in important ways. The location of the memorial is key for people like Julie Hambleton, founding member of Justice4the21, who states that its prominence should be in proportion to its impact. To her thinking, and in the minds of other victims and community leaders, if more people walk by and recognize the monument as a memorial to the BPB, more people can bear witness to the trauma and injustice. Herman has argued that offering recognition in this public way is significant to healing individuals and even the city more broadly: “entire communities can display symptoms of PTSD, trapped in alternating cycles of numbing and intrusion, silence and re-enactment. Recovery requires remembrance and mourning.”<sup>78</sup> As spectators, passers-by would be given the opportunity to uncover flashes of the past because the memorial would seek to bring trauma into the present.

As Birmingham recently made way for a new, more substantial memorial to the BPB, which was unveiled on November 21, 2018, it is important to see these discussions for what they are: the working through of trauma at a personal and community level. On these terms, as scholars such as Shoshana Feldman and Dominick LaCapra have noted, the latency of trauma memories indicates that repression does not necessarily equate to erasure.<sup>79</sup> Instead, trauma can be known in another time and space.<sup>80</sup> While former silences relating to the BPB within local histories reflect the absence of speech, we can nonetheless locate sites elsewhere in which trauma is played out—specifically, in the cityscape and in the experience of time. In constructing an explanatory language, the poetics of narrativity mirror the changing urban agenda: truth, reconciliation, justice, and multi- and intercultural conviviality.<sup>81</sup>

### Trauma as Identity

Narrative emplotment—the ordering and sequencing of events—not only organizes events but also forms the basis for personal and collective identities. This is evident in the trauma narratives of survivors, friends, and families involved with the campaign group Justice4the21 and of minority groups that were rendered a so-called “suspect community,” such as the Irish in Birmingham.<sup>82</sup> As this section will demonstrate, trauma narratives offer opportunities to talk, listen, express, share, and come to terms with troubling experiences. By contextualizing individual and collective experiences of historical trauma, narratives—both personal and historical—are framed, or emplotted.<sup>83</sup> Drawing on the work of Wendy Brown, this section will ask: how does a sense of woundedness become the basis for a sense of identity?<sup>84</sup>

A range of group identities have emerged as a response to the interrelationship between narrative, history, and trauma. To offer just one example, in her interview Robyn explains how shared understandings and meanings helped to shape a collective identity among survivors following the BPB.

Some months afterwards, I moved flats and I shared a flat with 3 other people who had all been in the bombings. Because when we met up afterwards you kind of get very close very quickly with other people who have been in the same situation. There's a . . . you quickly share the experience. If you had been in the bomb, you were instantly a mate. 4 of us; 3 people and me shared a flat in Mosely. A girl had her hand burnt and two of the guys were psychological damaged. I'm still friends with one of them . . . he had carried people out, carried parts of people out and he suffered from nightmares and just nervousness . . . We understood each other . . .<sup>85</sup>

Robyn reveals how trauma was, to use the words of Jeffery Alexander, “widely experienced and intuitively understood” among survivors.<sup>86</sup> A desire for common ground led to an identity bound together by shared experience. This shows how recounting the extreme can “have the power to form a community entangled together through the act of listening.”<sup>87</sup> As Wendy Brown has suggested in her study on injuries and power in late modernity, it is a sense of woundedness that forms the basis for these collective identities.<sup>88</sup>

It was not only the survivors of the bombings that experienced these feelings but the local community more generally. Paul Thrupp, the son of Trevor Thrupp, a former railway worker who lost his life on the night, explained how the BPB galvanized a broader community of loss.

It devastated everybody. Even people that wasn't involved in the Birmingham Pub Bombings. It just devastated everybody, to think that people could do that.<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, Eric Noble explained how the emergency services dealt with their grief.

The police were in a permanent state of readiness. I have lovely memories of the security of being together. Of men doing a difficult job.

