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Haunting and Transitional Justice: On Lives, Landscapes and Unresolved Pasts

Cheryl Lawther¹

Abstract

This article explores practices of haunting and ghosting after conflict related loss. This is not to suggest a focus on the occult or the paranormal, but to use these phenomena as a prism through which to understand the intersection between unresolved pasts and the transmission of trauma post-conflict. As Michael Levan notes, trauma lingers ‘unexorcisably in the places of its perpetration, in the bodies of those affected, in the eyes of the witnesses, and in the politics of memory’. The ghost, according to Avery Gordon ‘is the principle form by which something lost or invisible or seemingly not there makes itself known or apparent to us.’ In this article I argue for three conceptualisations of haunting when past traumas remain unaddressed – the haunting of lost lives; the haunting of landscape; and the haunting presence of the unresolved past. The article focuses on Northern Ireland, a post-conflict jurisdiction described as being haunted by a ‘conflict calendar in which every day is an anniversary’ and extensive fieldwork with victims and survivors of the conflict. The article concludes by arguing that the presence of ghosts and the experience of haunting represent a ‘call to action’ in the quest to deal with a legacy of violent conflict and human rights abuses.

Key Words

Haunting, Victimhood, Trauma, the Past

Introduction

Building on approaches to ghosts and haunting by Avery Gordon, this article is concerned with practices of haunting and ghosting after conflict related loss. This is not to suggest a focus on the occult or the paranormal, but to use these phenomena as a prism through which to understand the intersection between unresolved pasts and the transmission of trauma post-conflict. At first blush, dealing with the legacy of a violent past may appear to have little in common with notions of ghosting or haunting. I would, however, argue that the opposite is true: ghosts can be key to understanding how the effects of mass murder, genocide, slavery or colonial oppression extend far beyond the moment of atrocity to engender trauma that echoes for generations (Schwab, 2010; Schindel, 2014). Likewise, the work of truth, justice, accountability and memory is precisely about responding to the unsettled ghosts of the past and their presence amongst the living. Indeed, Archbishop Desmond Tutu was a powerful advocate of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission because of his hope that it would tackle the problem of the past’s ‘uncanny habit of returning to haunt one’ and its refusal to ‘lie down quietly’ (TRC Report, vol 1: 7). Conversely, writing about the cultural memory of Soviet terror, Alexander Etkind (2009) argues that Russian civil society is haunted by the ‘unquiet ghosts’ of the unburied Soviet past.

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The ghost, according to Avery Gordon (1997: 63), 'is the principle form by which something lost or invisible or seemingly not there makes itself known or apparent to us.' She proposes that we do not think of ghosts as representations of missing or dead persons, but as 'inarticulate experiences' and 'haunting reminders' of the violence and complex social relations in which we live (Gordon, 1997: 25). They offer a glimpse of 'the fundamental difference between the world we have now and the world we could have had instead' (Gordon, 1997: 127). For Derrida (1994), the spectre is the conveyor of legacies and demands from the dead. To live with, talk to and about ghosts Derrida (1994: xviii) proposes, is all done 'in the name of justice'. This engagement with ghosts involves a politics of mourning, of memory and of inheritances that allows for a diversity of relations to the past (Wilke, 2010). Reckoning with ghosts – through processes of truth recovery or reparations for example, therefore does not negate the past but remains focused on the present 'Because ultimately haunting is about how to transform a shadow of a life into an undiminished life whose shadows touch softly in the spirit of a peaceful reconciliation' (Gordon, 1997: 208; Wilke, 2010).

In this article I argue for three conceptualisations of haunting when past traumas remain unaddressed – the haunting of lost lives; the haunting of landscapes; and the haunting of the unresolved past. This conceptualisation demands that we, for example, see haunting as an animated state in which repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known and see place-memory as capable of embodying ghosts and haunting reminders of the past (Robinson, 2017). As Gordon (1997) argues, haunting and the appearance of spectres or ghosts is one way in which we are notified that what has been concealed, repressed or remains unanswered is very much alive and present with the potential for personal, social and political disruption. Ghosts thus prohibit the separation of the past, the present and the future. The experience of haunting post-conflict is thus a demand to close the loop between the living and the dead and the trauma of war and conflict.

The chapter focuses on Northern Ireland, a post-conflict society described as being haunted by a 'conflict calendar in which every day is an anniversary' (Rowan, 2012). There, the dead remain a potent and emotive means of legitimising and perpetuating the ethnonational and sectarian characteristics of political debate (Graham and Whelan, 2007). The dead have, for example, been used to perform the relevance of violence, demarcate borders, enact social martyrdom and perpetuate polarised conceptions of victimhood (Robinson, 2017). The failure to 'deal with' the legacy of the conflict by way of formal truth recovery means that for many victims and survivors, the spectres of the past remain in the present, precluding healing, closure or restitution and permitting space for the transmission of trauma into lives, spaces and the social and political fabric of everyday life.

