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**God's little acre and Belfast Chinatown:  
Diversity and Ethnic Place Identity in Belfast**

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**“God’s little acre” and  
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Diversity and Ethnic Place  
Identity in Belfast**  
Suzanna Chan

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## **“God’s little acre” and “Belfast Chinatown”: Diversity and Ethnic Place Identity in Belfast**

### **Summary**

For members of ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland, place making can mean negotiating challenges posed by tensions between the two majority communities of Catholic, nationalist, republican and Protestant, unionist, loyalist; tensions which are reflected in contests over place identity. In Belfast, the Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) has undertaken two building projects to service the needs of the Chinese community and to promote diversity, engaging in close consultation with local communities. Hong Ling Gardens Chinese Sheltered Housing Scheme provides culturally sensitive sheltered accommodation for Chinese elders. The second building will provide a Chinese Community and Resource Centre, and construction is planned to commence in December 2006. This paper highlights how the CWA has met challenges posed by territoriality, and anxieties in relation to perceived changes in politico-cultural place identities, within the complexities of Northern Ireland. It uses semi-structured interviews, cultural and social theory, consultation of meeting reports, and empirical observation.

**Keywords:** Northern Ireland, Diversity, Chinese Community, Place Identity, Racism

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## **Introduction**

The majority of residential areas in Northern Ireland's cities are segregated into districts that are predominantly Protestant or Catholic, and this has a bearing on the construction of place, the symbolic meanings it acquires, and the social relations enacted within it. Not only can the dynamic between place and ethnic identity contribute to polarization, and inhibit interaction between the two majority communities, it can also impact upon ethnic minority communities. For members of ethnic minorities, place making often means negotiating the challenges posed by tensions between the two majority communities of Catholic, nationalist, republican and Protestant, unionist, loyalist, tensions which are reflected in contests over place identity. In Belfast, The Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) has undertaken two projects to establish buildings which service the needs of the Chinese community, and in the process have engaged in close consultation with local communities in both nationalist and loyalist areas. Hong Ling Gardens Chinese Sheltered Housing Scheme opened in late 2004 and provides purpose-built, culturally sensitive sheltered accommodation for 59 Chinese elders. The second building will provide a Chinese Community and Resource Centre, and construction is planned to commence in December 2006, on the Stranmillis Embankment in South Belfast. The aims of this paper are to highlight how the CWA met challenges posed by territoriality, and anxieties in relation to perceived changes in dominant politico-cultural place identities, within the complexities of Northern Ireland. It maps how being identified differently in relation to the white majority communities, can structure relations within a particular socio-political context, where social relations and residential spaces are bifurcated according to the sectarian division. In this paper, treatment of the case studies is confined to an overview level, and therefore the problematic terminologies of 'ethnic minority' and 'ethnic majority', are resorted to, although in acknowledgment that they reveal nothing of the heterogeneities of the groupings they define. The research for this paper comprises semi-structured interviews, cultural and social theory, consultation of meeting reports, and empirical observation. This paper is a summary of research findings and observations to date, which will be further developed in future work.

### **Place identity and ethnic residential segregation in Belfast: a summary.**

Over the period of the Northern Ireland Conflict, intense sectarian violence and antagonism led to widespread population movement in Belfast; although ethnic segregation has been a feature of the city since its foundation. In the present day, thirty-five of Belfast's fifty-one electoral wards have a population that is at least 90 percent Catholic or Protestant, with substantial integration amongst only two middle-class groups in districts North and South of the city (Bollens 2000: 195; Nic Craith 2002:13). Residential segregation is most prevalent and intense in working class areas (Boal 1982), which have borne the brunt of the Conflict. Considerable scholarly research has been produced on the significance of a politics of locality and place to the social and ethnic identities of Northern Ireland's two majority communities (see for example: Boal, Murray and Poole 1976; Boal 1982, 1994; Bollens 2000; McAuley 1994; Murtagh 2002; and Doherty and Poole 1995). However, examination of the place-making strategies, and place-identities amongst ethnic minority communities has been virtually absent from these analyses. Thirty years ago, Frederick Boal included minorities in a rhetorical capacity, hinting at some of the challenges they might face when he ventured to observe that

The Catholic-Protestant conflict is perhaps further exacerbated by the fact that there has been no recent influx into Belfast of new immigrant ethnics who might have performed a 'useful' role as recipients of displaced Catholic-Protestant antagonisms (Boal 1976: 122).

