Troubling Places: Walking the "troubling remnants" of post-conflict space

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The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author

upon reasonable request.

1 INTRODUCTION

Violent conflict leaves its mark. It causes physical scars on bodies, creates absences where things and people have been permanently altered or destroyed, conditions avenues of memory and recall, and disrupts everyday mobilities and lived geographies. Violence leaves a legacy of "troubling remnants" (Jarman, 2002) and "spectral traces" (Jonker & Till, 2009). The former refers to material architecture; military fortifications, left-behind security paraphernalia, murals and monuments to the dead, places scored with the vestiges of horror and anguish. These tangible remains "trouble" post-conflict space, raising difficult questions of what to preserve, what to remove, why, and for whom. The latter refers to "surfacings of the dead," those "phantoms, histories, remnants, submerged stories and ways of knowing" capable of unearthing alternative cartographies of meaning and memory (Jonker & Till, p. 306). In this article, we argue that the walking family of methods (henceforth walking methods) is a potentially transformative means of examining the striated layers of meaning inscribed into public space and everyday life in the aftermath of political violence. Yet in spite of the growing popularity of these methods across a host of disciplinary fields, they have rarely been applied to these purposes in post-conflict space.

Specifically, we argue that the insights generated through walking methods have the potential to trouble dominant productions of post-conflict space by revealing alternative narratives of the past and alternative investitures in places and landscapes. While walking methods are no methodological panacea (Robinson & McClelland, 2020), they can help illuminate the manifold, yet often obscured, interstices where the past continues to trouble the present. In post-conflict space, there is often a significant gap between the emotional and symbolic value people attach to meaningful places and the dominant value-systems propagated by transitional regimes and powerful actors (Drozdzewski et al., 2016). Exploring these gaps may require approaches better suited to prompting place-based "perceptual memories" (Degen & Rose, 2012, p. 3284) and capturing "often-unnoticed microfeatures of the built environment" (Finlay & Bowman, 2017, p. 267).

Our work has heretofore been primarily concerned with Northern Ireland[1]. Working independently, we gravitated towards walking methods because of the richer insights we observed the methods yielding. Thus, while this paper is primarily a review focusing on *how* walking methods can better illuminate post-conflict space, it is reflexively-informed by our own recent research experiences.

2 WALKING METHODS AND THEIR USES

We define walking methods as those focused on how people create social meaning *in situ,* through purposive and mundane mobility and peripatetic practice, whether on foot or with a mobility aid, such as a wheeled vehicle. Researchers typically accompany participants "on the move" where both are "exposed to the multi-sensory stimulation of the surrounding environment" (Evans & Jones, 2011, p. 850). We avoid the term "walking interviews" as the family is not strictly interview-dependent and inclusive of "mobile ethnography" (Sheller & Urry, 2006), the "go-along" (Kusenbach, 2003), and solitary walking (Wylie, 2005). For instance, James Sidaway (2009) used solitary walking to encounter the geopolitical traces, material remnants, and everyday reminders of war, colonialism, and violence. Solitary walking and participatory walking can also be seen as complementary practices, as the former can lay the sensory groundwork for the latter, or the former can be a means of ethnographic reflection following a participatory journey.

Walking methods have arguably three formative strands, which we characterise as the transcendentalist, the emancipatory, and the everyday, respectively. The first is rooted largely in forms of Anglo-American and French romanticism, the "heroic tradition of the transcendental hiker" and the "shadow histories" of the itinerant and dispossessed (Bates & Rhys-Taylor, 2017, p. 3). Its modern incarnation is more phenomenological and explores sensuous encounters between embodied subjects, places and landscapes (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008). The emancipatory strand in turn draws upon the work of theorists like Michel de Certeau, who argues that walking in the city manipulates and transgresses the panoptical, totalitarian character of urban planning, thus representing a "multiplication" of urban "possibilities" (1984, p. 104). For Rebeca Solnit (2001), walking offers a radical re-appropriation of public space, an experiential slowness that subverts the oppressive temporality of modern capitalism. Emancipatory psychogeographers in the Situationist tradition of Guy Debord have explored new urban cartographies of lives, landscapes, and architecture off the beaten path (see Anderson, 2015).