This article is based on qualitative research with victims and survivors of the Northern Ireland conflict. Over 60 semi-structured interviews were completed with victims and survivors and their representatives between 2016 and 2018. Interviewees included victims of loyalist and republican paramilitary violence and British state forces. Both purposeful and snowball sampling methods were employed and as such, the sample is not strictly geographically representative of the Northern Ireland population or the impact of the conflict in respect to electoral wards, age, gender and socio-economic background. Rather, potential interviewees were approached on the basis of their relevance to the research questions. Approximately one third of interviewees were women. A blend of voices were sought, capturing those victims and survivors who are more familiar with recounting their experiences and those who are not, but who, in light of the invitation to participate in this project, expressed a desire to do so. Full

support for the research and review of the research questions was provided by the Commission for Victims and Survivors Northern Ireland. To illustrate one specific point, in one instance I have also chosen to draw from previously unpublished interview data.² The conceptual themes identified below emerged during the fieldwork and were refined during the coding process. Excerpts from the interviews are presented below, allowing, where possible, the voices of interviewees to ‘speak’.

The structure of this article is as follows. For those who are less familiar with the Northern Ireland context, the article opens with a brief background to the conflict, the nature and scale of victimisation and efforts to deal with the legacy of the past. It then deals with the first conceptual theme – ‘Haunting and Lost Lives’. In this part of the article I explore the existence and impact of ‘dead body politics’ whereby victims and survivors of the conflict and legacy issues have frequently been appropriated for political gain (Verdery, 2000). Yet, it is not only individual lives that have been scarred by the conflict. As Bell and Di Paolantonio (2009) argue, landscape and physical structures ‘hold’ memories, conjuring up and housing spectres of the past. These dynamics are explored under the heading of ‘The Haunting of Landscape’. The final conceptual theme is ‘Haunting and the Presence of the Unresolved Past’ – how the failure to comprehensively deal with the legacy of the conflict has contributed to high levels of conflict-related mental health problems and transgenerational trauma.

Through these three themes and the use of haunting as a lens by which to understand, first-hand, the accounts of victims and survivors, this paper adds a new prism to the existing scholarship on victims and dealing with the past in Northern Ireland. There is a wealth of literature on the mechanics of potential mechanisms for dealing with the past or the definitional debates between ‘innocent’ and ‘guilty’ victims for example. Haunting is often mentioned in these contexts as a rhetorical device. In a departure from that scholarship, this paper foregrounds the need to pay attention to practices of ghosting and haunting. It makes three distinct contributions. First, it demonstrates that haunting is more than an issue of phrasing, but that Northern Ireland’s ghosts continue to have a profound and often negative impact on the living, the dead, on landscape, politics and the social fabric. The frame of haunting can therefore be a way to transcend politicised discussions regarding the shape of potential legacy mechanisms or contests over the legal definition of a victim to foreground how the unquiet ghosts and the haunting impact of trauma in Northern Ireland may linger ‘unexorcisably’ in the places of its perpetration, in the bodies of those affected, in the eyes of the witnesses, and in the politics of memory’ (Levan, 2011: 81). Second, this paper illustrates how haunting is not an abstract or theoretical idea, but a physical, cognitive, emotional and political experience. Haunting as an analytical frame therefore offers a holistic perspective which captures the traumatic impact of the past in all its depth and breadth – on the physical landscape or on children in the form of post-memory for example. To date, discussions on dealing with the past in Northern Ireland have been characterised by the lack of such an approach. Third, and through the words of victims and survivors of the Northern Ireland conflict, this article demonstrates that where the past remains unresolved – through the absence of truth, acknowledgement or justice for example, the ghostly and negative presence of the past may be more acute. Thus, I would argue that a greater appreciation of ghosts and the haunting impact of the past is inseparable from the broader discussion on dealing with the past in Northern Ireland – a point which has yet been unacknowledged.

² Author’s interview, 2012.

Northern Ireland and the Past in the Present

For those who are less familiar with the Northern Ireland context, some brief details on the nature of the conflict and efforts to deal with the past are instructive at this stage. The Northern Ireland conflict began in 1969 and lasted over 30 years. In broad terms, it was fought between Loyalist and Republican paramilitary organisations and British state forces, including the British Army, Ulster Defence Regiment (an infantry regiment of the British Army) and the police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary. During this period, approximately 3,739 individuals were killed, giving an overall death rate of 2.2 per thousand of the population. It is estimated that a further 40,000 – 50,000 people were injured, while tens of thousands were displaced due to intimidation and political violence (McKittrick and McVea, 2012). Research by the Commission for Victims and Survivors Northern Ireland (CVSNI, 2011) notes that over one-third of Northern Ireland's population could be legally classified as a victim or survivor of the conflict.