. . . Where was our counselling for the trauma we went through? We did go through trauma. But because we were a tight unit we got through it together. . . . We were rarely alone. We were a unit of men.<sup>90</sup>

Kent states that communities assaulted by multiple blows of grief, pain, and terror tend to have an entirely altered outlook.<sup>91</sup> Possessing a transformed worldview, they look at the world through a different lens. Indeed, families and friends have subsequently sought safety in group identities, most obviously within the work of the pressure and campaigning group Justice4the21. Justice4the21 is led by siblings Julie and Brian Hambleton, whose sister Maxine was killed in the BPB. The group has, over many years, lobbied the government and met with senior political figures in order to secure convictions of the perpetrators. Justice4the21 has successfully pressed for a new inquest, the first of its kind to be granted in Britain. Following the acquittal of the Birmingham Six, the group has been the public face for a media campaign to recover what exactly happened on the night and to deliver justice. Justice4the21 has been an extremely vocal campaign group. Demonstrating the reoccurrence of trauma and an attempt to keep trauma memory alive in the act of repetition, the group organizes a yearly memorial service in the city.<sup>92</sup> It regularly holds protest meetings and has petitioned high-profile politicians. The group traveled to Brussels to join UKIP MEP Bill Etheridge at the European Parliament. Moreover, Julie Hambleton writes a regular column in *The Birmingham Mail*. Groups like Justice4the21 show how trauma can affect whole communities. Not only do they provide rituals of gathering, but they also become sites for people to come together to share their stories and thus impose order in chaos. As such, they demonstrate the powerful silencing effect of competing BPB narratives, which have denied justice to those directly affected.

Why is this social patterning important? As Julie's testimony reveals, the need for collective identities responds to the effects of unresolved trauma. As she explains in her interview, Julie did not find out on the night itself that her sister, Maxine, would not return home.

We were protected. Mum wouldn't talk about it in front of us . . . .  
 . . . mum has never told us, she never admitted to having seen the body, but we know she has, by the way, when we've had meetings with like, erm, the lawyers who are now involved, she obviously gets upset, and she says she was in a real state.  
 But the loss of Maxine had a huge impact on us. I find it difficult to put into words how the bombings and the loss of our sister: it's like you enter a parallel universe.<sup>93</sup>

Julie recognizes that she went into a deeper sense of mourning twenty-five years after the event. It was only after this dark period in her life that she connected with her family to discuss what had happened. Along with her brother Brian, she subsequently set up a website and a campaign group.

Shock is a terrible thing. We all behaved differently. My middle brother, Paul, I never saw him cry. I never saw him cry. Maybe he was trying to be strong for the rest of us, but I never saw him cry.

15 years ago, I hit a brick wall. Metaphorically speaking. I thought I was losing my mind. I couldn't eat, I was crying all the time. I was off work for 3 months . . . I was mourning.<sup>94</sup>

For communities such as Justice4the21, feelings of anguish and frustration arose in the absence of closure. For instance, it was decided by Julie's mother and teachers that she would not attend her sister's funeral. It was deemed too upsetting for an eleven-year-old and became shrouded in silence in Julie's home. As a result, the Hambleton's trauma remained subdued, emerging repeatedly in belated experience. Its full force may not have been immediately or obviously felt, yet it remained latent and reemerged unannounced, only finally able to emerge amid the narrativizing efforts of the Justice4the21 campaign.

It's only with the campaign that [Mum's] opened up about certain things. She would never have told us otherwise.<sup>95</sup>

This shows that collective trauma identities, in this case Justice4the21, can allow families, survivors, and communities to engage in dialogue that might not otherwise occur. Narratives serve in this way as a vehicle for the transmission of painful memories. For Julie, the campaign enabled her to speak to her mother about how she lives with trauma in the everyday. The campaign therefore serves to demand a process of sharing and listening, which in turn endows these narratives with meaning and purpose going forward. In this way, the BPB's presence in family and group narratives signifies how trauma acts as a vector of cultural and family identity.<sup>96</sup>