The preceding strands have been criticised for minimising "everyday pedestrian practice" (Middleton, 2011) and "mundane mobilities" (Binnie et al., 2007). As scholars in the everyday strand maintain, most walking practiced in the world is neither transcendentalist nor emancipatory, but instead functional and necessary for daily existence (Macpherson, 2016). Scholarly energies should instead be focused on "those who navigate, negotiate, and traverse the city streets in their day-to-day lives" (Middleton, 2010, p. 579). Furthermore, walking methods should illuminate the discrepancies between citizens' walking experiences and contemporary transportation policy and issues of access to public space. This insight is

not incommensurate with the emancipatory urge to multiply urban possibilities, but its emphasis is firmly grounded in material and policy concerns.

The strengths and weaknesses of walking methods have been detailed elsewhere (Robinson & McClelland, 2020), including in this journal by Palmgren (2017) and Holton & Riley (2014). Here we simply reiterate their burgeoning popularity across a diversity of scholarly disciplines and briefly illustrate the myriad ways scholars have employed walking methods to explore the emotional, symbolic, ideological, rhythmic, and narrative character of space, place, and landscape. From the fields of disability studies, gerontology, and health geographies, scholars have investigated the crucial intersections between wellbeing, mobilities, and access to public space (Bell et al., 2018; Carpiano, 2009). In urban studies and landscape research, scholars have explored place-based emotional and symbolic values and the conflicting imperatives of neo-liberal development regimes (Adams & Larkham, 2016; Edensor, 2008). Walking methods have also illustrated how forms of segregation (ethnic, racial, cultural) become ingrained into the material fabric of space and reflected in the practices and rhythms of everyday life (Roulston et al., 2017; Warren, 2017).

In these and other starting-points, scholars have used walking methods to illuminate forgotten, ignored, or taken-for-granted features of the political, material, and cultural landscape. By situating themselves with participants in the physical environment, they have accessed participants' senses of place (Cresswell, 2004) and what Edward Casey famously argues is the "constitutive co-ingredience" of people and place (2001, p. 684). These harmonise with Anderson's (2004, p. 254-5) call to return to the central project of humanistic geography, exploring the manifold ways in which "meanings, emotions and values come to constitute our world." The meanings, emotions, and the values people feel in their lived environments often diverge from what Henri Lefebvre (1991, p. 38-39) calls "conceptualised space," the "space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers…the dominant space in any society (or mode of production)." In short, walking methods "trouble" dominant space, place, and landscape by revealing complex, heterodox demands to co-create, remember, preserve, traverse, and transgress the spatial entanglements that comprise social and political life.

However, we argue that one particular form of conceptualised space, the space of societies supposedly transitioning from violence or authoritarianism, remains under-explored by walking methods. This may simply be a failure to report and analyse walking practices (Pierce & Lawhon, 2015), but the lacuna more likely reflects ethical and practical concerns. Those conducting research in polarised communities may be readily identifiable as "obvious

outsiders" (Hocking et al., 2018, p. 14), and thus viewed with suspicion and hostility. Participating in a walking study can engender real or perceived threats, not only in post-conflict contexts but anywhere characterised by enduring tensions or high levels of violence (Carpiano, 2009). Memories of state and/or community surveillance may foster a reluctance to work with geospatial technologies, such as those tracking participant movement and audio-visual recording (Finlay & Bowman, 2017; Kinney, 2018). More fundamentally, all locomotion is conducted within problematic power-geometries, particularly the gendered, racial, and cultural-religious nexuses that differentially impact marginalised groups (Warren, 2017). For some research participants, walking in public is inherently discomforting, transgressive, and risk-taking. Differential "embodied dispositions" means that walking closes down "certain possible research avenues" and may conspire to "limit who is likely to participate (not everyone can walk or would choose to participate in a walk)" (Macpherson, 2016, p. 430-431). Furthermore, Muziani (2015) cautions that the mnemonic qualities of troubling remnants forces scholars to consider the ethical implications of walking through places laden with painful memories.

Yet in spite of these considerations, we suggest that many post-conflict environments are ripe for the careful, critical, and ethical applications of walking methods. In the remainder of this article, we examine the potential for walking methods to trouble the conceptualised post-conflict space of one transitional society: Northern Ireland.