Presumably, Boal means 'useful' by becoming the focus for aggression that the majority communities would otherwise expend on each other. This logic of considering racism or hostility against ethnic minorities as simply a distraction from, or substitute for what would otherwise be sectarian aggression between the two majorities is highly problematic. Ethnic minorities, sectarianism and antagonism are at the centre of recent discussions surrounding growing levels of racist violence since the advent of the Peace Process. However, this period has also seen a

relative increase in the numbers of ethnic minorities (white and 'non-white') in Northern Ireland, which is linked to processes of globalization beyond local politics, and so it is not simply a matter of a sectarianism kept in check by the Peace Process being converted into racism.<sup>1</sup> Jarman and Monaghan succinctly outline the nuances of the issue in the wake of paramilitary ceasefires,

As sectarian residential segregation has continued to increase it is likely that some people have identified the minorities communities as the new 'other' and turned their attentions away from the Protestant or Catholic minority towards the Chinese and Indian communities who are beginning to create new interfaces in some working class communities. This is not to argue that racism and sectarianism are exactly the same thing but that they have common roots in a society which does not tolerate difference, which is focused in upon itself, is insecure and which accepts violence and abuse as a broadly legitimate form of expression (Jarman and Monaghan 2003: 21).

Members of ethnic minority groups have been producing crucial empirical and theoretical work on exclusion and racism in Northern Ireland, and promoting race-relations for decades. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce was established in 1983 in response to the difficulties faced by the Chinese Community, and founded the Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) in 1986. The CWA has a reputation as one of the most effective Chinese support organisations in the UK (Manwah Watson and McKnight 1998: 132). It promotes community relations and equal opportunities, monitors racist harassment and police responses, develops anti-racism training, and provides a range of services for the Chinese community in Northern Ireland. The CWA estimate the Chinese community to number approximately 8,000 people, who constitute 51% of the region's total ethnic minority population.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, it would be more accurate to speak in the plural, of Chinese communities, as the singular noun belies the diversity of people differentiated by factors such as gender, generation, age, and class, in addition to language and region of provenance. Chinese people began to settle in Northern Ireland in the early 1960s, and arrived primarily from Hong Kong and the New Territories, and mostly worked in the catering industry by establishing restaurants and take-away food outlets, and providing the labour force within this sector.<sup>3</sup> There are in the present day, third generation Chinese in Northern Ireland and an elderly first generation population who have been settled for over three decades, in addition to more recent arrivals from Mainland China.

Hong Ling Gardens Chinese Sheltered Housing Scheme was conceived in response to the needs of Chinese senior citizens for culturally sensitive, sheltered local authority housing in Northern Ireland. Anna Lo, Chair of the CWA, states that in its absence, senior members of the Chinese community had no option but to leave their families in Northern Ireland for schemes in Scotland and other parts of the UK, with Chinese speaking staff and culturally sensitive provision, which afford residents self-reliance and a richer social life (Lo 2005). The CWA identified a need for sheltered housing for Chinese elders in 1990, and Belfast Improved Housing (BIH) were willing to develop the project, subject to sufficient demand, which the CWA demonstrated in consultation with the Chinese community. However, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) was initially unsympathetic in the light of a policy that housing provision must be based on need for housing. This does not acknowledge the need for a special scheme for ethnic minorities, although as Lo points out, it is inconsistent with the reality in Northern Ireland where 98 percent of housing is segregated. Through lobbying the NIHE, the CWA made contact with the Chief Executive who supported the initiative. As a result, BIH proposed premises in Ava Avenue, a street in

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Hainsworth observes how Patrick Yu, the Chair of the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, Eleanor McKnight, Race Relations Officer with the CWA and the Guardian newspaper's David Sharrock linked a rise in racist harassment to the ceasefires, though both Yu and the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary and predecessor to the current Police Service of Northern Ireland) point to "crude economic gain" as the reason for attacks (Hainsworth 1998: 45).