Group identities therefore are important because they enable listening and support and offer a degree of catharsis and purpose for traumatized survivors. They are inherently social and cultural in this act. They do not offer resolution; indeed, in many ways, the existence of Justice4the21 is grounded in the idea that any ultimate working through, leaving behind the BPB without the resolution of justice, is a betrayal of the dead.<sup>97</sup> Engaging with each other and campaigning together helps victims to make sense of the past and their own marginalization, in a way that allows for a degree of catharsis above and beyond the group's ostensible purpose. As justice seems to have been denied indefinitely, a sense of purpose has been rendered instead through these collectivities. After all, as Brian Hambleton observed in a recent interview on Radio 4, he had "never felt a sense of relief," even when he thought the convictions of the Birmingham Six had been sound.<sup>98</sup> Instead, the anger and resentment shared within the group "become the only personal 'possessions' that the individual now has in place of the loved one."<sup>99</sup> In the case of Justice4the21, the campaign to reopen the inquest, to demand delayed justice, serves to pay respect to the lost—yet it also bolsters the self-respect of those that remain in the absence of justice. What we can see here is the historical construction of trauma through collective narrativization. Groups work together to make sense of trauma.

### Irish in Birmingham

The language of trauma has been used by those affected to explain what happened to themselves and to the collectivities to which they belong. In



Birmingham, the lives of six Irish residents were drastically altered: Hugh Callaghan, Patrick Joseph Hill, Gerard Hunter, Richard McKelkeny, William Power, and John Walker were all wrongly convicted of planning and carrying out the attack. Born in Northern Ireland, all six men had lived in Birmingham since the 1960s. The group, with the exception of Hugh Callaghan, were arrested en route to Belfast, where they were traveling to attend the funeral of James McDade, a PIRA member who had accidentally blown himself up when planting a bomb in Coventry's central telephone exchange.<sup>100</sup>

McDaid's funeral was to be held in Belfast, and some of the Birmingham Six were planning to go—they all knew McDade or his family mostly from a common childhood in Ardoyne.<sup>101</sup>

In one of the most notorious miscarriages of justice in English legal history, the men, while in police custody and then in a local prison, were subjected to brutal beatings and a catalogue of civil rights abuses and mistreatment. After extracting false confessions, and collecting forensic evidence that was later discredited, the Birmingham Six were sentenced to life imprisonment. After sixteen years of incarceration, their convictions were overturned in 1991.<sup>102</sup>

As the police force attempted to bring the attackers to justice, a silent yet visible shunning of Birmingham's Irish community took place. Risteàrd Sinclair explained:

After the BPB, things changed instantaneously. When I got up, my classroom people moved away from my desk. You were forced into new friendships because in unity there is strength. You choose not to have school meals because you didn't know what might be put in them. You were classed as second-class citizens.<sup>103</sup>

Singled out for abuse, Risteàrd discloses that the anti-Irish prejudice that he witnessed exhibited strong continuities with longstanding anti-Irish racism in postwar Britain. Feeding from long reservoirs of British racist discourse, which held up Irish people as potential terrorists, he explains that only the slightest spark was needed to rekindle racial violence and abuse.<sup>104</sup> "You had the mark of Cain on you because of an accident of birth."<sup>105</sup> As British people sought vengeance against the IRA, the National Federation of Licensed Victuallers contacted Roy Jenkins, the home secretary, to demand the reintroduction of capital punishment, and airport workers across the country refused to handle flights bound for Dublin or Belfast.<sup>106</sup>

Bill Craig, another relative who lost his brother in the attack, revealed:

Everybody more or less knew that it was the IRA that did it and they just took it out on every Irish person they could.<sup>107</sup>

Risteàrd Sinclair clarified:

The sad reflection after the bombings was that we became victims overnight. The family became polarised. Because of their English accents, they didn't have to be Irish and as long as people didn't know that they were content to withdraw from anything to be Irish.

For me, it made my Irish identity stronger because I don't like oppression under any form. Watching my father stand up to this and not being drawn into English-bad, Irish-good or Irish-bad, English-good. If people knew you had an Irish background, you'd be left waiting in the shops. They wouldn't serve you. For the first time, really, it made me understand what it was like to be a person with different skin. By becoming a victim yourself, you understood what others went through at that time. It wasn't cool to be Irish.<sup>108</sup>

The subsequent narratives of the BPB were thus central in constructing and regulating subject positions. Birmingham's Irish communities responded to widespread anti-Irish resentment by "keeping our heads down" and maintaining a low profile.<sup>109</sup> Where possible, accents were faded out, and Irish citizens avoided certain parts of the city. As the BPB reignited dormant racial constructions of the Irish as lazy, drunken, and seditious, verbal and physical assaults were commonplace. This racialization of the Irish, which has been well-documented elsewhere, resulted in a sense of alienation and silencing.<sup>110</sup> During one of our witness circles with Birmingham Irish Heritage Group, Participant A explains:

If you were in the city at the time, you could see the reaction. At Longbridge, you could see placards saying "hang them." There was a lot of bad feeling towards the Irish.<sup>111</sup>

Community tensions were further stoked with the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which was aimed exclusively at Irish terrorist activity. In the wake of the bombings, as panic and paranoia prevailed, the government rushed through the legislation, which allowed the police to detain suspects without charge for up to seven days and targeted Irish people attempting to move between Britain and the island of Ireland.<sup>112</sup> Its implementation saw 4,524 people detained under the act, of whom only forty-nine were ever charged with an offence.<sup>113</sup>

Participant C declares:

It informs our thinking of cycles of violence and injustice and how the law can be used against communities. It's part of what we know as a community, a part of what we witnessed.<sup>114</sup>

Under the PTA, the IRA, along with another Irish nationalist paramilitary group, was proscribed, and it became an offense to show any support for the organization. Considerable new powers were bestowed on the secretary of state over the control of population movement between Ireland and Britain. This included the power to remove people already living in Britain, resulting in the deportation of 217 Irish men and women.<sup>115</sup> The impact of the bombings was therefore felt socially, economically, and politically, both locally and nationally. Inflected by racial difference, the pitch of anti-Irish hostilities underscored what Paddy Hillyard has described as the making of a "suspect community."<sup>116</sup>

Participant B recalls:

The police were very crude. There were malicious tip offs. I remember going back and forth between Ireland and I remember being stopped.<sup>117</sup>

This sense of victimization was also felt by Participant C:

I'm sure they did have people on their lists. When I came over from Northern Ireland we had a visit [from the police] asking all kinds of questions.<sup>118</sup>

Participant D notes:

There was a great shock that took a long time to recover from. People's reaction—people are ignorant, it's like now people say look at all the Muslims now [as a suspect community].<sup>119</sup>

As Beiner suggests, memory is not “entirely in the past, but in the consciousness of its eternal presence.”<sup>120</sup> While painful for those who experienced it at the time, Risteard now views this as a transitive or generative experience. His testimony sheds light on the negotiations of the postwar British multicultural landscape:

I immersed myself in as much Irish history as I possibly could . . . Had the Birmingham bombings not happened I don't know whether I would have been involved so strongly with the Irish in Birmingham.<sup>121</sup>

In this way, the trauma of the BPB precipitated a need for retrenchment. Irish communities in Britain retreated within themselves as they were regarded with suspicion and paranoia. Communities were thus formed in response to the BPB's political aftershocks. As Nuala Killeen has explained, “community can be created by default, when the members are ostracised by large sections of the indigenous population.”<sup>122</sup> Narrativity has thus played a central role in identity formation. The construction of community identities and the collation of trauma narratives not only represents cultural worlds and selves but also endows traumatic experience with new meanings. Collective acts of listening and political activism serve as strategies of resilience. By proffering possibilities of cohesion and collective struggle, these identities reveal how traumatic experience marks group consciousness. To use the words of Beiner: “remembrance is not simply a metaphorical extrapolation of individual memory but a complex social construction, which inherently has a history.”<sup>123</sup> The poetics of narrativity, in this sense, shed light on the social and cultural afterlife of the BPB.

## Conclusion

Survival stories shape individual and group identities and map the long-term spatial and temporal significance of the BPB. What is clear from the narrative organization of the BPB is that trauma testimonies are used to simultaneously make sense of the past and explain the present and future. Memories of traumatic events are significant in terms of ordering personal and communal histories toward a future where it is possible to gain justice, reconciliation, and healing. Trauma memories thus not only stay alive with storytelling and listening, but they also occupy space and time. At every level, the city of Birmingham is still coming to terms with the events of 1974. When bombs ripped through the Tavern in the Town and the Mulberry Bush, they left a legacy for generations, a circle of pain and damage that sprawled from families into communities and leaked into the fabric of the city itself. Physical wounds may have healed, but the psychological impact on people and their families, on the Birmingham Six and the Irish community, has left an aftermath of