The civilian population were the greatest casualties of the conflict. According to the Sutton Index of Deaths, 1842 civilians were killed; 1114 members of the security forces; 395 members of Republican paramilitary organisations; 168 members of Loyalist paramilitary organisations; and 10 members of the Irish security forces.³ Republican paramilitary organisations – the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) – were responsible for approximately 60% of all deaths, 1712 of which are attributable to the IRA. Loyalist paramilitary organisations – the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) - were responsible for over 1,000 deaths (approximately 30%), while state security forces were responsible for directly killing 363 people (10% of all deaths).⁴

Following the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, Northern Ireland has been an active site of transitional justice. The reform of the criminal justice system and security forces, the release and reintegration of political prisoners, the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons and the development of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) have all formed part of the peace process (Northern Ireland Office, 1998; McEvoy, 2001; Campbell and Ni Aolain, 2003; Independent Commission on Policing, 1999; NIHRC, 2003). However, and in contrast to many other transitional jurisdictions, Northern Ireland has not had an overarching process of truth recovery. Instead, truth has been pursued in a 'piecemeal' fashion, through, for example, public inquiries; 'right to life' challenges under Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights; police-led truth recovery by the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, which investigates historical allegations of police malpractice, and the Legacy Investigation Branch based within the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), responsible for a cold-case review of all outstanding conflict-related deaths; and victim-led and civil society-sponsored initiatives (see: McEvoy, 2013 for a comprehensive overview). By nature and design, this approach has been uneven, incomplete and compromised by the weaknesses of the individual mechanisms (Lawther, 2015). As a result, victims' groups, NGOs and certain political parties have made repeated calls for a full examination of the past.

The debate on how best to deal with the past is traceable to at least 2004 when the then Northern Ireland Secretary of State Paul Murphy undertook a 'fact-finding' trip to South Africa. Since

³ Sutton Index of Deaths: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/> (accessed on 10 October 2018).

⁴ This final figure leaves out the matter of state collusion. It is now clear that the security forces and intelligence services had infiltrated both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary organisations and were complicit in multiple murders.

then, detailed proposals for truth recovery have been provided by Healing Through Remembering a Belfast based NGO, the British government appointed Consultative Group on the Past and the cross-party Stormont House Agreement (McEvoy, 2006; Consultative Group on the Past, 2009; Stormont House Agreement, 2014). Signed in December 2014 by a majority of Northern Ireland's main political parties and the British and Irish governments, the Stormont House Agreement (SHA) contains the most recent legacy proposals. It makes four specific recommendations on the past. They are the creation of: a Historical Investigations Unit, 'an independent body to take forward investigations into outstanding Troubles-related deaths'; an Independent Commission on Information Retrieval 'to enable victims and survivors to seek and privately receive information about the deaths of their next of kin'; an Oral History Archive 'to provide a central place for people from all backgrounds to share experiences and narratives related to the Troubles'; and an Implementation and Reconciliation Group 'to oversee themes, archives and information recovery' (Stormont House Agreement, 2014). These bodies effectively amount to a bespoke Northern Ireland truth commission. At the time of writing, the results of a government-led public consultation on the detail of the proposed legacy bodies are pending. Notwithstanding the ongoing suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the British state's unwillingness to disclose sensitive 'national security'-related information to families affected by the conflict and discussions over an amnesty for British soldiers who served in Northern Ireland have proved contentious. However, if agreement can be reached, the British government has indicated that the relevant bill will be introduced to Westminster in January 2021.

Haunting and Lost Lives

Northern Ireland has frequently been described as a society that is 'haunted by its past'.⁵ For the author Susan McKay (2008: 11), haunting is manifested in the fact that 'Every journey through the North brings you past places where atrocities were committed. Sometimes you see a withered wreath in a ditch, sometimes a monument, sometimes nothing at all marking the spot where blood was split'. She concludes, 'The past refuses to go away however we try to banish it' (McKay, 2008: 11). The loss of over 3,700 lives, the existence of unclosed wounds, missing bodies, unanswered questions and a political discourse that is punctuated by questions concerning the nature of the conflict has ensured the past continues to haunt the present. Thus as Derrida (1994: 11, italics in original) has argued, the 'spectre is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*'. Using haunting as an analytical device, in this part of the chapter I explore two key ways in which the lost lives of the Northern Ireland conflict continue to have a ghostly and destabilising effect on the present. First is the haunting impact of the failure to deal with the past – a haunting which I argue means that the living who continue to pursue questions of truth and justice and the re-dignification of the dead cannot rest. Second is the appropriation of the dead for political and social gain - a practice which means neither the dead or their family members can rest and foregrounds the spectre of the dead in social and political debate. As I will argue below, in both instances we see neither Harris et al's (2018) advocacy for an 'ethics of care' towards the ghosts of the past or in Derrida's (1994) terms, a taking of responsibility for the dead.