<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, there is some debate over numbers. The 2001 Census indicated 4,145, while the Multi-Cultural Resource Centre estimate between 7,000 and 8,000, contending that factors such as mistrust of official forms and language difficulties could mean that people do not complete the census forms (Jarman and Monaghan 2003: 14).

<sup>3</sup> See Manwah Watson and McKnight for a detailed account of the specific conditions under which Chinese migration from Hong Kong to the UK took place in the 1950s and 1960s.

Ballynafeigh. Both of the building projects are located in South Belfast and involve four residential areas directly adjacent to the Ormeau Road, a major artery which links inner city working class residential areas, mixed student accommodation, and middle-class suburbs at the outskirts of the city.<sup>4</sup> Ballynafeigh is in the upper Ormeau, and is a 'mixed' area.

The CWA conducted public consultations with local people in Ballynafeigh, who expressed considerable hostility to the sheltered housing scheme, some of which took a racist nature. Lo states, "I remember one elderly gentleman saying, 'No harm to you chinks, but we don't want you here' " (Lo 2005). Consequently, the CWA decided to look elsewhere, and although Lo feels that they should have persevered with the site in Ballynafeigh, priority had to be given to the safety of the elderly residents of the proposed scheme who could face intimidation from locals.<sup>5</sup> The CWA was offered a site in the Markets, a Catholic nationalist enclave in South Belfast, where Hong Ling Gardens Chinese Sheltered Housing Scheme now stands. More lobbying of the NIHE and Belfast City Council resulted in the allocation of a larger site, and the initiative grew into two housing schemes, one for the Chinese community, and larger premises for members of the local community.

This was a productive strategy on the part of BIH and begat a win-win situation, as Lo points out. Housing needs of both communities were serviced, and the CWA and the Chinese community could not be perceived as having "parachuted in to take the land" (Lo 2005). The CWA inputted into the design of the building, and also conducted successful community relations work with local white community, and so far no problems have arisen between locals and Chinese residents. Hong Ling Gardens, "hong ling" translates as "health and peace", provides *dwelling* for Chinese elderly in a culturally specific way. Families and social companions are relatively close at hand, and the location's proximity to amenities including the local market give potential outlets for everyday spatial practices. Larger windows take account of the need for ventilation because of a preference for stir-frying food, the kitchens have rice stores, and there is a Chinese garden. A pair of stone lions flanks the main doorway, signs are bilingual, and in respect of a traditional superstition of the number 4, it does not feature in room numbering. At a demographic level, not only has Hong Ling Gardens stemmed the flow of Chinese elderly to Scotland and the UK, but has also reunited some families by giving parents the possibility to come from Hong Kong to be near their children (Lo).

The CWA had planned that the sheltered housing scheme would also accommodate a Chinese Community and Resource Centre, however fundraising for the centre was incomplete at the time of building so this aspect of the plan was unrealised. By developing the Chinese Community and Resource Centre, the CWA argue they will be better able to meet the social, health, educational, economic and other needs of Chinese individuals and groups regionally. The Centre will provide offices for CWA staff, a hall, library, crèche, training room, conference room, playgroup facilities, an outdoor playground and car park. The CWA has four overall aims, and the Chinese Community and Resource Centre is strongly linked to the realization of Aim Three: "To promote diversity, equality and mutual understanding and the elimination of racism" (CWA 2005). The Chinese Community and Resource Centre for Northern Ireland will be developed "as a place of welcome and inclusion for all cultures and traditions"

- by developing it as a resource for engaging with other communities and promoting mutual understanding.
- by promoting the Chinese Community and Resource Centre as a venue for cultural

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<sup>4</sup> See Boal 1982, for a study of demographic changes linked to public housing provision in the area, pp. 264-265.

<sup>5</sup> Ballynafeigh has a mixed population in terms of social class and religion, comprising work class and middle class households, students, professionals, Protestants and Catholics. A survey published in 1995 indicated a higher than average level of mixed marriages and integration, but observed that there can be tensions around the Twelfth of July. Nonetheless, the study revealed that the majority liked living in a mixed area (Mullan 1995: 10)

expression by all (ibid).