trauma, which forty-four years later, continues to be worked through at numerous levels. Today, members of Justice4the21 shake fundraising buckets outside Birmingham's football stadiums, trying to raise the money they need to fight for convictions. Birmingham's Irish leaders, historians, and activists have advocated for—and have now created—a new, more prominent memorial to draw the attention of Birmingham's busy population back to this bloody piece of history. With city-wide support, this memorial was unveiled on the November 21, 2018, exactly forty-four years after the BPB. Standing together, faith leaders, politicians, academics, and activists joined with families of victims and the public and marked the BPB, this time in the center of the city, outside New Street Station (in sight of both the bomb sites). In this way, the narrativizing of the BPB steps once again, in solid form, into the center of Birmingham's city space, new conversations begin, and history gets made. All the while, alongside these public actions, numerous citizens remain silenced by their trauma, living out their days in the shadow of an act of terrorism that took twenty-one lives. The poetics of narrativity give ever-evolving shape to their grief and struggle, engaging a painful past to enable strategies of survival and continuity.

### Endnotes

We would like to thank the two reviewers of this article for their thoughtful comments and suggestions. Special thanks must also go to everyone who agreed to be interviewed for this project and to the participants of the two witness circles that we ran in conjunction with Birmingham Irish Heritage Group in Birmingham 2016. Address correspondence to Saima Nasar. History Department, 13-17 Woodland Road, University of Bristol, Bristol, BS8 1TH. Email: [saima.nasar@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:saima.nasar@bristol.ac.uk).

1. Interview with Robyn Tighe, Birmingham, December 13, 2014.
2. Interview with Robyn Tighe.
3. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, MD, 2016).
4. Guy Beiner, "Probing the Boundaries of Irish Memory: From Postmemory to Prememory and Back," *Irish Historical Studies* 39, 154 (November 2014): 296–307, 297.
5. Instead, there are a number of political works that focus on the legality of the trial. Heritage and community groups have shied away from re-opening political, social and racialized wounds, meanwhile academic investigations have stalled due to the sensitivity of the topic. In recent years, some inroads have been made—see for example, Graham Dawson, Jo Dover, and Stephen Hopkins, *The Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain: Impacts, Engagements, Legacies and Memories* (Manchester, UK, 2016); and Sarah O'Brien, "Negotiations of Irish Identity in the Wake of Terrorism: The Case of the Irish in Birmingham 1973–74," *Irish Studies Review* 25 (2017): 372–94.
6. Jan Patocka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago, 1996). This refers to a collective and historical experience of trauma, which produces a sense of identity and unity. In this way, trauma experiences can reinscribe and transform communities affected by crisis. This solidarity has arguably been significant for individuals and communities after the BPB.
7. Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening" in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, by Shoshana Feldman and Dori Laub (London, 1992): 57–74, 58.

