

Humboldt Universität zu Berlin  
Centre for British Studies  
Prof Dr Gesa Stedman

**Filmic Representations of the Troubles in  
Northern Ireland:  
Analysing *Mickybo and Me* (2005) and *Belfast* (2021)**

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**Melanie Ludewig**

Matriculation Number: 612873

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Address: Schwedter Straße 50, 10435 Berlin

E-mail: melanie.ludewig@web.de

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## **1. Introduction**

For a long time, films about the Troubles have been ‘a staple of Northern Ireland drama’ (Barraclough 2005, A5). Being usually a thriller or a revenge drama (McIlroy 1998, 1), the films used to feature bombings, raids, and kidnappings in the city of Belfast (Schwerter 2016, 105). The Northern Irish capital was thereby often characterised as a grim and dark place shaken by the sectarian conflict between unionist Protestants and republican Catholics (Schwerter 2017, 13). As far as the main characters are concerned, they were mostly male adults (Schwerter 2016, 107) who were not seldomly involved in the fighting themselves (McLoone 2006, 62–64; McLoone 2008, 159). The plot, in turn, made frequent use of tropes like the divided city narrative and a love-across-the-barricades-story (Barton 2004, 166; Hill 2006, 201; Schwerter 2022, 16).

Over time, the Troubles film genre evolved with its inherent features (Schwerter 2022, 50–52, 60–61). Thereby, the resulting image of Northern Ireland, the Troubles, and the city of Belfast was created and continuously shaped by the British and American film industries (McLoone 2006, 61, 64). This was not least because there was no flourishing Northern Irish film industry up until the 1990s (Schwerter 2022, 31). Before, films about Northern Ireland and the Troubles were increasingly made outside the country (Ibid. 32) with cities like London, Dublin, and Manchester serving as stand-in locations for Belfast for safety reasons (Hill 2006, 213; Schwerter 2017, 14).

However, this changed during the peace process of the 1990s. With the so-called ‘ceasefire cinema’ (Schwerter 2016, 107), a generation of mostly locally-produced films came about that allowed for a more experimental and less tentative treatment of the Troubles after 1994 (Barton 2004, 174). Not only did these films opt for different genres (including comedies and social dramas) when dealing with the Troubles (Barton 2019, 142; Hill 2006, 196; Schwerter 2017, 14), but also were they able to reflect on the sectarian conflict in a more hopeful manner (Schwerter 2016, 107), while presenting a modern and consumer-driven version of Belfast (Barton 2004, 174). According to McIlroy (1998), these productions differed from the former British and American films because they were increasingly made by Irish people (2), many of whom grew up in the context of the Troubles (Barraclough 2005, A5) and could, therefore, bring in their own experience.

In addition, a combination of policies and funding means supported local filmmaking at a time when the de-escalation of the sectarian conflict enabled an increasingly better political climate in Northern Ireland (Schwerter 2022, 31–32). Among these measures were the foundation of the Northern Irish Film Council providing funding for local productions, a rise in Arts Council funding together with the expansion of the national lottery funds to the region, and the BBC Extending Choice Policy (Ibid. 32; Barton 2004, 162).

When it comes to the substance of ceasefire cinema, many of the films explore what happens after the sectarian conflict and embrace the concept of new masculinity with men overcoming their violent past, while engaging in romantic relationships and finding a job in the service industry. This can be seen in films like *Divorcing Jack* (David Caffrey, 1998), *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* (Dudi Appleton, 1999), and *An Everlasting Piece* (Berry Levinson, 2000) (Barton 2019, 142). Other films like *Titanic Town* (Roger Michell, 1998) and *The Mighty Celt* (Pearse Elliott, 2005), have meanwhile started to put the experience of children and adolescents centre stage, an aspect that has until then often been neglected (Ibid. 141–142.; Schwerter 2017, 107).

With *Mickybo and Me* (2005) by Terry Loane and *Belfast* (2021) by Kenneth Branagh, I have chosen two films that seem to have been influenced by the approach of telling the story of the Troubles from a different angle. While *Mickybo and Me*'s release date allows for the film to be categorised as ceasefire cinema, *Belfast* is a more recent example of treating the Troubles in film. Yet, both films can be subsumed under the coming-of-age genre and focus on the theme of growing up in Belfast in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the Troubles erupted in Northern Ireland. What is interesting about them is that they present the action through the eyes of the child protagonists. Thereby, the films steer the audience's attention more towards the impact of the conflict on children. Apart from that, the films have been chosen because both were produced by Belfast-born directors that experienced the Troubles firsthand. Regarding their production and reception contexts, it should be noted that while *Mickybo and Me* is essentially based on the theatre play *Mojo Mickybo* (1998) by Owen McCafferty, *Belfast* was mostly inspired by Branagh's biography.

By comparing *Mickybo and Me* and *Belfast* based on their representation of Belfast as a home, I would like to answer the following question: How do the two films represent the Belfast of the late 1960s and early 1970s as a home and how do they reflect on the act of leaving the Troubles-ridden city? In doing so, the thesis aims at

adding to the scholarly conversation by providing an alternative portrayal of Belfast in film differing from both – the predominant image of the dark and grim city as featured in the earlier thrillers as well as the new consumer-driven version of Belfast as portrayed in many of the ceasefire films. Here, McLoone (2008) identified what he calls ‘a substantial representational gap’ (66). Besides, the thesis produces a valuable analysis concerning the representation of the Troubles in films focusing on children. Concentrating on the theme of home further allows for a close examination of the motif of leaving Belfast – a decision that many people had to make at the time (Browne 2019).

To allow for a balanced analysis that bears in mind both the content of the two films as well as their context, the theoretical part of the thesis comprises a theoretical and a historical background that set the scene for the subsequent film analysis. The theoretical background, first, introduces the notion of home as a spatial concept by reverting to the term ‘Heimat’. Here, the German cultural concept will be defined as an analytical tool for the subsequent film analysis consisting of three main parameters, namely the physical home, the social home, and the ideological home. In addition, the theoretical part provides insights into the representation of home on film. Therefore, I will make use of the concept of representation as developed by Stuart Hall in his article *The Work of Representation* (1997), before examining how cinematic practice makes use of the setting, location, and space to create a notion of home. Lastly, the chapter includes a section on the coming-of-age genre which, over the last few years, has gained in popularity with filmmakers and audiences alike (Fox 2017, 37; Münschke 2018).

The historical background, then, provides an overview of the origin and development of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. It thereby draws on the living conditions in Belfast at the time of the conflict and its consequences. Apart from that, the chapter will also focus on the treatment of the Troubles in film, the development of the Troubles film genre, and its inherent conventions. Regarding the literature, the thesis consults key works on (Northern) Irish Cinema (Barton 2004, Hill 2006, McLoone 2008, Monahan 2015) and the history of the Northern Irish Troubles (Morrissey and Smyth 2002; Mulholland 2020; Murphy 1978; O’Leary and McGarry 2016).

As far as the main part is concerned, the two films will be analysed against the backdrop of their representation of Belfast as a home. Home, in this case, does not only imply the physical home but also the social- and ideological components inherent to the concept. The analysis will, therefore, not only look at how the respective neighbourhoods are presented in the films, but it will also pay attention to the children's social environment, i.e., their family, friends, and neighbours, as well as the everyday practices and rituals that shape their lives. Moreover, *Mickybo and Me* and *Belfast* will be assessed on their usage of conventions inherent to the Troubles film genre. While the analysis will first and foremost be based on the two films, I will make use of additional resources such as film reviews (Dwyer 2005, Katz 2021), interviews (Armitstead 2022a, Clarke 2005), podcasts (Feinberg 2022, Horowitz 2022), and academic texts (Bastiat 2015, Beckett 2017).

Eventually, the analysis will be conducted in the shape of a partial, symmetric, convergent, cultural comparison<sup>1</sup> treating both films to an equal extent. Thereby, the focus will be on teasing out commonalities between the two films to compile a set of qualities inherent to the representation of Troubles-ridden Belfast as a home. After all, the comparison aims to draw out how and why *Mickybo and Me* and *Belfast* do not fit into the two established types of representing Belfast in Troubles films. In doing so, I would like to point out how a topical focus such as the concept of home can widen the scholarly conversation about the filmic representation of the Troubles and the city of Belfast. Perhaps, the thesis might even encourage further research to close the 'substantial representational gap' identified by McLoone.

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I follow a comparative methodology drawn out by Dannemann 2019, Haupt 1996, and Osterhammel 1996.

## **2. Theoretical Background: The Concept of Home in the Coming-of-Age Film**

As has been mentioned before, the theory chapter comprises the introduction of home as a spatial concept, insights into cinematic practice, and genre theory. While chapter 2.1 serves to structure the subsequent analysis of *Mickybo and Me* (2005) and *Belfast* (2021), chapter 2.2 examines how cinematic practice makes use of the setting, location, and space to create a notion of home. Finally, chapters 2.3 and 2.4 focus on the coming-of-age genre and its implementation in film.

### **2.1 Home as a Spatial Concept**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term ‘home’ as follows: ‘The place where one lives or was brought up, with reference to the feelings of belonging, comfort, etc., associated with it.’ (“Home,” def. 2.b). As such, the term describes an emotional connection between people and their homes (Scharnowski 2019, 230). One could say that there is a certain sense of place about home, i.e., ‘a clear character or identity belonging to or associated with [home]’ (“Sense,” def. P4.f). As an attempt to combine these two notions within one analytical concept, this chapter introduces the term ‘Heimat’. In terms of structure, I will first explain the meaning of Heimat and the sense of nostalgia inherent to it. Then, I will define the term Heimat as a spatial concept as used in this thesis, before pointing out the term’s reception within the academic community and its political controversy. The chapter aims at opening the concept of Heimat for film analysis and providing an analytical tool for the main part of the thesis.

So, what exactly is Heimat? When translated into English, the term Heimat has various referents like ‘home’, ‘homeland’, ‘native region’, ‘hometown’, ‘birthplace’, ‘nation’ etc. (Blickle 2004, 4). As a result, the concept has frequently been denoted to be ‘typically German’ (Scharnowski 2019, 11). However, as Blickle (2004) points out, this is not the case (2). While equivalents do not exist in either English or French, other, often Slavic, languages do have a word for Heimat (Ibid.). Historically, the ‘culture of Heimat’ (Moltke 2005, 7) started in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with the writings of the romantics reacting to the developments of the progressing industrialisation in Germany (Krockow 1990, 58). The rise in technology and increasing urbanisation forced millions of people to relocate constituted the loss of a familiar environment, a certain attitude towards life, and identity<sup>2</sup> for many of them (Ibid. 57-58).

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<sup>2</sup> It should be mentioned that the terms Heimat and identity are often used alongside each other. Blickle (2004), e.g., points out that the notion of Heimat rests on a ‘spatial conception of identity’ (15). As such, it serves to arrange space, time, and the self to produce meaning. Researchers dealing with Heimat (see



It is in this sense that the term *Heimat* holds a sense of nostalgia. According to Woods (2022), people have always mourned change and longed for previous versions of home (3). According to her, nostalgia offers a comfortable way to deal with the fear of innovation, as reverting to ‘a story that might tell us who we are and where it is we are going’ (Ibid. 4) provides us with a sense of security. This security is based on what she calls the ‘benefit of hindsight’ (Ibid. 10), i.e., knowing from experience what can be expected. As will be pointed out later in this chapter, the notion of the home provides us with a similar sense of security (Ibid. 4)<sup>3</sup>.

When defining the term *Heimat* for analytical purposes, researchers point out the nostalgic quality as central to the concept: For Eigler (2012), the term ‘carries a rich set of cultural and ideological connotations that combine notions of belonging and identity with affective attachment to a specific place or region’ (27). Scharnowski (2019) adds to this that *Heimat* is more than a business location, workplace, or market (235). To her, the place seems to be defined by its sociocultural dimension and emotional meaning for people (Ibid.). *Heimat* is, therefore, a place that is deeply connected with memories of people, happenings, and atmosphere (Bretschneider 2019, 59).

In this thesis, *Heimat* is defined as a spatial concept. The understanding of space and place is thereby based on the ideas of Yi-Fu Tuan (*Space and Place*, 1977)<sup>4</sup>, an influential researcher associated with the spatial turn. According to him, the more abstract category of space can be turned into place ‘via social relations and affective attachment’ (Eigler 2012, 36). To contextualise Tuan’s approach and to situate *Heimat* as a spatial concept within that framework, I will provide a brief outline of the spatial turn and the findings relevant to this thesis.

The so-called spatial turn denotes the restoration of space as an analytical instrument from the 1980s onwards (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 213). Space has thereby been increasingly perceived as being shaped by the social interactions happening within it – i.e., space can be understood as a social construction (Hallet and Neuman

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Blickle 2004, Thüne 1987) tend to conclude that ‘*Heimat* is identity’ (Blickle 2004, 66). I will, therefore, use the term identity in the same fashion throughout this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the film analysis in the main part of the thesis, it should be kept in mind that nostalgia is a subjective feeling that is unlikely to provide us with a correct idea of the past. This is important given that both *Mickybo and Me* and *Belfast* make use of certain techniques to convey the childhood memories of adult people.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that while the study was originally published in 1977, this thesis references from a later version of the book published in 2011.

2009, 12). This understanding of space is reflected in Michel de Certeau's conception of space and place as provided in his study *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980). According to Certeau (2011), place is 'an instantaneous configuration of positions' (117) that provides us with a sense of order, while space is '*practiced place* [emphasis as provided in the original]' that takes into account movement, different paces, and directions (Ibid.).

However, Certeau's perception of space and place is only one of many. Ever since the spatial turn took hold, there has been a sense of disunity and, hence, continued debate on how to define space and place. For my analysis, I will stick to Tuan's (2011) suggestion that the two categories can only be defined in relation to one another (6). As he puts it:

From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; *each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place* [my emphasis] (Ibid.).

By using the concept of Heimat as an analytical tool in the main part of the thesis, I would like to draw out what constitutes this pause and what it is that makes Belfast the child protagonists' Heimat. To open the concept for film analysis, I will break it down to three parameters: the physical home as provided in the geography of a place, the social home, i.e., the social environment at home, and the ideological home as reflected in daily practices and rituals.

When it comes to the physical home, Heimat can be defined, at least partly, in geographical terms. For many people, the notion of Heimat implies the house where they grew up, their hometown, the kind of landscape 'to which one feels native' (Blickle 2004, 4), or their home country (Ibid.). However, as Moltke (2005) points out, the scope of Heimat in a geographical sense is limited: Heimat is first and foremost bounded by people's ability to orient themselves (10–11). This sense of familiarity with which people experience their Heimat constitutes 'a fundamental source of confidence' (Tuan 2011, 199). As Tuan puts it, home is where people do not doubt where they are, where they can easily find their way around, and are, instead, taken aback when they come across something they did not expect (e.g., a step where they had not presumed it to be) (Ibid.).

Traditionally, Heimat used to be associated with rural life and landscapes (Bretschneider 2019, 56). This can be traced back to the origins of Heimat as a cultural

concept in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Scharnowski 2019, 15). However, this does not mean that cities cannot serve as Heimat. As Tuan (2011) points out, while people in rural areas often develop a sense of attachment to their surrounding landscape, people in the city foster similar feelings towards landmarks and anything else that restores a sense of identification for them (158).

At least as important as its physical component is the emotional attachment to home. Feelings like comfort and security that constitute home (Tuan 2011, 159) are rooted in a place's geography as well as in its social environment. According to Piepmeier (1990), the social home, and the first social interactions undertaken within it, shape a person's identity and experience of home (105). But what is the social home precisely? In this thesis, the social home comprises any social surroundings within the area considered as Heimat. This could be family, friends, neighbours, classmates, colleagues etc. When exploring a character's relationships with other people, I will, hence, look at their interactions, dialogues, and shared ways of expression. The latter can either be inherent to the language they speak, e.g., local accents and slang or can be retrieved from cultural practices (Bretschneider 2019, 74, 76).

As far as the ideological home is concerned, Tuan (2011) highlights that it is 'the memory of sounds and smells, of communal activities and homely pleasures accumulated over time' (159) that adds to the feeling of fondness of home. At home, daily practices and traditions organise people's life. Morley (2008), e.g., describes how family life and each member's daily agenda often work around communal meals (18). Up until today, family meals are of particular importance – especially on national holidays such as Christmas (Ibid.). Also, it is not uncommon for people to remember the smell and taste of certain foods when they think of home (Bretschneider 2019, 79). Moreover, spiritual and religious practices can shape people's (daily) routine at home (Ibid. 78). In Christian tradition, such practices could entail going to mass, regular praying, and, again, events such as Christmas or Easter along with their particular traditions.

As Bretschneider (2019) puts it, it is a shared set of values, norms, and traditions that provides us with concrete knowledge of how to do things at home (77). In addition, daily practices and traditions tend to order the home space and bring it under control (Douglas 1991, 289). Douglas (1991) even goes further stating that at home it is not even necessary to look for somebody, as you tend to know how they go about their

day (301). It should, therefore, be easy to find them at any time. In this sense, '[t]he order of the day is the infrastructure of the community' (Ibid.).

The academic treatment of Heimat as a concept is like the term's translation into English rather vast and unclear. While the topic has been dealt with in various disciplines like history, political science, sociology, ethnography, psychology, and literary studies, scholarship has often been based on a rather narrow, area-specific focus (Blickle 2004, 5; Moltke 2005, 8). As a result, there is no single comprehensive study of Heimat as a concept. According to Blickle (2004), this might be because the term Heimat has been heavily contested in German cultural and political discourse until today (13–14) – not least because Heimat has usually gained in popularity in times of crisis (Scharnowski 2019, 12–13). In the past, the term has, therefore, often been misused for political purposes, with the most noticeable one being the propaganda by right-wing nationalist parties (Ibid.; Bretschneider 2019, 23).

It should, hence, be noted that while basing the thesis on the concept of Heimat as an analytical instrument, I am aware of the term's political implications. However, given that this thesis aims at structuring the analysis of two Troubles films along the aforementioned parameters, I will refrain from using the term Heimat in a German political context, nor draw any parallels to it.

## **2.2 Representing Home in Film**

When watching a film, many of us get immersed in the world on the screen (Rhodes and Gorfinkel 2011, 21). Thereby, we might even gain a sense of orientation for the time and place in which the film is set. This subchapter looks more closely at how a place is created on screen through the means of setting, location, and space. As far as the structure is concerned, I will first explain the concept of representation by Stuart Hall, before going on to cinematic practice and explaining how the film makes use of its mise-en-scène to produce meaning.

According to Hall, 'representation is the production of meaning through language' (Hall 2003b, 16). But what exactly does this mean? In his article *The Work of Representation* (1997)<sup>5</sup>, Hall exemplifies how people transfer meaning between one another. This might look as follows: Person A sees a notebook in front of them and wants to tell person B about it. Person A would, therefore, use the term 'notebook' to

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that while the original book was published in 1997, this master thesis uses the reprinted version from 2003.

invoke the image of a notebook in their interlocutor's mind. The idea that both refer to the same thing when they hear the word notebook is what Hall calls a 'shared conceptual map' (Ibid. 18).

For a concept (here, the notebook) to be shared, A and B rely on belonging to the same culture which not only allows them to identify the notebook but also provides them with a shared language so that, ultimately, A can say to B: 'I see a notebook' and B understands (Hall 2003a, 2). Culture, therefore, serves as a kind of nexus between the production of meaning in the mind and sharing of meaning through language. Or, as Hall puts it: 'To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways that will be understood by each other.' (Ibid.)

The key to Hall's concept of representation is that meaning is constructed (Hall 2003b, 28). When growing up, children, therefore, learn a range of arbitrary codes that enable them to express and interpret certain ideas and concepts (Ibid. 22). These codes can either refer to things that exist in the real world – like notebooks – or to intangible concepts like 'death or friendship or love' (Ibid. 17) – or home as we shall see in the context of this thesis. It should be noted that the meaning of any concept is derived from social conventions (Ibid. 22), i.e., the process of agreeing that the term 'notebook' will stand for a book one can use to write in. However, these meanings are not necessarily fixed, they rather evolve as new codes or phrases develop over time (Ibid. 23–24).

After all, one needs to bear in mind that Hall's concept of representation speaks of languages in a broad sense (Ibid. 18). This means that any system structured to construct meaning, ultimately, works as a language<sup>6</sup> – and so does film (Rhodes and Gorfinkel 2011, 10). For the representation of home in film, this means that the film uses codes and conventions to convey meaning on screen (Mitchell 1995, 13–14). Monaco (2009) points out that these codes either exist within the film or come from without (197). I.e., they either imitate codes that exist in real life (e.g., the way people use their notebooks) or use codes inherent to other arts (e.g., facial expressions and gestures in the theatre) (Ibid.).

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<sup>6</sup> In his theory, Hall makes use of linguistic terminology speaking of 'signs' that ultimately lie at the heart of any meaning-producing system or 'language' and thereby 'stand for or represent the concepts and the conceptual relations between them which we carry around in our heads' (Hall 2003b, 18).

A code that would be inherent to the cinema is the *mise-en-scène*<sup>7</sup>. Borrowed from French, the term means ‘putting in the scene’ (Ibid.). In cinematic practice, however, the concept designates ‘the contents of the frame and the way that they are organised’ (Gibbs 2012, 5). Or, as Monaco (2009) puts it, the *mise-en-scène* answers the questions of what to shoot and how to shoot it (205). What these two attempts to define *mise-en-scène* allude to is that the concept subsumes various tools (e.g., lighting, décor, costume, and actors) to alter what can be observed on screen (Ibid.; Gibbs 2005, 12). The resulting shot, hence, needs to be carefully interpreted on the side of the audience. Just like codes in written and spoken language, cinematic codes need to be acquired (Monaco 2009, 176). While the resulting picture may approximate the actual object it represents, its meaning is nonetheless constructed and presented with a particular intention in mind (Ibid.; Hall 2003b, 20; Martin 2014, 14).

The setting forms part of the above-mentioned *mise-en-scène* and describes the place in which the story is set, i.e., an element of the story’s diegesis, as well as, the location where the film is set, i.e., a part of the production process (Hayward 2017, 346; Bender 2022). The term can, therefore, refer either to something inside the story or something outside of it<sup>8</sup>. As far as the place within the story is concerned, the setting can serve as a design feature or convention of a particular film genre. While gangster films are, e.g., frequently defined by grim urban surroundings (Hayward 2017, 187, 346), Westerns can be recognised by their usage of the wide landscapes inherent to the Wild West (Mitchell 1995, 14). The choice of location, hence, always depends on the setting of a film. Filmmakers can, thereby, decide whether to shoot a film or several scenes of it ‘on location’ (Rhodes and Gorfinkel 2011, 8), i.e., in places that exist in the real world, or a film studio (Ibid; Beaver 2014, 164).

In the context of *mise-en-scène*, the choice of setting and location contributes to the creation of space on the screen. Rather than being a mere ‘container’ for the on-screen action (Friedmann 2019, 48), space fulfils an important function in the production of meaning on screen. The setting of a story can, e.g., illustrate cultural norms and hierarchies in the relevant time and place in which the story is set (Hallet and Neumann 2009, 11). Furthermore, space somewhat defines the characters residing in it as well

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that while the concept of *mise-en-scène* is derived from theatre, this chapter focuses on the particularities of filmic *mise-en-scène* including the location and the camera’s perspective on it. The concept is, therefore, presented as inherent to film.

<sup>8</sup> To avoid confusion, this master thesis uses the phrase ‘setting’ to refer to the place within the story (e.g., the Belfast of the 1970s as presented in *Mickybo and Me*) and the phrase ‘location’ to invoke the actual filming location (e.g., the constructed studio set in which *Belfast* was filmed).

as the other way around (Ibid. 20, 24). As has been indicated in the previous subchapter, space is defined by the movement taking place within it (cf. chapter 2.1). Therefore, character movement within a certain space is likely to carry meaning: How do characters go about a certain space? Are they active or passive? How do they behave and what do they look or hint at? All these aspects may provide us with further information about them (Ibid. 12; Hallet and Neumann 2009, 24) and their function within the plot.

Finally, the *mise-en-scène* is also interwoven with the perspective the camera is taking on it. This is, e.g., achieved by using distinct shots and angles (Martin 2014, 14). A scene can, hence, be interpreted differently depending on whether it is shot from a high or a low angle. While the former provides us with a sense of inferiority, the latter does the converse (Monaco 2009, 181). In this sense, entire films, scenes, and shots require the audience's attention. In the analysis of *Mickybo and Me* (2005) and *Belfast* (2021), I will, therefore, look closely at the *mise-en-scène* while assessing how the two films portray the Belfast of the late 1960s and early 70s. Thereby, I will examine which places seem to be central to the notion of home, what they look like, and how the prevalent shots and camera perspectives contribute to the framing of Belfast as a home.

### **2.3 The Coming-of-Age Genre**

Often, only the mention of a genre evokes certain ideas and expectations in the spectator's mind. When it comes, e.g., to the Western, most of us would probably instantaneously think of cowboys, outlaws, duels, deserts, and Western cities (Brunow 2013, 40). In that sense, the genre serves as a 'checklist' (Driscoll 2011, 65) of components like character constellations, conflicts, and settings that define a group of literary texts or films (Kuhn et al. 2013, 1). The next two subchapters, therefore, look more closely at the coming-of-age genre and aim at setting up such a checklist for the subsequent film analysis.

