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‘Conflict cinema’ and hostile space in Northern Ireland and Palestine

Abstract:

This article is concerned with narratives of ethno-religious conflict depicted in a genre I term ‘conflict cinema’. The two films under discussion, *'71* and *Paradise Now*, are largely set, respectively, in the cities of Belfast in Northern Ireland and Nablus in Palestine and represent the divisions and violent tension between enemy factions there. The intersection of the landscape of the conflicts and the bodies of the male protagonists who must negotiate them emphasizes the centrality of physically being ‘in place’ or ‘out of place’ to ‘conflict cinema’. The soldier/colonizer Gary Hook in *'71* and the freedom fighters/terrorists Said and Khaled in *Paradise Now* travel through the enduring battlegrounds of their divided and politically unstable societies. Against the backdrop of ethno-religious conflict, both films focus on the ideal militant body that must be a machine or an automaton. I argue that through the screenwriters’ and filmmakers’ depiction of these bodies’ negotiations of conflict space, or in other words, the interface between the body and the unstable, urban conflict zone, ‘conflict cinema’ upsets overdetermined notions of the male militant body, thus manifesting the paradox of the dehumanised body that is also innately human.

Biographical note:

Louise Harrington’s primary research examines global partitions (India, Ireland, Israel/Palestine) and cultural production, on which she is completing a book. She also works on the intersections between conflict and border studies, and literary and film studies. Her work has been published in *South Asian Review*, *Journal of Postcolonial Cultures and Societies*, *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* and *South Asian Diaspora*. She has also contributed to edited books on topics ranging from the leitmotif of the railway in Indian literary imagination to theories of Thirdspace and the Partition of Bengal.

Keywords:

Screenwriting – Conflict cinema – Ethno-Religious conflict – Storytelling

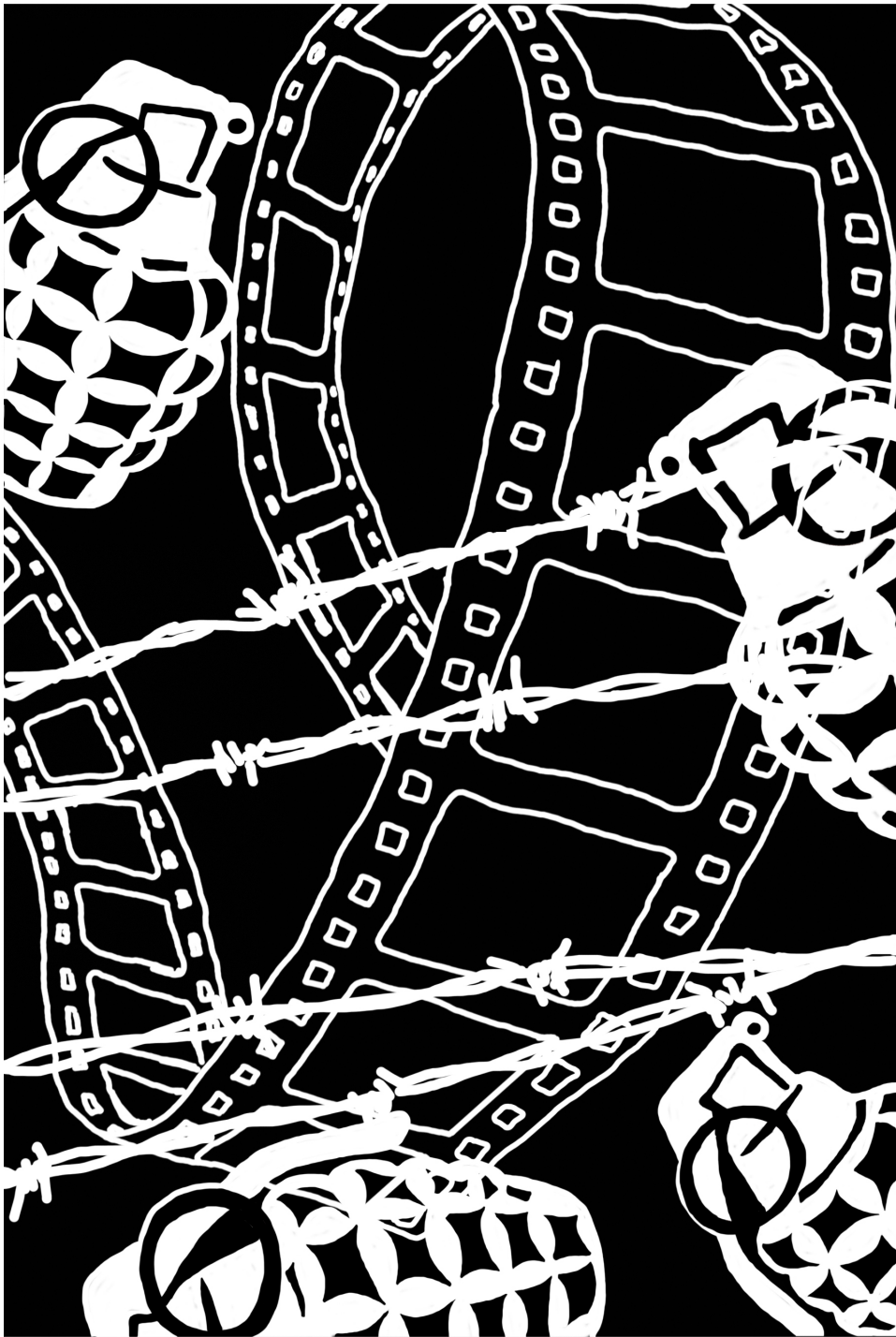


Fig. 1. Ulrike Sturm, *Conflict cinema*, linocut, 2016

Introduction

Violent, ethnic conflict resonates in many places, in many forms; whether due to the shadow of past wars, the impact of present dissonances, the threat of future violent struggles, or a combination of the three. The way in which writers offer narrations of these conflicts via cultural products, such as fictional visual texts, offers audiences a range of representations of, and reactions to, the chaos of war. In these creative responses, some particularly skilful screenplay writers and filmmakers do more than simply depict victory and defeat, or the winners and losers, not least because such things can be difficult to identify in ethno-religious conflict. Instead, for example, they harness the muddle of seemingly endless conflicts, striving to decipher the lack of agreed beginnings and endings, or the hazy principles of a conflict and its actors.

One of the key features of these representations is a focus on the movement of bodies – often soldiers of some kind – through the space(s) of conflict. In their navigation, an ‘interface’ emerges, to use Elizabeth Grosz’s expression, between bodies and space that signifies the interconnectedness of the two. Grosz employs ‘interface’ to explain the symbiotic relationship between bodies and the space of the city specifically. Her argument is that there is a linkage but also disunity between the body and the city as they continually constitute and define each other ‘in a series of disparate flows’ (1998: 47). Through this variable correlation between the physical urban space and the physical body, the issue of being an empathetic and emotive human or a non-human, in the guise of “automated” military bodies, is raised. In the context of conflicts that are visualised in film, or ‘conflict cinema’ as I term it, the locale of urban space can be extended to include the whole terrain of the conflict, (such as the borders of the city and beyond them), since the same two-way relationship between body and space exists here.

The two films under discussion in this article, *'71* (2014) and *Paradise Now* (2005), are largely set, respectively, in the cities of Belfast in Northern Ireland and Nablus in Palestine. The space of the conflict zone that encompasses these cities – rather than the city itself – interfaces with the bodies of the male protagonists. The soldier/colonizer in *'71* and the freedom fighter/terrorist in *Paradise Now* travel through the enduring battlegrounds of their divided and politically unstable societies. In depicting the interface between these bodies and the space they navigate, some of those writing and making ‘conflict cinema’ upset overdetermined notions of the male militant body, thus manifesting the paradox of the dehumanised body that is also human.

What is ‘conflict cinema’?

Stefan Wolff’s definition of the term ‘conflict’ illuminates not only the broad concept of conflict, but it also references one of this article’s primary concerns, ethnic conflict in film, in particular a type of film that I call ‘conflict cinema’.

Generally speaking, the term ‘conflict’ describes a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their individual perspectives entirely just, goals. Ethnic conflicts are one particular form of such conflict: that in which the goals of at least one conflict party are defined in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault

line of confrontation is one of ethnic distinctions (Wolff 2006: 2).

This genre, I suggest, is distinct from the genre of the war film that deals with large scale combat such as World Wars I and II. This neologism is specifically concerned with ethnic conflict that is often, but not always, borne out of a geopolitical partition in the wake of colonial rule. As a result of decolonisation, or the withdrawal (to various degrees) of the British Empire from its colonies and outposts throughout the twentieth century, many territories across the globe were divided on ethnic and/or religious lines. New national and international borders were constructed, and lasting sectarian, ethnic and religious-based conflict emerged in a number of places, including Northern Ireland (McVea and McKittrick 2012, Jackson 2014), Palestine (Schlaim 1994, Krämer 2008), Kashmir (Bose 2005, Schofield 2010), Sri Lanka (Bandarage 2008) and Cyprus (Papadakis et al. 2006). However, there are, of course, ethnic conflicts that do not originate with the machinations of British Empire, such as in the Balkans, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Sriram et al. 2010, Taras et al. 2016).