As detailed above, there has been a long and protracted debate on how best to deal with the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict. Much of that debate centres around the failure to establish a formal truth recovery mechanism (McEvoy, 2013; Lawther, 2015). For many

⁵ Newspaper headlines have included: 'Northern Ireland's peace is haunted by ghosts who will not be silenced', 'Haunted' Enniskillen bomb survivor reveals suicide attempt', 'Anguish Haunts Northern Ireland's Retired Terrorists' and 'Troubles soldier haunted by 1971 shooting of two sisters as daughter of one demand's truth'.

victims and survivors, the trauma of the loss of a loved one has been heightened by the failure to deal with the past. For some interviewees, a process of dealing with the past has, as would be expected, been equated with providing acknowledgment and recognition of wrongdoing – ‘it’s just about the recognition that this shouldn’t have happened in your family, it was wrong, it was wrong what happened to my son or my policeman, it was wrong what happened to the soldier, it was wrong what happened to the IRA’.⁶ Yet, as the following extract illustrates, it has also implicitly been linked with restoring the dignity of the dead – ‘it really is the dignity of their loved is what they’re fighting for, what they represented in life, that’s what it’s about’.⁷ Such statements correspond to Harris’ (2014: 218) argument that the ghosts of the past ‘demand that we work to make our lives meaningful by working to make their lives meaningful’. Speaking to ghosts as not merely ‘boundary objects’ between the past and the present or between memory and commemoration for example, for some victims and survivors, the haunting presence of the unresolved past acts as a blockage between *existing* and the ability to *live* in the here and the future.

I earnestly believe that once this inquest is over that I have accomplished my goal, I have achieved what I have set out to. ...it’s time to be free;⁸

...you’re dealing with people who would be quite old and infirm. We have a family member who would be in his mid to late 80s, he’ll be 85 and he wants his day in court but he needs it now because he knows..., we think that family members have held on just so they could have one good day in court.⁹

Yet, as is also illustrated above, ghosts do not respect temporal boundaries, meaning that ‘Relations among the living are damaged. Relations between the living and the dead have been unhinged...Relations with those yet to be born are at stake’ (Whande, 2012: 12-13 cited in Harris, 2014: 217). The fieldwork in Northern Ireland on which this article is based revealed a familial and cross-generational haunting. The following extract illustrates this dynamic:

It’s been going on that long my mother led the campaign, my mother has since passed. My aunt then took over the campaign and she has now, she’s not well herself and obviously, I’ve taken it over in the last couple of years, I don’t want to hand it over to my son to take it over. Let’s sort it out once and for all. ... We can’t brush it under the carpet and keep on brushing it under the carpet, it’s just affecting the future, I don’t want my kids growing up to have to deal with what I had to deal with or what my mum had to deal with. ...So, if it’s lying there and it’s rotting, let’s clean it out, let’s deal with it, let’s move on but move on when people have answers to the questions that they have.¹⁰

In her work on the sociology of haunting, Gordon (1997: 206) argued that ghosts ‘inaugurate the necessity of *doing something*’ (my emphasis). In a similar vein, Harris (2014) has suggested that ghosts demand that we take responsibility before them, in front of them, seeing them and respecting them. In the Northern Ireland context, or indeed, in other post-conflict or post-authoritarian jurisdictions, the need to deal with the past by way of truth, justice and acknowledgement is clear. Indeed, the co-chair of the Consultative Group on the Past (CGP) – established in 2007 by the British government to find a way forward on dealing with legacy

⁶ Author’s interview, 16 February 2017.

⁷ Author’s interview, 5 December 2016.

⁸ Author’s interview, 7 February 2017.

⁹ Author’s interview, 2 March 2017.