First and foremost, the coming-of-age genre is defined by a sense of change. Focusing on self-discovery and identity formation, the characters are confronted with existential problems and questions whose solution ultimately allows them to mature and gain a new outlook on their life (Münschke 2018; Selbo 2015, 289). However, while there are certain patterns inherent to the coming-of-age theme, the genre's conventions are often mixed with elements of other genres (Fox 2017, 5). This means

that in many novels or films coming-of-age is just one aspect of the respective uber genre, e.g., a drama or comedy (Uytdewilligen 2016, 189; Selbo 2015, 295, 296).

The contemporary coming-of-age novel and film have their origins in the German ‘Bildungsroman’ of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Fox 2017, 5). The word Bildungsroman thereby translates into ‘novel of education’ or ‘novel of formation’ (Encyclopedia Britannica 1998a). Here, the aspect of education lies in the ‘moral, psychological, and intellectual development of an often youthful main character’ (Allen 2012, 181) that is often initiated by a ritual, a transformative event in life or a moment of epiphany (Selbo 2015, 290).

A narrative tool central to both, the coming-of-age story and its precursor the Bildungsroman, is the so-called ‘rite of passage’. Such a rite can rely on actual cultural practices or traditions that mark a change in a person’s social status like the prom and graduation from high school in an American teen film (Driscoll 2011, 66). Yet, rites of passage can also be a mere ‘experience of limits’ (Ibid.). This means they are events in the life of the protagonist that serve to test their boundaries and condition the character’s search for identity (Münschke 2018).

Selbo (2015) points out that based on the ethnological concept developed by Arnold van Gennep<sup>9</sup>, one can identify the three stages of a rite of passage in a typical coming-of-age plot (290–291): Usually, coming-of-age is evoked by a phase of disengagement with previous life patterns. This stage is called ‘separation’ (Gennep 1977, 166). During the stage of ‘transition’, the protagonist finds themselves between abandoning their old attitude towards life and acquiring a new one. In the final stage, that of ‘reincorporation’, the protagonist fully embraces their new self (Ibid.).

While the rite of passage seems to be an essential narrative tool for any coming-of-age film, the way change is brought about differs from story to story. Life events that may serve as a catalyst are, e.g., entering puberty, gaining sexual awareness and orientation, being confronted with restrictive moral codes, experiencing exclusion, losing a loved one, or discovering the unfaithfulness of partners and family members (Selbo 2015, 291–292; Fox 2007 5–6). According to Münschke (2018), these

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<sup>9</sup> Van Gennep’s *Rites of Passage* (original title: *rites-de-passage*) is a study that explored how rituals were used in non-industrialised societies to mark a transition from one social state to another (Gennep 1977). Similar ‘rituals’ can also be found in modern post-industrialised societies, and as Selbo (2015) highlights, serve a similar purpose, namely ‘the transition from childhood to manhood’ (291). As such, the concept can be broadly applied to the coming-of-age film.



individual experiences are what make the stories' main characters appear dynamic. From the moment they go, e.g., through losing a family member or leaving their home for the first time, the characters must confront themselves with existential questions. Their answer to the question thereby always reflects their values (Selbo 2015, 292).

While these core principles remain by and large the same in most stories, it should be mentioned that coming-of-age can be applied in various contexts. The different times and places in which the story is set thereby shape the plot (Millard 2007, 10). Historical events can, e.g., bring certain circumstances, restraints, and conflicts to the fore that have an impact on the protagonist's journey of self-reflection and growth (Ibid.). Setting a story in the city of Belfast in the 1960s and 70s is, hence, likely to highlight the Troubles as a life-changing event that might alter the way the protagonist sees themselves, the city, and the community they live in.

#### **2.4 Coming-of-Age Narratives in Film**

After having pointed out the origin of the coming-of-age genre and some of its inherent features, this subchapter looks more closely at the coming-of-age film. Firstly, it should be mentioned that when talking about a coming-of-age-film, I do not automatically mean a teen film (Fox 2017, 3–4). While the latter is a phenomenon of American cinema having its roots in Hollywood productions of the 1950s (Schuster 2013, 302), the former can be perceived as a much broader and inclusive concept to classify films (Fox 2017, 4). As Millard (2007) highlights, 'formative experience can occur at any stage' in life (4). Therefore, Selbo (2015) divides the coming-of-age film into three categories: the 'pre-teen-', the 'teen or adolescence-', and the 'post-adolescence' film (290).

In the pre-teen film, the protagonists are twelve years or younger. The films often concentrate on topics such as 'friendship or teamwork or increased understanding of the adult world' (Selbo 2015, 292) and tend to tell stories in a particularly charming and innocuous manner (Ibid.). The two films that are analysed in the main part of this thesis can be classified as pre-teen films. While the protagonists of *Mickybo and Me* (2005) are eight and nine years old, Buddy in *Belfast* (2021) is aged nine (Armitstead 2022b; Whyte 2006, 178).

The other two types are equally defined by the age of their protagonists, the issues treated, and the conflicts at the centre of them. The teen film – probably the most well-known among the coming-of-age films (Millard 2007, 4; Selbo 2015, 293) – focuses

on young protagonists between 13 and 19 years of age (Selbo 2015, 293). The plot thereby often evolves around themes of change experienced during adolescence on different levels, including the body, thoughts, and emotions (Ibid.). Sexuality plays a role as well as the strife for independence from parents and the judgement from peers (Ibid.). The post-adolescence film, meanwhile, presents characters that are at least 20 years old and struggle with their lives or feel stuck (Ibid.). As Selbo (2015) puts it ‘[e]ven if the characters *are* [emphasis as provided in the original] adult, there may still be traits of childhood or adolescence (insecurities, residual anger, neuroses that block forward progress and more)’ (290).

Apart from their content-based commonalities like the imminent transformation of the protagonist and the usage of rites of passage, coming-of-age films also share cinematic features. In terms of setting, they would, e.g., adapt the spaces in which the characters operate to their respective age and stage in life. In the case of pre-teen and teen films, prevalent settings can be the family home, the school, and places where the children and adolescents spend their free time (Beaver 2014, 58; Münschke 2018). The post-adolescence film may conversely focus more on the work-, relationship-, or family context in its choice of setting (Selbo 2015, 294–295). However, the setting also adapts to the time and place in which the story is set. Therefore, the representation of how the characters dress and go about their everyday life is based on contemporary (youth) culture (Uytdewilligen 2016, 1; Münschke 2018).

When it comes to the cinematic tools such as shots and angles used by the coming-of-age film, one must see the films put forth by the European cinema tradition as distinct from the classical Hollywood teen film. The latter was increasingly created after World War II when the American film industry discovered the economic potential of mostly white middle-class adolescents (Fox 2017, 7; Schuster 2013, 203). The resulting productions, hence, often relied on studio resources and large budgets (Fox 2017, 8). In Europe, where comparably smaller film industries could not keep up with the high sums of money spent on the other side of the Atlantic, so-called ‘auteur films’ were based on much smaller budgets (Ibid. 7). This was enabled by making use of autobiographical content and filming on location with little equipment to reduce production costs (Ibid.). In addition, they implemented cinematic strategies from European art cinema (e.g., the usage of lighting to reinforce the overall atmosphere of the film and the usage of unexpected camera movements) (Ibid. 10) in the New Wave

cinema<sup>10</sup> tradition of the time. The result was a set of increasingly personal films that established a connection with the audience (Ibid. 8, 10).

Up until today, coming-of-age films ‘are often unapologetically sentimental and focus on an emotional connection to the audience’ (Selbo 2015, 189). Thereby, they seem to follow a similar approach to the European auteur film. According to Münschke (2018), there is a tendency for coming-of-age dramas to have a comparably high frequency of cuts. In addition, they make occasional use of blurred colours and low-key lighting. Montage is often used to reflect on the interior processes of the characters. When it comes to the use of music, melodies, and songs that appear from the off, they do not only come from the time in which the film is set to make a statement on contemporary pop culture, but they also relate to the protagonist and their emotions seemingly serving as a kind of ‘valve’ (Ibid.).

This emotional connection is also what lies at the heart of the current popularity of coming-of-age narratives. As Fox (2017) puts it, ‘they offer people a symbolic configuration that makes it possible for them to understand who they are, and how they have come to be the way they recognize themselves as being’ (11). As such they serve as a mirror for their audiences on their own process of self-discovery. (Selbo 2015, 296). The same is true for filmmakers who enjoy shooting coming-of-age films to learn more about themselves and their identity formation (Fox 2017, 11). This can be done in various ways, e.g., by adapting a literary source, by setting a story in a time and place that reminds them of their youth (Ibid.), or by using biographical material to tell the story as has been the case with Kenneth Branagh’s *Belfast* (2021). Lastly, the genre flexibility of coming-of-age films adds to their popularity with filmmakers and audiences alike. (Selbo 2015, 195).

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<sup>10</sup> New Wave cinema came about in France in the 1950s. Filmmakers like Claude Chabrol and François Truffaut created films that overrode classical conventions. The films of the era thereby conveyed a distinct vision of the film as a medium of communication (as is e.g., alluded to in the frequent use of close-ups) (Beaver 2014, 197–198; Monaco 2009, 349–354).

### **3. Historical Background: The Troubles in Northern Ireland**

The following two subchapters aim to contextualise the subsequent film analysis in a historical sense. Therefore, chapter 3.1 draws out the implications of the Troubles on the city of Belfast in the 1960s and 70s. Then, chapter 3.2 explores how the sectarian conflict has so far been represented on film. It thereby focuses on tracing the development of the Troubles film genre and the depiction of Belfast in so-called ‘Troubles films’.

#### **3.1 The History of the Troubles: Life in Belfast in the 1960s and 70s**

In this subchapter, I will take a closer look at the Troubles and their effect on the Northern Irish capital in the 1960s and 70s. Starting from the assumption that the Troubles are often falsely perceived to be a religious conflict, I will explain its ethnic, political, and economic implications. Therefore, I will briefly summarise the conflict’s origin and outline the run-up to the outbreak of the Troubles in August 1969. Then, I will focus on the consequences of the sectarian conflict for Belfast citizens by looking at the living conditions at the time and the resulting exodus from the city. Finally, I will summarise the conflict’s resolution through the Good Friday Agreement and close by describing how the heritage of the Troubles is still tangible in Belfast today.

As Muldoon (2004) points out, the Troubles are often reduced to having been ‘a clash of religious identities’ (457). However, this is not the case. Rather religion is just one of many components that contributed to the eventual outbreak of the conflict in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s (Ibid). After all, it is true that the conflict unfolds around republican Catholics that envision a reunification with the Republic of Ireland on the one hand, and unionist Protestants that prefer to be part of the United Kingdom (UK) on the other (Ibid.; O’Leary and McGarry 2016, 2). Yet, rather than merely describing religious communities, these labels go back to different ethnic groups, the native Irish and the English and Scottish settlers whose enmity has its roots in the Ulster Plantation in 1609 (Muldoon 2004, 458; O’Leary and McGarry 2016, 2).

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the plantation of Ulster, the most northern of the four Irish provinces, followed the defeat of the native Irish clans in the area (Muldoon 2004, 458). Thereupon, the land was confiscated, and the native Irish population was marginalised while English and Scottish settlers occupied the more fertile farmlands (Ibid.; Jarman and Bell 2018, 39). As a result, the two communities had a hostile

relationship: While the mostly Catholic native Irish accused the Protestant settlers<sup>11</sup> to have stolen their land, the latter felt as though they constantly had to defend their right to the land (Muldoon 2004, 458). However, the settlers and the native Irish did not only differ in their religious affiliation. They also spoke different languages and dialects (Gaelic and different varieties of English), had distinct traditions and cultures, and were treated differently from a political point of view. Nonetheless, religion became the key distinction between them over time (Ibid.; O’Leary and McGarry 2016, 60).

Fearing a Catholic rebellion, the mainly Protestant political elite introduced the so-called Penal Laws in Northern Ireland<sup>12</sup> in 1697 that systematically discriminated against the Catholic population by preventing them, e.g., from owning property, accessing secondary education, or being represented in parliament. Many of these policies would remain in place for hundreds of years and would only be fully abolished in the course of Catholic emancipation in 1829 (Calame and Charlesworth 2011, 65; O’Leary and McGarry 2016, 69, 81). Nevertheless, even after the repeal of the Penal Laws, discrimination against Catholics remained inherent to Northern Irish society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (O’Leary and McGarry 2016, 81).

When Belfast became a hub for the shipbuilding-, engineering-, and textile industries in the course of industrialisation (Mulholland 2020, 12–13; O’Leary and McGarry 2016, 75–76), discriminatory structures in the labour market often favoured Protestants in leading roles. Even in working-class positions, Protestants often obtained better wages in higher-skilled jobs than Catholic workers (O’Leary and McGarry 2016, 76). However, from the 1920s onwards, Belfast’s key industries declined and unemployment soared in the city – even among Protestant workers. By the 1960s, unemployment in Northern Ireland was considerably higher than in other parts of the UK (Ibid. 161–162; Mulholland 2020, 13). According to Mulholland (2020), this situation exacerbated the sense of hostility on both sides, Catholic and Protestant, after the War of Independence (1920–21) (13). Especially in the working-

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<sup>11</sup> It should be mentioned that although the English and the Scottish settlers were both Protestant, they did not share the same creed. While the Scottish were mostly Presbyterian, the English were predominantly Anglican. It was only later that the two ethnic groups approximated and came to regard each other as fellow Protestants (O’Leary and McGarry 2016, 59-60, 62).

<sup>12</sup> Here, it should be noted that Northern Ireland as a political entity only came into being as a result of the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921) at the end of the Irish War of Independence (Bryan and Stevenson 2009, 70; O’Leary and McGarry 2016, 101). However, as the thesis focuses on Northern Ireland, this chapter tries to concentrate on the happenings north of the Irish-Irish border. So, what is referred to as ‘Northern Ireland’ any time before 1921, refers to the six counties of Ulster that will later form Northern Ireland.

class areas of the city violence broke out repeatedly (Calame and Charlesworth 2011, 67).

The creation of Northern Ireland after the War of Independence has frequently been described as a process of gerrymandering that ensured a unionist Protestant majority (Morrow 2018, 23; O’Leary and McGarry 2016, 100). Having been suppressed by the British state for years, the Catholic population of Northern Ireland felt overall closer to the Republic of Ireland and dismissed the newly established region as ‘an artificial state devoid of geographical, historical or political logic’ (Tonge 2002, 19). Even more, Catholics found themselves oppressed again: First, the regional government prohibited any symbols of affiliation with the Republic in the south, e.g., hoisting the Irish flag (Ibid.). Secondly, the government introduced a majority voting system that did not allow for proportional representation of the Catholic minority (Ibid. 21). Finally, Catholic workers were still more likely to be unemployed than their Protestant counterparts and often lived in more precarious areas (Ibid. 22, 23).

In the 1960s, the civil rights movement brought Catholic discrimination in Northern Ireland to the streets. These public demonstrations were interpreted by unionist Protestants as a direct affront to the state and regional government (Muldoon 2004, 458–459). The mostly Protestant police force, therefore, struck down the protests violently (Bryan and Stevenson 2009, 71). Thus, demonstrations frequently escalated into street violence and inspired destructive action by republican and unionist paramilitary groups (Ibid. 459; Calame and Charlesworth 2011, 69). Ultimately, the civil rights marches and the reaction to them by the police and paramilitaries marked the outbreak of the Troubles which lasted nearly thirty years. From then on, ‘[a]ssassinations and assassination attempts, sniper attacks, bombings, bomb scares, street riots, civilian searches, and vehicle checkpoints had become part and parcel of life in Northern Ireland’ (Muldoon 2004, 459).

A particularly severe series of rioting in Belfast broke out in August 1969 as a reaction to the Battle of the Bogside in Derry, a confrontation between republican Catholics, unionist Protestants, and the Northern Irish security forces (Mulholland 2020, 25). Throughout the riots, everyday goods like milk bottles were turned into petrol bombs (Ibid.). Moreover, barricades were built to hold up violent mobs roaming the streets (Calame and Charlesworth 2011, 71). The latter were often composed of objects such as ‘telegraph poles, hijacked bakery vans, municipal buses, upturned cars, scaffolding and paving stones’ (Ibid.). Nonetheless, the violence reached a level where

the police by themselves could no longer provide safety to the inhabitants. Consequently, British army troops had to interfere. However, they, too, were unable to prevent further mass violence. (Ibid.; Mulholland 2020, 25–27).

The main actors in the sectarian conflict were republican and unionist paramilitary groups, the (mostly Protestant) police force of Northern Ireland, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) as well as their reserve, the B-Specials, and the British army (Bryan and Stevenson 2009, 7; Mulholland 2020, 25–27). When it comes to the paramilitaries, there were several groups of different sizes. The most important ones among them were the Irish Republican Army (IRA) fighting on the side of the Catholics, and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and Ulster Defence Association (UDA) supported by unionist Protestants (Muldoon 2004, 459). During the Troubles, the IRA further split up into two camps – the ‘Original-’ and the ‘Provisional’ IRA. While the former believed that the long-term solution to the conflict lies in political means, the latter increasingly reverted to violence (Cowell-Meyers and Arthur 1998).

While the scope of violence in Ulster during the Troubles differed immensely (Toner 1994, 632), researchers have found that the situation in urban areas like Belfast was particularly serious (Bollens 2012, 58). According to Bollens (2012), attacks on everyday infrastructure often targeted businesses, shops, and pubs in the Northern Irish capital (58). Calame and Charlesworth (2011) add that 30 per cent of all deaths associated with the Troubles between 1969 and 1998 happened in Belfast – and most of them in the city’s working-class areas (78). It was, hence, the ‘worst-off’ neighbourhoods that suffered the most from the violence. Especially, the so-called ‘interface’ areas, where one ethnic community bordered the other, were prone to repeated outbreaks of violence, poverty, and destitution (Ibid. 76; Morrissey and Smyth 2002, 77, 153).

The exposure to permanent violence caused many people to leave their homes (Mulholland 2020, 27–28). While the relocation of some families was caused by the destruction of their houses (Bollens 2012, 68–69), other families also based their decision to leave on the economic situation, and the future of their children (O’Leary and McGarry 2016, 81; Lanclos 2003, 1). While some moved to areas of the city that were dominated by people of their own religion (Bollens 2012, 68–69), others left the city behind to move to the countryside or an entirely different country (Lanclos 2003, 1). According to Browne (2019), between 45,000 and 60,000 people had to leave their homes because of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Ultimately, such moves away only

reinforced residential segregation between Catholics and Protestants, especially in Belfast (Calame and Charlesworth 2011, 80).

The end of the sectarian conflict was introduced with a ceasefire in 1994. Within four years, talks were conducted with the two conflict parties represented by the political parties Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). With the help of the British, Irish, and American governments, a peace agreement was brought about: In 1998, the Good Friday Agreement introduced a coalition government that included both republican Catholics and unionist Protestants (Bryan and Stevenson 2009, 81; Dixon 2015, 18). This arrangement, although not having been without any crises, has over time provided relative peace in Northern Ireland (Muldoon 2020, 459–460). However, as Bollens (2012) puts it, this peace appears more like a ‘clenched teeth compromise’ (59) than a ‘happy ending’ (Ibid.).

Today, relics of the Troubles can still be identified in the city of Belfast which is defined by the social tensions between republican Catholics and unionist Protestants (Bollens 2012, 17). These can be experienced physically as well as on a social- and psychological level (Ibid. 16). Most visible is the segregation in the city along the so-called peace lines. In addition, symbols such as flags and painted kerbstones hint at the political affiliation of the inhabitants in the area (Morrissey and Smyth 2002, 152, 153). In the case of some areas, like Shankhill Road (unionist Protestant) and Falls Road (republican Catholic), a mere look at people’s addresses can identify where they stand politically (Lanclos 2003, 6–7). Ultimately, Belfast has remained ‘a checkerboard of Catholic and Protestant neighbourhoods’ years after the outbreak of the Troubles (Toner 1994, 630).

### **3.2 The Troubles in Film: The Troubles Film and Its Conventions**

Northern Irish film has long been defined by the Troubles. The sectarian conflict has been ‘*the* [emphasis as provided in the original] defining feature of the region’ (Hill 2006, 242) and, therefore, of the films originating from or playing in it. This subchapter will look at the representation of the Troubles in film and trace the development of Northern Irish cinema. As the evolution of the Northern Irish film industry goes hand in hand with that of the Troubles film and its conventions, I will distinguish two stages: the traditional Troubles thriller produced from the 1970s up until the early 1990s and the so-called ceasefire cinema that came about with greater investment in Northern Irish filmmaking from 1993 onwards. Emphasis will be on the conventions of the



Troubles film and the depiction of Belfast in these two stages to provide a basis for the subsequent film analysis.

The development of the Northern Irish film industry started in the early 1990s when the ceasefire and the ensuing peace process promised a calmer and more stable political climate in Northern Ireland (McLoone 2000, 69; Schwerter 2017, 14). Before, Northern Irish stories were often told through the lens of British and American filmmakers (Hill 2015, 147) whose interpretation of the sectarian conflict often ‘focused obsessively on the violence of the region but in a manner that has largely stripped it of history and context’ (Cleary 2002, 107). In many of the films produced from the 1970s onwards (e.g., *Angel* by Neil Jordan, 1982; *Cal* by Pat O’Connor, 1984; *The Crying Game* by Neil Jordan, 1992), the sectarian conflict has, therefore, been perceived as a given and served as a backdrop against which the Troubles thriller was set (Hill 2015, 177–178; Schwerter 2022, 269).

The plot of a Troubles thriller often unfolds in the city of Belfast. The Northern Irish capital is thereby portrayed as a rather grim and dark place (Schwerter 2022, 51). Not only is the city visually divided into Unionist and Republican areas using peace lines, painted kerbstones, and murals (Ibid. 50), but also do recurring outbreaks of violence between paramilitary groups, the RUC and the British army discourage any thought of peaceful cohabitation of the two communities (Ibid. 51; Schwerter 2016, 105). Belfast, it seems in the Troubles thriller, is a city dominated by fighting, shootings, bombings, lootings, and abductions (Schwerter 2016, 105).

It should be mentioned, however, that what is suggested to be Belfast on screen has often been a stand-in location. I.e., as filming in Belfast during the Troubles was considered a security risk, filmmakers chose to shoot their films in Dublin, London, or Manchester instead (Schwerter 2017, 14). Yet, Hill (2006) argues that this practice of substituting Belfast has made the city an ‘abstract place of imagination’ (213). Beyond the already-mentioned murals and painted kerbstones, people may have no idea of what the city looks like given that monuments such as Belfast City Hall, the Albert Memorial Clock Tower, and Belfast Castle are only rarely referred to in films (Ibid.). Therefore, early Troubles films only provided ‘little sense of Belfast as an actual lived-in space’ (Ibid.). This impression is reinforced when taking a closer look at the recurring settings in the thrillers. These include dim alleys, run-down buildings, and the dubious-looking interior of a pub. Most films also tend to focus on the working-class areas of the city where most of the violence has taken place. As a result, life in

Belfast's middle-class districts is rarely considered part of the story (Cleary 2002, 141). As for the soundscape, certain sounds like the noise of army helicopters in the sky, gunshots, and explosions seem to be inherent to the Troubles thriller (Schwerter 2022, 31, 268).

However, not only the depiction of Belfast as a divided city follows certain conventions. As far as the main characters of the Troubles thriller are concerned, they are often male characters involved in the conflict, e.g., as paramilitaries, police officers or soldiers. Female characters, children, and adolescents on the contrary take on marginal roles. Being rarely brought to the centre of attention, their experience and understanding of the conflict remain intangible to the audience (Schwerter 2016, 107; Schwerter 2022, 99). Of those few central female roles that are available, however, many are stereotyped and descend from a long line of novels – and likely, perceived gender roles – that many Troubles thrillers are based on (e.g., the female seducer or the prisoner's wife) (Schwerter 2022, 274). Women and children, it seems, occupy the private sphere as opposed to the public sphere where the sectarian conflict takes place (Hill 2006, 201).

Nonetheless, all characters – even the protagonists – seem to be unable to influence how the Troubles affect their lives. This can be observed in a trope called 'love-across-the-barricades'. The name refers to a love story in which the lovers are from either side of the two hostile communities, like Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. While the couple tries to overcome the divide between republican Catholics and unionist Protestants, they must face physical as well as psychological barriers. The former come, e.g., in the shape of barricades and peace lines that close off parts of the city from another. The latter can be seen in support for one's community and the intimidation of the lovers by community members (Schwerter 2022, 60–61, 271). The psychological pressure and the violence inherent to the plot often cause the relationship to fail. As Cleary (2002) points out, it is not uncommon for romance in the Troubles film to end 'not in triumph but in frustration' (112).

Along with the establishment of the Northern Irish film industry in 1993, the Troubles film has moved away from the thriller genre. Instead, filmmakers have turned to new formats of telling a story about the Troubles including comedies and social dramas. This approach to re-tell the sectarian conflict was inspired by the peace process and the resulting sense of hope (Hill 2006, 196, 233; Schwerter 2017, 13–14). According to Schwerter (2017), this newfound optimism allowed for a 'psychological

distance' (14) from the conflict. This may have enabled filmmakers to revisit the past as well as imagine a future for Northern Ireland (Ibid.). The process also facilitated a sense of 'freshness' that came with the introduction of new characters and perspectives to Troubles films (Schwerter 2022, 33). This can, e.g., be seen in films like *Titanic Town* (Roger Michell, 1998) and *The Mighty Celt* (Pearse Elliott, 2005) that put the experience of children and adolescents in troubled Belfast centre stage (Ibid).