3 WALKING IN A TROUBLED PLACE

In recent years, several important studies have emerged utilising walking methods in Northern Ireland, despite the practical and ethical difficulties described above. Most have investigated the impact of prolonged conflict over territory and public space. Roulston et al. (2017) and Smyth & McKnight (2013) use walking methods to explore how people physically negotiate their segregated and spatially encoded environments. The Belfast Mobility Project couples geospatial technology with walking interviews to examine the production and reproduction of deeply segregated space in North Belfast (Hocking et al., 2018). Also in North Belfast, Mitchell & Kelly (2011) employ "ethnographic walks" to examine policymakers' attempts to carve out "bubbles" of "peaceful spaces," paradoxically discovering the erection of new barriers between cordoned-off zones of peace and the everyday mobilities of local residents. Skinner (2016) utilises a form of the go-along method to probe dark tourism and the public performance of conflict memory in West Belfast. While

these studies evince a growing appreciation of walking methods, some limitations are apparent.

Walking in Northern Ireland has thus far insufficiently embraced Anderson's call to re-engage with the essential concerns of humanistic geography. The emotion, affect, vitality, and multi-temporality of post-conflict space remains under-addressed. Space is not merely segregated, divided, and contested; those divisions are constructed on deep reservoirs of emotional and traumatic meaning and impact (Robinson, 2018). Public space in Northern Ireland is striated with the co- presence of the material, political, and cultural semiotics of post-conflict transition, spatial regeneration, and/or urban renewal and the persistent troubling remnants and spectral traces of the Troubles. Murphy & McDowell (2018, p. 2) argue these spatial co-presences must be examined with "transitional optics" if Northern Ireland is to break free of "permanent liminality," of being perpetually "stuck between a violent past and a future which is still emergent."

McCleery (2018, n.p.) asserts that existing methodological orientations are partly responsible for this "stuckness". He argues research frequently re-treads well-established ground, reiterating the same "macro socio-political" factors underpinning competing narratives about the nature of the conflict—what McEvoy and McConnachie (2012) call the "meta-conflict." There is often a failure to conceptualise Northern Ireland as a "complex, contradictory, and incoherent assemblage of meanings, practices, and materialities (O'Dowd & Komarova, 2013, p. 528). This calls to mind Diana Taylor's monumental study of post-*junta* Argentina, where becoming "trapped in bad scripts" reifies rather than troubles dominant political narratives and conceptualised space. Stimulating new possibilities may depend on engaging with methodological innovations while simultaneously taking seriously the essential foundations of humanistic geography. Our contention is that walking can contribute to this project in several crucial ways.

First, walking methods are place-sensitive and although place has long been a central concern of humanistic geographers, few have actively operationalised it methodologically. Rather, as Till (2005, p. 8) has argued, researchers tend to treat places as "backdrops" or "containers" rather than active mediators of social action. Anderson et al. (2010) advocate that geographers employ "polylogic" methods, or methods that explicitly acknowledge, utilise, and generate insights from the co-constituted agency of the researcher, researched, and place of the research encounter. As Lucy Lippard states, a place has temporal "depth," it is "a layered location replete with human histories and memories… what formed it, what happened here, what will happen here." This is especially important in Northern Ireland,

where fluid memories of "what happened here" and who has the right to narrate, remember, and commemorate in place are sources of significant ongoing contestation (Robinson, 2018)).

Robinson (2018) posits that scholarly readings of Northern Irish space often accept the dominant spatial pronouncements of powerful actors, thus marginalising the voices of subaltern subjects and neglecting the heterodox forms of place-attachment, performance, and everyday encounter that characterise its complex spatial realities. Walking calls scholarly attention to forgotten and overlooked places, as well as those perceived as mundane, less-important, or empty but still redolent with symbolic meaning (Adams & Larkham, 2016). Additionally, walking methods are better suited to reveal place-based dynamism, or how participants' narrations and experiences of, and in, place are changed and rewritten over time (Holton & Riley, 2014).