8. Jay Winter, "The Generation of Memory: Reactions on the 'Memory Boom' in Contemporary Historical Studies," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 27 (2000): 69–92.
9. See Jack Saul, *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing: Promoting Community Resilience in the Aftermath of Disaster* (London, 2014).
10. Dawson et al. *The Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain*, 8.
11. Michael Roth, *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past* (New York, 2011), 147.
12. As noted by Dawson et al., memories of the Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain have remained "frozen in the polarised antagonistic forms of wartime." Dawson et al., *The Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain*, 8.
13. Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, *Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing* (Manchester, UK, 2000), 106.
14. Caroline Garland, "Thinking about Trauma" in *Understanding Trauma: A Psychoanalytical Approach*, ed. Caroline Harland (London, 1998), 9. See also, Selma Leydesdorff et al., "Introduction: Trauma and Life Stories" in *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives*, ed. Kim Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff, and Graham Dawson (London, 1999).
15. Aaron Denham, "Rethinking Historical Trauma: Narratives of Resilience," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 45, no. 3 (2008): 391–414. See also, J. B. Waldram, *Revenge of the Windigo: The Construction of the Mind and Mental Health of North American Aboriginal Peoples* (Toronto, 2004).
16. Aaron Denham, *Rethinking Historical Trauma*.
17. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 3.
18. Dawson et al. argue that these silences exist more generally within hegemonic public representations of the Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain. Silences therefore must be recognized as being part of an "active process that is reproduced through modes of complicity." See Dawson et al., *The Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain*, 11.
19. Saul has observed that in the wake of 9/11 "it sometimes seemed" that only first responders and victims "had the moral authority to speak." Jack Saul, *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing: Promoting Community Resilience in the Aftermath of Disaster* (New York, 2013), 125.
20. John Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA* (London, 1997); Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago, 1991).
21. Dawson et al., *The Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain*, 2.
22. O'Brien, *Negotiations of Irish Identity*.
23. See Gary McGladdery, *The Provisional IRA in England: The Bombing Campaign 1973–96* (Dublin, 2006).
24. Carl Chinn, *Birmingham Irish: Making Our Mark*, (Birmingham, 2003); Lesley Lelourec, "Responding to the IRA Bombing Campaign in Mainland Britain: The Case of Warrington" in Dawson et al., *The Northern Ireland Conflict in Britain*; Barry Hazley, "Re/Negotiating 'Suspicion': Exploring the Construction of Self in Irish Migrants' Memories of the 1996 Manchester Bomb," *Irish Studies Review* 21, no. 3 (2001): 326–41.
25. McGladdery, *The Provisional IRA in England: The Bombing Campaign 1973–96*.

26. Dawson et al., *The Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain*, 9.
27. Jonathan Coe, *The Rotters' Club* (London, 2002), 102.
28. Coe, *The Rotters' Club*, 104.
29. There are parallels between Birmingham and responses to the Warrington bombs that targeted civilian life. See Lelourec, "Responding to the IRA Bombing Campaign." More indiscriminate and more deadly than other attacks, media and popular depictions of the BPB conflated IRA terrorism with Irish immigrant life. This, O'Brien explains, was captured in newspaper headlines such as the *Birmingham Mail's* "Treat Them as Enemies." In terms of Britain's social fabric, Irishness had therefore "shifted from being a political to a social problem." O'Brien, *Negotiations of Irish Identity*, 390.
30. O'Brien, *Negotiations of Irish Identity*, 37. This notice references the M62 Coach Bombing of February 4, 1974, which killed nine soldiers and three civilians.
31. Laura O'Reilly, "The Birmingham Pub Bombings, The Irish as a 'Suspect Community' and the Memories of the O'Reilly Family" in Dawson et al., *The Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain*, 287. A distinctive characteristic of a new cultural politics of difference, this, Hazley argues, disrupted the hybrid identities of the Irish in Britain, Hazley, *Re-negotiating Suspicion*, 337.
32. Hazley, *Re-negotiating Suspicion*, 123.
33. Kit de Waal's *The Trick to Time* also sheds light on processes of grief. She details anti-Irish sentiment as Irish men and women were frequently attacked following the PIRA's campaign. Mona, the novels protagonist, ends up choosing to block out November from her yearly calendar in an attempt to mourn the losses she experienced. Kit de Waal, *The Trick to Time* (London, 2108).
34. See Chris Mullin, *Error of Judgment: The Truth about the Birmingham Bombings* (Dublin, 1997); James Moran, *Irish Birmingham: A History* (Liverpool, 2010).
35. Brian Gibson, *The Birmingham Bombs* (Surrey, UK, 1976). Another important documentary, titled "Aftershock: The Untold Story of the Birmingham Pub Bombings," was aired on BBC2 on November 9, 1994.
36. Fr. Denis Faul and Fr. Raymond Murray, *The Birmingham Framework: Six Innocent Men Framed for the Birmingham Bombings* (Dublin, 1976).
37. World in Action produced a series of programs on the case, beginning with "In the Interests of Justice," tx. October 28, 1985 (ITV).
38. "Childhood Memories of Irish and Those of Irish Descent, 1960–2010," Birmingham Irish Association, 2012.
39. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (London, 2001), 7.
40. P. Yaeger, "Consuming Trauma; or, the Pleasure of Circulating," in Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw, eds., *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony and Community* (Urbana, IL, 2002), 29.
41. Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD, 1995), 67.
42. Roth, *Memory, Trauma, and History*, 84.
43. Laub, *Bearing Witness*, 69.
44. Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD, 2001), 21.