According to McLoone (2000), this sense of 'freshness' was owed to the greater involvement of native filmmakers in productions after 1993 (69). This, he argues, has made the resulting works more intricate when compared, e.g., to earlier American productions (Ibid.). Yet, the emergence of the so-called ceasefire cinema had only been made possible by greater investment in regional filmmaking in the first place: The incentive for smaller Northern Irish film productions was given in the 1980s when Channel 4 was introduced in the UK. In the 1990s, the Northern Irish Film Council was founded to encourage local filmmaking. Further money was generated through rising Arts Council funding, the expansion of the national lottery funds to Northern Ireland, and the BBC Extending Choice Policy that ensured more autonomy for UK regions (Ibid. 32; Barton 2004, 162). The development of the Northern Irish film industry – and with it the evolution of the Troubles film – in the early 1990s can, hence, be seen as the result of both, the incipient peace process as well as the investment made in and the economic advancement of the region (Schwerter 2016, 106).

The latter is also reflected in the representation of Belfast in post-1993 Troubles films. Many of them point out the city's development into what is called the 'new Belfast', i.e., a consumer-driven version of the city defined by its modern architecture and shopping centres. Here, it seems, the city of Belfast is not divided and everyone makes use of what is intended to be a shared space irrespective of their religious and political beliefs (Barton 2004, 174; Hill 2006, 232). While this depiction of Belfast in films may occasionally resemble an advertising video (McLoone 2008, 66), it does not seem to do justice to the real city. As McLoone (2008) points out, even today there seems to be a lack of diversity in the illustration of the Northern Irish capital on film (66). This 'substantial representational gap' (Ibid.) between the image of the dark and grim city in the traditional Troubles thriller and the vision of the 'new Belfast' ought to be filled.

However, the impact of modern economic development can also be felt in the portrayal of male characters in ceasefire films. Several films (e.g., *Divorcing Jack* by

David Caffrey, 1998; *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* by Dudi Appleton, 1999; *An Everlasting Piece* by Berry Levinson, 2000) thematise how men embrace a new sense of masculinity after the Troubles. Often, they have to overcome their violent past and redefine their life while engaging in a romantic relationship, finding a job in the service industry, and increasingly abandoning their life in the public sphere for domesticity (Barton 2019, 142; Hill 2006, 236–237). Yet, the change in illustrating male characters does not seem to have influenced the portrayal of women in Troubles films. As Hill (2006) highlights, female roles are still restricted to those of the girlfriend, wife, and mother in most cases (237). He further argues that within the private sphere of the home, female characters must often compensate for absent father figures. The term ‘absent’ thereby does not only refer to those who passed away but also to those fathers who are present but prove to be unsupportive to their wives and children (Ibid.).

Nonetheless, the ceasefire film manages to integrate these features into an often humorous story. (Black) humour thereby seems to be the supporting element to go beyond the increasingly predictable conventions of the Troubles film and make the new productions worthwhile (Ibid. 210). It is frequently used to criticise existing power structures in Northern Irish society: Often, paramilitary groups, the British army, and representatives of the churches become targets of all sorts of mockery carried out by overstated and embellished characters, funny situations, and puns on the linguistic level (e.g., wordplays, neologisms, and confusion of the register) (Schwerter 2022, 275). Hill (2006) holds that taking on a humorous perspective on the Troubles has only been made possible by the peace process in the 1990s (210). Before, some jokes might have taken the wrong way with either of the two hostile communities.

After all, it can be said that the peace process in Northern Ireland and the establishment of a local film industry encouraged a change in the way the Troubles are presented in films. Not least because of the sense of optimism that resulted from the ceasefire, filmmakers have started to move away from the Troubles thriller and introduced a humorous and more light-hearted way of revisiting the past. At the same time, the depiction of Belfast has changed, too: While the Northern Irish capital used to be portrayed as a grim and dark place in the thrillers of the 1970s and 80s, newer productions have sketched out a post-industrial consumer-driven version of the city. Yet, between these two versions seems to be a ‘representational gap’ that the following film analysis and comparison intend to fill.

#### 4. Case Study: *Mickybo and Me* (2005) by Terry Loane

*Mickybo and Me* (2005)<sup>13</sup> is the debut film of the Northern Irish filmmaker Terry Loane (Dwyer 2005). Born and raised in Belfast, Loane based the screenplay on Owen McCafferty's theatre play *Mojo Mickybo* (1998) thematising the development and end of a friendship between a Protestant and a Catholic boy in Belfast in 1970 (Barraclough 2005, A5; Bastiat and Healy 2015, 34–35). The idea of turning the play into a coming-of-age film might have been partly due to the personal connection of the writer-director with the story. In an interview, Loane suggests that parts of it also reflect his own experience of growing up in the Northern Irish capital, e.g., sleeping against the backdrop of gunshots and explosions at night (Clarke 2005).

Hence, *Mickybo and Me* can be described as a personal film in which a sense of nostalgia seems inherent: While the story seems to be rendered through the eyes of the child protagonist Jonjo, it is told retrospectively by Jonjo's adult self (Beckett 2017, 161). This way, 'the adult self can rationalize the experience and integrate it fully into their identity' (Ibid.). This should be kept in mind even if the thesis does not examine the narrative structure of the film as such. Another important tool that the film uses is intertextuality, i.e., referencing another text or film within the film. In *Mickybo and Me*, this is achieved through the constant mentioning of the Western *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) by George Roy Hill. According to Bastiat (2015), this systematic referencing through the means of plot, dialogue, setting, and camera work serves as a *mise en abyme*, i.e., a film or story within the film (139).

Set against the backdrop of the Troubles, *Mickybo and Me* is no political film (Ibid. 142). This has often been criticised. Bastiat (2015) even goes as far as saying that if it was not for the presence of tanks, British soldiers, and the Northern Irish accent, 'the film could just as easily be telling the story of two small children in Northern England or Scotland' (142). While this criticism may be justified, it should be mentioned that from a film studies perspective, it is nonetheless interesting to look at its representation of Belfast in the 1970s. Released in 2005, *Mickybo and Me* can be categorised as a ceasefire film. Therefore, the subsequent analysis will pay particular attention to the usage of Troubles film conventions and their effect.

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<sup>13</sup> While I will refer to the film by its full name throughout the chapter, references given in parentheses are an exception as they will only comprise a shortened version of the title and the respective time code, e.g., (*Mickybo* 07:36).

#### 4.1 The Physical Home: Tracing Belfast in *Mickybo and Me*

This subchapter looks at the representation of Belfast as a home at the physical level – i.e., the outline of the city, the atmosphere created, and the settings and cinematic tools used to do so. I will pay particular attention to the role physical violence takes on when representing life in Belfast, the sectarian division of the city, and the representation of the Northern Irish capital as opposed to the rural (Northern) Irish landscape, especially the seaside. Another essential element of the analysis is the emotional connection to home. I will, therefore, look more closely at how the two boys feel about their home in Belfast and how the city and Northern Ireland, in general, are reflected upon through the use of symbolism and comments of other characters in the film.

*Mickybo and Me* (2005) starts with a scene featuring a mother and her son entering a shoe shop shortly before a bomb explodes (01:17–02:04). While this scene is positioned outside the main plot, it serves to illustrate the extent of violence in 1970s Belfast. Set against the jolly folk tune ‘Belle of Belfast’, the scene highlights a fundamental aspect when analysing the physical home in the film: Life in Belfast at the time is set against the backdrop of the unpredictable nature of violence (Murphy 1978, 121). Looking at the scene in more detail, the camera introduces us to the scene by focusing on the pair’s feet walking along the pavement. Then, the camera shows the mother and her son in a medium close-up before taking up an observer position and showing them enter *Scott’s Shoes* from the other side of the road. This sequence of shots seems to have been compiled to introduce the spectator to the scene step-by-step. While the close-up on their feet indicates that the mother seems to drag her son behind her, the medium close-up points to her strained facial expression. The full shot then draws the audience’s attention to the pair’s surroundings. Not only is the scene filmed in a range of cold-looking colours such as light blue and grey, but some of the buildings stand out looking run-down: Shop windows are broken and there are signs of previous fires (Beckett 2017, 163). This part of the city seems to have been targeted by paramilitaries before – which also explains the sense of hurry conveyed through the camera work.

The explosion makes clear, life in Belfast is not as calm and peaceful as it may seem in some parts of the film. With the background music forming a clear antithesis to what can be seen on screen, the audience gets a first glimpse into the nature of the Troubles. With the camera lingering on the shop for a short while after the explosion,

the audience sees the smoke rising from the building and hears the shop's alarm going off. As the image of the shop fades out, Jonjo, a nine-year-old boy from a Protestant part of the city introduces us to the story from off-screen: 'Back in 1970, the whole world knew that Belfast was a divided city. Neighbourhoods turned into ghettos, but I knew nothing about all that. My world was no bigger than a few quiet streets. But that was before I met Mickybo.' (*Mickybo* 01:57). This commentary does not only suggest that the previous event has taken place in another part of the city, but that depending on where you live in Belfast, you are either more or less exposed to sectarian violence (Schwerter 2022, 225). The introductory scene can, therefore, not only be read as a means of setting expectations but also as a note of caution as to how the film may alienate the viewer's perception of the Troubles by telling the story through the eyes of a child (Ibid. 273).



Figure 1: Mother and Son Enter the Shoe Shop Before the Explosion (01:35). *Mickybo and Me*. Directed by Terry Loane, performance by Johnjo McNeill and Niall Wright, Studio Canal and Working Title Films.



Figure 2: The Sudden Explosion in the Shoe Shop (01:48). *Mickybo and Me*. Directed by Terry Loane, performance by Johnjo McNeill and Niall Wright, Studio Canal and Working Title Films.

The preceding quote also highlights the fact that Jonjo's vision of Belfast changes as he befriends Mickybo, an eight-year-old boy from the Catholic area around Palestine Street. Not only is Jonjo's perception of his hometown framed by the religious divide but also by his class background. While Jonjo has grown up in a middle-class household, Mickybo lives in a working-class area in the west of Belfast (Ibid. 226). Therefore, Jonjo's experience of the city resembles 'a few quiet streets' whereas Mickybo's is closer to the aforementioned 'ghettos'. In his neighbourhood, people tend to move out of their houses and a burnt-out bus in the middle of the road serves as a barricade (*Mickybo* 08:41). This part of the city, it seems, is repeatedly hit by outbreaks of violence. This is suggested in scenes featuring bombings and pub shootings (*Mickybo* 20:44, 1:15:19). While both boys are allowed to move freely in their respective neighbourhoods, they must not cross the bridge that serves as a 'dividing line' (*Mickybo* 08:08) between the two communities. The fact that the boys cross the bridge nonetheless, points to a lack of understanding of the sectarian conflict and the implied dangers of wandering around in a Catholic area as a Protestant and the other way around (Schwerter 2022, 226) – especially in so-called interface areas like this one, where one community borders the other.

The difference between Jonjo and Mickybo's living realities is, however, not only reflected in their respective neighbourhoods but also in their homes (Ibid. 227) and how they go about their day. As the only child of a middle-class couple, Jonjo lives in a rather spacious and tidy house (*Mickybo* 02:07). Mickybo's home, contrarily, seems much more chaotic and cramped (*Mickybo* 09:31). The latter is because Mickybo comes from a family of eight where he grows up with five sisters – against whom he must, at times, assert himself. As a result, the boy spends much of his time outside. There, however, he gets chased and bullied by two older Protestant boys, Gank and Fartface (*Mickybo* 03:38). For Mickybo, life in his part of Belfast seems to resemble a constant struggle. Jonjo, on the other hand, traditionally goes out for ice cream with his dad once a week (*Mickybo* 05:49). The look of the shop, the music inside it, and the sense of ease it conveys, seem to suggest that the Troubles are remote from Jonjo's daily life.



When Jonjo's narrator voice explains from off-screen that '[t]he other side [of the bridge] was like the other side of the world' (*Mickybo* 08:23), he highlights that the other side constitutes a blank space in his vision of Belfast. I.e., because he is not allowed to cross the bridge, he has no idea what Mickybo's neighbourhood on the other side may look like and how the life of his friend differs from his own (Schwerter 2022, 226). As a result, Jonjo seems somewhat disturbed when crossing the bridge for the first time. Not only does he hesitate in the middle of the bridge (*Mickybo* 08:19), but also does he seem to be overwhelmed by experiencing the modest housing, the extent of destruction in the area around Palestine Street, and the idea that people must leave their homes behind. This is suggested not least by the camera work (*Mickybo* 08:33): The camera films Jonjo from behind when walking along Palestine Street. Usually, this perspective would allow the audience to assess the boy's surroundings. However, the street in front of him appears blurred. This only changes as a mattress appears right in front of the boy's face. This comes as a surprise to both – Jonjo and the viewer – and initiates a change in camera perspective. Now, the camera points out the burnt-out bus in the middle of the road and highlights that there is barely anyone else in the street. This conveys a sense of intimidation to the viewer who may now be able to empathise with Jonjo's statement. Compared to 'his side of the world', this one seems run-down and threatening.

However, that this is not the way Mickybo feels about his neighbourhood is highlighted in several instances throughout the film. The most noticeable one is the scene featuring the morning after a bomb went off in his neighbourhood (*Mickybo* 20:23–21:37). In this scene, Jonjo arrives at the bomb site out of breath and worried about his friend. Again, the camera films him from behind. Only this time, the perspective does indeed allow the viewer to assess the level of destruction: a pub is burnt down, rubble and paving stones pile up on the juncture, and firemen, policemen, and soldiers tidy up the street. Next, the camera shows Mickybo making his way over to his friend from the other side of the road in a full shot. When he gets close to Jonjo he exclaims: 'You should have seen the place burning. Nearly burnt down the whole street. It was pure class.' (21:03). The sense of excitement in his voice suggests that to Mickybo the extent of violence in his neighbourhood is not only normal but also intriguing. This impression is reinforced as the scene continues: Mickybo shows his friend a blown-off finger that he collected from the bomb site. While saying to Jonjo that he got them 'a treasure' (21:18), Mickybo takes the remaining ring off the finger

and throws it away. This gesture makes clear that it is not the jewellery the boy is interested in, but the human remains. Unlike his friend, Mickybo does not seem to connect the piece to the injuries and deaths incurred by the attack. This makes clear that the boy feels safe despite the reoccurring violence in his neighbourhood (Beckett 2017, 167).

The film uses the Troubles as the backdrop against which the boys' adventures take place – or as Beckett (2017) puts it: 'Loane [...] depicts the city of Belfast as a playground in which the political and social realities of the Troubles are integrated into a world of childhood innocence and play' (161). This can also be seen in a scene where the boys' escape after having stolen apples from an old man's tree is helped by two tanks driving down the road and thereby cutting off their persecutor (*Mickybo* 06:52). In another scene, Mickybo and Jonjo roam the streets of Belfast and pass by a red-brick wall where policemen search three men lined up against it (*Mickybo* 23:53). In scenes like these, the camera renders evidence of the Troubles by focusing on the instances a little longer than necessary. This way, Beckett (2017) argues, it draws attention to what appears ordinary to Mickybo and Jonjo and counterposes it with the viewer's knowledge of the Troubles to an alienating effect (165).

Nevertheless, the two boys seem to sense that there is something abnormal about the constant threat of violence in Belfast. This can be seen in several scenes at the seaside where Jonjo and Mickybo intend to go on a ferry to escape to Australia. As they walk, e.g., along the beach, the two of them discuss how Superman would stop the fighting in their hometown (*Mickybo* 1:02:45). While this conversation indicates the boys' general awareness of the sectarian fighting, the subsequent scenes further seem to counterpose the troubled city with the peaceful Irish seaside. Here, it seems, the boys can enjoy themselves at the fun fair and are not judged on anything else but their young age (cf. *Mickybo* 1:04:13). Another instance where Northern Ireland is juxtaposed with the Republic in the South is when the boys are brought back home after their failed attempt to leave for Australia (*Mickybo* 1:11:03). When talking to an Irish guard, the latter is seemingly joking when he asks them whether they did not realise that the grass in the South was 'that bit greener, the sky a little bluer' (1:12:06). The film seems to reinforce the idea of a North-South divide when the boys are handed over to the Northern Irish police at the border post (*Mickybo* 1:13:15). Here, the Irish guard takes two colourful blankets off their shoulders. The Northern Irish policemen, in turn, provide Jonjo and Mickybo with two dark grey blankets instead. The

symbolism here seems to suggest that the two boys return from the more peaceful South of Ireland to the troubled North. Beckett (2017) even goes as far as proposing that the boys are leaving behind a ‘world of innocence’ (173) when returning to Northern Ireland where events like the death of Mickybo’s dad and the separation of Jonjo’s parents will lastingly impact their lives and end their friendship (Ibid.).

Finally, *Mickybo and Me* presents Belfast as a troubled city. Thereby, the film stays true to historical facts such as the city’s division into predominantly Catholic and Protestant neighbourhoods and their unequal exposition to physical violence. However, the audience’s perspective on the violence is alienated by its presentation through the eyes of the child protagonists. What may seem normal to Jonjo and Mickybo has a startling effect on the viewer who contrarily to the young boys has an idea of the danger involved in the presence of tanks and body searches carried out by the police during the Troubles. Especially when being compared to the Republic in the South, Northern Ireland, and especially Belfast, are characterised as rather dark and grim places. Yet, this is mostly transferred subtly while using symbolism. Overall, there is a sense of light-heartedness in the way Jonjo portrays Belfast in 1970 through his childhood memories. This is, however, not least due to the nostalgia that comes into play when the adult Jonjo looks back at his childhood over thirty years later.

#### **4.2 The Social Home: Families on Both Sides of the Bridge**

In this subchapter, I will look at the social home as presented in *Mickybo and Me* (2005). The focus here is on the boys’ families on either side of the bridge, as these are the main social settings pointed out by the film. In the analysis, I will, therefore, pay special attention to the roles the parents take on. I will thereby assess whether the fathers match the portrayal of absent father figures inherent to the ceasefire cinema. Moreover, I will take a look at the portrayal of the mothers as well as the boys’ perception of their families, and their parents in particular. This way, I intend to explore Mickybo and Jonjo’s emotional attachment to their social home.

As Bastiat (2015) points out, the representation of Mickybo and Jonjo’s families plays on both religious and gender stereotypes (144). While Jonjo is the only child of a Protestant middle-class couple, Mickybo lives in a large working-class family. Here, the film seems to suggest that being Catholic equals being poor and having a lot of children, whereas being Protestant is implied to be the opposite. As could be seen in chapter 3.1, this is not necessarily the case. While Catholics were, indeed, more likely

to be unemployed due to systematic economic discrimination, there were middle-class households on both sides of the sectarian divide (Calame and Charlesworth 2011, 78; Tonge 2002, 22).

As far as the number of children per family is concerned, the fact that Mickybo has five sisters is interesting given that Mickybo's siblings are not mentioned in the original play by Owen McCafferty (Bastiat 2015, 144). In an interview, director Terry Loane explains his choice as follows: 'The reason that I gave Mickybo a lot of sisters is that it gives him another reason to have a chip on his shoulder. And also it means that when Johnjo [sic!] walks into Mickybo's house, he enters an entirely new world' (Clarke 2005). In doing so, Loane adds another layer to Jonjo's comment that the other side of the bridge is 'like the other side of the world' (*Mickybo* 08:23). While Jonjo is used to quiet dinners with his mum and dad, experiencing Mickybo's home at lunchtime is the complete opposite (*Mickybo* 09:27–10:48). There is a lively, if not chaotic, atmosphere in the sitting room with Mickybo's mum talking a lot while the children mess behind her back. While the sense of chaos is further underlined by quick camera movements, a medium close-up of Jonjo's face indicates that the boy is seemingly overwhelmed by the experience.



Figure 3: A Usual Dinner at Jonjo's House (02:07). *Mickybo and Me*. Directed by Terry Loane, performance by Johnjo McNeill and Niall Wright, Studio Canal and Working Title Films.



Figure 4: Lunchtime at Mickybo's House (09:39). *Mickybo and Me*. Directed by Terry Loane, performance by Johnjo McNeill and Niall Wright, Studio Canal and Working Title Films.

In general, the lunchtime scene at Mickybo's house also serves as a good example to draw out the family dynamic and the roles mother and father take on respectively. After Jonjo is let in by Mickybo's mum, the two of them enter the sitting room. There, they first come across Mickybo's dad who is sleeping on the sofa. The TV shows a horse race (*Mickybo* 09:28). Before walking on to the back of the room, where the children are sitting around the dinner table, Mickybo's mother leans over her husband and says: 'No, no darling, you sit your ground. Sure you must be exhausted.' (09:28). As the scene resumes, the mother offers Jonjo food and drink, while spooning out food and cleaning up the kitchen. At the same time, Mickybo steals money from his sleeping father's pocket, while being watched by his sisters. As the mother is chatting along – seemingly not noticing her son's trick – the girls at the table call out for her, ready to tell on their brother, if he doesn't share the money with them. The twins, who like Lewis Carroll's Tweedledum and Tweedledee<sup>14</sup> tend to speak in unison (Bastiat 2014, 143), thereby seem to lead the negotiation process that only takes place as a short exchange of looks. The mother in the meantime asks Jonjo where he is from, whether his mum allows him to play in the Catholic neighbourhood, and what the two boys are up to. Thereby, she proves to have a vivid imagination when she suggests to them 'adventuring up the Amazon jungles' (09:59) or 'conquering Everest' (10:12).

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<sup>14</sup> Tweedledum and Tweedledee are two characters from Lewis Carroll's 19<sup>th</sup> century novel *Through the Looking Glass* who are known for speaking in unison. Styling characters in stories based on Tweedledum and Tweedledee has become a recurrent motif in (English) literature (Bastiat 2014, 143; Kuiper 2011).

Although it provides just a glimpse into the life of the family, the scene points out that the mother takes up the homely duties of cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing, while the father seems to be absent. This is suggested in several instances throughout the film: The father is unemployed and spends most of his day drinking and gambling in a pub (cf. *Mickybo* 03:53). When he is at home, however, he seems to be either drunk and asleep or reading the newspaper, while the mother is taking care of the household (*Mickybo* 09:28, 13:22). However, she seems to be a loving and forbearing wife. Having accepted her husband's seeming addiction, she compensates for his absence at home. Thereby, she takes on every task with a smile on her face, uses her imagination to make life more endurable, and spreads a sense of optimism by wearing brightly coloured clothes and singing along to the song 'I only want to be with you' while doing the dishes (Bastiat 2014, 139; *Mickybo* 13:17). The song by Dusty Springfield from the 1960s, thereby, seems to have two functions: Not only does singing along to the upbeat song portray Mickybo's mum as a cheerful person, but also does it seem to comment on the parents' relationship. Although the father's unemployment and seeming addiction aggravate the family's financial situation, Mickybo's mum would not want to live without him. This holds true when in a later scene, Mickybo's mother explains to Jonjo that her deceased husband 'was nothing special, son. [...] But he was better than nothing.' (*Mickybo* 1:22:34). Mickybo's father's loving characteristics meanwhile stand out, when it becomes clear in a discussion over dinner that the father spends the little money he has on toys for his children (*Mickybo* 13:34). Therefore, it can be said that Mickybo's dad does not completely neglect his role as a father.

However, there is a different dynamic in Jonjo's family. Having grown apart in their marriage, Jonjo's parents do not share the same bed anymore, barely talk at dinner, and go about their days separately (*Mickybo* 20:35, 02:07). While the mother stays at home and commits to tasks such as child-rearing and doing the household, Jonjo's father works during the day and goes out dancing at night. The state of their marriage seems to leave Jonjo's mother depressed. The father, on the other hand, starts a new relationship that, in turn, leads to Jonjo and his mother moving out. While these issues only unfold as the plot progresses, there are various hints at the parents' imminent separation, e.g., the tense atmosphere at the dinner table (*Mickybo* 02:07), the looks Jonjo's father exchanges with the shop assistant at the ice cream parlour (*Mickybo*

06:01), and the glance that Jonjo gets of his father kissing another woman when hiding in the cupboard under the stairs (*Mickybo* 33:15).

As a result, Jonjo refers to what he knows from the film *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* to assess his family situation (González 2016). Posing himself questions such as ‘Can you have two wives [...]?’ (*Mickybo* 1:01:33) and ‘Can you swap the wife you have now for a new one?’ (1:01:41), the boy tries to make sense of his parents’ separation. Going through this process, Jonjo’s perception of his father seems to change, and he sides with his mum. While before the boy used to look up to his dad who secretly bought him ice cream (*Mickybo* 05:49) and gave him money when he asked for it (*Mickybo* 14:25), Jonjo now does not seem to think as highly of him anymore. In the end, he chooses to live with his mother who is portrayed as the exact opposite of Mickybo’s mum. Wearing mostly plain and dark clothes, Jonjo’s mum appears anxious in several instances in the film (*Mickybo* 02:43, 30:29). She is, hence, protective of Jonjo who is not only her only child but also her ‘number-one man’ (*Mickybo* 19:48).

A similar process of rethinking the relationship with his dad can be observed with Mickybo. While at first, he also looks up to his dad and competes for his attention with his sisters, this seems to change throughout the film. In a scene in the middle of the film where he and Jonjo find shelter in a barn, Mickybo tells his friend about a drawing he made for his dad the previous year (*Mickybo* 49:10): When the boy showed the picture of a bomber plane to his dad, the latter praised it in front of his friends in the pub. Yet, when the father got home in the evening, he had left the picture behind in the bar – likely because he was too drunk. A close-up of Mickybo’s face in the scene points out his frustration about his dad’s seeming mental absence. As the scene goes on, it also seems to confirm the alleged ‘chip on his shoulder’, since Mickybo expresses his resentment of vying for his father’s attention (50:00).