¹⁰ Author’s interview, 6 March 2017.

issues in the past in Northern Ireland (but ultimately doomed to failure), Archbishop Robin Eames explicitly drew on the language of haunting to press home the necessity of engaging with the recommendations of the CGP when giving evidence at the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. Speaking evocatively of the impact of those who ‘carry on their minds and bodies the results of Northern Ireland’s conflict’, Eames argued, ‘The past is never going to go away. The ghosts of the past will continue to haunt this generation and the next, feeding on sectarian attitudes, unless some way is found to move forward but to move forward with real respect for the sacrifice and trauma of the past’ (NIAC, 2009, ev. 2). Post-conflict, taking responsibility for lost lives and the haunting impact of the past on victims and survivors can be realised precisely through a comprehensive process of dealing with the past.

The second manifestation of haunting identified above is the appropriation of the dead for political and social gain. Reflecting on the use of the dead for political purposes in Eastern Europe, Katherine Verdery (2000: 29) well captures how the dead are vulnerable to being used in this way:

Dead people come with a curriculum vitae or resume – several possible resumes, depending on which aspect of their life is being considered... Their complexity makes it fairly easy to discern different sets of emphasis, extract different stories, and thus rewrite history.... Words can be put in their mouths – often quite ambiguous words – or their actual words can be ambiguated by quoting them out of context.

Verdery’s work can be readily applied to a range of post-conflict and transitional jurisdictions including Israel/Palestine, Colombia and South Africa, where the dead and their contested victimhood have become sites and sources of political and ideological point scoring. In Northern Ireland, the dead and victims and survivors of the conflict have frequently been appropriated for political gain. The sharpest manifestation of this debate concerns the definition of ‘who’ is a victim of the conflict. The Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 provides the statutory definition of a victim or survivor. According to Article 3, Paragraph 1 of the Order, this is

- (a) someone who is or has been physically or psychologically injured as a result of or in consequence of a conflict-related incident;
- (b) someone who provides a substantial amount of care on a regular basis for an individual mentioned in paragraph (a); or
- (c) someone who has been bereaved as a result of or in consequence of a conflict-related event.¹¹

As an inclusive definition of victimhood, the Order includes all those affected by the conflict – civilians, members of the security forces, former members of paramilitary organisations and their families. While the Order passed into law in 2006 with little political opposition, it has since become a focal point for debates over so-called ‘innocent’ and ‘guilty’ victims and the existence of a ‘hierarchy of victimhood’ (Brewer, 2010; Brewer and Hayes, 2011; Lawther, 2014a, b). In broad terms, the definition of a victim contained in the Order has been rejected by members of the unionist pro-state community who have claimed that ‘true’ victim status demands innocence and have advocated for a hierarchy of victimhood. Broad support has however been found within the nationalist and republican community who have argued for an

¹¹ The Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2006/2953/contents> (accessed on 4 December 2018).

‘equivalence of grief’ and have rejected hierarchal interpretations of victimhood (Lawther, 2014a).

While contests over victimhood have marked much of the debate on dealing with the past, including proposals over the use of an amnesty or limited immunity from prosecution, a pension for the injured and the release of funding for legacy inquests in the coroner’s courts, one of the sharpest and most visceral manifestations of this debate concerns the publicity associated with the launch of the Report of the Consultative Group on the Past (CGP) in 2009. For current purposes it also clearly demonstrates the appropriation of the dead for political gain and the haunting presence of the past in the present. Amongst the 31 recommendations on how best to deal with the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland made by the CGP was the proposal for a £12,000¹² ex-gratia ‘Recognition Payment’ to all victims and survivors of the conflict.¹³

The political spectacle that followed appeared to suggest, in Walter Benjamin’s (cited in Edelman, 1988) words that ‘even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins’. Having previously briefed the media about the contents of the report, including the proposed payment to all of those defined as victims, the launch of the report in Belfast city centre, attended by the author, was marred by angry protests from different victims’ groups – often holding photos of the dead and the deceased, directed against the Consultative Group themselves, prominent Republicans present such as Gerry Adams and other victims – almost all of it directed against the £12,000 payment. The recommendation provoked a very negative reaction amongst Unionist politicians in particular. For example, the then DUP leader Peter Robinson criticised the Reports failure to distinguish between ‘innocent victims and terrorists’, while a former unionist politician critiqued the failure to respect ‘*our honoured dead*’ (DUP, 2009: 4; Lawther, 2014a: 35). The dead were similarly invoked in the accompanying press coverage. One of the most lurid examples of the appropriation of victimhood came in the Irish News, the main nationalist newspaper. The weekend prior to the launch, the front page carried the headline “*Butchers, Bombers, Victims – They are All the Same.*” The photographs below juxtaposed Lenny Murphy (leader of the UVF Shankill Butchers), Thomas Begley (the IRA member killed in the Shankill bomb) and 9-year old Patrick Rooney, the first child killed in the conflict.