While religion, nationalism and politics could all be said to play a role in ethnic conflict, they may not in fact cause internecine or civil war, instead ‘the stakes in ethnic conflicts are extremely diverse, ranging from legitimate political, social, cultural and economic grievances of disadvantaged ethnic groups to predatory agendas of states and small cartels of elites, to so-called national security interests, to name but a few’ (Wolff 2006: 6). The array of influential factors suggests that the histories and mechanisms of the above examples of ethnic conflict are complex and their present states are naturally varied. In fact, some are currently mired in violent hostility, such as in the case of Palestine and Israel, some continue to destabilise the region, as along the Rwanda-DRC border, or some lie ‘dormant’, as in Northern Ireland. There is no set period of time before cinematic portrayals of a conflict appear, like all cultural production, many factors, from the personal to the economic, influence the advent of artistic responses to historical, social, or political events. Some films are released ‘post’-conflict or after the height of the conflict, such as *'71*, whilst all cinema about the Israel-Palestine conflict could be said to emerge ‘during’ the conflict since it is ongoing. The common denominator of the ethnic tension portrayed in conflict cinema, however, is that it can erupt into violence at any time, given the right trigger. The cinema reveals the reality that conflict regions are troubled by a permanent state of antagonism or rivalry, tension, suspicion and fear. As such, the conflicts are, in many ways, unresolvable and in this manner they differ from a war, which could be said to stop and start. Disputes rooted in ethnic difference can break out into full scale civil war but can also remain in a condition of hostility where civilians and state actors alike endure the lasting threat of previously unresolved contentions.

Conflict cinema is not a uniform genre in which screenwriters and filmmakers adhere to a specific formula in order to successfully situate and portray a conflict. The foci emerge from varied historical times, geographical spaces and out of a diverse set of socio-political and cultural issues. As previously mentioned, the war (and anti-war) film is a recognised genre that is largely concerned with twentieth century wars (Eberwein 2005). Conflict cinema uses some similar tropes as the war film, for example they might both depict violent combat, and the hopelessness and futility of war, such as *All Quiet*

on the Western Front (1930), or raise the question of the morality of war, as in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). Yet, conflict cinema is not concerned with some key features of the war film such as trench warfare, nor does it focus on the separation between ‘those back home’ and the frontline, nor operate to glorify the military. The main differentiating feature, I argue, is the space of the action. In conflict cinema, the local and personal nature of ethnic conflict manifests less as a designated warzone and more as an unstable lived space of ceaseless hostility, which bodies must negotiate carefully if they are to survive. Civilians, informers, collaborators and various kinds of mercenaries are all implicated in this space, as is the case, for example, in *Omar* (2013) written and directed by Hany Abu-Assad and set in the West Bank, and in the British-Irish film *Shadow Dancer* (2012) written by Tom Bradby and directed by James Marsh. It follows that films within the genre of conflict cinema are set in a landscape where everyday spaces and places are demarcated as safe or unsafe by borders and border zones. This filmic topography often involves a complex, maze-like network of streets and buildings, literally shaped by walls, fences, barriers and hiding places – perhaps functioning to segregate religious or ethnic groups. Having the ownership of local knowledge plays a significant role here too: knowing how to navigate these spaces becomes crucial because a lack of cartographic fluency can see you incarcerated, interrogated or dead. The intersection of these facets on screen – the landscape of conflict and the negotiation of it by human bodies – emphasises the centrality of physically being ‘in place’ or ‘out of place’ to conflict cinema. It is important to note that there can be a significant amount of conflict within a work of cinema but conflict alone does not bring that film into the genre of conflict cinema. For example, Carla Lever discusses several films including the work of South Africa’s pre-eminent contemporary artist William Kentridge’s short animated film *Ubu Tells the Truth* (1996–97) (in another article of this Special Issue). Such films offer commentaries on conflict rather than contributing to the corpus of conflict cinema. Similarly, Reginald Rose’s seminal work, *Twelve Angry Men* (1955), is dominated by conflict-based situations – twelve jurors bring their personal histories and prejudices into a jury room to decide upon the matter of murder – but this film, reviewed by Simon Dwyer (in another article of this Special Issue) remains in the realm of traditional drama and is not conflict cinema.