In an interview, the actress Susan Lynch (playing the new girlfriend of Jonjo’s father) highlights how both fathers are useless as role models for their sons. At the same time, Lynch hints at the incapability of the mothers to deal with their husbands’ character flaws (Caden 2005). Consequently, Jonjo and Mickybo must find themselves some new role models who they find in the characters Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kids from the film of the same name (Beckett 2017, 172). By imitating the two outlaws, the boys seem to ‘create their own heroism, because there is none around them’ (Lynch in Caden 2005).

After all, it can be said that the social home of both, Jonjo and Mickybo, is characterised by loving mothers as well as absent fathers. Thereby, the mothers seem to inhabit the private sphere of the home where they take on household tasks. As such, the film does not only play on stereotypes but also places female characters like the mothers and sisters at the margin of the plot. As for the fathers: While they may be absent for different reasons, their absence causes both, Jonjo and Mickybo, to reassess their relationship with their dads. In the case of Mickybo, this change in perception is, e.g., reflected in going from proposing gambling to retrieve money for the ferry to Australia (like his father would have done it) (*Mickybo* 1:05:42) to questioning whether his father did ever have any luck at horse racing (*Mickybo* 1:19:24). In need of new role models, the boys, therefore, re-enact the life of the outlaws Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid which will be explored in more detail in the next subchapter.

#### **4.3 The Ideological Home: Living like Outlaws**

This subchapter deals more closely with the ideological home as presented in *Mickybo and Me* (2005). As has been mentioned before, this part of the home is characterised by daily practices and traditions and the feeling of fondness retrieved from them (cf. chapter 2.1). While the film does feature practices like the family dinner at home, the focus seems to lie on everyday play and how it shapes the boys' relationship with home. I will, therefore, take a closer look at the way Mickybo and Jonjo imitate the outlaws from George Roy Hill's 1969 Western *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Thereby, I will examine how the imaginary play affects the boys' friendship, their understanding of their living realities, and their coming-of-age process. The focus here is to explore how the *mise en abyme* is used to develop a narrative about friendship that models the love-across-the-barricades trope which is central to the *Troubles* film.

Referencing *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* becomes a central tool for the cinematic narration from early on: Soon after the two boys have become friends, they secretly go to the cinema to watch the Western that recounts the adventures of two outlaws in the Wild West and their escape to Bolivia (*Mickybo* 15:54). From then on, the resuming film is modelled on the story. Mickybo and Jonjo, thereby, take on the roles of Butch and Sundance respectively and roam the streets of Belfast while acting out whole dialogues from the original Western (González 2016). In various scenes, the boys' life approximates that of their chosen heroes when they steal toy guns and bananas from a shop, break into an old man's house, scare off Gank and Fartface with a real gun, and eventually escape from Belfast to make their way to Australia (*Mickybo*



24:51, 27:40, 33:53). On the run, the boys even further rely on their imagined identities when, e.g., robbing a bank and jumping from a pier right into the sea to escape their persecutors (*Mickybo* 1:09:16). These two scenes are not only inspired by but directly transferred from *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and reinforce the impression of a story within the story.

According to Schwerter (2022), the boys' imaginary play as laid out above helps them to retreat from the troubled city into a world where neither religious nor economic differences exist (227). However, the creation of this fantasy world is based on a lack of understanding of how the Troubles affect their lives. This, in turn, enables Mickybo and Jonjo to become friends in the first place. As Beckett (2017) suggests, it is acquiring a more defined but not yet complete understanding of the sectarian conflict that, at the end of the film, not only triggers their coming of age but also ends their outlaw fantasies and friendship (166). Before, however, multiple references to the original Western are tied into the plot of *Mickybo and Me* to illustrate the boys' rite of passage. Thereby, leaving their hometown and families behind constitutes the moment of separation. The transition phase, then, comprises the boys' multiple adventures in the (Northern) Irish countryside. On their journey, they must test their limits on several occasions, e.g., when Mickybo has to live up to the anti-hero Butch Cassidy and rob a bank to gain money for their journey to Australia (*Mickybo* 44:20). Jonjo, on the other hand, must rescue his friend from a burning barn and the police (*Mickybo* 51:03, 58:52). As has been mentioned before, the boys also use their knowledge from the Western to assess their family situations in real life (*Mickybo* 1:01:13). This already indicates a sense of growing up and anticipates the transformation of the two main characters at the end of the film.

To assess this last component of the coming-of-age narrative, I will rely on Beckett's (2017) findings. According to her, *Mickybo and Me* displays three 'levels of awareness and understanding' (Beckett 2017, 165). The lowest one is that of Mickybo and Jonjo who are largely unaware of the sectarian fighting around them. The next higher level is that of the older boys, Gank and Fartface, who seem to have a rough idea of the conflict and its implications. Lastly, the highest level is occupied by the adults who understand the complete picture (Ibid.). Mickybo and Jonjo's transformation is, hence, brought about by a higher sense of awareness when reaching the second of these levels. This newly gained understanding, in turn, renders their friendship impossible. Like a love-across-the-barricades story, Mickybo and Jonjo's

friendship is not meant to last and, eventually, prevented by the sectarian pressures in the city of Belfast (Hill 2006, 242; Schwerter 2022, 229).

However, the two boys do not have their moment of epiphany at the same time. I will, hence, look at two key scenes that capture each of the boys' coming-of-age moments. First, Mickybo is forced to rethink his living reality when coming home to the death of his father (*Mickybo* 1:17:05–1:20:09). Shot by a unionist Protestant in the local pub, Mickybo's father explains to his son that '[i]t all happened dead quick' (1:18:15) when he sat in his usual spot by the end of the bar having a pint of beer. This is exactly where Mickybo and his dead father have their imagined conversation. The father thereby appears completely sober giving Mickybo the attention he has always wished for. He listens patiently to his son telling him about his adventures and answers all his questions, even those concerning his death or gambling. While there is no doubt about the fact that this conversation is only taking place in Mickybo's mind on the content level, the camera reinforces the impression of a real dialogue: By filming father and son in a two-shot first and then, using alternating close-ups of them as they speak, the camera treats their conversation like any other. At the same time, low-key instrumental background music seems to suggest a dream-like quality of the conversation. While this may lead to confusion on the side of the viewer, the camera dissolves it at the end of the scene. As Mickybo leaves the pub in slow motion, his father's corpse is sitting at the end of the bar with his head lying on the counter (1:19:44). By then, the background music has stopped, and undertakers appear to attend to the dead body.



Figure 5: Mickybo's Conversation with His Deceased Father (1:17:15). *Mickybo and Me*. Directed by Terry Loane, performance by Johnjo McNeill and Niall Wright, Studio Canal and Working Title Films.



Figure 6: Mickybo Walks Out of the Pub after the Imaginary Conversation with His Deceased Father (1:19:44). *Mickybo and Me*. Directed by Terry Loane, performance by Johnjo McNeill and Niall Wright, Studio Canal and Working Title Films.

Beckett's (2017) interpretation of this scene, which I am inclined to agree with, is that the imagined conversation with his deceased father transfers Mickybo from his fantasy world of living like an outlaw back to the real world (174). This 'rupture' (Ibid.) is underlined by various cinematic tools such as the camera work and the music. From the moment that Mickybo exits the pub, he must be 'the big man' (*Mickybo* 1:19:12). I.e., he must leave that part of his childhood behind where he imagines being Butch Cassidy and spends his days running about Belfast with Jonjo. Instead, he buddies up with Gank and Fartface, with whom he now shares the same level of understanding of the Troubles. Being a representative of the Protestant community, Jonjo is meanwhile blamed by Mickybo for his father's death (Beckett 2017, 191).

This is pointed out in the second scene where the two boys meet for the first time after Mickybo's father's death (*Mickybo* 1:22:54–1:25:41). Not knowing about the distress that the loss has caused his friend and the process of change it has initiated, Jonjo presumes that his friend will just carry on playing their imaginary game. However, this is not the case. Instead, Mickybo turns him down and sides with Gank and Fartface as they arrive. Mickybo's gang membership is thereby also expressed in his clothing: Instead of a woollen jumper, he now wears a shirt with a jacket over it. This makes him appear much more like his new friends. In addition, Gank and Fartface now call him 'Micky'<sup>15</sup>. This highlights the fact that Mickybo as Jonjo knows him is gone. This impression is reinforced when Micky and his friends physically abuse Jonjo. Gank and Fartface thereby prompt Micky to fight him. The camera captures this in quick movements alternating between close-ups of the boys' faces and focusing on other body parts that get either hit or kicked. This way the camera conveys a sense of chaos that stops after Mickybo has stabbed his friend with a folding knife. The camera, then, lingers on Micky's seemingly shocked face before he drops the knife and runs off. With Jonjo lying on the floor, the camera zooms in on the knife that now has Jonjo's blood on its blade. Behind it, slightly blurred, is the sheriff star Jonjo got from Mickybo in the police car on their way back to Belfast after their adventure had ended. This composition of objects seems to juxtapose both Jonjo's friend Mickybo and the seemingly traumatised boy he has become after his father's death.

At the same time, the image seems to symbolise the loss of their imaginary world for Jonjo. The fact that his friend has physically abused him based on his religious affiliation has an eye-opening effect on Jonjo – or as he puts it, has 'hit him like a freight train' (*Mickybo* 1:25:40). The comment does thereby refer to the bridge (and the train track below it) that serves as a dividing line between the Protestant and Catholic communities in the area. Jonjo thereby re-connects the end of his friendship with Mickybo with the divisive pressures of sectarianism (Schwerter 2022, 229). At this stage in the film, Jonjo narrates off-screen, and his child's voice fuses with that of the adult Jonjo as he repeats his words from the beginning of the film in a slightly altered manner ('Back in 1970 the whole world knew Belfast was a divided city. But I knew nothing about all that until it hit me like a freight train.'). This seems to suggest that, in hindsight, the adult Jonjo was able to identify the moment when he lost his

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<sup>15</sup> The change in nickname is even taken further in the final scene over thirty years later when 'Micky' has turned into 'Mick' (*Mickybo* 1:26:04).

childhood innocence while simultaneously realising the impact the Troubles had on his life (Beckett 2017, 161). This includes the knowledge that he is not safe on the other side of the bridge where he may be easily attacked based on his religious belief. Yet, with the boys' friendship having come to an end, there is no reason for either of them to ever cross the bridge again (Schwerter 2022, 229).

This chapter has shown how the imaginary play of the boys, as part of their ideological home, is deeply tied in with the development of their friendship across the divide and their coming-of-age process. By gaining a better understanding of the sectarian nature of the city, the boys realise that their friendship is impossible. Metaphorically speaking, their friendship can *bridge* the divide between Catholics and Protestants for only as long as Mickybo and Jonjo are largely unaware of the conflict. This is the case for most of the film when the boys create their fantasy world that seems to allow them to suppress the troubled city around them – or, as mentioned previously, use it as the backdrop against which their game takes place (cf. chapter 4.1). However, this only seems to work while neither of them has experienced the effects of the violent conflict firsthand. In the end, the death of Mickybo's father initiates both, the boys' coming of age and the end of their friendship.

#### **4.4 Leaving Home in *Mickybo and Me*: Suggesting Different Life Plans**

As could be seen in the previous subchapters, Mickybo and Jonjo's imaginary play allowed them to escape from Belfast – even if just for a short while – and prompted their coming-of-age process. That the wish to leave the troubled city behind seems to be deep-seated in the boys is not only reflected in their childhood adventures but also the final scene of the film (*Mickybo* 1:25:42–1:27:30). In this subchapter, I will, therefore, look at the scene where the adult Jonjo has emigrated to Australia and sends a letter to his childhood friend. Thereby, I will pay particular attention to how leaving Belfast is reflected upon and the extent to which the scene expresses a sense of hope of reconciliation that is key to films produced in the ceasefire era.

Set over thirty years later, the scene begins by showing the bridge that used to divide Jonjo and Mickybo's neighbourhoods. While in the 1970s people refrained from crossing the bridge, it now seems to be a busy passageway to get from one part of the city to the other. From a high-angle shot of the bridge, the camera cuts to the inside of a pub, focusing on a letter that arrived for the adult 'Mick'. The camera focuses on the letter and pans along the pub as it gets picked up and is brought over to Mick. Clinging

on to the image of the letter, the camera makes a connection between the object and the adult Jonjo's off-screen narration:

I know it's been over thirty years, but I wanted to get in touch. My mum still sends me all the newspaper cuttings from home. Births, deaths, marriages. It's like I never really left. *You can take the boy out of Belfast, she says, but you can't take Belfast out of the boy* [my emphasis]. I hear things are a lot better there now. Let's hope they stay that way. Let the children be children a while longer. I found this today and I wanted you to have it. It took me right back. Blood brothers. Anyway, if you're ever in Down Under, give me a call. Your friend, Jonjo. (*Mickybo* 1:25:42)

As Mick opens the letter and looks inside, the camera focuses on his hands, refraining from showing his face. For a moment, it seems, the film wants to pay tribute to Jonjo's experience (e.g., by zooming in on a photo of himself and his family) before contrasting it with that of Mick. Eventually, when the camera shows the addressee, the audience sees the now adult Mick sitting on a highchair at the end of the bar in the same pub that also his father had frequented (and died in). Here, the film seems to draw a parallel between the life of Mick and his deceased father while contrasting it to the life Jonjo has attained through emigration: While the latter seems to have successfully built up a life in Australia, Mick seems 'unable to escape the city and his working-class condition' (Bastiat 2015, 144). As such, the film seems to suggest emigration as a possibility to leave the Troubles behind (Ibid.).

Although not completely it seems. As Jonjo points out in his letter, he has remained in contact with his mother over the past years and, thereby, received information about the state of the city before and after the Good Friday agreement in the late 1990s. The timing he has chosen to get in touch, therefore, seems symbolic. The peace process and the change in atmosphere that ensued in the early 2000s seem to have encouraged Jonjo. As suggested by the previous impression of the bridge, Belfast now seems to be a place where Mick and Jonjo could be friends. The letter can, therefore, not only be read as a piece of nostalgia reminiscing a long-gone friendship but also as an attempt at reconciliation (Schwerter 2022, 229–230). The film, thus, ends on a hopeful note as is often the case in ceasefire cinema.

However, some critics see the ending of the film as 'a sentimental narrative sop' (Hill 2006, 242–243). While this may be true, the scene nonetheless provides a valuable perspective on the theme of leaving Belfast. Suggesting that 'You can take the boy out of Belfast, but not Belfast out of the boy', the film highlights that while people may have left the city behind, they did so to escape from the conflict and not from Belfast per se. In the case of Jonjo, it seems that his hometown is still close to his

heart. Apparently nostalgic about home and his childhood, the adult Jonjo, hence, seems to present his and Mickybo's adventures in an idealised way. Even if taking place against the backdrop of the Troubles, his vision of Belfast in the 1970s is lively and exciting – and, as pointed out in chapter 4.1, sometimes counterintuitive to the audience's preconception of the sectarian conflict.

After all, it can be said that the final scene of *Mickybo and Me* renders a different image of Belfast than the main plot. Set in the early 2000s, the city is now presented as a place where sectarian pressures no longer prevent a friendship between Protestants and Catholics. Taking a sense of hope from the preceding peace process, Jonjo now gets in touch with Mick as if to reinstate their friendship and reminisce about their cowboy adventures. Following up on a scene that illustrated the end of the boys' friendship, the scene conveys a sense of reconciliation. By suggesting that one of them has made it two Australia, while the other one seems to never have left his part of the city, the film points out two alternative life plans – that of escaping from the conflict through emigration and that of staying in the city throughout the Troubles and beyond. Ultimately, it seems that irrespective of the life plan the characters have chosen for themselves, Belfast still seems to have a strong call of home.

## 5. Case Study: *Belfast* (2021) by Kenneth Branagh

Kenneth Branagh's *Belfast* (2021) is based on his biography and childhood memories (Halligan 2021). Shot mostly in black and white, the film recalls growing up in Belfast during the Troubles and leaving the city due to sectarian and economic pressures (Ibid.; Armitstead 2022b). The film is set in August 1969 when rioting broke out in the Northern Irish capital. Like Branagh, the main character Buddy is nine years old at the time. In addition, small cues such as the boy's passion for films and theatre plays as well as an instance showing Buddy reading a *Thor*<sup>16</sup> comic suggest that the film's protagonist serves as a stand-in for the director. However, as Wessel (2022) points out, the film leaves open which parts of the coming-of-age drama are true and which are not.

Given that the film was shot during the Covid-19 pandemic, Branagh's version of Belfast relies on a set intended to rebuild the neighbourhood around Mountcollyer Street in the 1960s (Loughrey 2022). As O'Carroll (2022) highlights, most of the area has been demolished over the years, which also may have contributed to the decision not to film *Belfast* on location. Other cinematic choices that have been made include filming in black and white (with only a few instances of colour in the film) and relying on music by the Northern Irish singer Van Morrison for the soundtrack (Clarke 2021; Loughrey 2022).

Another tool that is central to the film's way of representing the Troubles is, once again, taking on the perspective of a child protagonist. Perceiving the sectarian conflict through nine-year-old Buddy's eyes seems to alienate the audience's understanding of it. Wessels (2022) points out that observing the violent outbreaks while identifying with the child protagonist renders the happenings less dramatic than the film's genre, the coming-of-age drama may have suggested. Moreover, some conveyed memories may seem somewhat trivial to the (adult) viewer (Ibid.), while others may nearly seem too good to be true (Clarke 2022). The latter may provoke a sense of nostalgia about the film, even though, as Armitstead (2022a) puts it, '[this] film is not about blue remembered hills but grey remembered streets'.

However, some critics see in nostalgia the tool that prevents the film from being political: Hans (2022), e.g., denounces the fact that the Troubles are 'boiled down to a

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<sup>16</sup> The reference to Marvel's *Thor* points to the director's filmography which includes the shooting of the first one of the *Thor* films for the Marvel Cinematic Universe (Lawson 2021).



vague problem of “bloody religion”. Clarke (2022) adds that jokes about religious belief are often cautiously placed – mostly to mock the main character’s own Protestant beliefs. While these may be valid points, it should be noted that *Belfast* is a highly personal film. So, while it brings the director’s childhood memories to the fore, it is perhaps less intended to capture Northern Ireland’s political situation at the time (Armitstead 2022a; Wessel 2022). Rather it concentrates on how the conflict affects the family’s life and eventually causes them to leave Belfast (Farber 2021). After all, it may have been this focus on daily life during the Troubles that may have appealed to film critics and awarded *Belfast* with the Oscar for best original screenplay (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences 2022).

After all, the following analysis will focus on how *Belfast*, as a more recent film about the Troubles, relies on features of both, the traditional Troubles thriller and the ceasefire film or, contrarily, subverts them. I will thereby rely increasingly on non-academic sources like film reviews and podcasts given that there is little academic treatment of the film to date. After the analysis, a comparison between *Mickybo and Me* and *Belfast* will be drawn in chapter 6.

### **5.1 The Physical Home: Life on Mountcollyer Street in *Belfast***

In this subchapter, I will look at the representation of the physical home in *Belfast* (2021). I will thereby look at how Branagh’s film counterposes the image of modern-day Belfast with that of his childhood memories. The latter is especially characterised by the neighbourhood in and around Mountcollyer Street where Buddy lives, the nearby park, and the school. In addition, I will look at the representation of sectarian violence and how it affects the community and the life of Buddy’s family in particular. In doing so, I will highlight cinematic tools that serve to reinforce a certain image of the Northern Irish capital.

The film starts with a sequence of images that trace the Belfast cityscape against the backdrop of the upbeat song ‘Down to Joy’ by Van Morrison (Belfast 01:11–02:51). Filmed in colour, the camera introduces the audience to various landmarks of the city: the port area with the Harland Wolff wharf and its two iconic cranes, Samson and Goliath, the river Lagan, the Titanic Museum, the Belfast City Hall, College Square, the Crumlin Road Courthouse, and Belfast Castle. Suggesting that this is the city as we know it today, the camera cuts to a peace line exhibiting multiple murals. One of them displays a group of rough-looking, presumably working-class, men

wearing flat caps (02:42). While their faces are marked with wrinkles and plasters, the usage of colours like dark blue and grey reinforces the cold and grim atmosphere emanating from the picture. After lingering on the mural for a while, the camera tilts upwards to introduce the black-and-white main plot as if to suggest going back in time (02:47). The peace line is thereby cleverly used. On the one hand, it indicates that sectarian division still forms part of modern Belfast. On the other hand, it seems to propose that the subsequent story brings us right to the roots of the conflict and, hence, draws a connection between the sequence of pictures and the main plot.



Figure 7: The Main Plot Starts Behind the Peace Line in Black and White (02:51). *Belfast*. Directed by Kenneth Branagh, performance by Jude Hill, Northern Ireland Screen and TKBC.

However, the introductory scene does not only contextualise the subsequent main plot but also counterposes two visions of Belfast that are usually represented in Troubles films. Modern-day Belfast, it seems, has managed to integrate the modern architecture of the waterfront (e.g., Titanic Museum) into a cityscape equally shaped by historical buildings like the city hall, castle, courthouse, and industrial sites like Belfast Port. The ‘new Belfast’ that has often dominated visions of Belfast created by ceasefire films, only seems to be one component of the entire city. The same can be said for the peace line that symbolically stands for the dark and grim city from the traditional Troubles thriller. The film, hence, seems to neutralise these two visions and contributes to giving Belfast a face after having long been an ‘abstract place of imagination’ (Hill 2006, 213). Given that *Belfast* itself was shot on a ‘purpose-built set’ (Halligan 2021), the introductory scene, moreover, prevents the film from providing a similarly one-sided image of the city like many films before it.



Figure 8: The Introductory Scene Shows Images of the Belfast City Scape in Colour (02:01). *Belfast*. Directed by Kenneth Branagh, performance by Jude Hill, Northern Ireland Screen and TKBC.

The main plot of the film is set in a predominantly Protestant working-class area in the north of Belfast (Bradshaw 2021). Buddy's street, however, seems to be an exception. Here, many Catholic families live alongside a few Protestants like the protagonist's own family (Schultze 2022). The first major riots break out on 15 August 1969 – the day when the story begins (*Belfast* 02:52–03:48). Yet, as the audience gets introduced to Buddy's neighbourhood, there is no sign of any violence. Instead, the atmosphere in the neighbourhood is lively and virtually idyllic. People are out in the street chatting and laughing, while children are playing. Throughout the scene, the audience gets the impression that everybody in the neighbourhood knows everybody. This is highlighted when Buddy's mother calls her son in for his tea. Neighbours quickly join her in shouting for the young boy. Eventually, it is Buddy's cousin Moira who finds him in a small side street pretending to be a 'dragon slayer' while fighting other children with a makeshift wooden sword and the lid of a dustbin (03:29). On his way home, various neighbours greet the boy and talk to him. Buddy, in turn, seems to know everyone by their name (03:58). This already indicates a strong sense of community in the neighbourhood around Mountcollyer Street that I will look at more closely in the next subchapter (cf. chapter 5.2).

Yet, the atmosphere within the neighbourhood changes within seconds when the rioting breaks out (*Belfast* 03:49–05:40): The chattering and laughing noises fade out as masked men storm into the street. Perceiving this moment through Buddy's eyes proves to be a powerful tool. Suddenly, the street turns quiet, and all sounds appear to

be far away. For a moment, it seems, as if the young boy is ‘frozen’ when the camera turns around him two and a half times while he stands still watching the rioters in complete shock. In the background, hushed voices of parents calling for their children to get inside the house get through to the spectator (04:50). However, Buddy does not seem to pay attention to them. The whole scene demonstrates an unreal, if not nightmarish, quality. Only the explosion of a bomb seems to be able to ‘wake the boy up’. With his eyes wide open, Buddy seems to go from a state of shock-induced paralysis into a state of panic and fear shouting for his mum (05:10) who eventually comes to his rescue and brings him home (05:29). Inside the house, Buddy, and his brother hide under the table while their mother observes the riots from underneath the window. In the meantime, rioters throw petrol bombs at houses, break drainage grates, break windows, and blow up a car (cf. 05:57, 06:08, 07:01). In the background, noises of explosions, breaking glass, and people shouting can be perceived. Occasionally, the camera cuts from the rioting in the streets to the inside of other, presumably Catholic, houses where people try to hide while the rioters vandalize their houses (06:04). Quickly pivoting camera movements thereby underline a sense of hectic and chaos throughout until the screen eventually turns to black.

The outbreak of sectarian violence in the neighbourhood is accompanied by a change in the atmospheric quality. From the moment, the rioters enter the street, there is a darkness taking over the neighbourhood. The change in lighting thereby seems to underline the change in mood of the scene from a light-hearted and friendly atmosphere to a terrifying one (Beaver 2014, 22–23; BBC News 2021). Similar instances can be observed throughout the film where the weather seems to reflect the mood of a scene or foreshadow, e.g., a hideous-sounding sermon at the church, a fight between the parents, or the grandfather’s poor health and death towards the end of the film (cf. *Belfast* 13:59, 33:52, 58:04).