In late 2003, the CWA identified a building to purchase and refurbish into a Chinese Community and Resource Centre, on Donegall Pass, which is a Protestant, unionist, loyalist area off the Ormeau Road, roughly a quarter of a mile from the Markets. Donegall Pass comprises a diminished community of an estimated 2,000 residents, which represents a sharp decline in population from 5,000 since the late 1960s.<sup>6</sup> Seventy one percent rent property from the NIHE and levels of unemployment fluctuate between 20% and 25% (Officer 2001: 3). There is also a relatively longstanding local Chinese community of approximately 23 households within Donegall Pass (Jarman 2004: 19), who stand outside the loyalist/unionist identity with which the area is linked (Officer 2001: 3). There are several Chinese-owned businesses, mostly restaurants, on Donegall Pass, from which staff could have easy access to the Chinese Community and Resource Centre. In keeping with their policy of promoting good relations, the CWA involved the Donegall Pass Community Forum in their plans, although there was no actual obligation for them to do so. Through this contact it became clear that some local residents had concerns about the proposal. Further discussions were held between the CWA and members of the Donegall Pass Community Forum, and it was agreed that a process of open consultation to allow the CWA to explain their plans and engage in dialogue with the local residential and business communities would take place. The CWA also commissioned Neil Jarman, a consultant from the Centre for Conflict Study to facilitate the consultation, who produced a document *Report on the Consultation about proposals for a Chinese Community Centre on Donegall Pass Belfast* (2004), which is drawn from in this paper.

The consultation, in June 2004, comprised three open sessions for residents of Donegall Pass, for local politicians and church leaders, the local business community and one for Chinese residents and members of the Chinese business community. The meetings evidenced prevalent objections from the local white residential community, which relate to the impact of economic and social processes on the built environment, and to concerns about place-identity and symbolic spatial meanings.

#### **“God’s Little Acre” and “Belfast Chinatown”: Forming an exclusionary place-identity.**

Jarman details four main themes which emerged from the concerns expressed by the members of the local white residential community. These relate to the negative impact of free-market development on the local community; a perception that the Chinese Community Resource Centre would be better placed, as a regional centre, to compete for resources with existing local projects; a view that the proposed centre would increase segregation and weaken generally good relations between local Chinese and white residential communities; and concerns that the identity of Donegall Pass as Protestant should be preserved (Jarman 2004: 1). These concerns reveal the local community’s insecurities in the face of changes to the immediate built environment through processes of commercial redevelopment and privatization, which they are neither in a position to influence nor benefit from,<sup>7</sup> and a desire to retain overall control over the place-identity of Donegall Pass as Protestant, loyalist, and implicitly, as white. Although there are overlaps between some of these themes, not all bear a relationship to the CWA’s proposals. Donegall Pass is located close to the city’s retail and social hubs, and has consequently borne the negative effects of intensive levels of market-led redevelopment. The gentrification and commercialization of a residential working class area and its environs has brought an increased traffic flow, parking

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<sup>6</sup> Donegall Pass can be traced to the provision of housing for workers employed in the heavy industries, shipbuilding, the nearby Gasworks (the industries that created the Protestant working class) and the retail outlets of the city centre, in the late nineteenth century (Officer: 2). In societies not subjected to Conflict-related ethnic residential segregation, Donegall Pass and similarly depleted areas would, according to Bollens, transform from one ethnic group, or land use, to another. However, in Belfast, “the maintenance of community viability is intimately connected to the protection of political territoriality” (Bollens 2000: 214).