There are, as McKay (2018) argues, ‘...those who use the dead to fight old battles’. In the above example, the dead were used to further political claims-making and offered those advocating for and against the Recognition Payment ‘a usable past’ whereby violent histories were used to bolster partial political perspectives (Moeller, 1996). The impact in terms of haunting is manifold. The dead such as Murphy, Begley and Rooney or those whose memories, images and life stories were invoked by different campaigning groups remain front and centre of political and social discourse. While they may fulfil a political purpose, speaking to key themes in the two competing political ideologies, the dead cannot rest and for remaining family members who often do not consent to the use of their loved one in this way, their present is haunted by the political and social use of their loved one. The experience is undoubtedly traumatic. Moreover, and beyond the example of the CGP, recourse to the assumed demands and perspectives of the dead remains a potent and emotive means of legitimising and perpetuating the ethnonational and sectarian characteristics of political debate in Northern Ireland (Graham and Whelan, 2007). In Northern Ireland, the haunting use of the dead therefore

¹² The figure of £12,000 was derived from the Irish Government’s ‘Remembrance Fund’ and ‘Acknowledgement Payment’ of €15,000 to the surviving spouse, their children or the parents of an individual who was either fatally injured in Ireland or who was resident in Ireland at that time.

¹³ The controversy surrounding the ‘Recognition Payment’ closed down debate and discussion on the Report of the CGP.

precludes the separation of the past, the present and the future, impacting the dead, the living and society at large (Robinson, 2017).

The Haunting of Landscape

Memory scholars have consistently emphasised the capacity of physical spaces to promote continuity with, and the preservation of, memory (Halbwachs, 1992; Viebach, 2019). Nora (1989: 19) for instance, identifies the main purpose of the lieux de memoire as to stop time, to block the work of forgetting and to establish a ‘state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial’. From this perspective, place transforms into what Booth (2001: 780) defines as a ‘point of connection’ that allows traces of the past to materialise into memory manifestations, such as memorials, monuments and museums (Viebach, 2019). The response to the then President of Argentina Carlos Menem’s issuing of a decree to demolish the Escuela de Mecanica de la Armada (ESMA), used as a clandestine detention centre during the dictatorship of 1976-1983, in the name of ‘reconciliation’, well illustrates this case.¹⁴ For advocates of Menem’s decree, the building was not only a reminder of the past, but also triggered a demand in the present – *how will you live* with this unsettling presence in your midst? (Bell and Di Paolantonio, 2009). Yet, linking arguments in favour of the preservation of commemorative sites with the work of human rights, Menem’s proposal was contested by a number of human rights groups, who protested that the past cannot be simply obliterated. Rather, and reflecting Derrida’s call to justice, they argued that the way to live with ghosts is not to destroy their haunts, but to give ghosts their proper place in the future, in order that they might inform, abstractly, the post-conflict landscape (Bell and Di Paolantonio, 2009).

This example demonstrates the capacity of conflict affected places and spaces to ‘hold’ memories and conjure up and house the spectres of the past. Transcending space and time, violent events frequently mark the real and imagined landscape, irrespective of what remains of the physical fallout of the event (Trigg, 2012). As the increasing attention paid to the ‘transformative’ capacity of atrocity sites attests, the ghosts of the past can be housed and their experiences put to future use. Yet, where the past remains contested, such sites are

...ghost-places, haunted places, places that blur the temporal lines between life and not-life. When places of memory are made, they are not made simply to put the ghosts to rest (a gravestone, a cairn, a shrine...), they are *performing their haunting in public*, and the performance is designed to instruct an audience in *how* to remember the life that was lost (Robinson, 2017: 26).

As much as lives can be haunted by the past, this part of the article will make the case for the haunting of landscape. One of the primary ways in which landscape can be haunted is through the ‘freezing’ of geographical space and suspension of the time-space-memory continuum. As Feldman (1991: 67) argues, ‘Ghost tales map the history of death in local space, disrupting the linearity of time’. For Feldman, ghosts are spectral traces, whose reason for existing (or persisting) is to call attention to what happened in a particular place and to demand that that place does not pass from memory. The concept of social haunting, which Till (2005: 23) adapts from Derrida therefore demonstrates both how ‘The process of selectively calling forth the dead and the past through place is one way individuals and groups try to fill absence and represent loss in the present.’ Moreover, given the subjective materiality of place and its links to concepts such as home, the community, the collectivity, emotion and atmosphere, claims to

¹⁴ Approximately 30,000 people disappeared during the Argentine ‘dirty war’.

geographical haunting are part of the politics of place making, memory and national identity (Hetherington, 1998).