The day after the riots, the whole street is busy tidying up, fixing broken windows, and building up a barricade at the end of the road (*Belfast* 07:46–09:01). The latter is, i.a., made from a burnt-out car, pieces of wood, and paving stones which were taken off the sidewalks. The camera points this out by focusing on Buddy’s shoes as he walks out of the house onto the dismantled pavement (*Belfast* 7:58). Using a tracking shot to follow the boy making his way to the barricade, the camera perspective is limited to showing the young boy. Given that he is much smaller than most people around him, the viewer cannot fully see what they are doing. Only snippets of conversations

between the neighbours highlight a sense of communal self-reliance (e.g., ‘The police won’t protect us. We have to do it ourselves.’) (08:21). After Buddy has climbed up the barricade, the camera takes up a high-angle shot of the street. Now, the audience gets a complete overview of what is happening below: People support one another, and everyone gets involved. Soon men will also take up the role of vigilantes – checking who enters and leaves their street during daytime and protecting the neighbourhood at night (cf. *Belfast* 16:46, 33:54). At the same time, the film draws a parallel between what happens in Buddy’s neighbourhood and an original news report about the riots and their impact on entire communities in Belfast (*Belfast* 07:33). By using this excerpt, the film makes clear: Buddy’s street is one of them and what is shown on TV is equally happening at the boy’s doorstep. This is underlined by the appearance of a tank driving past the family’s sitting room window after the news report has just thematised the employment of British armed forces in the Northern Irish capital (*Belfast* 09:12).



Figure 9: A High-angle Shot of Buddy’s Street Shows the Bustling Atmosphere On the Day After the Riots (08:57). *Belfast*. Directed by Kenneth Branagh, performance by Jude Hill, Northern Ireland Screen and TKBC.

Nevertheless, it seems that even though the outbreak of sectarian violence has seriously affected people’s lives, made them feel less secure, and threatened Catholic families in particular, it cannot seem to bring down the tight-knit community structures. Even after the sound of army helicopters hovering over the neighbourhood has become normal, there are instances in the film when life in the Mountcollyer Street area seems as idyllic as before. This is, e.g., the case when Buddy goes to school and learns together with children of both, Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, or when

he spends a sunny day with the extended family in the park (cf. *Belfast* 25:10, 49:56). Yet, conversations such as the one Buddy has with his cousin Moira about guessing people's religions by their names remind the audience that life is not as carefree as it may seem (*Belfast* 17:44). Simple things like people asking you for your name or religion can turn out dangerous. The two children, therefore, seem to struggle and pose themselves questions like 'What are you supposed to say in these situations?' and 'Is there any way to bluff the paramilitaries?'. Here, the film seems to indicate how the sectarian conflict affects children and young adults.

This is also the case in other scenes, e.g., when Buddy's brother Will tells his father (Pa) about his milk deliveries which provide rioters with petrol for their bombs (*Belfast* 47:43). In another instance, Buddy and Moira become part of a 'gang' which turns out to be a group of local rioters looting the supermarket for sectarian reasons (*Belfast* 30:59, 1:11:28). The group's local chief, Billy Clanton, is thereby characterised as 'a jumped-up gangster' (*Belfast* 44:05) who pressures fellow Protestants like Buddy's father to support them. True to the motto 'You're with us or you're against us.' (*Belfast* 43:57), Billy Clanton wants Pa to either pay them or become involved in the violence himself. Here, the film illustrates another facet of the sectarian pressures. While Buddy's family may not fall victim to physical violence and vandalism, they are pressured to take a side and, thereby, betray the Catholics in their neighbourhood – with whom the family has so far had a good relationship. When Pa declines any support, his family becomes the target of the paramilitary group in the aforementioned supermarket looting. Trying to save his family, Pa contributes to Billy Clanton's arrest by the police (*Belfast* 1:15:27). It is this firsthand experience of sectarian violence that pushes the family to leave their home in Belfast behind at the end of the film.

In an Interview, Branagh points out that some parts of the sectarian violence displayed in the film seem to Buddy like 'a wild, wild west scenario' (Maron 2021, 28:05). This impression explains the frequent usage of the theme song of the Western *High Noon* ('Do not forsake me, oh my Darling' by Tex Ritter). As Farber (2021) points out, the music is intended to draw a parallel between Fred Zinnemann's 1952 Western and *Belfast*'s final 'showdown' after the supermarket looting. This is made possible by a previous scene in the film in which Buddy watches *High Noon*, while his mother is on the phone fighting with her husband (*Belfast* 45:24). Other instances of violence seem similarly inspired by Buddy's film consumption. This is, e.g., the case when Billy Clanton hits one of the neighbours in his face (*Belfast* 29:19). The

movement of his fist, thereby, seems to allude to battle scenes in Marvel films staging superheroes and villains. This does not only seem to underline Buddy's vivid imagination and inspiration taken from cinema visits, which I will look at more closely in chapter 5.3 but also, once again, serves as a hint that *Belfast* draws from the director's biography.

Overall, it can be said that the director's childhood memories strongly impact the depiction of the physical home in *Belfast* and, hence, the representation of the Troubles through the eyes of the child protagonist. This is indicated by shooting the main plot in black and white as opposed to coloured images of the city today in the introductory sequence. In addition, the camera repeatedly limits the viewer's perception of the surroundings to what is comprised within the height of the boy when filming him in a full shot. This technique seemingly makes the audience identify with Buddy's vision of Belfast. However, putting the boy's perspective centre stage differentiates *Belfast* from traditional Troubles films that usually focus on the experience of adult male characters involved in the conflict. Interestingly, the film does not dwell on the sectarian outline of the city. Instead, the effects of the Troubles are exemplified in the protagonist's neighbourhood only. This, in turn, reinforces the impression that sectarian violence is close to home.

## **5.2 The Social Home: Reflecting on Tight-Knit Communities**

As has been mentioned before, *Belfast* (2021) depicts a tight-knit community of Protestants and Catholics. In this subchapter, I will look more closely at this community and how it shapes Buddy's social home in the film. I will thereby focus on different levels of the community – the core family (consisting of Buddy, his mother, father, and brother), the extended family (including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins), and lastly neighbours and school friends. Examining how these different levels affect Buddy's sense of home and identity, I will draw out what it is that makes Buddy feel at home in the Mountcollyer Street area and, in turn, makes it so hard for the young boy to leave the city in the end.

Buddy's core family consists of his mother, father, and older brother Will. While his mother (Ma) takes up the child-rearing, household tasks and administrative work such as keeping track of the back tax payment, the father works as a joiner in England. Coming home to Belfast every second week, Pa is not present in the family life most of the time. However, when he is home, he brings presents for the children, takes the

family to the cinema, visits the grandparents' house, and spends time with the extended family (cf. *Belfast* 47:21, 21:46, 10:49, 50:33). So, while he may seem to fulfil the role of the absent father figure as displayed in ceasefire films, Pa is nonetheless devoted to his family. Torn between coming back to Belfast where job opportunities are rare and the Troubles are taking hold of the city, and moving to England permanently with his family, Pa works hard to sustain the family and pay back his tax liabilities (which likely result from his tendency to gamble).

Ma, on the other hand, is illustrated as a strong female character. While she is taking on the household all by herself, she also tries to protect her children from becoming involved in the sectarian conflict. It is already in one of the first scenes when she saves Buddy from the riots in the streets and guides him home, that she is represented 'like an urban Boadicea<sup>17</sup>' (Branagh 2020, 4; *Belfast* 05:38). While the father is gone, she is the one ensuring the boy's safety. Similarly, she is dealing with the visit of a police officer after Buddy has stolen chocolate from the local corner shop or when she forces her son to bring back the washing powder that he removed from the supermarket in the looting (*Belfast* 44:43, 1:12:48). However, while it may seem that Ma is in control of things, phone calls and out-of-earshot conversations with her husband reveal that she is truly overwhelmed (*Belfast* 23:11, 45:42). As is pointed out by the actress Caitríona Balfe, who plays Ma in *Belfast*, the film does not downplay the mother's efforts. While she may be restricted to the private sphere of the home, she takes on an integral role in the life of the family and their eventual decision to leave Belfast (cf. *Belfast* 1:18:28). This, Balfe argues, is acknowledged in a scene where Pa thanks Ma for her commitment (Horowitz 2021, 24:03, *Belfast* 1:08:33).

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<sup>17</sup> Boadicea is a warrior queen led a revolt against the Romans in 60 CE. Today, she is known to be a national heroine of England (Encyclopedia Britannica 1998b).





Figure 10: Buddy's Ma is Illustrated as an 'Urban Boadicea' When Rescuing Her Son (05:38). *Belfast*. Directed by Kenneth Branagh, performance by Jude Hill, Northern Ireland Screen and TKBC.

The family life is deeply integrated with that of the wider community: Not only does Buddy's family have a good relationship with their neighbours, but they also frequently meet their extended family. Especially his grandparents, Granny and Pop, play a crucial role in the boy's life. In regular visits after school, Buddy and Pop talk about the young boy's first love, do his maths homework, and contemplate the sectarian conflict in Belfast (*Belfast* 26:01, 32:27). His grandmother, on the other hand, takes Buddy to the theatre and joins the family at the cinema (*Belfast* 1:01:57, 1:04:58) and thereby actively encourages the boy's passion for the dramatic arts. According to Farber (2021), it is in spending time with his grandparents that Buddy gains experiences and insights that his parents, whose relationship is strained by fights about tax payments and the question of moving away, are apparently unable to provide him with.

However, when it comes to the sectarian conflict, both parents and grandparents raise Buddy with a strong sense of tolerance. When the young boy, e.g., asks his father who is responsible for the rioting in the street and whether it was people from their side, the latter reassures him that 'There's no "our" side and "their" side in [their] street' (*Belfast* 13:34). In another instance, towards the end of the film, when Buddy tries to figure out whether he could marry his Catholic classmate one day, Pa explains to Buddy that he could marry every person he wants irrespective of their religious affiliation (*Belfast* 1:27:14). Also, when assisting Buddy with his math homework, Pop replies to his grandson's statement that there can only be one answer: 'If that were true, son, people wouldn't be blowing themselves up all over this town' (*Belfast*

33:11). Here, the film makes clear that Buddy grows up in a protected environment of people who are not committed to any sectarian fighting. The only person who might, though unknowingly, deviate from this pattern is Buddy's older cousin Moira. Urging Buddy to become part of her gang eventually leads to the children becoming involved in a supermarket looting brought about by sectarian rioters (*Belfast* 1:12:26). Here, the film seems to make the point that childhood innocence becomes instrumentalised by those involved in the Troubles.

Yet, the community seems to have its own measures to counteract this sense of radicalisation. A scene that exemplifies the values of Buddy's neighbourhood is the visit of the local police officer at Buddy's house after he and Moira have stolen chocolate from the local corner shop (*Belfast* 44:24–45:18). Coming home from school, Buddy enters the living room after his mother has already seen him and called him in. Then, the camera pans from right to left, first showing the policeman, then Ma asking Buddy to sit down in the armchair opposite from them to talk to the officer. Both of them seem rather serious. Next, the camera focuses on Buddy, showing his face in a medium close-up while using a slightly canted angle from above (44:57). This renders the whole scene more intimidating – especially when from off-screen, the police officer speaks in a very low voice about 'a very serious crime [that] has been committed down in Mr Singh's shop' (45:04). The look on Buddy's face meanwhile seems scared and his lips are pressed together as if determined not to say anything. Not only does the film here seem to parody the really serious crimes that are committed in the course of the Troubles, but also does it uphold the power structures and values of the working-class community (Armitstead 2022b). This becomes clear when Ma sees the policeman out and people in the neighbourhood are seemingly curious about what he might have wanted and how long he might have been in the house (45:09). In this sense, the scene can be read as a way for the community to penalise morally wrong behaviour. It seems to say, 'If you behave badly, people will find out.' – and perhaps the talking is even worse than the police officer's visit.

Yet, that this form of social control may appear suffocating at times, too, is pointed out in a mocking scene shortly after the barricade in Buddy's street has been built (*Belfast* 16:39–17:07). One of the neighbours, Frankie West, sits by the barricade and controls who is entering and leaving the street – whether he knows the people or not. This leads to irritation when Buddy's aunt and uncle come for a visit. Pointing out that he and his wife have been visiting Buddy's family for years, uncle Mack refuses to

give Frankie their name and house number. That this is, indeed, unnecessary is pointed out at the end of the scene when Frankie says: ‘We won’t worry about their name or the number now. We know where they live.’ (*Belfast* 17:03). The neighbourhood, thus, seems to be both a source of confidence as well as a means of social control.

However, Buddy’s family seems to like being part of the community they live in. This can be seen in a conversation between Ma and Pa on the bus (*Belfast* 54:12–57:59) before the latter leaves for the airport. In it, the mother highlights that it is the social context of the neighbourhood and extended family that impedes her decision to move away: ‘We’ve known this street and every street ‘round it, all our lives and every man, woman and child that lives in every bloody house, whether we like it or not. I like it.’ (*Belfast* 55:33) She thereby points out that she does not know any other home but Belfast. In addition, she highlights that the children can play anywhere in the neighbourhood, since the people know them and care for them. Here, the already mentioned sense of community in the area becomes especially noticeable. Like her son, Ma seems to draw a sense of security and comfort from the people around her.

Finally, it seems to be this sense of familiarity that constitutes Buddy’s emotional attachment to his social home. Whether it is his core family, his extended family or the neighbours, people look after the young boy and shape his personality. On the one hand, this can be seen in specific incidents such as experiencing first love, playing childish tricks like stealing from the local shop, and the family’s and community’s reaction to them. On the other hand, it can be seen in the teaching of values such as tolerance. The latter is especially vital given the time and space Buddy grows up in. Irrespective of their religion, people in the neighbourhood assist each other and maintain the community spirit. This seems to suggest that Buddy’s neighbourhood remains a safe space – perhaps to a misleading extent. In fact, I would argue, that it makes the on-screen violence appear less grave and, hence, alienates the viewer’s perception of the sectarian conflict.

### **5.3 The Ideological Home: Refuge at the Cinema**

This subchapter will deal more closely with the ideological home as presented in *Belfast* (2021). I will thereby look at the daily life of Buddy’s family – from daily practices such as visiting the grandparents and doing homework to special occasions such as going to the cinema when the father is at home. Apart from that, I will look at instances in the film that reflect on both, the Catholic and Protestant faith, and how

humour is used to decrease tension within a film dealing with the Troubles. Throughout, I will point to various instances that seem to contribute to the boy's coming-of-age process. So, by the end of the film, Buddy has acquired a new sense of understanding about his life, his home in Belfast, and the circumstances of the Troubles.

Most of Buddy's life takes place in his neighbourhood – either at home, in school, or outside on the street and in the park. After school, Buddy often spends time with his grandparents with whom he has a very close relationship. His grandfather not only helps Buddy with his maths homework but also provides him with essential guidance on his first love and doubts about leaving Belfast (cf. *Belfast* 25:01, 32:39). Here, it seems, the young boy can unburden himself and is taken seriously. At the same time, it is in conversations with his grandparents that Buddy learns important things about life and the Troubles.

This is, e.g., the case when Buddy struggles with his maths homework and Pop, in turn, explains to him the concept of 'spread betting' (*Belfast* 32:24–33:52), a term used in horse racing. Here, the grandfather seems to suggest that when writing less legibly, Buddy could raise his chances of receiving a favourable mark from his teacher and, hence, sitting closer to the front desk where his puppy love Catherine sits (33:03). While Buddy identifies Pop's approach as cheating, his grandfather seems to propose that 'all is fair in war and love'. Showing the pair of them in a two-shot for most of the conversation, the camera captures both, Pop's mischievous smile while giving the advice and the pensive look on Buddy's face as he processes the information (33:01). To the young boy, the grandfather is not only his closest confidant but also seems to be incredibly wise (Armitstead 2022b). However, the conversation goes even further: When Buddy tells Pop that there can only ever be one correct answer, the conversation goes full circle when the grandfather projects the comment on the Troubles. As he puts it, there would be no fighting between unionist Protestants and republican Catholics if they all agreed on one right answer (33:11).

After all, Catholics and Protestants do not seem to be that different – at least this is the impression the audience gets from the film when Buddy's mother says that their Catholic neighbours 'just kick with the left foot' (*Belfast* 10:57) or Buddy and his father joke about going to confession (*Belfast* 12:11, 1:27:36). As if to underline this sense of being essentially the same, the film includes a scene that is equally joking about the Protestant faith with a minister preaching about heaven and hell. In the scene,

he shouts at the congregation that they will pass away ‘agonisingly’ (*Belfast* 14:08) while sketching an image of a fork in the road that seems to follow Buddy throughout the film (cf. *Belfast* 22:24, 28:20). The camera meanwhile underlines the daunting experience of the sermon using canted angles from below and zooming in on the minister’s sweating face. A glimpse of Buddy’s wide-eyed face seems to affirm that this mass will have a lasting effect on him. However, to neutralise the boy’s perspective, the film makes use of humour: Not only is the scene introduced by an off-screen comment that denounces Catholicism as ‘a religion of fear’ (13:59), but it also ends with the minister’s question for money (15:12) (which reminds the audience of the selling of indulgences in the Catholic Church of the 16<sup>th</sup> century). Thus, while religion seems to play a role in the life of the family, it needs to be taken with a grain of salt.



*Figure 11: The Minister at the Church Preaches About Heaven and Hell (14:03). Belfast. Directed by Kenneth Branagh, performance by Jude Hill, Northern Ireland Screen and TKBC.*

On the weekends, Buddy is often spending time with his (extended) family. This includes meeting up at the boy’s house, playing in the park, and going to the cinema. The latter thereby seems to fulfil an important function in Buddy’s life as it allows him to forget life in the troubled city for a while and impacts his imagination and perception of his own life. This can be seen in instances where sectarian violence is represented with an air of cinematic effects (cf. *Belfast* 29:15, 1:14:23). At the same time, Buddy seems to foster a growing passion for stories and acting. This is indicated in the rare usage of colour in the otherwise black-and-white main plot: The films in the cinema are shown in colour and the golden stage lights from the theatre play *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens are even reflected in Granny’s glasses (*Belfast* 1:02:05).



*Figure 12: The Golden Light From the Theatre Play is Reflected in Granny's Glasses (1:02:05). Belfast. Directed by Kenneth Branagh, performance by Jude Hill, Northern Ireland Screen and TKBC.*

These instances highlight what is thematised in a conversation between Buddy and his grandmother on the bus after they have watched the play (*Belfast* 1:02:34–1:04:33). In it, Buddy suggests Granny to join them at the cinema on the weekend to distract her while Pop is in the hospital (1:03:30). Here it seems Buddy is giving away advice himself – seemingly drawing from what appears to help him. The stories of various films seem to distract him from the Troubles, his parents' fighting, and the thought of leaving Belfast. His grandmother seems to notice this and shares with him her excitement for the cinema when she was younger. Especially the film *Lost Horizon* (1937) by Frank Capra and the idea of the paradise-like 'Shangri-La' seem to have captured her attention. When Buddy asks her about the place and if she's ever been there – not understanding that it carries a symbolic function – Granny replies 'There were no roads to Shangri-La from our part of Belfast' (1:04:12). As she does so, the camera zooms in on the dreamy expression on her face. Here, a sense of nostalgia becomes tangible.

The intertextual reference to the other film thereby serves to draw a parallel to a paradise that Belfast has never been. However, this does not seem to prevent the city to appear paradise-like through Buddy's eyes. Ehrlich (2021), hence, proposes that 'Belfast will [soon] be a Shangri-La of Buddy's own'. This comment can be interpreted on two levels: On the one hand, it seems to suggest that Buddy is likely to reminisce about his childhood in Belfast after he has moved to England – however, this is no longer part of the film which ends with the bus driving the family off to the

airport (*Belfast* 1:28:36). On the other hand, it can be read as a sort of meta-reference to Branagh's film as such given that it provides a nostalgic view of the city to the audience.

Throughout *Belfast*, Buddy seems to receive various pieces of information about religion, the sectarian conflict, and the impact it has on the life of his family from various sources – including conversations, films, and firsthand experience with the Troubles – and pieces them together. When talking to his parents, grandparents, and cousin, he poses questions and seems to dwell upon the answers, as is suggested in the camerawork when using close-ups and lingering on the boy's facial expression a little longer than might be necessary (cf. *Belfast* 33:15, 1:03:04). In the end, it seems, Buddy has created his own picture of what happens around him – however incomplete. This seems to be indicated in small but recognisable changes in his behaviour. When for example asked by his grandfather at different stages of the film what it is that he wants Buddy's answers indicate that he is going through a coming-of-age process. In the first instance, he replies: 'Every night, before I go to sleep, [...] I ask God if he'd fix it so that when I wake up in the morning, I am the best footballer in the world. And then I also ask him, as well, that when I grow up, can I marry Catherine? [...] That's what I want' (*Belfast* 33:29). In the next instance, towards the end of the film, Buddy's answer to the question of whether he wants to move to England or not, is much shorter: 'I want you [Pop] and my Granny to come, too.' (*Belfast* 1:01:30).

After all, it seems that it is through film, play, and laughter that the family gets the chance to forget about the Troubles, their financial problems, and the grandfather's ill health. Especially to nine-year-old Buddy, stories serve as a means to 'digest' traumatic experiences such as the rioting and fighting in the streets. In addition, the humorous treatment of religion and the Troubles seem to help release tensions as they come up in the film. Again, I would argue that this renders the conflict less serious than it was, while still conveying the weight of its impact on Buddy's family. At the end of the film, the ideological home in the shape of stories, films, and memories of his childhood in Belfast is the only thing that remains for Buddy when moving to England permanently. This is why I would contend that it is of great significance in the film and for Buddy's coming-of-age process.

#### 5.4 Leaving Home in *Belfast*: An Escape Route

In this subchapter, I will examine the theme of emigration that seems to be central to the film's diegesis as well as Buddy's coming-of-age process. Therefore, I will first look at how leaving the city is represented in *Belfast* (2021) before I turn to tracing the three key phases of Buddy's rite of passage.

From the moment the Troubles break out in Buddy's neighbourhood, the idea of leaving the city is brought up – and not only that, throughout the film it seems to be 'the elephant in the room'. When Buddy's father, who has been working in England for several years, suggests moving away from Belfast, the idea is mostly motivated by being able to be with his family and protect them. However, this is not easy when only being at home once every two weeks. In frequent phone calls with his wife, there seems to be an unspoken charge on both sides. While Ma feels left alone with the responsibility of minding the children and preventing them from getting caught up in the sectarian violence, Pa feels that it is her hesitation in making the decision to leave Belfast that prevents them from leading a better life (cf. *Belfast* 45:48, 1:07:40).

The decision is further aggravated by the family's financial worries and their loving ties to home – as is represented in their large extended family and tight-knit neighbourhood community. '[D]rowning in debt' (*Belfast* 23:25), the family cannot even afford to go on holidays (cf. *Belfast* 29:51) let alone move to Vancouver or Sydney (cf. *Belfast* 49:33). In addition, the fact that both countries are far away from Belfast unsettles Buddy's mother who, as mentioned before, draws her sense of identity from the community she lives in. She, therefore, dismisses her husband's idea to move to Australia as is suggested in phrases like 'I didn't come up the lough in a bubble. There's no one from 'round here [who] can afford the fare to go down there [...]' (*Belfast* 49:37). To her, Pa's suggestion that they could always visit their family, or the other way around seems like a fantasy. However, her husband seems less concerned. He argues that Commonwealth countries such as Australia and Canada need skilled workers like him and that their government offers grants to pay for the passage (*Belfast* 23:41). For him, the film seems to suggest, emigration – and the brochures of Sydney and Vancouver stand symbolically for it – offers 'an escape route' (*Belfast* 23:59).

This is, however, not what the parents communicate to their children. Instead, they make moving away to Australia, or later England, sound like a fun experience. This is



pointed out in a scene set at Christmas when the family tries to make a decision (*Belfast* 1:05:22-1:07:15). After unwrapping presents and playing against the backdrop of the theme song from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968), Ma and Pa ask Buddy to sit with them on the sofa. As they talk, the camera shows the three of them sitting next to each other with Buddy sitting in the middle. This allows the audience to see the uncertain and nervous looks that the parents give to one another as they describe the bigger house they could live in and the garden where Buddy could play football (1:06:07). Yet, the young boy does not seem to be impressed. His subsequent meltdown suggests that Buddy – although having previously been excited about the idea of having a garden (59:57) – does not want to leave his grandparents and life in Belfast behind (1:06:42). As the director suggests in an interview, this scene does not only suggest that the boy does not want to leave his home but also that he dreads the idea of dealing with loss and growing up (Maron 2021, 49:49). After all, this is what Buddy must do for the rest of the film. Not only is the decision to move to England made after the family has become the target of sectarian violence in the final showdown of the film (*Belfast* 1:18:58) but also the young boy loses his grandfather (*Belfast* 1:21:21). Moreover, when the family eventually moves to England, the boy also has to leave Catherine and his grandmother behind (*Belfast* 1:26:30).

For Buddy, who like his mother takes his sense of identity from his home in Belfast, the experience of moving away is life-changing and kicks off his coming-of-age process: The outbreak of the Troubles and the accompanying discussion about leaving them behind marks a moment of separation for the boy. He begins to consider what is important in his life and thereby develops a strong sense of appreciation for his social home (the grandparents, his first love Catherine, his cousins, and friends). This is highlighted in his emotional outbreak at Christmas when the boy leaves no doubt about his concerns about feeling lonely in his new surroundings (*Belfast* 1:06:47). On the other hand, while learning a lot about the danger inherent to the Troubles through conversations or firsthand experience, Buddy seems to foster a sense of understanding. Therefore, he no longer objects to his mother's decision to leave the city after the supermarket looting (*Belfast* 1:18:45). This instance indicates that something in the boy's outlook on his life in Belfast has changed and, hence, marks his transition. This impression is reinforced by Pop's death. Experiencing the death of a close family member seems to teach Buddy that leaving behind is as much a part of his life as starting anew. However, when Buddy leaves his neighbourhood on the bus towards

the airport at the end of the film, the audience is left in the dark as to whether the boy manages to embrace a new home in England and thereby achieves a sense of reincorporation. Rather he turns around to his Granny standing in the doorway of her house when driving off. Her closing words ‘Go. Go now. Don’t look back. [...]’ (*Belfast* 1:28:22) seem to underline the conflicting feelings of the boy. While he still may not want to leave Belfast behind, he knows that he has to.

