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Unforgetting Hillsborough: researching memorialisation

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ABSTRACT: The Hillsborough Disaster took place on April 15, 1989. 96 football fans lost their lives as a result of events on the day. Several survivors have committed suicide and many more lives have been blighted. Initially, fans were blamed for the deaths and it was not until 2017 that fresh inquests ruled they had died as a result of 'unlawful killing', for which the police were mainly responsible. The fans were completely exonerated. I'm exploring the way different forms of memorialisation constitute LLs, how to try to capture 'an' LL across spaces and time, and how to find my own place in it as a researcher.

The Taylor Report, 1989

... the officers in command assumed that there was an attempted pitch invasion. ... A request was made for dog handlers. §78

In virtually every case the cause of death was crush asphyxia due to compression of the chest wall against other bodies or fixed structures ... §109

Hillsborough
The Report of the Hillsborough Independent Panel

September 2012

...statements made by SYP [South Yorkshire Police] officers were initially handwritten as 'recollections', then subjected to 'review and alteration' [by] SYP solicitors and a team of SYP officers. ... police officers were asked to reconsider and amend their initial statements before they were forwarded to the Taylor Inquiry... 'key' words and descriptions such as 'chaotic' were counselled against and, if included, were deleted.

Ben-Rafael (2016: 209)

... memorialization gives life to the past in the present.



The people depicted in the design are 'the guardians of the memory.'
Tom Murphy, Sculptor

Massey (2005: 9) ... space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, ... always under construction ... never finished; never closed.

Huebner & Phoocharoensil (2017: 109)
'The power of monuments rests in the histories they create.'
Whose monuments? Whose histories?



DATA:

The LL of Hillsborough is a nexus of trajectories shaped by the ongoing interventions of *inter alia* individuals, institutions, activist groups, artists, passers-by, etc., producing their accounts, artefacts, transgressive emplacements and acts of unforgetting across different places, media, and timescales. In my research, I am drawing on survivor memoirs, interviews, official reports, media reports, cultural artefacts (including books, banners, songs, monuments, art works), and observing public acts of remembering...

The S*N newspaper falsely blamed the fans for the disaster – a narrative that persists. The S*n is boycotted in Liverpool.



LORD JUSTICE STUART-SMITH: One of the things that strikes me about the alterations that I have looked at - and I have not looked at all of them - is that there tends to be a removal of criticisms of senior officers but no corresponding removal of criticisms of the fans.



APPROACH:

Lou (2016: 131)

I reconceptualize LL as a cultural text that sediments in multiple historical and social processes on various timescales

Seals (2017: 273)

... the researcher must be vigilant in reflexively accounting for the researcher's own positionality during the experience:

- What do I notice?
- Why do I notice these elements of the LL?
- What are my feelings about these elements of the LL?
- What aspects of these elements interact with what aspects of my own positioning to make me feel this way?
- What about the LL is allowing this dialogism between self and others to occur?