<sup>7</sup> Graham observes that the loyalist working class perceives no relevance to itself in “globalizing neo-liberalism and its knowledge and technology driven economies”, which have emerged in Northern Ireland’s current post-industrial phase (Graham 2004: 490).

problems, reduced housing stock, and pushed property prices beyond the reach of locals. However, all residents of the area, white and non-white, experience these negative effects. Regardless of how opaque the relationship between redevelopment issues and the CWA's proposed centre may be, it was perceived by some white residents as another example of unwanted change. Some associated Chinese-owned businesses in the area, for which the CWA are not accountable, with unwelcome changes to its place identity and visual streetscape, thereby indicating a polarization of attitudes around notions of 'insiders' (white Protestant, unionists, loyalists) and 'outsiders' (Chinese). Polarities involve stereotypes. One resident complained that Donegall Pass "used to be known as God's little acre, we now feels it's becoming the Belfast Chinatown" (Jarman 14).<sup>8</sup> "God's little acre" is an idealisation of place as white and Christian; while its opposite, "Chinatown", conjures up a place of difference. "Chinatown", like all stereotypes is instantly recognisable regardless of where it crops up, whether London, San Francisco, or Rome. It names a place of strangeness in the midst of what is considered ordinary and familiar, which exerts attraction for visitors or tourists who wish to sample foreign food, and partake of an 'exotic' ambiance. It can encompass a set of clichés that calcify Chinese people into stereotypes, deny any interweave of Chinese and white residents, and distract from how Chinese people who live in the area, or work there, have social, spatial and emotional relationships with it.

The remark then, encapsulated how residents could resort to representations of an idealised past which might yet be retrieved, and reveals how Chinese residents, workers and business people could be configured as a stereotypical presence. The proposed Chinese Community and Resource Centre was seen less as a resource warranted by the local Chinese residents of Donegall Pass, and the wider Chinese community, than as another blow to the territorial control of a majority ethnic group that feels itself besieged.<sup>9</sup> The local community in Donegall Pass has experienced the immediate effects of the Conflict since the late 1960s, and as in other loyalist/unionist districts, responses have taken a militarised form which included the emergence of local paramilitary groups perceived to be engaged in community defence against threats from republicans (Officer 2). Conflicts between paramilitary groups and others in the community can ensue through racketeering and punishment beatings and shootings (Officer: *ibid*).

There has been racist hostility against the Chinese community in Donegall Pass.<sup>10</sup> Some of this can be contextualised in terms of a sense of competition over scarce resources such as housing (Officer: 3), which can lead to resentment when the more longstanding, or larger group naturalises its right to resources over another group that is perceived to be 'outsider'. The CWA

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<sup>8</sup> Some residents expressed a suspicion that 'planners' want to turn the area into a Chinatown. The 'visibility' of ethnic businesses perceived as a threat to identity in some areas, is lauded as a positive expression of 'culture' by some urban designers. In their proposal for a 'cultural corridor' for Belfast, Gaffikin, Morrissey and Sterrett list diverse ethnic restaurants amongst the galleries and craft shops, as an attractive mix which would ensure an "animated ambiance" (Gaffikin, Morrissey and Sterrett 2001: 153).

<sup>9</sup> A 'siege' mentality and defensive territoriality has been associated with Protestant communities (see Bollens: 228), and with unionism and loyalism. According to Shirlow and McGovern, the loss of socio-economic status since the decline of the heavy industries is perceived as an example of "Catholic besiegement" (rather than understood as a reflection of global economic restructuring), aided by the British state which has failed a community that loyally served it in two World Wars and against Republicans, hence defence emerges as "the primary discourse defining the mediating practice between the Self and Other". (Shirlow and McGovern 1997:178-179). The customary call for "communal solidarity in the face of a perceived threat of the 'other'", also represses intra-communal heterogeneities (Shirlow and McGovern 1997: 5).

<sup>10</sup> It is established that there is a history of racist hostility against the Chinese community in Donegall Pass. In 1995-96, there was serious vandalism of property in the area and some Chinese residents were intimidated out (Manwah Watson and Mc Knight 1998: 137). Thirty-seven racist incidents were recorded in the Donegall Pass area between 1996 and 2001, and the Chinese Community featured prominently in the number of recorded incidents (Jarman and Monaghan (2003: 39). Hainsworth observes how the Progressive Unionist Party (which has a good record of supporting minorities) provided important role in mediation, in collaboration with the CWA (1998: 42). By 2003/04, the number of reported racial incidents had quintupled, with the worst record in South Belfast, which experienced 147 incidents (House of Commons 2005: 7).