The question of whether Buddy will look back or not, can, however, be answered on a meta-level when reading the young boy as a stand-in for the director, Kenneth Branagh. As has been mentioned before, Belfast seems to have become an idolised place of imagination for Branagh – or as Ehrlich (2021) points out, a sort of Shangri-La. While the troubled city of the late 1960s might have never been as idyllic as presented in the film, leaving it behind together with a strong sense of identity and rootedness that Buddy and/or Branagh felt in Belfast might have made it appear this way. Leaving the city in *Belfast* is, hence, conveyed to be more than just an ‘escape route’ but is presented as a struggle between personal welfare and safety, on the one hand, and the call of home, family, and community, on the other.

Finally, it can be said that the notion of home is quintessential for *Belfast* and the way the film deals with the question of leaving the city. While emigration is first suggested to be a possibility to escape the violence, it turns out to be strongly interwoven with the child protagonist’s sense of identity and coming-of-age process. The film thereby leaves open what the young boy’s state of reincorporation may look like. Yet, the fact that *Belfast* is based on the director’s biography does allow the audience to take an educated guess. Last but not least, the film seems to take up the various components of the concept of home – physical, social, and ideological – in its discussion of what it means to leave the city behind.

## 6. Synthesis: (Leaving) Home in *Mickybo and Me* and *Belfast*

In this chapter, I will compare the representation of the Northern Irish capital as a home in the films *Mickybo and Me* (2005) and *Belfast* (2021). The comparison is thereby conducted in the shape of a partial, symmetric, convergent, cultural comparison. Throughout, I will pay particular attention to the films' commonalities in their representation of the home to highlight how they differ from both the original Troubles thriller and the ceasefire cinema. In terms of structure, the comparison will be carried out based on the analysis parameters introduced in chapter 2.1 – the physical, social, and ideological home, as well as, the theme of leaving Belfast. After examining how the two films reflect on these categories, I will conclude the chapter by assessing what this comparison may contribute to the existing scholarly conversation on Northern Irish cinema and the Troubles film.

As has been mentioned before, both films can be categorised as coming-of-age dramas that perceive the Troubles-ridden city through the eyes of the child protagonists. This is vital when considering their representation of Belfast in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In both films, the protagonists are eight and nine years old. Therefore, the films can be categorised as pre-teen coming-of-age films which further affects how their stories are told. Another component impacting the depiction of the city in both films may be the directors' personal connection to the respective films: While *Belfast* is explicitly based on Branagh's biography, Loane has also drawn on his experience of growing up in Belfast during the Troubles when making *Mickybo and Me* (although the main plot is essentially taken from the theatre play *Mojo Mickybo*). Consequently, both films can be regarded as highly personal productions which is, as will be seen in the following, also reflected in their representation of Belfast as a home and the act of leaving the city.

When it comes to the physical home, both films use the Troubles as the backdrop against which their stories evolve. They, hence, illustrate how sectarian violence affects the protagonists' living conditions – though to a varying degree. *Mickybo and Me*, on the one hand, places a particular emphasis on the sectarian divide of the city since it is central to the plot. Not only do Mickybo and Jonjo come from different parts of the city but also are the Protestant and Catholic communities they live in separated by a bridge. The two boys, therefore, live in an interface area that is not only defined by distinct religious affiliations but also by different economic statuses. While Jonjo comes from a Protestant middle-class background, Mickybo lives in a Catholic

working-class area of the city. As a result, the former is barely affected by sectarian violence. Mickybo, however, lives in a neighbourhood that is frequently targeted by bombings and shootings and is, therefore, characterised by run-down houses, barricades, and people leaving their homes. Being the exact opposite of Jonjo's quieter and more affluent-looking area of the city, the other side of the bridge appears to Jonjo 'like the other side of the world' (*Mickybo* 08:23).

*Belfast*, on the other hand, renders a different image of the sectarian divide: Taking place in a predominantly Protestant part of the city, yet, in a street where there live mostly Catholics, the film takes Buddy's neighbourhood as an example of similar conflicts taking place in the entire city. Consequently, the film does not refer to the sectarian outline of Belfast. Nonetheless, the audience gets an idea of the impact the Troubles had on people's life at home. Given that Buddy's street is home to mostly Catholic families, it is one of the areas where rioting breaks out in mid-August 1969. Growing up in a Protestant household, Buddy's house is, unlike the houses around it, not attacked. Within the microcosm of the neighbourhood, the story does, therefore, not so much evolve around the conflict between the two religious communities (although it is obviously crucial to its development) but on the impact, the Troubles have on those who refrain from taking a side. Although Protestant, Buddy's family maintains a friendly relationship with their Catholic neighbours and does not become involved in the conflict. This is different in *Mickybo and Me* where the sectarian pressures avert the boys' friendship in the end and draw them apart.

Both films take up the violence inherent to the conflict in various instances throughout the film. However, in *Mickybo and Me*, the bombings and shootings seem to take place away from the children and mostly serve as the backdrop against which the story is set (e.g., the presence of tanks, the body searches, and the burnt-out pub as part of the boys' imaginary play). The Troubles-ridden city thereby seems to take on the function of a 'playground' in which Mickybo and Jonjo pretend to be outlaws. The conditions in the city meanwhile seem to inspire their adventures – and help them to align their living reality with that of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) when, e.g., stealing bananas and toy guns from the local shop and re-enacting dialogues from the Western.

*Belfast*, on the other hand, focuses more on the involvement of children in the depicted violence. This can be seen in scenes where Will's milk delivery turns out to help the rioters build petrol bombs or where Buddy gets caught up in a supermarket

looting. Even the initial outbreak of the riots in Buddy's street at the beginning of the film and the eventual showdown after the supermarket looting when Billy Clanton holds the family hostage seem to bring the violence close to home. When trying to make sense of the violence around him, Buddy seems to recall what he knows from the films he has watched. Some scenes in the film, therefore, bear similarities to a Western (which is reinforced by underlining them with music from Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon*), while others remind the audience of a fight between heroes and villains in a Marvel film (which at the time in which the film is set only exist as a comic). Yet, while the outbreak of the Troubles and the inherent violence seem to scare Buddy in *Belfast*, Mickybo in *Mickybo and Me* seems to find the idea of bombings and shootings exciting. This is not least indicated in his fascination for guns as well as in his collection of 'treasures' including human remains like a blown-off finger.

However, while the films differ in how they portray sectarian violence, they use similar techniques to alienate the viewer's perception of them. E.g., by implying that the presence of soldiers, army helicopters, tanks, barricades, body searches etc. seems normal to the children, the films automatically draw the audience's attention to these details. In some cases, the perspective of the child protagonists even renders the violence less grave than it may have been. This is, e.g., the case when Buddy in *Belfast* still clings on to his childish dreams of becoming the best football player in the world and marrying his puppy love Catherine, when the Troubles force his parents to contemplate leaving their home. A similar incident can be observed in *Mickybo and Me* where Mickybo's urge to tell his father all about his adventures obscures the fact that the latter is dead by conjuring up an entirely imagined conversation between the two.

Overall, both films do not provide much background information on the Troubles. While *Belfast* makes repeated use of snippets taken from original news reports, there is even less help for the uninformed viewer in *Mickybo and Me*. Yet, this may be explained by the different release dates of the two films. In 2005 when *Mickybo and Me* was released, the Good Friday Agreement that officially marked the end of the conflict in 1998 may have been more present than in 2021, when *Belfast* was released. Another difference in the treatment of the city and its outline can be seen in *Belfast's* usage of present-day images of the city which are – together with the scenes featuring films at the cinema and theatre plays – rare occasions of colour in the film. Here it seems that, perhaps because of shooting the film on a studio backlot rather than on

location, the filmmakers found it necessary to provide a more comprehensive image of the city after which the film is named. Hereby, the film seems to neutralise the vision of Belfast provided by previous Troubles films as either a grim and dark place or a modern, consumer-driven city. *Mickybo and Me* meanwhile seems to opt for a different strategy – although with a similar effect. Here, the final scene suggests a more peaceful atmosphere in the city over thirty years later. This can be seen in Jonjo’s letter which can be read as a gesture of reconciliation and in the depiction of the bridge as a means to connect the communities within the city rather than dividing them.

As far as the social home is concerned, both films point out the family home as a critical setting that shapes the child protagonists’ personalities. Thereby, the core families of either, Mickybo, Jonjo, and Buddy, are defined by absent fathers. The mothers, in turn, seem to compensate for their absence while taking on household chores and child-rearing. Yet, the fathers in the two films are absent for different reasons: In *Mickybo and Me*, the absence of Mickybo’s father stems from unemployment, a tendency of gambling, and a seeming alcohol problem. Jonjo’s father’s absence from his family is meanwhile characterised by adultery and the eventual separation from his wife. In *Belfast*, Pa’s employment abroad constitutes his absence – however, gambling and the related debt are also an issue. Nonetheless, both films seem to highlight the fathers’ loving characteristics as if to indicate that at least in two of three cases the fathers did not choose to be removed from the family life most of the time. This is reflected in the presents Mickybo’s father makes for his children in *Mickybo and Me*. In *Belfast*, while also making presents, Pa tries to come home from England every fortnight and insists on finding a solution that works for the whole family when considering leaving Belfast for good.

The mothers are meanwhile portrayed as strong female characters who care for their children while taking on the household and making life more bearable for their families during the Troubles. In *Mickybo and Me*, this is to an extent alluded to in Mickybo’s mother who proves to be forbearing with her husband’s seeming addiction, while looking after six children all by herself. At the same time, her singing and imagination seem to distract the family from the sectarian fighting at their doorstep. Nevertheless, the role of the mother is even more pronounced in *Belfast*, where Ma takes on administrative work such as overseeing the state of their back tax payment while running the household, raising the children, and protecting them from getting caught up in sectarian violence, even if at times unsuccessful. This does not remain unnoticed:

In one of the scenes set in the family home at Christmas, Pa thanks his wife for all her work. Here, the film seems to suggest that its makers are aware of the fact that reducing female characters to the roles of girlfriend, wife, and mother tend to exhibit them as flat characters and reduce their influence to the private sphere only. Instead, *Belfast* acknowledges the role of the mother and allows for her views on the Troubles to be expressed as can be seen from conversations and arguments Ma has with her husband about leaving the city. In fact, it is the mother who has the final say on the family's move to England at the end of the film.

At the same time, both films make use of stereotypes and humour when sketching the Northern Irish community. In *Mickybo and Me* this is exemplified by portraying the Catholic family as poor and with many children, while in the more affluent Protestant family, Jonjo grows up as an only child. In *Belfast*, the film meanwhile ridicules communal power structures, e.g., when the local police officer visits Buddy's house to investigate 'a very serious crime' (*Belfast* 45:04). In another instance, the sermon at the Protestant church is mockingly suggested to be closer to the Catholic 'religion of fear' (*Belfast* 13:59) than most Northern Irish Protestants might want to believe. However, in instances when no joking is involved, *Belfast* represents the neighbouring community as tight-knit. Here, people support each other irrespective of their religious affiliation and even the rioting does not seem to be able to change this.

This sense of tolerance also becomes visible in the treatment of Buddy's first love: Not knowing whether he could ever have a future with Catherine, his father reassures him that he could marry any person he would like – irrespective of their religious belief. A similar sense of open-mindedness becomes visible in *Mickybo and Me* where Jonjo and Mickybo become friends despite being from different sides of the sectarian divide. However, as it turns out, their friendship is only able to bridge the divide for as long as they know very little about the sectarian conflict around them. When they realise the effect of the sectarian conflict on their lives, as is illustrated in the assassination of Mickybo's father by a unionist Protestant sniper, their friendship is doomed to fail. Here, Belfast is presented as a place where Catholics and Protestants cannot live in peaceful cohabitation, let alone be friends. After all, both films seem to draw on the love-across-the-barricade trope. While in *Mickybo and Me*, it ends as is often the case in frustration, the situation in *Belfast* is not as clear: On the one hand, moving to England hampers Buddy's relationship with the Catholic girl. On the other

hand, Pa's reassurance that Buddy could even marry a 'vegetarian antichrist' (*Belfast* 1:27:19) conveys a sense of hope for the young love.

When it comes to the depiction of the ideological home in *Mickybo and Me* and *Belfast*, both productions put films and their ability to stimulate the boys' imagination at the heart of their plots. While their shared passion for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* allows Mickybo and Jonjo to perceive Belfast as their own Wild West, Buddy's love for stories and films, in general, helps the boy to escape from the troubled city – even if it is just for a short while. This sense of distraction seems to enable all three of them to hold on to their childhood and provides both films with a sense of 'innocent lightness' in their portrayal of the Northern Irish capital as a home. Being represented as a *mise en abyme*, the story about Butch and Sundance seems to structure Mickybo's and Jonjo's life to the extent that the imitation of the two characters constitutes their friendship. So, whenever they meet one another, they can be sure to address themselves with the names of the outlaws and go about their adventures while re-enacting entire scenes from the Western. In *Belfast*, on the other hand, intertextual references to various films like classical Westerns or *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968) point out that watching TV and going to the cinema is an essential component of how Buddy and his family spend their free time. Moreover, the visits to the cinema exhibit special occasions when Buddy's father is at home and the whole family spends time together – they, hence, serve as a sort of 'connecting device'.

Furthermore, films irrespective of how they are integrated into the main plot fulfil another function: In both cases, they serve as a source of knowledge that the children tap into to interpret their living realities. As has been mentioned before, Buddy makes use of his knowledge from Westerns like *High Noon* (1952) to reflect on the outbreak of sectarian violence in his neighbourhood. In *Mickybo and Me*, Jonjo tries to assess his parents' imminent separation with the help of the character constellation in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Also, Butch and Sundance seem to become Mickybo's and Jonjo's idols after they have developed doubts about the qualities of their own fathers as role models. Here, the viewer gets the impression that film and imagination are something the boys turn to when they cannot find the answers to their questions in real life. However, it is the confrontation with their living reality and the realisation that even (anti-)heroes like Butch and Sundance could not solve the sectarian conflict in Belfast that marks the end of the boys' friendship and constitutes their coming-of-age moment in *Mickybo and Me*. Nevertheless, over thirty years later, Jonjo and



Mick's memories of the Western and their adventures as outlaws (as symbolised by the sheriff star) comprise a sense of nostalgia about their childhood in 1970s Belfast.

This sense of nostalgia seems to dominate the last scene of *Mickybo and Me* dealing with the act of leaving the city. From Jonjo's letter, the audience gets to know that he has emigrated to Australia while Mick has stayed in Belfast. While reinforcing their different economic statuses, the scene nonetheless also points to the fact that despite having moved to 'the other side of the world', Jonjo still seems to feel a strong call of home. This is alluded to in his intensive contact with his mother who provides him with all the news from Belfast. It seems that if it was not for the sectarian conflict, Jonjo would not have left his home. Mick, on the other hand, sits in the same pub that also his father frequented and, therefore, seems to have opted for a different life plan. While emigration is here presented as a way out of the conflict, staying means living through it – against all the odds, including the frequent bombings and shootings in Mick's neighbourhood.

A similar picture is drawn in *Belfast* where emigrating is explicitly labelled as an 'escape route' (23:59). Here, the film seems to suggest that it is the social environment, i.e., the tight-knit community and the extended family, that aggravates the family's decision to leave the city for England. The audience thereby gets a sense of how Buddy and his mother, in particular, draw their sense of identity from their home on Mountcollyer Street. Therefore, they do not seem to care about the bigger house and the garden, the higher standard of living and the perspective to repay their debts faster. Instead, they are worried about being lonely and being bereaved of the sense of security and comfort they draw from home. It is this existential experience that frames Buddy's coming of age in the film.

Overall, it can be said that both films provide a nostalgic view of Belfast in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This prevents them from drawing a dark and grim picture of the city as presented in the traditional Troubles thriller. While nonetheless depicting the evolving sectarian violence, perceiving the Troubles through the eyes of the child protagonists somewhat alienates the audience's perspective on the conflict and, at times, makes it appear less grave than it may have been. However, the focus on the concept of Heimat has allowed emphasis on a distinct vision of the city different from that of both, the traditional Troubles thriller and the ceasefire cinema. While retaining inherent tropes such as the divided city narrative or the love-across-the-barricades story, the two coming-of-age films have rendered the Troubles in a more personal

manner while drawing from the experiences of their Belfast-born directors. Moreover, illustrating the theme of growing up in Belfast during the Troubles highlights the perspective of children that has often been neglected in films about the sectarian conflict. In doing so, *Mickybo and Me* and *Belfast* single out themes such as the feeling of security, the experience of tight-knit communities, and passing on values such as tolerance amid the sectarian conflict. The films thereby also enable the perspective of those who are not involved in any violence and, therefore, renounce the conflict. Yet, while using the Troubles as the backdrop against which both stories are set, the films do not provide much background information on the conflict and, instead, fall back on the usage of stereotypes and, sometimes black, humour to comment on the Troubles – a strategy well-known from films of the ceasefire era.

Nevertheless, the two films' vision of Belfast and their analysis based on the representation of Belfast as a home may, indeed, contribute to the scholarly conversation about Northern Irish cinema and the Troubles film. After all, the analysis parameters of the physical, social, and ideological home allow the analyst to trace Belfast as a lived-in place and may help to uncover distinct perceptions of the city and the conflict. Finally, the depiction of Belfast in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a home by itself may not close the 'substantial representational gap' identified by McLoone. However, it may inspire more research on the representation of the city in Northern Irish films based on such a thematic focus. This, in turn, may inspire to pose questions that have so far not been asked and, perhaps, widen the scope of research topics within the field so that, eventually, a more wide-ranging set of categories is brought about that goes beyond the grim and dark city, on the one hand, and the new consumer-driven version of Belfast on the other.

## 7. Conclusion

This master thesis has explored the filmic representation of the Troubles by comparing the two coming-of-age dramas *Mickybo and Me* (2005) by Terry Loane and *Belfast* (2021) by Kenneth Branagh. Trying to answer the question ‘How do the two films represent the Belfast of the late 1960s and early 1970s as a home and how do they reflect on the act of leaving the Troubles-ridden city?’, I have introduced the German term *Heimat* as an analytical tool. The analysis has, then, been based on the three analytical parameters drawn out from the spatial concept: the physical home, the social home, and the ideological home. In addition, I have looked closely at the theme of leaving Belfast as represented in the two films.

Encouraging an analysis that embraces the films’ context as much as their content, I have further explored the representation of home in film as exemplified in the usage of the setting, location, and space. Thereby, I have started from the assumption that for a film to impart meaning, the filmmakers and the audience must be aware of the conventions inherent to the ‘language’ of film. According to Hall, all meaning is constructed which is why a simple change in the camera perspective can change the entire *mise en scène* and its conveyed meaning. Therefore, elements like the camera movement, -angle, and -shot, have been introduced as central to the film analysis in the main part. The same goes for all other components that affect the contents of the frame and, hence, the concept of home revealed by the film, e.g., the choice of costume, lighting, character movement, facial expressions, and gestures.

Apart from that, I have looked more closely at genre theory to draw out the main characteristics of the coming-of-age film. The fact that both films can be categorised as pre-teen films impacts the prevalent themes in *Mickybo and Me* and *Belfast*. The family home, therefore, proves to be an important setting in both films and the main conflicts evolve around existential questions such as leaving home, losing a loved one, and attaining a better understanding of the adult world as well as the sectarian conflict taking place at the children’s doorstep. Furthermore, the child protagonists go through a rite of passage that induces a confrontation with their current life pattern, their renunciation, and the embrace of a new self. In the analysis, I have, hence, explored both the family home as part of the social home and the protagonists’ respective coming-of-age processes by tracing their moments of separation, transition, and reincorporation.

The analysis has further been designed to not only incorporate theoretical aspects but also the films' historical background. Given that both, *Mickybo and Me* and *Belfast*, are set against the backdrop of the Troubles, I have outlined the conflict's origin, its outbreak and development from the late 1960s onwards, and its resolution by the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Thereby, I have placed particular emphasis on the living conditions in Belfast in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Another important aspect of this chapter was to clear up the misunderstanding that the Troubles are a purely religious conflict as is often suggested in Northern Irish films. This has proved useful for the analysis of the two films, as they tend to not give away too much about the sectarian conflict. However, this is, at least partly, due to their personal background as *Mickybo and Me* and *Belfast* process the experiences of their Belfast-born directors and, therefore, tend to provide a nostalgic view on the theme of growing up in the troubles-ridden city.

This highly personal connection to film production has also been explored in the context of the representation of the Troubles on film. After all, the Troubles film has its roots in mostly British and American thriller productions of the 1970s. However, the incipient peace process of the 1990s together with the creation of a Northern Irish film industry inspired a change in genre: From then on, Troubles films have more frequently been provided in the shape of comedies or social dramas. The so-called ceasefire cinema era thereby increasingly relied on involving local talent to allow for more complex stories featuring new characters and perspectives on the conflict that have so far been omitted. When it comes to the representation of Belfast, however, the two established types of Troubles films have created a gap between two visions of the city: that of the grim and dark city depicted in the traditional Troubles thriller and that of the new consumer-driven Belfast of the ceasefire cinema.

Ultimately, it is this gap in representation that this thesis is trying to fill – although not completely. As the comparison between *Mickybo and Me* and *Belfast* based on the thematic focus of home has been able to show, the Belfast of the late 1960s and early 1970s receives a different, more personal, and sometimes slightly alienated image when perceived through the eyes of a child protagonist. In both films, the sectarian conflict sometimes appears less grave than it may have been. This is not least due to the sense of nostalgia that is provided through the narration of the story in hindsight by Jonjo's adult self in *Mickybo and Me* and reverting to a mostly black-and-white main plot in *Belfast* as if to suggest a journey through time.

As far as the analytical parameters are concerned, the focus on the physical home has allowed me to draw out the unpredictable nature of the sectarian conflict while still capturing its impact on the protagonists and their families. The children's interpretation of the happenings around them (that not seldomly draws from what they know from the films they have watched) thereby allows for a sense of 'light-heartedness'. At the same time, the films do not conceal the threat of bombings, shootings, and rioting. In addition, the focus on the social home furthers the depiction of Belfast as a lived-in space. The fact that the protagonists' families are not involved in any sectarian fighting thereby enables the perspective of mothers and children that have often remained marginal in previous films. The ideological home, finally, points out the significance of cinema-going and imagination for the child protagonists to retain a sense of childish innocence when growing up in Belfast. Nonetheless, towards the end, both films exemplify how life-changing events cause the children to come of age and acquire a greater sense of understanding of the Troubles and the implied dangers. In *Mickybo and Me*, this is when the two boys abandon their re-enactment of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. In *Belfast*, on the other hand, cinema, and films in general, seem to remain an integral part of the protagonist's life and enable distraction from his own living reality.

The act of leaving Belfast is also dealt with in both films – although to a different extent. While it is touched upon in the last scene of *Mickybo and Me*, the question of leaving the city behind seems to be the mainstay of *Belfast*. Nonetheless, both films seem to draw similar conclusions: Emigrating is illustrated as a way out of the Troubles. However, it seems to be more of a pragmatic decision than a desire to leave their home which can be seen in the protagonists' reflection on leaving Belfast. *Belfast* thereby explicitly points out the family's struggle in weighing personal safety and economic opportunity in England against the tight-knit community at home and the sense of identity they draw from it. *Mickybo and Me*, on the other hand, alludes to this sense of identity when proposing in Jonjo's letter to Mick that 'You can take the boy out of Belfast, but not Belfast out of the boy'. I.e., even though leading a seemingly successful life in Australia, Jonjo still seems to long for home.

Coming back to the research question, it can be said that while having a slightly different focus when representing the Belfast of the late 1960s and early 1970s as a home, both films draw a similar picture of what is like to grow up in the Northern Irish capital during the Troubles and to leave it eventually. It seems that for all three

protagonists, Jonjo, Mickybo, and Buddy, the 'pause in movement' that defines their home in Belfast and transforms it into place, is anchored in the sense of security they get from their respective neighbourhoods (physical home), their families and friends (social home), and their imagination (ideological home). The latter is thereby strongly influenced by their film consumption and allows them to suppress the violence surrounding them and cling on to their childhood – if only just for a short while.

Finally, the child protagonists' perspective on Belfast as their home has enabled the audience and analyst to view the Northern Irish capital as distinct from either the grim and dark city or the 'new Belfast'. Thematic foci like this one may, therefore, be able to contribute to the scholarly conversation on Northern Irish cinema and Troubles films by encouraging research that goes beyond these two visions of the city. This way of assessing Northern Irish cinema may be especially beneficial when dealing with newer productions that have an even greater 'psychological distance' to the actual conflict in the late 1960s and the early 1970s than the previous ceasefire films. Perhaps, studies like this one, ultimately, encourage thinking of Belfast in a more nuanced manner and enable the creation of even more categories than the two existing ones to close the representational gap identified by McLoone.