As noted above, the scope of this article includes two examples of conflict cinema pertaining to two separate conflicts. The first is the case of Palestine and Israel. In the wake of commitments made by the British Mandate in Palestine in 1917, the UN Special Commission implemented a partition plan in late 1947 that has ultimately led to the emergence of the Occupied Palestinian territories (the West Bank and Gaza) and the State of Israel. Violent ethnic conflict between, mainly, Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs has existed on account of this for almost seventy years with the hostilities repeatedly growing and abating in scale (Schlaim 2009). This situation is depicted in the film *Paradise Now* (2005) which was directed by Hany Abu-Assad, an Israeli-born Palestinian, who also co-wrote the screenplay with a Dutchman, Bero Beyer. This film focuses on two young men, Said and Khaled, in Nablus, a city in the West Bank, who are planning a suicide attack on a bus in Tel Aviv. The backstory reveals that these childhood friends were recruited into the Fedayeen, or Arab nationalist guerrilla

fighters, and selected to take part in a suicide mission, which is organised in retaliation to an Israeli bomb that killed their comrades. The action of the film closely follows their opposing and vacillating responses to this task, which are also contrasted to those of Suha, a character who advocates non-violent resistance to Israeli force.

The second conflict dealt with in this article is Northern Ireland. The six counties which make up Northern Ireland, a province of the United Kingdom, were divided from the rest of the island of Ireland in 1922 when the British Empire agreed to an independent Irish Free State (now the Republic of Ireland). The religious divide between Catholics/Republicans and Protestants/Unionists is at the heart of the conflict that saw sectarian violence reach its height in the 1970s, a period known euphemistically as the 'Troubles', and continues to reverberate in the present despite a Peace Agreement in 1998 (Feeney 2014). The film *'71* (2014) focuses on the Troubles and is directed by the French-Algerian-British Yann Demange and written by the Scottish playwright Gregory Burke. It follows the trials of a novice British soldier, Gary Hook, on his first deployment when he is left behind by his regiment during a riot in hostile territory. The main action takes place over the following twenty-four hours wherein the sinister urban landscape of Belfast is revealed, as is the unpredictable nature of a sectarian war. While *Paradise Now* and *'71* are concerned with distinct conflicts and geographies, they both serve to render the interface between the site of ethnic conflict and the militant individual invested in it.

Militant bodies

It was about five thousand years ago that 'uniformly armed bodies of men obeying common leadership came into being and began to fight in an organised and purposive manner' (Keegan and Holmes 1985: 11). Since then, in the field of military history, soldiers have been routinely imagined and represented as masculine, heroic, disciplined and loyal (see, for example, Mosse 1985, 2001, Dawson 1994). They are highly trained and regimented, akin to Michel Foucault's conception of the 'docile body' (1979), tuned into receiving orders and directions, willing to obey and carry out duties. Indeed, the ideal soldier is a refined and well-regulated engine who is expected to keep a distance from the personal and the emotional in order to perform the designated operations s/he has been cultivated to execute, which likely include acts of violence. According to Christophe Wasinski, a soldier's identity must be fixed or stabilised through discipline, training and surveillance in order that their bodies effectively function as tools, or weapons, of war. Such military codification goes back several centuries, and has succeeded in transforming human beings into 'reified entities' and 'controllable cogs ready to annihilate the enemy and sacrifice themselves on dangerous battlefields', which Wasinski also argues 'has become an essential component of the very meaning of war in the modern state-centric world' (2011: 71).

Following the claim of military codification, it can be reasoned that the ideal soldier or militant body is like a machine. It is carefully and gradually automated to perform in a militaristic sphere, either explicitly due to the pressures of hierarchical command, or, implicitly by peers and the power of group identity (what Wasinski calls 'a collectively

self-imposed cohesion' 2011: 59). Militant bodies that are drilled to conform to soldierly practice and to execute belligerent actions without consideration of, or in spite of, their individual sympathies or human sensitivities, are analogous to an automaton. They move away from organismic to mechanical embodiment, perhaps resembling Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg (1985), in whom the line between the organic and the technical is blurred (and also irrelevant). The model militant body has been radically altered or mechanised; it has been 'formatted', to use Wasinski's term (2011: 62), by hegemonic structures of militarism that create controllable combatants.

The film *'71* demonstrates the gruelling procedure of honing a militant body in its opening scenes when a black screen is filled with audio of belligerent grunting and thumping noises before cutting to the soldier-hero Gary Hook pummelling his fellow army cadet in a boxing match-training exercise. Hook is part of a novice regiment in the British Army who are undergoing required training, including rifle skills, field craft, battlefield drills and fitness instruction. A montage of the young recruits performing military manoeuvres follows the off-camera, opening line of the film, ostensibly delivered by a lieutenant: 'Good lads, you'll do for me boys. Welcome to the regiment'. While fresh-faced and inexperienced, the recruits nonetheless offer a view of emergent disciplined combatants. The close shots of Hook's face expose his initial unsureness at being there. His eyes flicker with doubt, but he operates as the consummate soldier responding automatically to calls for attention with assurance, as though his drilled body is independent of his inexperienced mind. When Hook's untested regiment is deployed to Belfast, their first mission is to assist the Ulster police force in a raid on a house on Falls Road – the centre of Catholic Republican territory. In this supposedly routine task for the British Army during the Troubles, the soldiers are ordered to form a barrier to keep the hostile locals away from the house where the now brutal raid is taking place.