have played a positive role in promoting good relations in the past, resulting in less harassment of Chinese residents, who are in turn more willing to use local amenities (Officer: 3). These include an existing community centre in Donegall Pass, established as a result of intensive community activity and the efforts of the Donegall Pass Residents Forum. Members of the Chinese community use the Donegall Pass Community Centre, which is a significant achievement in the context of a sometimes fraught relationship. There has been low-level harassment of Chinese residents in the past due to fears of an incursion of larger numbers driven by myth-making and rumour, which the community centre manager has played an active, positive role in countering (Officer: 3). During the consultation meetings, some white residents said they were pleased that Chinese residents used the Donegall Pass centre and objected to a Chinese community centre on the grounds that its provision would lead to an increase in segregation and a decline in cross-community relations, which were already in need of enhancement. Chinese people attend a weekly luncheon club for the elderly, and English classes, and it was feared that were these to take place in separate premises, integration would decrease and the loss of users would undermine the viability of the Donegall Pass community centre (Jarman: 11). Members of the Chinese community in Donegall Pass acknowledged that a Chinese community centre could lower levels of contact with the wider community. However there was strong support for the CWA proposals for resources to meet the requirements of the community, who felt they received little in return for their contribution to the local economy, and raised issues of isolation, and a lack of social space (Jarman: 20). Effectively, the community centre would have provided the Chinese minority a sense of spatial ownership and identification, and the CWA with a base for promoting cross-community relations. The CWA case for a separate community centre pivoted on the inadequacy of existing resources to service a much wider range of needs or allow for activities to take place on a regular basis. There were also plans for activities that would appeal to the white residential community and promote cultural exchange and dialogue.

While the consultation meetings were not well attended by the white residential community, Lo observes that it appeared a larger number had objections. There was a vicious leafleting campaign,<sup>11</sup> and propaganda recalled how the Donegall Pass community had fought hard against Catholics, and now had to fight the Chinese (Lo 2005). The CWA countered this campaign by delivering a letter to all households in the area. According to Lo, the Donegall Pass Community Forum also held a meeting with local residents during which a lot of racist comments were made. A transcript of the meeting was presented to the CWA, who had not been invited, as evidence of local opinion. The chair stated, "well, Anna [Lo, Chair of the CWA], it's bad luck for you, you've received a lot of opposition. But it's great for us, it has given us a cause to unite the community" (Lo). Loyalist paramilitaries threatened the CWA not to go against the wishes of local people; and it was claimed that residents would take to the streets in protest if the proposals for the Chinese Community Resource Centre went ahead.

Intervention came from Belfast City Council, who offered the CWA an alternative of any City Council site in South Belfast. Michael McGimpsey of the Ulster Unionist Party presented the contact for considering a site and the CWA also engaged in extensive party-by-party lobbying. The CWA proposed a vacant site on Stranmillis Embankment, in the Holylands area off the lower Ormeau Road, and presented their plans to the Council, who voted unanimously to allocate the site and granted a 25-year lease with an option to renew for another 25 years. The Chinese Community Resource Centre will be purpose built to a total cost of £1,133,600, most of which was raised by the end of 2005. Clearly, this stage of the project contrasts sharply with the Donegall Pass phase, where the local politicians who had participated in the consultation showed no initiative in promoting more positive dialogues to improve relations (Lo 2004: 2). However, the CWA felt full cross-party support existed amongst politicians for the plans for the Stranmillis Embankment site. The CWA have also engaged in consultations with the Lower Ormeau Road Residents Association and the Holylands Regeneration Association and have found them very supportive of the proposal (Lo 2005).

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<sup>11</sup> Patrick Yu confirms that the leaflet targeted the proposed Chinese Community Resource centre reveals links between some paramilitaries and Combat 18 and the BBP (2005: 20).