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## **Appendix: Sequence Protocols**

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## Sequence Protocols

Table 1: *Mickybo and Me* (2005) – Cinematic Tools

Scene	Time Code	Characters	Plot Description	Sound	Camera
Intro: explosion at the shoe shop	01:17–02:04	A mother and her son	<p>The film starts by showing two pairs of shoes walking along the pavement. From the look of it, one of them is a pair of women’s shoes, while the other pair belongs to a young boy. Next, a woman and her son are shown hurrying past several broken shop fronts. Eventually, they enter a shoe shop. The sign above reads Scotts Shoes.</p> <p>A cut to the inside of the shop shows the mother and son stepping inside. Next, the camera cuts back to the outside of the shop and lingers on it. Then, a bomb explodes. This can be assumed from the detonation and the smoke subsequently rising from the shop. As pieces of rubble fall to the ground and the alarm goes off, the off-screen narration sets in. The nine-year-old Jonjo leads into the main plot of the film: ‘Back in 1970, the whole world knew that Belfast was a divided city. Neighbourhoods were turning into ghettos but I knew nothing about all that.’ As he speaks the image of the burning shop fades out and is replaced by the next scene.</p>	<p>The upbeat folk song ‘Belle of Belfast’ plays in the background as mother and son hurry along the footpath. Suggesting a sense of light-heartedness, the tune seems somewhat antithetical to the happenings on screen.</p> <p>Yet, while the song may seem like a counterintuitive choice to accompany the scene, it seems to highlight the unpredictable nature of the Troubles. Violent attacks may, hence, take place when you least expect them.</p>	<p>The camera first focuses on two pairs of feet moving along the pavement. Then, the camera cuts to show both, mother and son, in a medium close-up respectively. This allows the audience to assess their facial expressions which seem to suggest a sense of tension and hurry. Finally, the camera uses a full shot to show the mother and her son entering the shop. After cutting to the inside of the shop for a short moment the camera cuts straight back to the outside and even lingers on the scene for a while after the explosion.</p>
Jonjo crosses the bridge to visit Mickybo	08:01–08:49	Jonjo, a Catholic family moving out of their house	<p>Jonjo walks over the bridge and hesitates when he gets to the middle of it. Turning back to look at where he came from, his narrator’s voice comments from off-screen: ‘The bridge was the dividing line between us and them. The Protestant and the Catholic. I’d been told a million times not to cross it. The other side was like the other side of the world.’ Then, Jonjo resumes walking.</p> <p>The scene shows Jonjo walking down a road in Mickybo’s neighbourhood. On his way to Mickybo’s house, the boy assesses his surroundings. The street consists of modest-looking red-brick terraced houses. Overall, the neighbourhood seems quiet, as there are barely any people out on the road. The only people Jonjo seems to encounter are a family carrying their belongings out of the house into a car. This seems to suggest that they are leaving the city. In the middle of the road, a burnt-out bus serves as a barricade. All of this contributes to an eerie atmosphere.</p>	<p>Eerie-sounding instrumental background music sets in. This does not only underline the on-screen action, i.e., that Jonjo is crossing the bridge despite his parents’ objection, but also serves to raise the viewer’s suspense about what is to follow.</p> <p>Already on the bridge, the music seems to anticipate what may await Jonjo on the other side (i.e., burnt-out busses, modest housing, seeming poverty, and people leaving the city).</p>	<p>The camera shows Jonjo walking across the bridge from a high angle. This way, the viewer can assess that he turns around to look behind him when he reaches the middle. A close-up of Jonjo’s face indicates the boy’s insecurity and/or anxiety about crossing the bridge – something that he is not allowed to do.</p> <p>The scene cuts to show Jonjo walking down a road in Mickybo’s neighbourhood. The camera films him from behind using a medium close-up. The street in front of him is blurred. This changes when a mattress appears in front of the boy’s face. Next, the camera focuses on a family carrying their belongings out of their home as if to suggest that they are moving away. The camera then takes up a full shot to assess Jonjo’s surroundings.</p>

Lunch at Mickybo's house	09:27–10:48	Jonjo, Mickybo, Mickybo's family (mother, father, five sisters – two of them twins)	<p>Mickybo's mother and Jonjo enter the sitting room. Inside, the children are having lunch, while their father is asleep on the sofa. On TV, a horse race is on. Before attending to her children for 'feeding time at the zoo', the mother leans over her sleeping husband and says: 'No, no darling, you sit your ground. Sure you must be exhausted.'</p> <p>At the dinner table, Mickybo and four of his sisters are eating their food while one of them (presumably the oldest) gives out food. Two of Mickybo's sisters are identical-looking twins who not only wear the same clothes but also tend to say the same thing at the same time. As the mother offers Jonjo food and drink, Mickybo declines all of these offers for his friend. Jonjo, on the other hand, seems to be overwhelmed. Next, Mickybo tells his friend that his mother 'is nuts' and that he is not to mind her. Getting up from the table, Mickybo tells his mother that they are going out.</p> <p>While his mother is chatting along and imagining what the two boys may be up to (e.g., 'adventuring the Amazon Jungle' or 'conquering Everest'), Mickybo steals a couple of coins from his sleeping father's pocket. This is when Mickybo's sisters call out for their mum as if wanting to tell on him. However, a brief exchange of looks with his twin sisters saves Micky who then gives all of them their fair share. Accepting the offer, the twins shout in unison: 'Nothing Ma. Just wanted to say lunch was lovely.'</p> <p>When Mickybo's mum realises that Jonjo is not from the same neighbourhood, she asks him where Mickybo found him and whether his mother allows him to play in their neighbourhood. When Jonjo just manages a vague 'Uh-huh' as a reply, the mother simply smiles. With all these things happening, the mother talking a lot and the children behaving somewhat cheeky, the atmosphere in Mickybo's house seems lively, if not chaotic.</p>	The horse racing commentary in the background hints at the fact that Mickybo's father is gambling.	<p>The camera follows the events in the sitting room with quick movements. It thereby uses mostly medium shots and close-ups. This seems to suggest that there is not very much space in the cramped sitting room. Combined these two techniques suggest a sense of chaos about the scene.</p> <p>Throughout the conversation between Mickybo and his mother, the camera focuses on them respectively as they speak. Occasionally, the camera points out Jonjo's face as if to check his reaction to what is happening around him.</p> <p>When Mickybo steals the money of his father, the camera follows closely what he is doing. When his sisters threaten the boy to tell on him (by calling for their mother), the camera again takes up its quick/hectic movements focusing on people as they speak.</p>
The day after the explosion	20:23–21:37	Jonjo, Mickybo	<p>Jonjo wakes up suddenly, gets dressed quickly and runs out of the house. He makes his way over the bridge and runs through the streets in the Catholic part of the city seemingly looking for Mickybo and the place where the bomb exploded the night before. As Jonjo reaches a juncture where a pub is burnt down, he stops. Seemingly out of breath, he looks at his surroundings. The sign with the pub's name on it can hardly be read ('The Lagan City Bar'). Smoke rises from the building on the other side of the street. On the street, firemen, policemen, and soldiers are tidying up. Yet, there is still lots of rubble all around. Jonjo seems shocked at the sight of it.</p> <p>Then, Mickybo appears on the other side of the street and skips over the rubble to make his way to his partner. He is excited when</p>	As Jonjo makes his way towards the bomb site, sad-sounding background music sets in. The music seems to foreshadow what Jonjo is about to see once he reaches the juncture with the burnt-down pub. However, the music may also seem to mislead the audience to the extent that they believe something happened to Mickybo. The fact that he is alright comes along with a sense of relief for the viewer.	The camera uses a tracking shot to capture Jonjo running towards the bomb site. Thereby, the camera changes perspective to either show the boy in profile or from up-front. When he reaches the juncture, the camera films him from behind to allow the viewer to assess the scene in front of him. Then, it shows Jonjo's face in a medium close-up. This allows the viewer to recognise the state of shock in which the boy finds himself. However, the perspective also serves

			<p>he says: 'You should've seen this place burning. Nearly burned down the whole street. It was pure class.' When JonJo asks him whether anybody was hurt, Mickybo does not seem to care, as is indicated in his reply: 'Don't know. But I got us a souvenir. A lucky treasure.' Then, he shows his friend a bombed-off finger. On the finger is a golden ring that Mickybo pulls off and throws away. Then he uses the finger to point towards the pub and says: 'Do you think I used enough dynamite there, Sundance?' As he does so, he runs off with Jonjo following him. When they are gone, Fartface arrives at the juncture on Mickybo's Chopper bike and looks after them.</p>		<p>to highlight a change in Jonjo's expression. Before the audience can see his friend appear on the other side of the street, the smile on Jonjo's face hints at the fact that Mickybo is safe and sound. The camera underlines the boys' conversation by showing their faces in a medium close-up as they speak. Yet, when Mickybo shows his friend the blown-off finger, the camera zooms in on his 'treasure'.</p>
Mickybo's story about his father	49:10-51:29	Jonjo, Mickybo	<p>The two boys are still sitting on the hay bales in the barn. While Jonjo still sits at the bottom, Mickybo sits up high in the 'attic' of the barn with his legs dangling over the edge. When Jonjo asks him how he can tell the difference between his twin sisters, Mickybo replies: 'I just can, They're a wee bit different. They're both wee bitches. They've probably already taken my bedroom.' Jonjo then tells him that he thinks that he is lucky for getting a Chopper bike, as his father only ever buys him ice cream. This is when Mickybo tells his friend a story about his dad: 'Last year, I done this beezzer drawing of a bomber plane for my dad. I gave it to him in the bar. And he showed all his mates and they said it was pure class. He bought me my very own drink. When he got home, the twins started reading poems. So I said to my dad to show them all the picture. He forgot all about it. Left it behind him in the bar. The twins just fucking laughed into my face. Well, they can all die for all I care.' Seemingly frustrated the boy then pushes down the gas lamp to the floor. The lamp breaks and the hay catches fire. Jonjo then jumps up from the hay bales to extinguish the fire by trampling on it. However, he stops his efforts to save his friend who cannot seem to get down from the attic of the barn with the flames growing higher and higher. When Jonjo cannot seem to enter the barn either, he orders his friend to go to the other end of the barn, push out the bales, and jump on top of them. Then, when Jonjo can see him, he orders Mickybo to jump. Landing on the hay bales, Mickybo smiles and says: 'I want to do that again.'</p>	Not applicable	<p>The camera shows each of the boys in a medium close-up as they speak. This allows the viewer to assess their facial expressions. While they speak earnestly about their family situations, they have serious looks on their faces. Given that the gas lamp stands upstairs where Mickybo sits, the viewer can fully see his face. Jonjo's face, on the other hand, is partly in the shadow. The camera accompanies the rest of the scene with rather quick and hectic movements as if to highlight the underlying danger of the situation. First, it follows Jonjo as he tries to extinguish the fire. Then, the camera shoots the boys in canted angles as they speak to each other given that they find themselves on different levels. I.e., the camera imitates the perspective of each of the boys. Throughout the scene, the camera makes use of various types of shots (full shot, medium shot and medium close-ups) to allow the audience to assess what the characters are doing as well as to 'read their faces'.</p>

The imagined conversation between Mickybo and his deceased father	1:17:05–1:20:09	Mickybo and his deceased father	<p>Mickybo enters the pub and walks towards his dad sitting on a high stool at the end of the counter - his usual place. There, climbing up the stool next to him, the boy tells his father about his adventures with Jonjo. As he does so, his dad looks at him in a calm, collected and somewhat satisfied manner. Then, he even recollects his own trips to the sea as a child. However, when Mickybo tells him that they nearly made it to Australia and whether his father will come with him next time, the latter replies: ‘No, Son. I’ll not be going anywhere.’ This is when Mickybo seems to understand that his father is dead. When he asks him about it, the father recalls the moment of his death: ‘It all happened dead quick. Just sitting having a wee pint. Thinking about the world in all its glory. And some joker just came in and started shooting all around him.’</p> <p>When Mickybo shortly after asks his father, if he would him a drink, his dad declines: ‘No, Son. You’ve to buy your own. You’re the big man now.’ Then when getting off the highchair to leave the bar, Mickybo asks his dad: ‘Did your horse ever win, Da?’ The father replies truthfully: ‘No, Son.’</p> <p>When Mickybo walks out of the pub in slow motion, the audience can see his dead father sitting on the high stool at the end of the bar with his head lying on the counter. When Mickybo is gone, undertakers arrive to attend to the dead bodies and transport them off the site. Then, the screen turns black.</p>	Throughout the conversation between Mickybo and his dad, low-key instrumental music plays on in the background. This provides the conversation with a dream-like quality and highlights that it only takes place in Mickybo's head. This is reinforced when the music stops as the boy exits the pub.	When talking to his dad, the camera first shows father and son in a two-shot. Then, the camera focuses on each of them individually as they talk (medium close-up). This way, the audience can assess their facial expressions and emotions. Also, the shot-back-shot fashion in which the scene is shot reinforces the impression of a real conversation. That this is, however, not the case is made clear on the content level of the conversation.
The end of Mickybo and Jonjo’s friendship	1:22:54–1:25: 41	Jonjo, Mickybo, Gank and Fartface	<p>When Jonjo discovers his friend at the cinema entry, he runs over to him. Inside the cinema, he talks to Mickybo as usual and refers to him as ‘Butch’. When he asks him to come to the playground, however, Mickybo declines and sends him away. Mickybo now wears a shirt with a jacket over it instead of a woollen jumper. This makes him look much more like Gank and Fartface with whom he now plays. As they arrive, Mickybo sides with them and even accuses Jonjo of having stolen his Chopper bike (even though he knows that Gank and Fartface stole it earlier in the film). Gank and Fartface make clear that they take care of ‘Micky’ now. When Jonjo wants to leave they hold him back and tell Micky to fight him which he does.</p> <p>When Jonjo runs off, the boys catch him at the back entrance of the cinema and hold him for Micky to stab his friend. After he has done so, Gank, Fartface, and Micky run off and leave Jonjo behind. The latter gets up from the ground. His nose and hand are now bleeding. On the ground, the folding knife that Micky used to stab Jonjo lies next to the sheriff star that Jonjo got from his friend after their adventure had ended.</p>	Not applicable	<p>The camera shows Mickybo in a full shot outside the cinema entry. Then it shows Jonjo’s face in a medium close-up before it cuts to show him running over the street to meet his friend. Inside the cinema, the camera films the boys in a medium close-up as they speak. When Gank and Fartface appear, the camera movement becomes quicker which conveys a chaotic impression. The camera changes between medium shots and close-ups as the boys speak and zooms in on other body parts (e.g., their legs) when the fighting begins. This way it becomes difficult to say who has hit whom.</p> <p>When Jonjo runs off, the camera uses a tracking shot while showing his full profile through the bars of a fence as he runs along. The same is done for</p>

					<p>Gank and Fartface and, eventually Micky. Thereby, the camera cuts from Jonjo to the boys underlining the chase that is taking place.</p> <p>When Jonjo has reached the door of the cinema's back entrance, the camera films him through the door's glass window (while being positioned on the inside). When the older boys appear, the camera cuts back to the outside and resumes its quick/ hectic camera movements as the fighting continues. The quick movements stop after Micky has stabbed his friend. Not showing the action of stabbing him as such, the camera first focuses on Micky's face, then on the folding knife in his hands, and later on the folding knife lying on the ground with blood on its blade. Behind the knife the sheriff star lies on the ground – although it appears slightly blurred. After Micky and the older boys have gone, the camera focuses on Jonjo getting up and then slowly zooms out while moving upward as if suggesting leaving the scene.</p>
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<p>A letter from Jonjo (more than thirty years later)</p>	<p>1:25:42 – 1:27: 30</p>	<p>Mick, the adult Jonjo (from off-screen)</p>	<p>The camera shows the bridge that used to serve as a dividing line between Jonjo and Mickybo’s parts of the city. Now, the bridge is highly frequented by pedestrians as well as cars. The bridge, it seems, has become an important part of Belfast’s traffic infrastructure. The adult Jonjo’s narration points out that it is now over thirty years later.</p> <p>The scene cuts to a pub. In the pub, a letter is passed on to Mick (the adult Mickybo) who sits on a highchair at the end of the bar – just like his father used to do it. From off-screen the narration continues. Jonjo seems to read from the letter. While he does so, Mick takes a photo of Jonjo and his family and the sheriff star from the previous scene out of the envelope. It turns out that while Mick has seemingly stayed in Belfast, Jonjo has emigrated to Australia. However, he is still in touch with his mother and gets all the news from Belfast. In his letter, he expresses appreciation for the calmer atmosphere in the city brought about by the peace process. Meanwhile Mick looks at the picture of his now adult friend. When Mick turns the sheriff star in his hands, Jonjo comments that finding the star has brought him right back to their childhood adventures. Suggesting that the same happens to Mick, the image of the man in the pub merges with that of Jonjo and Mickybo jumping off the pier. The film ends in a freeze frame – just like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.</p>	<p>As Jonjo’s adult voice resumes the narration, the rumbling noise of a train appears in the background. The noise seems to suggest that the bridge that is now full of traffic is the same one that Mickybo and Jonjo used to cross in 1970 to meet each other.</p> <p>Then, instrumental music sets in and plays in the background until the freeze frame at the end of the scene fades away and the screen turns black. This seems to suggest a dreamlike/ nostalgic quality of the scene with the now adult men reminiscing their childhood adventures.</p>	<p>The camera shows the footpath of a bridge. People are passing by, then cars drive along the street right next to it. Cutting to a high-angle shot of the bridge, the camera seems to verify what the audience might have guessed: Over thirty years later, the bridge no longer serves as a dividing line between the two parts of the city but rather connects them.</p> <p>Then, the scene cuts to the inside of a pub and shows and focuses on a letter, as if to suggest that this is the letter the adult Jonjo is reading from. Then, the letter gets picked up by a man who carries it over to Mick. While the latter opens the envelope, the camera does still linger on the object in Mick’s hand.</p> <p>The camera then cuts to show Mick sitting at the bar of the pub on the same seat where his father used to sit. Next, the camera goes back to focusing on the contents of the envelope: a picture of Jonjo’s family in front of the Sydney opera house and the sheriff star. As if suggesting that the sight of the star transports Mick right back to their childhood adventures, the picture of the grown-up man blurs. Then, the two young boys appear jumping off the pier in a freeze-frame.</p>
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Table 2: *Mickybo and Me (2005) – Analysis Parameters*

Scene	Physical Home	Social Home	Ideological Home
Intro: explosion at the shoe shop	The scene introduces the Belfast of the 1970s. Situated outside the main plot, the scene points out a significant aspect of the Troubles, namely that the violence is unpredictable. It can, hence, appear when people least expect it. Jonjo's narration highlights that the attack must have taken place in a different part of his city. In his middle-class Protestant neighbourhood, violent outbreaks seem to be rare. His comment also indicates that he does not have any idea how the violence affects people in other neighbourhoods where sectarian attacks are more likely.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Jonjo crosses the bridge to visit Mickybo	This part of Jonjo's narration seems to suggest that his 'mental map' of Belfast only includes his neighbourhood. He does not seem to have an idea of what the other side might look like, as he is not allowed to go there. The bridge serves as a 'dividing line' or territorial marker between the Protestant and Catholic communities. When walking down the street in the Catholic neighbourhood on the other side of the bridge, Jonjo seems to be overwhelmed by the experience. Not only is the working-class area distinct from his neighbourhood but also does he get confronted with barricades and people leaving their home because of sectarian violence the first time. This highlights his lacking knowledge of the sectarian outline of the city as well as the implied violence.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Lunch at Mickybo's house	The scene highlights a difference between lunchtime at Mickybo's house and the dinner scene at Jonjo's house at the beginning of the film (02:05 –02:53). While Jonjo's house appears nicely furnished, quiet, and tidy, Mickybo's house is lively/chaotic and loud. In addition, the space seems to be crammed given that there are so many people living in the house.	The scene points out that the film plays on gendered and religious stereotypes (especially when contrasted with Jonjo's family). Here, the Catholic family is much larger and poorer (working class) than the Protestant family (middle class). In addition, the mother seems more 'active' in the sense that she takes on household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing, while the father is asleep on the sofa. In this sense, Mickybo's father seems to conform to the image of the absent father often referred to in ceasefire cinema. As far as the mother is concerned, one can say that while she possesses a strong personality and eccentric character (as indicated in her colourful clothing and vivid fantasy), she is still confined to the private sphere of the home.	Not applicable

<p>The day after the explosion</p>	<p>The state of the juncture after the explosion Catholic part of the city reflects the fact that it was often the poorer working-class areas of the city that were most exposed to the violence. While Mickybo and JonJo both grow up in Belfast during the Troubles, Jonjo's life is less affected by them as he grows up in a middle-class Protestant area of the city. This may be why Mickybo is used to violent outbreaks and has learned to ignore them. Rather than dwelling on the casualties of the attack, he finds it thrilling, as is indicated by the phrase 'It was pure class.' His seeming delight in collecting souvenirs in such incidents adds irony to the situation – black humour is used here to alienate the audience's perception of the scene, it seems. In addition, the scene points out how Mickybo is able to make use of the Troubles as a backdrop against which their adventures as Butch Cassidy and Sundance take place.</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>
<p>Mickybo's story about his father</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>Mickybo's story highlights the absence of his father in his life. While the boy looks up to his father, he seems to be frustrated with the lack of attention that he receives from him and the fact that he has to compete for the father's attention. Not only does the father spend much of his time at the pub drinking, but he also does not seem to take much care of what is important to his children. This is what the left-behind picture seems to symbolise. While superficially the father praised his son's picture – and probably also meant it – he did not care enough about it to take it home with him and in turn hurt his son's feelings. The competition with his sisters, and especially the twins, also adds to the boys' frustration. While he may not seriously wish them to die, he seems to be fed up enough to leave his family behind and move to Australia. After all, the presents he gets from his father (e.g. the Chopper bike) seem to be the father's excuse for not being present in Mickybo's life most of the time. However, the presents may also stand for an attempt to show his family that he is still there, even though the father is often either at the pub or asleep at home.</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>
<p>The imagined conversation between Mickybo and his deceased father</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>The imagined conversation with his dad points to Mickybo's coming of age. Talking with his father about his death seems to make the boy aware of the erratic nature of the Troubles. Therefore, the boys' perception of the sectarian conflict in the city has changed. The part of his childhood where he could run about Belfast with Jonjo is over. Instead, he has to be 'the big man' now – despite being only eight years old. Also, the boy seems to consider his father's behaviour and</p>

			<p>his function as a role model. This is suggested by Mickybo's question about gambling. While the boy asks whether his father's horse was ever successful, what he really seems to be asking is: 'Was it worth it?'</p>
<p>The end of Mickybo and Jonjo's friendship</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>The sequence points out that his father's death has changed Micky's understanding of the Troubles. Having realised that a Protestant - like Jonjo - has shot his dad, makes a friendship with Jonjo appear impossible. Instead, he makes friends within his own (Catholic) community. Ironically, his new friends are the boys who used to bully Micky in the past. It seems that 'fighting a common enemy' draws Micky and the older boys together. For them, Jonjo is a representative of the Protestant community and, therefore, serves as a scapegoat for the death of Micky's father. Jonjo, on the other hand, does not seem to have a clue about all this. When he first comes across Micky, he assumes that the two of them would continue playing their imaginary game as is suggested in addressing him with 'Butch'. Micky, however, declines and tells Jonjo that 'the swings are for wee kids'. He thereby refers back to the conversation with his dead father and points out that he has to act more mature now. Yet, Micky only turns his friend down and physically abuses him, when Gank and Fartface appear and tell him to do so. This indicates a sense of peer pressure. Sectarian pressures, it seems, now seem to affect both Micky's and Jonjo's lives. For Jonjo, this realisation seems to constitute his coming-of-age moment. This is indicated in the close-up of the camera on the folding knife and the slightly blurred sheriff star next to it. These two objects seem to parallel Jonjo's childhood adventures with Mickybo and the end of their friendship (as is suggested by the violent confrontation). The fact that his friend has not turned him down based on his personality but based on his religion has 'hit Jonjo like a freight train'. The fact that the narration of young Jonjo here blurs with the boy's adult voice seems to underline that it was only later that Jonjo reflected on this incident as the moment where he lost his childhood innocence and acquired a more comprehensive understanding of the Troubles.</p>

Table 3: *Belfast (2021) – Cinematic Tools*

Scene	Time Code	Characters	Plot Description	Sound	Camera
Intro: Belfast today	01:11–02:51	Not applicable	Not applicable	<p>‘Down to Joy’ by Van Morrison plays in the background. While older songs of the musicians are used in many instances of the film, this song is a newer one that has been produced for the film.</p> <p>Similar to the pictures of Belfast today, it seems to highlight a sense of modernity as well as continuity.</p>	<p>The camera captures modern Belfast in colour. Thereby, the camera provides several shots of the city from above and from various sights/monuments (e.g., the port with the two cranes Samson and Goliath, the Titanic Museum, the City Hall, College Square, the courthouse, and the castle). Then, the title of the film appears in yellow capital letters.</p> <p>Next, the scene cuts to a peace line with various murals on it. The first one displays a man wearing a respiratory mask who carries a mermaid. The second one features a group of, supposedly working-class men. All of them wear flat caps and their faces are marked with wrinkles and plasters. Some of them smoke. The prevalent colours used in the mural are dark blue and grey. After zooming in on the second mural and lingering on it for a while, the camera tilts upwards. This is when the film turns from colour to black and white. This is when the main plot begins.</p>
Life in Mountcollyer Street before the riots	02:52–03:48	Buddy’s mother, neighbours, Buddy, Moira	<p>The main plot of the film begins on 15th August 1969 in Buddy’s neighbourhood. Presumably in the late afternoon, Buddy’s mother is calling her son in for tea. There is a lively atmosphere in the street with neighbours standing outside chatting, children running around and playing various games (e.g., hopscotch, imaginary play). As Ma calls Buddy, the neighbours seem to take this up and call for him, too. In the end, it is Buddy’s cousin Moira who finds him in a small side street playing with other children and pretending to be a ‘dragon slayer’.</p>	<p>Van Morrison’s ‘Down to Joy’ is fading out, while the chattering and laughing noises in Buddy’s neighbourhood become more pronounced.</p>	<p>The camera uses a tracking shot moving up the road, as neighbours repeat Buddy’s name. Then, the camera follows Moira to the small alleyway where the camera shows Buddy in a medium shot playing with a girl. Thereby, a happy expression on the boy’s face becomes noticeable. The audience gets the impression that there is a light-hearted atmosphere in the neighbourhood overall.</p>