Across Northern Ireland a number of ‘political/conflict tours’ are offered by a diverse range of victim, ex-combatant, community and campaign/advocacy groups.¹⁵ As part of the broader practice of ‘dark tourism’ or ‘conflict heritage’, the tours are designed to be of interest to visitors, students and researchers (see for example: McDowell, 2008; Skinner, 2016). They typically involve exploring a specific geographical area (urban and rural), with the tour guide providing an insight into the local experience of violence. Stops are frequently made at local memorials, wall murals and other unmarked sites of violence. To some extent such sites have become ‘haunted’ by the knowledge of what happened there, where echoes of the past and ‘imagined geographies’ transform familiar places into ‘uncanny environments’ (Derrida, 1994; Mandolessi, 2014; Gregory, 1994; Rose, 2009). With colleagues, I undertook eight of these tours across Northern Ireland during 2016/17. One tour, led by a local victims’ group in rural County Fermanagh, in the West of Northern Ireland, well illustrates the haunting of place. Described as a ‘educational tour given by local guides providing the stories from each region and showing the real effects of Terrorism on local families and individuals’, this tour involved driving around the local area and stopping at different locations where the tour guide, a life-long resident of the area, explained particular aspects of local history and the experience of victimhood and loss.¹⁶ Some of the stops were clearly marked with formal or informal memorials while others bore no identifying marks.

Individually and collectively, the stops demonstrated how time can be circumscribed and memory fixed in the physical landscape. For this tour guide, as with others encountered by the author, there was a clear sense that on recounting the details of specific atrocities, both time and geography were frozen in that particular moment. In essence, each stop on the tour acted as a *lieux de memoire* (Nora, 1989). Thus, a bus stop used by local school children was not just ‘a bus stop’, but *the bus stop* at which a bomb exploded; hills and ditches in the surrounding fields were not mere aspects of topography, but part of the arsenal of paramilitary organisations who used the natural landscape to their advantage when planning operations; likewise, an empty farm building was deemed emblematic of the attempted destruction of local life and the need for constant vigilance. While this freezing of place and time may be a function of trauma, as Till (2005: 13) argues,

Returning to places that haunt our imaginations fold and warps imagined times and selves (past, present, future), yet the ritual practice of returning creates a sense of temporal continuity and coherence. When someone goes back home (and each of us have many homes), he or she may experience such vivid memories that it may appear (even momentarily) as though the place and the person returning are exactly the same as they once were.

Equally, the specific locations chosen to be shared with visitors spoke to a particular experience of victimhood in a rural setting and its impact upon families, farms and the close-knit nature of rural life. More problematically, the tour fed into claims of, for this Protestant community, ‘innocent victimhood’ and the unjustifiability of ‘Terrorist’ violence. Indeed, the organisation responsible for this tour only engages with individuals and victims’ groups who have ‘the same

¹⁵ See for example: <https://deadcentretours.com/>; <http://coiste.ie/tours/>; <https://www.rucgefoundation.org/ruc-gc-memorial-garden/>.

¹⁶ <https://seff.org.uk/research-and-publications/> (accessed on 17 December 2018).

position on violence that we do'.¹⁷ Thus while these forms of memorialization were designed to 'manipulate time' (Munn, 1992; Viebach, 2019), they were not directed to a comprehensive understanding of the past, but the formalization of partial collapsing of time and space – 'the past is omnipresent, it's here every single day'.¹⁸ In this respect, the fractured and divided landscape on which the Northern Ireland conflict took place is haunted physically and cognitively, acting as 'the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available' (Caruth, 1996: 6). While not of course exclusively associated with the Protestant unionist community from which this example is drawn, the call to and use of the ghosts of the past is arguably more acute in those transitional societies where the past has not been dealt with and where the 'duty of memory' requires a summoning of partial representations of the past (Booth, 2001).

These dynamics of haunting are also replicated in respect to local forms of memorialisation. By way of example, best known for the sectarian segregation of its residential space into the two opposing neighbourhoods of the Loyalist Shankill Road and the Republican Falls Road, West Belfast sustained a high incidence of conflict-related deaths (440 out of a total of approximately 3,739) throughout the conflict, and the past is visually present in the physical and cultural landscape (Graham and Whelan, 2007). Since the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994, West Belfast, like many other areas in Northern Ireland, has been actively marked by the construction of what many local people regard as tangible sites of suffering, hurt and loss. These symbolise the locations where lives were lost and 'actualise' many other deaths which occurred outside the area. Permanent monuments, statues, plaques and memorial gardens are all located prominently in public space (Graham and Shirlow, 2002).