The action of this defining scene builds, alongside the taut soundtrack, to a height of tension that ultimately erupts in the first on-screen casualty. As the camera alternates its focus between the naive faces of the regiment and the belligerent faces of the civilians, disorienting devices such as billowing smoke from a burning car lay bare the escalating hostility. Hook and his fellow soldiers are presented as automated bodies who must withstand the affecting environment of their assignment. They are required to be unemotional to the anguish and fury of women and children shouting in their faces because fear or guilt are at odds with the genealogy of ideal soldiers who must repress their subjectivity in favour of a committed single-mindedness for their duty. As the action develops and physical struggles between the civilians and soldiers begin, the combatants are further depicted as lacking compassion, for instance when one of them punches a woman for spitting in another soldier's face. At this point in the film, the storytelling situates Hook and his regiment in the narrative of dehumanisation that envelops the actions of consummate soldiers (Wasinski 2011: 70).

But not all militant bodies are necessarily soldiers in a national army. They also exist in less state-sanctioned forms, such as revolutionary or guerrilla armies, terrorist groups or resistance movements. Guerrilla fighters, for instance, organise themselves in irregular units and employ covert tactics in order to escape detection and to carry out their operations. However, this does not signify their lack of skill, efficiency or

militancy. In his handbook on guerrilla warfare, Che Guevara famously lists among the characteristics necessary for a revolutionary fighter: cunning, audacity, inventiveness, indefatigability, extreme endurance, and a willingness to volunteer for the ‘suicide platoon’ (1961: 73). Guerrillas are similar to regular units in that they represent militant bodies who follow a militaristic code and are bound by courage, discipline and loyalty to the group and cause. Their only difference with a soldier is that they simply operate outside of the legitimacy of the state apparatus. The great military theorist and Prussian general of the nineteenth century, Carl von Clausewitz, identified and wrote about various types of unconventional warfare, some of which feature in his seminal 1832 multi-volume book, *On War*, but he coined the term ‘small wars’ in his less well-known 1810 and 1811 lectures to refer to irregular armed movements and insurgencies (Daase and Davis 2015). In contemporary society, actions that would be called small wars by Clausewitz are rhetorically characterised as acts of terrorism in a post-9/11 world that is consumed with national security and unsystematic acts of violence. Resistance movements, particularly those associated with national liberation wars, frequently have a guerrilla faction that many identify as a terrorist group, for example the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Ireland, and Hamas in Palestine (Berti 2013, Grisham 2014).

The focus in *Paradise Now* is on Palestinian guerrilla resistance fighters (or terrorists, depending on perspective). Initially the two protagonists, Said and Khaled, are portrayed as idlers and somewhat inept mechanics, struggling to keep their jobs; they do not represent disciplined or highly skilled militants. However, it quickly emerges that, in fact, they are potential suicide bombers. Although it is not explicitly stated, they are possibly members of Hamas as they are part of a covert militant cell in the city of Nablus in the West Bank that functions to fight the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. With the appearance of Abu Karem, a leader of the resistance group, the transformation of Said and Khaled from harmless young men into automated militant bodies begins. The leader explains that a suicide bombing mission will be carried out the next day on a bus in the Israeli city of Tel Aviv and that Said and Khaled have been chosen to perform this duty, ‘together, like you wanted’. The men’s humanity, as set up in the opening scenes, is suddenly at odds with the revelation that they are part of a militant resistance movement and had previously volunteered to martyr themselves for the Palestinian cause by deliberately killing Israelis. The swiftness of this shift in the narrative, from being regular men to prospective suicide bombers, is significant because it instantly initiates the dehumanisation of Said and Khaled.

In popular imagination, certainly in much Western media, suicide bombers are deemed to operate outside any human realm. They are perceived as programmed robots since they represent what Hamid Dabashi refers to as ‘disposable bodies’ (2012: 6), indeed they are subhuman. Cultural anthropologist Alessia Acquistapace elaborates on this prevailing viewpoint:

The suicidal person is *a priori* defined insane, a fanatic, “a fundamentalist”, someone that is not reasoning, and also almost a non-human. They are “bomb-men”, something in between a weapon and a human being, or a “kamikaze”. ... In other words, what is denied is not only the rationality, the existence of a political project, however bloody, behind the suicide terrorism, but also the human nature of the terrorist and the simple possibility

that certain social, political, psychological and symbolic conditions can lead a “normal” person to a suicide attack (2006: 242).