Second, walking methods catalyse discovery through subtle alterations of the power-dynamics inherent in research encounters. Finlay & Bowman (2017, p. 269-270) argue that walking reduces "situational disparities" between researcher and participant with regards to age, gender, race and other characteristics. Kusenbach (2003) claims walking together fosters more "egalitarian connections." Additionally, the conversation or dialogue on a walk is easier, more dynamic and less rehearsed or reiterative. Kinney (2018, p. 177) asserts that "talk becomes easier when walking", while Pinder (2011) observes how it better accommodates naturally occurring pauses, lulls, and silences. However, alterations of the power-dynamics between researcher and researched may depend on non-directive methodological applications, or allowing respondents control over the direction or journey route (Bergeron et. al, 2014; Evans & Jones, 2011). Walking methods are not unique in potentially unsettling the researcher-researched dynamic (e.g. Pain & Kindon, 2007), but many applications explicitly cast the researcher in the role of the learner or the follower and the participant in the role of the leader or expert.

Ultimately, walking with participants in troubled places has the potential to unsettle dominant productions of transitional space, not only by diversifying existing narratives of place, space, and landscape, but by revealing overlooked aspects of existing places of significance and calling researcher's attention to places they would never have thought to look. The following section briefly details two recent studies in Northern Ireland.

4 EXCAVATING TROUBLING REMNANTS AND SPECTRAL TRACES

Robinson (under review) employs walking methods to examine the memory of the former Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) along the Southwest run of the Irish border. The

UDR was an auxiliary unit of the British army comprised exclusively of Northern Irish men and women who typically served near the towns and villages where they lived. They were predominately border guards who could also be mobilised to support specific army actions (Ryder, 1991). The role of the UDR throughout the 30-year history of the Troubles is deeply contested. From an (Irish) nationalist lens, the UDR is often seen merely as a continuation of a long history of British/unionist colonial oppression. From a unionist lens, the UDR were local men and women bravely, loyally, and legally serving their country and protecting its borders. And while the UDR was directly responsible for eight deaths during the Troubles (McKittrick et al., 2008), there are numerous allegations of collusive crossover with loyalist murders, and UDR weaponry consistently found its way into the hands of loyalist paramilitaries (Cadwallader, 2013).

The UDR differed most notably from the regular British army in their deep connection to the places they served. Off-duty UDR men and women did not go home to fortified barracks but to flats in sometimes dangerous villages or isolated farmhouses in rural areas of Northern Ireland. Consequently, they were uniquely vulnerable to paramilitary assassination (Patterson, 2013). In present-day Northern Ireland, survivors' memory-practices have been marginalised by a post-conflict symbolic landscape saturated with hagiographic portrayals of former paramilitaries *and* the widespread elision of traumatic memory by neoliberal spatial regeneration (Switzer & McDowell, 2009). Thus, Robinson uses walking methods to both uncover and explore the contested landscapes of the Irish border not contained within these dominant spatial imaginaries.

Robinson explicitly adopted non-directive walking methods when working with ex-UDR survivors and bereaved. Participants were simply asked to "Take [Robinson] to those places in your local area that were important for [him] to understand and tell [him] about them." He also utilised "go-alongs" on "border tours" with a prominent local survivors' group. Ultimately, what Robinson discovered troubled his presuppositions about post-Troubles symbolic landscapes and introduced places of significance inaccessible to him had he employed sedentary methods. He ultimately argues that ex-UDR men and women deploy the traumatic past in public space in order to *prolong* it; that their memory-work's superordinate purpose is not to engage in sectarian or quasi-sectarian one-upmanship but rather to resist a dominant post-conflict space and time that seeks to render them and their experiences anachronistic through calls for "reconciliation" and "moving on" from the violent past. Robinson arrived at these insights by studying the routes through post-conflict space his respondents took and the often out-of-the-way and overlooked places in their local

environments that they chose to bring him to, places that powerfully illustrated the ongoing presence of the past in their daily lives (fig. 1). Crucially, Robinson contends, had he merely employed traditional qualitative interviewing with local victim's advocates, these insights about the motivations and roots of UDR resistant-memory would not have been accessible.

McClelland's (2018) study of the former Ebrington Barracks in Northern Ireland's second city of Derry also digs into the striated layers of troubled places using walking methods.[2] Ebrington was a British army base and command-centre during the Troubles that is presently undergoing a state-led mixed-use redevelopment, though one beset by lengthy delays and partially-fulfilled ambitions. This transition renders Ebrington particularly relevant to contemporary policy challenges in post-conflict contexts, especially over the creation of "shared space" and the mobilisation of heritage for regeneration and conflict transformation (Doak, 2018; Murphy & McDowell, 2018). McClelland employs non-directive one-to-one walks with local residents, business owners, and regeneration professionals, allowing them to lead the way through a familiar place. Ultimately, Ebrington's temporal depth emerged as the critical dimension permeating the walks, with participants revealing the multiple, overlapping temporalities differentially experienced in a place where "past decay and future regeneration" co-exist, "producing both temporal and sensory juxtapositions" (Degen, 2017, p. 145).