45. George Legg and Lucy Harrison, "Remembering the Docklands Bomb" in *Not a Split Second* (2017).
46. Legg and Harrison, "Remembering the Docklands Bomb."
47. See Moran, *Irish in Birmingham*, 199–201; Mullin, *Error of Judgment*, 7–8; and Mary Hickman and Bronwen Walter, *Discrimination and the Irish Community* (London, 1997), 204.
48. L. C. Garro, "Narrating Troubling Experiences," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 40, no. 1 (2003): 5–43.
49. Interview with Maureen Mitchell, Birmingham, 2016.
50. Interview with Maureen Mitchell. See also O'Reilly, *The Birmingham Pub Bombings*.
51. O'Reilly, *The Birmingham Pub Bombings*.
52. Interview with Maureen Mitchell.
53. Interview with David Pithie, Birmingham, June 24, 2015.
54. Denham, *Rethinking Historical Trauma*.
55. See also R. A. Neimeyer and A. E. Stewart, "Trauma, Healing, and the Narrative Emplotment of Loss," *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services* 77, no. 6 (1996): 360–75.
56. Hazley, *Suspect Communities*.
57. Susan Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918–1931* (London, 2008), 7.
58. Interview with Alan Hill, Birmingham, December 7, 2014.
59. Interview with Alan Hill.
60. Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière, *History beyond Trauma, Whereof One Cannot Speak, Thereof One Cannot Stay Silent* (New York, 2004).
61. Everett Zimmerman, "Personal Identity, Narrative, and History: The Female Quixote and Redgauntlet," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 12, no. 2–3 (January–April 2000): 369–90.
62. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 7.
63. Amy Shuman, *Other People's Stories, Entitlement Claims and the Critique of Empathy* (Urbana, IL, 2010), 13.
64. Shuman, *Other People's Stories*, 13.
65. Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of Landscapes" *World Archeology* 25, no. 2 (October 1993): 152–74.
66. Interview with Alan Hill.
67. Angela Moran, "Hail Ambiguous St Patrick: Sounds of Ireland on Parade in Birmingham" *Irish Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (2010): 157–78.
68. The College Arms, located on College Road, was owned by the Irish licensee, James McDonnell. A petrol bomb was hurled through the window. The fire caused over five thousand pounds of damage. Similarly, at the Irish Community Centre in Digbeth, a fire was started. Fortunately, the alarm system alerted firemen before the bomb went off. See Panikos Panayi, *The Impact of Immigration: A Documentary History of the Effects and Experiences of Immigrants in Britain since 1945* (Manchester, UK, 1999), 147.

69. As noted by Vivian Bird, Birmingham was the first UK city to hold a St. Patrick's Day parade. In 1952, the city's parade started forty-five minutes before London's. The Birmingham parade claims to be the largest event in the UK and the third best attended in the world. See Vivian Bird, *Portrait of Birmingham* (London, 1970).
70. Interview with Eric Noble, Birmingham, April 27, 2015.
71. Wendy Hesford and Wendy Kozol, *Haunting Violations: Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the "Real"* (Urbana, IL, 2000), 32.
72. Interview with Robyn Tighe.
73. Kent, *Aftershocks*, 24.
74. Kent, *Aftershocks*, 24.
75. Lecrouc in Dawson et al. *Northern Ireland Troubles*, 266.
76. "In Pictures: Three Decades after Birmingham's Pub Bombings," BBC News, accessed January 2018, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/picture\\_gallery/04/uk\\_three\\_decades\\_after\\_birmingham0s\\_pub\\_bombings/html/8.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/04/uk_three_decades_after_birmingham0s_pub_bombings/html/8.stm).
77. Interview with Julie Hambleton, Birmingham, July 6, 2015.
78. Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York, 2015), 242.
79. See Shoshana Feldman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York, 1992); LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*.
80. Mark Crinson, *Urban Memory: History and Amnesia in the Modern City* (London, 2005), 15.
81. Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (London, 2004).
82. See Paddy Hillyard, *Suspect Community: People's Experience of the Prevention of Terrorism Acts in Britain* (London, 1993).
83. Denham, *Rethinking Historical Trauma*, 392.
84. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ, 1995). Also see Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in Caruth, *Trauma*, 183–99.
85. Interview with Robyn Tighe.
86. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley, CA, 2004), 2.
87. Miller and Tougaw, *Extremities*, 19.
88. Brown, *States of Injury*, 70.
89. Interview with Bill Craig, Birmingham, October 6, 2015.
90. Interview with Eric Noble.
91. Kent, *Aftershocks*, 25.
92. Amy Shulman argues that "Storytelling involves a desire or a willingness either to recognize pattern in experience or to impose pattern on experience." Shulman, *Other People's Stories*, 13.
93. Interview with Julie Hambleton.
94. Interview with Julie Hambleton.