This description situates the suicide bomber as being, by definition, devoid of rationality and humanity. There is rarely a suggestion that they are anything other than possessed by a very dangerous religious radicalism. The body of the suicide bomber also functions as a mechanised weapon, which is visually rendered in *Paradise Now* when Said and Khaled physically and psychologically prepare themselves for their mission. Through this scene, they steadily become less human and more automated.

The first step in this process is for each of them to make a martyr’s video that justifies their imminent actions, invokes religious doctrine and offers a farewell to their families. After an initial and comical false start with Khaled’s video, where the amateur cameraman fails to record his emotional speech, control is regained and a close-up of Said’s face captures his profound intent as he says, ‘[o]ur bodies are all we have left to fight with against the never-ending occupation’. The camera then cuts to a sequence of shots overlaid with evocative recitations from the Qur’an, during which the bodies of Said and Khaled undergo ceremonial purification, including cleaning, shaving, scrubbing and praying. We also see a shot of the bombs being made by a man with prosthetic hands, at once signalling the robotic subtext and the perils of the mission. In due course, the ritual ends and Said and Khaled are no longer scruffy car mechanics, but presented as solemn, shaven-headed insurgents wearing crisp black suits with white shirts. In this uniform, they now look uncannily alike; their individuality appears to vanish, as does their humanness. In the remainder of the scene, they take their seats alongside their comrades at a long table to eat a final meal. As the Qur’anic recitations come to an end, the scene simulates an image of the Last Supper and thereby emphasises the approaching martyrdom of these two men who are no longer mere humans.

Acquistapace suggests above that the ‘certain social, political, psychological and symbolic conditions’ that might lead a young man to prepare for suicidal violence are frequently unknown or ignored (2006: 242). *Paradise Now*, however, through its storytelling, does provide the viewer with a rare instance of humanised terrorism in the affecting vacillation of Said’s resolve toward his lethal task; the audience are left in doubt as to whether he will go through with it or not. Similarly, while Gary Hook in *’71* is set up by the screenplay writers and filmmakers to be an uncompassionate, skilled and inhuman British coloniser in Belfast, he is humanised once he is separated from his regiment and at the mercy of the city streets. Against the backdrop of ethno-religious conflict, both films depict the impossible paradox of the militant body that must be a machine, but is innately human. This is largely achieved through the visual portrayal of the body’s negotiation of spaces of conflict, or in other words, the interface between the body and the unstable, urban conflict zone.

Hostile spaces

The new physical borders in the wake of a partition and during ethno-religious conflict transform the landscape that they cut through. Whether these borders take the form of the separation walls and fences between Israelis and Palestinians, or the so-called

‘peace-lines’ in Belfast, space is fractured in an attempt to implement ‘ethnic contact avoidance’, as Allen Feldman puts it (2000: 53). These borders render subjects vulnerable, given that they often work to keep people in, as much as they also keep people out. Furthermore, borders intend to fix mobility and stabilise identity, while they also suggest themselves as a necessary component of maintaining order and security among divided peoples. In its earlier incarnation in the 1990s, the discipline of Border Studies was mainly concerned with the hard geopolitical borders of the nation-state, but over time both the real and symbolic boundaries within national borders have garnered more and more interest. This new focus has included the everyday lives of those living in border cultures, such as in partitioned societies where borders operate to keep opposing groups apart and apply cartographic certainty to the question of belonging. In a post-partition zone, issues like stability, security and control become crucial to the project of justifying the original partition plan. The effected population is required, that is *forced*, to accept and to navigate the rising borders, and as a result, the warped cartography of the partition map commands power over individual bodies. A political decision made in a seat of government to divide land on ethno-religious grounds is strongly felt in those localities that find their home-place fragmented and abruptly unfamiliar. Spatiality is important here since it denotes the sense of active agency that space possesses (McDowell and Sharp 1997: 3). It can be produced and reproduced, is meaning-making for the people in it and ultimately takes on new power in the (post-) conflict region when what was once a known, lived place quickly becomes a hostile and alien space.

The existence of lived hostile space is evident in the early scenes of *'71* when a senior army official briefs the young cadets on the topography of Belfast. As they sit in a classroom, they are shown a map of the city that brings to life the sectarian divisions through the use of different colours – green areas for Republicans and orange areas for Unionists. This visual aid to the segregation on the ground acts as a seemingly reliable representation of the often invisible but nonetheless existent lines that the people of the city negotiate on a daily basis. Later, when the regiment moves out to assist the house raid, their fortified truck travels through a maze of small streets that carry a foreboding atmosphere and reek of friction, not least due to a burning car around one corner and makeshift road blocks around the next. These streets also represent a sinister labyrinth because the British soldiers are clearly not ‘in their place’ when they travel through them. Although they have a map delineating the city’s safe and dangerous zones, disorienting devices abound. For instance, there is a tense soundtrack that resembles a fast heartbeat, while the local (Catholic) community have removed all the street signs, which suggests that the perceived cartographic reality as told in their map is subject to unexpected change or to eradication. The soldiers have traversed a line and are exposing themselves to whatever may lie on the ‘other’ side of the partition. While there is no formal war between national armies taking place on these streets, Belfast in 1971 is precarious to say the least, in the grip of the Troubles, and therefore this urban space operates substantial control over the movement of uninitiated bodies.