Although McClelland's research reinforced an established critique of heritage-led redevelopment in Northern Ireland (Doak, 2018, Boland et al., 2019), the granular insights generated by walking unsettled authorised narratives of Ebrington's regeneration process in richer, more nuanced ways rooted in peoples' lived and everyday experiences. Walking Ebrington provokes dissonant but simultaneously held feelings of belonging *and* alienation, of violent memories intertwined with hope for its transformation. His study thus reveals how hope, memories of absence, and troubling remnants are entangled within the regeneration process.

One particularly pertinent remnant one respondent called McClelland's attention to was the easily-overlooked concrete flagpole base on the edge of the former parade ground, a material vestige within the now repurposed public space (fig. 2). The flag's absence is an exemplar of the "often-unnoticed microfeatures of the built environment" Finlay & Bowman (2017, p. 267) discuss. Given the deeply contentious political debates in Northern Ireland over flags and emblems, the base stands as a spectral trace of a contentious past, erased and not referenced in published materials, but persistently retaining its palimpsestic material trace.

Figure 1: Former general store near Rosslea, Co. Fermanagh. Site of the assassination of Douglas Deering (12 May 1977). Photo by Joseph S. Robinson. Used with Permission.

Figure 2. Absent flagpole, Ebrington, Derry. Photo by Andrew G. McClelland. Used with Permission.

The absent flag evokes Ebrington's multi-temporal character whilst simultaneously provoking interrogation of what counts as heritage, what should be remembered and commemorated, and revealing the elisions and disappearances underlying state-led transformations. This concrete fragment reveals Ebrington's persistent "inbetweenness" (McClelland, 2018, p. 34), both in its particular place and in the wider regional context. Like Robinson's study of UDR-memory in the Southwest, McClelland found the rich, emotive qualities of Ebrington's temporal depth were best excavated using walking methods. Despite originating from very different research programmes, these two studies' similar choice of walking methods revealed their ability to better access people, places, and often unnoticed features of significant post-conflict landscapes. Additionally, both authors were forced to question their own prior understandings of the material and discursive legacies of violence in Northern Ireland through a rigorous engagement with the material remnants and spectral traces that may have remained unexamined.

5 CONCLUSION

Walking methods foreground perspectives that trouble authorised post-conflict discourses, space, and temporalities by revealing people and places straddling times, where troubling remains persist and spectral traces haunt. They also have the potential to unearth less-visible claimants to "mattering," introducing people and places that may have been "written out" of the production of conceptualised space. These less-visible people and places may be better accessed through walking methods, by moving through post-conflict space with people who must alternatively perform and conform to the spatial constrictions inherent in social and political marginality (Warren, 2017). Walking methods may thus be ideally situated to study the "lifeworlds" of people navigating post-conflict space, "the preflective, taken-for-granted dimensions of experience" and "unquestioned meanings." (Buttimer, 1976, p. 281).

Many post-conflict contexts are characterised by enduring tensions over how the past is narrated, how stories are performed, witnessed, and who has the right to curate their meanings in public space. Following McCleery's provocation and adapting Taylor's notion of "bad scripts," we suggest that the traditional qualitative methods employed in studying Northern Ireland may contribute to the narrowing of possible scholarly questions, research vistas, and political choices. Incorporating walking methods into qualitative and mixed-method research programmes can help reorient scholars back to the fundamental promise of human geography and away from over-studied and overly-familiar discourses and spatial narratives. To challenge dominant and calcifying narratives and productions of post-conflict space, we must embrace methodological innovations that have, at least, the potential to trouble the spatial stories we are accustomed to hearing.

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[1] The name Northern Ireland is contested. Some prefer the moniker "North of Ireland" or "The Six Counties."
[2] The city name is also disputed. Although officially known as Londonderry, a majority of local residents refer to Derry.