## **Racism and Sectarianism.**

Why have residents in the Lower Ormeau, and the Holylands reacted differently to those in Donegall Pass? The Lower Ormeau is predominantly a Catholic, nationalist area and is immediately adjacent to the Holylands, a network of streets given over to a large portion of privately rented accommodation with a mixed, transient student population, and this can contribute to a more fluid sense of place identity.<sup>12</sup> Hong Ling Gardens is located in the Markets, a predominantly Catholic, nationalist, republican area and has not met with antagonism from the local community, thus, if different formulations of ethnic identity appear to be a factor, crucially however, without reliable research it would be extremely facile to infer that nationalist communities are more emphatic towards ethnic minorities. Chinese residential or business communities have not been established within the Markets area, and Hong Ling Gardens was built concurrently with the construction of larger premises for members of the local white community. Evidence shows that racism and racist attacks feature in both Protestant and Catholic areas. There are also more ethnic minorities in Protestant areas as they often have much more vacant property at lower market prices (2002: 40). The House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee document *The Challenge of Diversity: Hate Crime in Northern Ireland* (2004-05), states that housing policy appears to impact on hate crime and notes the prevalence of race hate crime in loyalist areas where ethnic minorities tend to be housed, due to a relative shortage of stock in nationalist or republican areas (2005: 12).

Sectarianism and racism are not identical. Sectarianism is a mode of discrimination and of determining social actions based on religious and politico-cultural differences. Racism is based on supposed physical differences, although 'race' is a socially constructed system of differencing bodies; however, racism can also draw on cultural differences. During period from 2003-2004, 147 racial incidents occurred in South Belfast, with a high proportion in loyalist areas against Chinese people.

### **Points towards conclusions**

- The Chinese community in Donegall Pass expressed a strong desire for a Chinese Community and Resource Centre, to provide social space, support, and reduce isolation, and felt the site on Donegall Pass would make an ideal location.
- The wide range of needs of the Chinese community could not be serviced by the community centre that exists in Donegall Pass.
- Other ethnic minorities across Northern Ireland have their own community centres. The Donegall Pass residents had themselves fought for their own community centre rather than share a centre with Sandy Row, a nearby Protestant, unionist, loyalist community.
- The Chinese Welfare Association were not required to consult with local residents, yet carried out six months of consultation to explain the proposal and address resident's concerns.
- A large number of the local white residents remained opposed to the proposed Chinese Community and Resource Centre. Four main themes emerged from the concerns of locals over

- Development
- Resources
- Relationships
- Identity

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<sup>12</sup> However, there are frequently tensions between students and residents caused by some student's anti-social behaviour.

- The Chinese Welfare Association were subjected to racism, intimidation, and threatened with violence by loyalist paramilitaries, and street protests from local residents, if they proceeded with plans.

### Observations.

For Lo, the opposition to the proposed centre on Donegall Pass is about racism, and unwillingness “to share with ethnic minority people in the area” (2004: 2), and there is considerable evidence to support this. Factors also emerged in relation to the Donegall Pass plans which cannot be pinned down to racism, but were based on the concerns of white residents that a separate community centre would decrease integration, or that by emptying the Donegall Pass Community Centre of its Chinese users, an already vulnerable local resource would be jeopardized. This begs the question of whether, through more progressive political and religious leadership of the white residential community, they could have entered into a positive dialogue with the CWA, to explore alternative outcomes. These would need to be based on cooperation and respect for different requirements, rather than an expectation that the minority will simply assimilate into an agenda set by the majority. Instead of fruitful dialogue however, a hostile, belligerent element determined the outcome of the plans for the Donegall Pass site, and hardened the boundaries of this area on exclusionary lines. Members of an economically marginalised white working class community experiencing a decline in communality were galvanised, by some elements, to recoup a mythical ‘traditional’ place identity against an ‘Other’ represented as ‘Chinatown’. A sense of marginalisation in the face of economic restructuring and political advances by republicans, and abandonment by middle-class unionists, may be a significant factor toward exclusionary practices, and present a challenge to ethnic minorities’ place-making, in white working class loyalist areas. The successes of Hong Ling Gardens and the Chinese Community Resource Centre in its Stranmillis Embankment phase show what can be achieved when there is progressive leadership, dialogue and mutual respect. This paper is intended as an introduction to the case studies and the factors involved. Future research will follow two directions by examining the role of the State in resolving such contestations; and how the case studies present challenges to extant theoretical paradigms.

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