In the West Bank, space is no less dangerous. *Paradise Now*, in fact, opens with a scene that presents perhaps the most quintessential emblem of hostile space, the border

checkpoint, which depicts the reality of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation. The film begins with Suha, an advocate of non-violence and the daughter of a famous, (now deceased), Palestinian resistance fighter, standing still in the middle of a road, staring at the checkpoint she must go through to get to Nablus. Carrying her small suitcase, she walks up to the Israeli soldier on duty, while another soldier with his rifle pointed at Suha is visible in the blurred background of the frame. No words are spoken during this scene; the adversaries – Suha and the soldier – simply stare each other down as her bag is searched, her identification is checked, and after a slight nod from the border guard she walks away from the checkpoint. This opening overtly sets up the narrative's central trope of navigating contested spaces. From this moment on, checkpoints, fences and barricades are permanent features of the film; they form the backdrop to the action and often block the movement of the Palestinians. At all of these barriers, there are also Israeli soldiers with their guns aimed, occasionally firing, actively ensuring that people stay 'in their place' as decreed by the dominant power in the conflict. Suha does not get very far after she goes to check on her car at the repair shop before her taxi is stopped by another, unforeseen, road block manned by soldiers. Along with the rest of the community who are hindered by this obstacle, she has to take an alternate route by foot, demonstrating the extent to which the contested flow of Palestinian bodies is part of the everyday fabric of the landscape.

In both *Paradise Now* and *'71*, bodies are depicted as incarcerated, not literally so in prisons, as we know them, but essentially in religious and ethnic enclaves and ghettos. The space of conflict in Belfast and the West Bank has obliged inhabitants to remain in areas where identities and mobilities can be fixed, so the state, or the ruling forces like the police or army, can maintain control. As Elizabeth Grosz argues, ghettoization '[ensures] social conformity, or [positions] social marginality at a safe or insulated and bounded distance' (1998: 48), and it follows in these two films that the partitioning of space according to ethno-religious identity has clearly situated bodies in bounded environments. However, in the face of such internment, Gary Hook in *'71* and Said in *Paradise Now* transgress imposed borders and in so doing challenge the perception of their violent male bodies as inhuman. Their transgressive actions call to mind Michel de Certeau's concepts of tactics and strategy.

De Certeau maintains that strategy is within the purview of the powerful, those with authority, insofar as they are the people who control environments, while tactics are what the weak must employ when moving around space that is out of their control and is thus unpredictable (1984: xix). Both Hook and Said employ tactical navigation in their respective predicaments as they adapt to the spaces around them by necessity and seize opportunities where they can. For example, in *'71*, when the house raid spirals out of control on Falls Road and the British Army are forced to retreat to their barracks, Hook is left behind in the chaos. In fact, he is abandoned because in the fracas he flees from two IRA members who are shooting at him. Thus begins a lengthy chase scene through a warren of Belfast streets, alleys and houses, which leads Hook further and further into unknown enemy territory. This event sets up the film's central concern as the viewer tensely waits to see if Hook will safely emerge from the seemingly inescapable web that is Belfast. Similarly, in *Paradise Now*, Said is left behind in the

no man's land of the border zone between Israel and Palestine by his comrades when their operation is interrupted by soldiers. Like Hook, he also travels between the two enemy sides as he goes through the hole in the security fence from Palestine into Israel and back again. In these movements Said must tactically negotiate the spaces of the conflict he finds himself in because he has no control over them and the border territory is alien to him. In both films, the men are revealed to be disorientated in their new surroundings. For example, when the Israeli border guards begin to shoot at Said and Khaled they frantically run in different directions, not knowing where safety lies, which ultimately leads to their separation. In '71, Hook's disorientation in his environs is conveyed primarily through the shaky camera effect that places the audience inside the chase scene. This technique, while nauseating, operates to fuel the tension of the viewing experience and to amplify the instability and danger of Hook's situation.