Rioting breaks out as Buddy walks home for his tea	03:49–07:32	Buddy, neighbours, rioters, Buddy’s mother, Will	<p>Buddy goes home with his makeshift wooden sword and shield (the lid of a dustbin) in his hands. While walking down the road, he is talking to neighbours and making jokes. Some of them tell him that his mother is looking for him, and others ask him about the game he has been playing. It seems that people are well aware of what other people do. Also, Buddy knows all the people and addresses them by their names.</p> <p>However, the atmosphere seems to change from one moment to the other, and the laughing and chatting noises fade out. Then, several masked people appear in the street and rioting breaks out. As the rioters storm the street, Buddy stands still as if in a trance and observes what is happening. Only an explosion seems able to ‘wake him up’. Then, the boy is panicking. He shouts for his mum and tries to run home as the rioters throw petrol bombs at (Catholic) houses and break windows.</p> <p>Buddy’s mum then comes to the boy’s rescue and shields both of them with the lid of a dustbin that her son previously used when pretending to be a dragon slayer. When inside, the mother orders Buddy to hide under the kitchen table while she is looking for his brother Will. When they get back into the house, the children stay under the table while Ma moves over to the sitting room window. From below the window, she observes the riots outside. The rioters are shown breaking drainage grates and setting a car on fire. The camera also cuts to the inside of other (presumably Catholic) houses where families try to hide as the rioters vandalize their homes.</p> <p>The scene ends with the explosion of the car mentioned above. Then, the screen turns black. From off-screen, Ma is commenting on the scene: ‘Holy God.’</p>	The laughing and chattering are fading out as if to suggest an unreal, if not nightmarish, atmosphere, barely any sound can be perceived for a couple of seconds. Voices of neighbours calling their children inside the house are hushed. However, this changes when the bomb explodes. From then on, the noises of people shouting, bombs exploding, and windows being broken can be perceived. Presumably Protestant rioters shout for Catholics to get out of their neighbourhood.	The camera movement underlines the change in atmosphere. At first, the camera focuses on Buddy with his eyes and mouth wide open (medium close-up). Then the camera pivots around the boy two and a half times before capturing the explosion that serves as the ‘waking moment’. Then the camera movement is fast and hectic. When Buddy tries to make his way home, the camera focuses on him so that the audience cannot fully assess what is happening around him. It also points out that the nine-year-old boy is much smaller than most people surrounding him. When Ma comes to Buddy’s rescue, the camera shows her shielding boys from the rubble with the lid of a dustbin (medium shot). Thereby she looks like ‘an urban Boadicea’ (Branagh 2020, 4). This is pointed out in the script as if to underline the mother’s strong character.
Tidying up the next day	07:33–09:37	Buddy, neighbours, Buddy’s mother	Several TVs in the window of a TV repair shop report about the street riots in Northern Belfast the night before. This seems to be an original news report from the late 1960s. In it, the reporter explains the situation: The riots targeted Catholic houses in mostly Protestant neighbourhoods. The violence has, thus, pushed many Catholics to leave their homes. Finally, the reporter poses the question of whether these neighbourhoods could ever return to living in peace. The scene then cuts from showing people on TV tidying up their street to people in Buddy’s neighbourhood doing the same thing. This seems to suggest that the news report could have equally been shot on Mountcollyer Street. Here, people are tidying up, fixing windows, and building a barricade (made from a burned-out car, paving stones, pieces of wood etc.) at the end of the street.	As Buddy walks down the street, the viewer can perceive snippets of the neighbours’ conversation. In them, they talk about finishing the barricade before the kids get home from school and the need to protect themselves (e.g., ‘The police won’t protect us. We have to do it ourselves.’). While the news report contextualises the riots and draws a parallel to Buddy’s neighbourhood, the neighbours’ conversations provide some subjective insight into how the people in Buddy’s neighbourhood feel. In addition, their	The camera uses a tracking shot to follow Buddy as he walks down the road. Thereby, the camera focuses on his shoes for a while to point out the missing paving stones on the ground. While the conversation snippets point to a busy atmosphere in the street, the audience’s perspective is limited. The camera shows Buddy walking along in a full shot. However, everything that is higher than the boy (including most people around him) cannot be seen. Therefore, the viewer cannot fully assess the happenings on the street. Yet, this changes when Buddy climbs

			<p>Buddy leaves the house and walks down the street where in some places parts of the pavement are missing. Instead, there is only sand. As the boy walks towards the barricade and climbs it, he looks around him and observes the busy atmosphere in the street. People are helping one another and are seemingly determined to protect the community.</p> <p>Inside the house, Buddy's mother is watching the news report about the riots on TV. As the reporter points out that British armed forces have been employed in Belfast, a tank passes by the sitting room window. This reinforces the given impression that Buddy's neighbourhood is one of the targeted areas thematised on the news.</p>	<p>conversations also highlight the strong sense of community.</p>	<p>up the barricade. This is when the camera provides a shot of the neighbourhood in a high-angle shot.</p>
Going to mass	13:59–15:21	Buddy, Will, the minister	<p>The scene at mass is introduced by a shot of the church from the outside. From off-screen, Pa says: 'I've nothing against Catholics but it is a religion of fear.'</p> <p>Inside the church, the minister gives his sermon. In it, he explains to the congregation how their death will either lead them to heaven or hell depending on the road they opt to take. While preaching about the 'fork in the road' and what each of the roads signifies, the minister shouts and sweats. This (together with the theme of the sermon) creates a daunting/grim image of religion. This is reflected in Buddy's reaction to it as he follows the minister's words with his eyes and mouth wide open.</p> <p>At the end of his sermon, however, the minister asks the congregation for money. Buddy politely thanks the minister and tells him that the sermon was 'very good'. Although the smile on the boy's face seems somewhat strained as he does so.</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>The camera uses slightly canted angles from below when filming the church building as well as the minister. This contributes to conveying a daunting/grim atmosphere.</p>
Control at the barricade	16:39–17:07	Frankie West, Uncle Mack, Aunt Violet	<p>The scene shows a control at the barricade in Buddy's street. Children are sitting on the barricade and vigilantes holding torches. One of the neighbours, Frankie West sits by the barricade and notes down who enters the street. He thereby asks people for their names and the name and house number of the people they are visiting. However, Buddy's uncle Mackie does not seem to be impressed. He argues that he has brought his wife, Buddy's aunt Violet, to her sister's house for years. He, therefore, refuses to give Frankie the information and insults him. Yet, as they leave, Frankie says: 'We won't worry about their name or the number now. We know where they live.' – as if to mock the precautionary measures in place himself.</p>	<p>In the background, the sound of helicopters hovering over the neighbourhood can be perceived.</p> <p>At the beginning of the scene, a voice from off-screen, perhaps another vigilante, asks people to queue orderly to be able to access the street.</p>	<p>The camera films the scene through the windows of the burnt-out car that forms part of the barricade – as if suggesting standing out outside the street. This way, the viewer can only see Mack's and Violet's faces through separate windows. To see Frankie, the camera needs to cut to the other side. There, the audience can see him sitting in a camping chair.</p> <p>When Frankie highlights that he knows who they are/where they live, the camera shows his face in a close-up.</p>

Pop helps Buddy with his homework	32:24–33:52	Buddy, his grandfather and his grandmother	<p>Pop and Buddy sit at the sitting room table. While the boy is doing his maths homework, the grandfather is tinkering and/or repairing something. Granny is meanwhile preparing dinner in the adjacent kitchen. In the scene, Buddy is struggling with long division. Pop, hence, advises him to be patient – with the sums and the girls.</p> <p>When Buddy asks his grandfather for the solution, the latter tells him to write a bit less clearly to increase his chances of being right if the teacher is not entirely sure (e.g., ‘She might give you the benefit of the doubt if your seven looks like a one with a fancy tail.’). Yet, Buddy seems unsure about this piece of advice and identifies it as cheating. His grandfather reassures the boy that it would be ok to be cheating if it allowed him to sit closer to Catherine. Instead of cheating, he calls it ‘spread betting’, a term taken from horse racing.</p> <p>When Buddy, however, tells his grandfather that there is surely just one right answer, Pop replies: ‘If that were true, son, people wouldn’t be blowing themselves up all over this town.’ He no longer talks about maths. Instead, he refers to the Troubles. Buddy seems to think about it for a while before he tells his grandfather that his parents think about emigrating. Noticing that the boy is upset, Pop asks him what is that he wants. Buddy, in turn, replies that he would like to become the best football player in the world and marry his classmate, Catherine.</p>	Not applicable	The camera captures the scene in a two-shot. This way, the audience can observe grandfather and son talking to one another. However, to capture their facial expressions/emotions, the camera occasionally shows either of them in a close-up. Thereby, the camera lingers for a while on Buddy’s pensive face after Pop has referred the Troubles.
A policeman comes to Buddy’s house	44:24–45:18	Policeman, Buddy, his mother, neighbours in the street	<p>The scene begins with two children at the end of Buddy’s street drawing on a wall, when a man warns them that there are ‘peelers’ around. At the same time, a police officer knocks at the front door of Buddy’s house.</p> <p>When Buddy walks home from school, he ducks down as he reaches the open sitting room window. However, having seen him already, his mother calls him in. Inside the house, Buddy walks into the sitting room where his mother and the police officer are sitting. His mother asks him to sit down and talk to the police officer about an incident that happened at Mr Singh’s shop. After the boy has sat down in the armchair, the deep voice of the policeman appears off-screen. How he talks about ‘a very serious crime’ that has been committed at the corner shop appears slightly intimidating. It seems as if the policeman wants to scare the boy a little and it seems to work. While the latter does not speak, he seems nervous.</p> <p>The atmosphere changes when the scene cuts to the outside of the house where Ma sees the police officer out. The two of them are chatting and laughing while the neighbours are eying over to them as if wondering what the officer wanted in there. Back inside, Ma turns to Buddy in a slightly angry voice and runs after him up the</p>	Outside the house, comments of neighbours can be perceived as they wonder about the police officer’s appearance at Buddy’s house. It seems that nothing remains unnoticed in Buddy’s neighbourhood where everybody knows everybody. Therefore, the incident, once again points to the function of social control that the tight-knit community seems to fulfil as much as that of mutual support.	Throughout the scene, the camera is used in various ways to support the on-screen action. When, e.g., Buddy comes home, the camera focuses on his legs and feet as well as those of the people around him. It seems as if he walks more cautiously when he gets closer to the sitting room window. This seems to suggest that he already has an idea of what, or rather who is waiting for him at home. This impression is reinforced when Buddy tries to get a glimpse of the sitting room through the window and then ducks down. Inside the house, the camera pans from right to left as Buddy enters the room. Thereby, the audience gets to see the police officer and Ma sitting at one end of the room. Buddy however sits down on the armchair opposite them.

			stairs. Buddy meanwhile desperately shouts that he did not even eat the chocolate		<p>The set-up thereby resembles that of an interrogation.</p> <p>When sitting in the chair, Buddy's face is shown in a close-up. The camera thereby uses a slightly canted angle from above which reinforces the intimidating atmosphere of the situation. The close-up allows the viewer to assess Buddy's facial expression: while he seems nervous, he does not speak at all. Instead, he presses his lips together as if trying very hard to withhold information from the police officer.</p> <p>When Ma sees the officer out, the camera shoots them from the other side of the street as if to imitate the view of curious neighbours assessing the situation.</p>
Ma and Pa's conversation on the bus	54:12-57:59	Buddy, his mother and father	<p>At the beginning of the scene, the bus is shown from the outside. In it, the audience can see the reflection of an army helicopter hovering over the neighbourhood. Buddy stands at the bus stop holding a ball in his hands while his parents are sitting next to each other on the bus. The parents sit with their backs turned to Buddy and talk about the father's job prospects in England. As they talk, Buddy can hear every single word they say. This is suggested in several questions the boy poses (e.g., 'Are you allowed to play football in that garden, Daddy?'). Throughout the parents' conversation, the bus driver announces the time that is left until the bus leaves for the airport.</p> <p>In their conversation, Pa explains to Ma that his boss reached out to him and offered him a permanent job in a management position together with a house where they could live rent-free. Not only will he get a higher salary, but also will the house be bigger than their current one. This is when Buddy jumps into their conversation. Ma thereupon asks her son to look out for the traffic. While Buddy assures her that the traffic is ok, she seems to let her husband's words sink in.</p> <p>Then Ma asks him whether this is what he wants. He affirms and adds that he wants her and the children with him. This is when she explains to him how hard it is for her to leave Belfast, where she knows everyone and everything. In addition, she points out how they do not need a garden in Belfast as the children can play wherever they wanted, as everyone is minding them. Throughout</p>	<p>The sound of the helicopter at the beginning of the scene and the traffic noises remind the audience that the parents are having their private conversation in a public space. At the same time, there does not seem to be much time for this conversation- This is indicated by the bus driver announcing the time until the bus leaves off-screen. Buddy's voice interrupting them can be seen as another indication that even though this conversation should be private, it is not - not least because of the time and space in which the parents have it.</p>	<p>The camera highlights the presence of the helicopter by filming its reflection on the exterior of the bus.</p> <p>The parents' conversation is often shot through the bus windows as if the camera was taking on an observer's perspective. Meanwhile, medium close-ups are used to draw attention to the character's facial expressions. This is very effective given that it highlights the mother's tears as well as Buddy's change in mood. While at first, he is happily playing with his ball, he is seemingly sad/confused by the end of the scene.</p>



			most of her monologue, she whispers as if to make sure that her words cannot be overheard by Buddy. As she talks, tears are running down her face.		
Buddy's conversation with his grandmother on the bus	1:02:34–1:04:33	Buddy and his grandmother	A bus is driving down the road. Inside, Buddy and his grandmother are driving home from the theatre. While sitting in the last row, they talk about Pop's health. When Buddy asks Granny when his grandfather would get out of the hospital, Granny just replies: 'When the doctor says his lungs are fine.' This is when their conversation changes to whether Granny ever wanted to leave Belfast and how she fostered a passion for the cinema when she was a child. She then tells Buddy about Shangri-La, a fictional paradise-like place from the film <i>Lost Horizon</i> (1937). However, when Buddy asks her whether she has ever visited that place (not understanding that it has a symbolic function), Granny says: 'There were no roads to Shangri-La from our part of Belfast.' Then she looks out of the window with a dreamy expression on her face. Their conversation also captures Buddy's own passion for films when he invites his grandmother to go to the cinema with them where they watch <i>Chitty Chitty Bang Bang</i> (1968).	Not applicable	The camera shows the bus from the outside to set the scene. Then it cuts to the inside of the bus. It shows Buddy and his Granny sitting at the back of the bus either in a two-shot or by showing them in a close-up as they speak. Thereby, the camera sometimes lingers a little bit longer on one of their faces as if to suggest that they are processing the information just received. Overall, the mood of the scene changes from being more serious (e.g., when talking about Pop's health and the family's imminent decision to leave Belfast) to a brighter atmosphere, when talking about films. For both, Buddy and his Granny films seem to distract them from their living reality. This is indicated in Buddy's sense of excitement and Granny's dreamy smile as she watches out of the window.

<p>Discussing moving to England at Christmas</p>	<p>1:05:22–1:07:15</p>	<p>Buddy, his father, mother, and brother</p>	<p>At Christmas, the family are unwrapping Christmas presents against the upbeat theme song of <i>Chitty Chitty Bang Bang</i> (1968). There are several presents including a James Bond matchbox car, the Tottenham football team as Subbuteo football figures, a ray gun and costume to dress up as Scott from <i>Thunderbirds</i> (a series from the 1960s), a book by Agatha Christie, and Cadbury’s chocolate etc. The family is shown laughing and playing. When the music has stopped, the audience can see Buddy fully dressed as Scott playing with his ray gun. Behind him, his mother and father are sitting on the sofa. They ask him to sit with them. Next, Ma and Pa talk to Buddy about their plan to move to England, while giving each other nervous glances over the boy’s head. It seems as if they tried to make moving home sound as nice as possible by pointing out the bigger house and the garden that comes with it. This is when Buddy has an emotional outburst. As turns out, the young boy does not care about the garden to play football in. Instead, he is worried about leaving his grandparents and his life in Belfast (including his school project on the moon landing and Catherine) behind. Moreover, he is worried about not having any friends and being mocked for his accent when they move to England. The parents meanwhile seem overwhelmed and try to console their son by reassuring him that no decision has been made yet. Assessing that the young boy is too tired, Ma proposes to leave the discussion for now. The scene ends with Buddy’s outcry: ‘I don’t want to leave Belfast!’</p>	<p>The theme song of <i>Chitty Chitty Bang Bang</i> (1968) is carried over from the previous cinema scene as if to highlight the jolly atmosphere in Buddy’s house at Christmas. However, the song stops about halfway through the scene, and the atmosphere changes. It seems to suggest that after the fun part of the day, serious decisions have to be made.</p>	<p>The camera movement in the scene is quick and shots change following the action on screen. While the camera first focuses on the individual presents, it then captures the individual family members’ reactions to them. Close-ups show their faces light up, while medium shots allow the audience a glimpse into how the family spends the day playing and having fun. The conversation at the end of the scene is captured by showing the parents and Buddy sitting on the sofa (with Buddy sitting between them) in a medium-full shot. This way, the audience can assess the parents’ nervous looks as well as Buddy’s changing mood from being happy to being devastated.</p>
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Table 4: *Belfast (2021) – Analysis Parameters*

Scene	Physical Home	Social Home	Ideological Home
Intro: Belfast today	The intro sequence of <i>Belfast (2021)</i> introduces the city and what it looks like today. Thereby, the camera points out several landmarks of the city. While some of them include old buildings (e.g., the city hall and the courthouse), others are more modern (e.g., the Titanic Museum). There are also industrial sites like Belfast Port (featuring the two iconic yellow cranes of the Harland and Wolff shipyard). It seems as if the sequence is intended to ‘give Belfast a face’, i.e., allow the viewer a proper look at the city given that the subsequent main plot has been shot on a studio backlot. Moreover, one could also read the sequence as a counteraction to previous Troubles films that have provided an incomplete image of the city by using a completely different city as a stand-in location (traditional Troubles thriller) or focusing on only one part of the modern city, e.g., the ‘new Belfast’ (ceasefire cinema).	Not applicable	Not applicable
Life in Mountcollyer Street before the riots	The scene suggests a light-hearted atmosphere in a neighbourhood where everybody seems to know everybody. When Buddy’s mother calls her son in for tea, the neighbours know exactly who she is looking for and take up her calling – as if happy to help. In addition, it stands out that people seem to spend much time out on the street chatting, laughing, and playing.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Rioting breaks out as Buddy walks home for his tea	The outbreak of violence in the street represents a rupture with the sense of ease about life in the neighbourhood previously conveyed by the film. Instead, it points to how life in the street will change and how the violence will affect people. In addition, the scene already hints at the fact that Buddy’s family is not Catholic like many of their neighbours given that the rioters refrain from vandalizing their house. Overall, the scene serves as an introduction to the conflict that lies at the heart of the violence: the outbreak of sectarian violence in the neighbourhood and the pressures inherent to the conflict that eventually leads Buddy’s family to emigrate.	Not applicable	Not applicable

Tidying up the next day	The scene serves to contextualise the Troubles. Not only does the news report explain how rioters vandalized Catholic houses in mostly Protestant areas of the city the previous night, but it also draws a parallel to Buddy's neighbourhood. E.g., after people have been shown tidying up their street on TV, the people on Buddy's street equally tidy up their street and build a barricade. Here, the film seems to suggest that the Troubles are taking place right at the boy's doorstep. Nonetheless, the scene also points out the neighbours' sense of community. Rather than relying on the police to protect them, Buddy's neighbours intend to protect themselves (e.g., by building a barricade). In addition, people are helping one another to fix their houses. It, therefore, seems that the riots have not driven the tight-knit community apart.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Going to mass	Not applicable	Not applicable	Here, the film seems to parody the role of the church in society. By suggesting that Catholicism is a religion of fear before cutting to the sermon in the Protestant church, the film mocks Protestantism as what follows strongly appears daunting to the viewer. At this stage of the film, <i>Belfast</i> (2021) seems to propose that the two religions are not that different. This impression is reinforced when the minister asks for money at the end of the sermon. This strongly reminds the viewer of the 16 <sup>th</sup> -century selling of indulgences, as the minister is first causing fear in the congregation when preaching about heaven and then asking them for money – as if to suggest that this would help them to pick the road to heaven.
Control at the barricade	Not applicable	The scene points out how security measures such as controlling people as they enter the street strain people's relationships. While some like Frankie support them, others find them ridiculous given that everybody knows everybody in the street. This is reflected in Mack's irritation. Although not living in the street himself, Buddy's uncle has been there visiting the family for years. The fact that Frankie affirms this impression renders the end of the scene slightly amusing. Apart from that, the viewer gets the impression that the fact that people in the street know each other well comes in handy here as it allows for social control. This, however, may also feel unpleasant to people.	Not applicable

<p>Pop helps Buddy with his homework</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>The regular visits to his grandparents' house after school are a significant part of Buddy's life. In conversations with his grandparents, and especially his grandfather, Buddy seems to be able to speak his mind and 'unburden' himself. While Pop helps him with his maths homework, he also consults him on his first loves and listens to Buddy when he tells him about his parents' plan to leave Belfast.</p> <p>Despite his young age, Buddy is presented as a considerate child who can differentiate right from wrong and, therefore, identifies Pop's trick as cheating. However, when it comes to the part of the conversation where Buddy talks about his wishes for the future/dreams, the film leaves no doubt that like any child he fosters, sometimes unrealistic, dreams that still seem to be most important to him.</p> <p>The point made here seems to be that Buddy's imagination protects him to some extent from being affected by the Troubles. While the conflict indeed influences his life in the course of the film, the boy is nonetheless able to be a child and behave accordingly.</p>
<p>A policeman comes to Buddy's house</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>The scene represents an old way of policing. Thereby, the police officer scares the young boy, while seemingly having the approval of the mother. The interrogation functions as a way to instil community values in the boy and sanction morally wrong behaviour. While stealing from Mr Singh's shop can be seen as a childish trick, the policeman's visit is intended to make sure that it will not happen again another time.</p> <p>At the same time, the scene points out that even in the wider neighbourhood the police visit does not remain unnoticed. When Ma sees the police officer out, neighbours are peaking at them as if to figure out why he was in there. Comments like 'Was he in there long?' that can be perceived in the background reinforce this impression.</p> <p>After all, the scene also seems to parody the police as an authority. Against the backdrop of the Troubles taking place in the city, appearing at Buddy's house to report on a childish trick may seem laughable.</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>

<p>Ma and Pa's conversation on the bus</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>Ma's monologue points out that it is the sense of community and the feeling of security that she draws from it that makes it hard for her to leave Belfast. Having lived in the city all her life, she does not know any other home and finds it hard to believe that the communal spirit would be the same elsewhere. Also, she does not seem to care for a bigger house and a garden. Contrarily, she points out that the family would not need any of that if they stayed because the children can play anywhere in the neighbourhood. This, she argues, is only possible because the neighbours are looking out for their children.</p> <p>The tears on her face underline that Ma is suffering from having to decide between either staying or leaving. After all, she seems to be drawing a sense of identity from the city and the community – just like her son. Buddy's change in mood seems to draw a parallel between his own struggle to leave home and that of his mother.</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>
<p>Buddy's conversation with his grandmother on the bus</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>	<p>The scene highlights Buddy's and Granny's passion for films. These seem to allow them to 'escape' from reality. This seems to be suggested in Buddy's invitation that Granny could join them at the cinema to distract herself from the fact that Pop is at the hospital. However, as their conversation turns to Buddy's family's imminent decision to leave Belfast, it becomes clear that the young boy is in a similar need for distraction.</p> <p>In addition, the film seems to draw a connection between Buddy and his grandmother who both foster a passion for films at a very young age. In addition, it seems as if the films allowed them to visit places while staying in Belfast. The point the film seems to make here is that despite not being a peaceful place like Shangri-La, Belfast is nevertheless their home.</p>

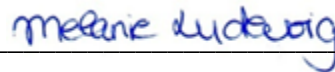
## Statutory Declaration

I hereby declare the following:

(1) that this work has never been submitted, in whole or in part, for any other degree, examination, or thesis; (2) that it is my own work; (3) that I have acknowledged all the sources which I have used in the context where I have used them; (4) that I have marked and acknowledged whenever I have reproduced a source verbatim, and likewise any unaltered use of tables, graphics, etc.; (5) that I have marked as indirect citations all references to sources which I have copied from other sources without having verified them myself.

With my signature, I acknowledge that any violation of these declarations will lead to an investigation for cheating or attempted cheating.

This thesis contains 31,242 words.



Berlin, 25 May 2023

Melanie Ludewig