95. Interview with Julie Hambleton.
96. Denham, *Rethinking Historical Trauma*, 392. Indeed, when Julie introduced herself, she did so as the sister of Maxine, who lost her life in the BFB.
97. See LaCapra, *Writing History*, 22 and Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 184.
98. Brian Hambleton, "The Reunion," Radio Four, tx. September 13, 2015.
99. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness* (Boston and New York, 2003), 96–97.
100. Kaja Irene Ziesler, "The Irish in Birmingham 1830–1970" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 1989), 340.
101. Interview with Risteàrd Sinclair, Birmingham, July 10, 2015.
102. See Mullin, *Error of Judgement*.
103. Interview with Risteàrd Sinclair.
104. For more on longstanding anti-Irish racism, which focused on tropes of terrorism and violence, see Tom Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace: Religious Tension in Modern Scotland, 1819–1914* (Manchester, UK, 1987); Michael De Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798–1882* (Madison, WI, 2004); Frank Neal, *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience, 1819–1914: An Aspect of Anglo-Irish History* (Liverpool, UK, 2003); Alexander Peach, "Poverty, Religion and Prejudice in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Catholic Irish in Birmingham 1800–c1880" (PhD diss., De Montfort University, 2000); and L. Perry Curtis Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irish in Victorian Caricature* (Newton Abbot, UK, 1971).
105. Interview with Risteàrd Sinclair.
106. Sean Mcquire, "Error of Judgement: The Truth about the Birmingham Pub Bombings," *Race & Class* 28, no. 4 (1987). For more on parliamentary discussions on capital punishment, see Hansard, House of Commons Debate November 28, 1974, vol. 882 cc634–752; Hansard House of Commons Debate December 11, 1974, vol. 883 cc518–640.
107. Interview with Bill Craig, Birmingham, October 6, 2015.
108. Interview with Risteàrd Sinclair.
109. Witness Circle with Birmingham Irish Heritage Group, Birmingham, August 3, 2016.
110. See Enda Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain* (Oxford, 2007); Paul Harrison, "Culture and Migration: The Irish English," *New Society* 25; Gavin Schaffer and Saima Nasar, "The White Essential Subject: Race, Ethnicity and the Irish in Post-war Britain," *Contemporary British History* 32 (2018): 209–30.
111. Witness circle with Birmingham Irish Heritage Group, Participant A.
112. Hillyard, *Suspect Communities*, 13.
113. John Rees, *Timelines: A Political History of the Modern World* (London, 2012), 123.
114. Witness circle with Birmingham Irish Heritage Group, Participant B.
115. John Rees, *Timelines: A Political History of the Modern World* (Abingdon, UK, 2012), 123.
116. Hillyard, *Suspect Communities*, 13.

117. Witness circle with Birmingham Irish Heritage Group, Participant C.
118. Witness circle, Participant D.
119. Witness circle, Participant E.
120. Guy Beiner, "In Anticipation of a Post-memory Boom Syndrome" *Cultural Analysis* 7 (2008): 107–12, 109.
121. Interview with Risteàrd Sinclair.
122. Nuala Katherine Killeen, "Culture, Identity and Integration: The Case of the Irish in Birmingham" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2002), 128.
123. Guy Beiner, "Between Trauma and Triumphalism: The Easter Rising, the Somme, and the Crux of Deep Memory in Modern Ireland," *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 2 (April 2007): 366–89, 369.