But in tactically moving through the urban space, Hook becomes increasingly detached from his military function and his automated guise. In his very 'out-of-placeness' (Feldman 2000: 53), he becomes a humanised face of colonial violence. Not only does he literally shed his army fatigues at one point, but he also encounters people from both sides of this civil war. In so doing, he enters the interstitial spaces of the Troubles where he witnesses the criminal work of informers, collaborators and paramilitaries, which in turn offers him and the viewers a candid version of a conflict that does not have clear-cut good guys and bad guys. On this journey, which takes him from the Republican side of the city to the Unionist side and back again, Hook is made flesh. Even when he stabs a member of the Provisional-IRA, he does so not as a soldier in combat against an enemy, but rather as a hunted man choosing his own life over another's. In this scene, the audience are asked to empathise with Hook as the camera captures his poignant mixture of relief and grief in a close-up. He realises that he has defeated his pursuer, but is also shown staying with the dying man, holding his hand, almost tenderly, as he takes his last breath. Hook's is no robotic militant body trained to kill without remorse, but embodies a terrified man who has found himself in unfamiliar and hostile territory from which he may not escape.

Initially, when Said finds himself alone in *Paradise Now*, separated from Khaled, it seems as though he will nonetheless carry out his suicide mission. He is about to board a bus in Israel, ostensibly to detonate the bomb, but hesitates when he sees a child beside the driver. There is a lingering shot of Said's face and, in a similar fashion to '71, the camera exposes the significance of his hesitation through a close-up of his uncertain and troubled eyes. This narrative pause allows the opportunity to cause devastation to pass and Said's humanity is recovered. Being confronted with the other side of the conflict – in the form of a young Israeli child – wakes Said from his automated militancy. In Nablus he would not have come face to face with the 'enemy' in this way, so it is only through his traversing of the region, and crossing the border into Israel, that he becomes more human. It must be noted, however, that after he abandons the mission, he returns to Israel a second time where he does board a bus full of young soldiers. With no children in sight to make him think twice on this occasion, the film ends with just Said's eyes in the frame, this time they appear cold and blank, and then the screen cuts to white. It is possible of course that he has now detonated the bomb and the white

screen symbolises the heaven he believed he would ascend to as a martyr, but in a subversive act the screenwriter refuses to resolve this moment of crisis, leaving the audience to consider instead Said's inner journey up to that point.

Said's earlier admission to Suha, that his father was executed by the Fedayeen because he was working as a collaborator with the Israelis goes some way in answering the question of why this unreligious, and seemingly sane man would consider a suicide mission. His decision to become a suicide bomber might have been in some way related to a need to repay the debt of his father's disloyalty to Palestine. If this were the basis for Said's resolution, his actions echo Christopher Coker's claim that humanity can, in fact, be at the root of violence such as suicide bombing. Coker says, 'even suicide can be affirming. Western societies find this alienating, for we no longer allow citizens to find war life affirming or to affirm their own humanity through violent acts' (2002: 9). Said's possible suicide, it could therefore, be argued, may serve as an act of charity to compensate for his father's betrayal of his people, or an act of compassion in sympathy with his fellow Palestinians for whom, he earlier stated, living in Nablus is 'like life imprisonment'. Or, maybe the act is a political statement signalling that his own human body is all he has to fight with in this conflict. Regardless of the motivations or the various interpretations of the ending, *Paradise Now*, unusually and perhaps disconcertingly, portrays Said as both a potential inhumane suicide bomber and also a 'normal' human, not a crazed terrorist.

Conclusion

Paradise Now and *'71* are both examples of conflict cinema that foregrounds male bodies. As outlined, in these films, the screenwriters and filmmakers present visual reminders and motifs of the inhumanity of soldiers and militants in ethno-religious conflict, who are necessarily automated. The relentless force of Hook's, as well as Said's and Khaled's surroundings – both in terms of the specific conflict zones and the hegemonic systems the men answer to – regiment and dehumanises them, demonstrating the formidable control that can be wielded over individual bodies. However, once the screenwriters and filmmakers set up this established perception, they dismantle it by upsetting the overdetermined notion of the militant male body. Instead, they expose the paradox of the automated and dehumanised body that also cannot *not* be human in the lived space of conflict. In the two films, the camera maps the contested flow of bodies in occupied or hostile territory, for instance when the characters are constrained by or, at times, transgress the physical barriers put in their way. The maze-like prison of Belfast and the ruined shell of Nablus are exposed through regular images of deprivation and intimidation. The continual tactical navigation of this terrain by the characters shows how their human bodies are manipulated by dominant structures, while they endeavour through inhuman means to liberate themselves from this oppression. They also seek to liberate themselves from the political shambles that were/are the conflicts in Northern Ireland and Palestine-Israel. *'71* and *Paradise Now* are overtly political in their distillation of historical events and these original screenplays unashamedly require viewers to question their assumptions about the given conflicts and about the relationship between the state and the individual. The

oscillations of and decisions made by Gary Hook and by Said and Khaled throughout the narratives are symbolic of the variety of individual responses that exist to the dehumanising and re-humanising aspects of enduring conflict.

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