While acting as homes or repositories for the ghosts of the dead, local sites of memorialisation also demonstrate the disruption of the time-space-continuum and the freezing of geographical memory (Hamber and Wilson, 2002). For example, as Robinson (2017) argues, if the death(s) were violent or unjust, the ghost-place may confront the audience with a violent unsettled past, and the ghosts who haunt the place may cry from within for truth and justice. Conversely, deaths that do not 'fit' the dominant narrative are concealed. In Republican areas of West Belfast, for example, sites where security forces, informers and civilians were killed by Republicans are elided from the memorial landscape. Such dead remain a haunting presence by virtue of their 'complex victim' status. Moreover, in her anatomy of memory, politics and place in the new Berlin, Till (2005: 9, 195) writes of 'ghosts' of places of memory being 'created ... to give a shape to felt absences, fears and desires that haunt contemporary society' and through which 'contemporary dreams of national futures are imagined'. As Till (2005) suggests, local forms of memorialisation can be used to inscribe political meaning on space. Thus, the 'duty-to-tell' function of commemorative sites in Northern Ireland has been used for partial political claims making, perpetuating polarised and hierarchal conceptions of victimhood and haunting the present with competing narratives of the past.

Haunting and the Presence of the Unresolved Past

The final area this article addresses is the relationship between haunting and the traumatic presence of the unresolved past. In their recent work, Brewer et al (2018) argue that sustained communal violence has a haunting imprint on everyday life in the form of 'brutalising' mundane common sense language, ideas and beliefs; the brutalisation of everyday social

¹⁷ Author's interview, 5 December 2016.

¹⁸ Author's interview, 12 April 2017.

practices and behaviours; and the brutalisation of everyday cognitive maps and frames through which sense is made of the world. In this part of the paper, for reasons of space and conceptual clarity, I have adopted a narrower focus in relation to haunting and the traumatic presence of the impact of conflict – the prevalence of conflict related mental health problems and trans-generational trauma.

The intensity and intimacy of the Northern Ireland conflict appear to have had a defining impact on its emotional and traumatic legacy. Given the small geographical size of Northern Ireland and the fact that the conflict was at its most concentrated in a small number of communities (particularly in North and West Belfast), the daily experience of violence and victimhood was personal and intimate. Research by Bunting et al (2013) estimates that in Northern Ireland, 39.9% of the population have experienced a conflict-related traumatic event (for example, bombings, shootings and mutilations), while 16.9% have witnessed a death or serious injury. Likewise, research by Shirlow, Mesev and Downs (2009) indicates that in the most conflict affected areas, at least 80% of the local population knew someone who had been killed or injured as a result of the conflict. The impact on mental health has been stark. At the time of writing, it is believed that around 15 percent of the adult population have experienced conflict-related mental health difficulties (CVSNI, 2015). This equates to around 213,000 adults out of a population of 1.8 million (CVSNI, 2015). It is manifested in, for example, the fact that Northern Ireland has one of the highest recorded rates of PTSD anywhere in the world and that the prescription rate for anti-depressants is also one of the highest in the world (Ferry et al, 2012).¹⁹ The following statements by three victims of the Northern Ireland conflict bear testament to these statistics:

My wife never recovered from that night. Never ever recovered. Her problems developed. In 1984 she tried to take her own life, even though she had the wee children and all ... And then she started to hit the bottle and she became what's called a binge drinker ... And she would say to me – 'I let them in, if I hadn't opened the door they wouldn't have got in'. It was like survivor guilt. She never forgave herself and there was nothing I could do to persuade her away from that and eventually, the drink killed her at 51 ... That was a bigger tragedy for me.²⁰

...not alone did they kill my brother but they killed my mother too. My mother never stopped crying every day.²¹

A lot of people, in death, I mean I have a brother who's an alcoholic – he was shot in the throat, and I have a sister – all my sisters take diazepam – that was their way of sticking their head underneath the sand.²²

Arguably the starkest indicator of the continued legacy of the conflict has been the increase in suicide deaths since the conflict ended. The number of suicides has doubled from

¹⁹ <https://www.thedetail.tv/articles/new-data-shows-northern-ireland-is-a-world-leader-in-prescription-drug-use> (accessed on 9 November 2018).

²⁰ Author's interview, 13 June 2017.

²¹ Author's interview, 9 February 2017.

²² Author's interview, 7 February 2017.

approximately 150 deaths per year in the mid-1990s to more than 300 deaths by the year 2010 (O'Connor and O'Neill, 2015). Men, and in particular young men, are at particular risk. As of November 2018, the Northern Ireland rate of suicide deaths is 16 per 100,000 – the highest in the United Kingdom and for males, double that of England (O'Neill and Hamber, 2018).

Particular mental health challenges have been identified for former members of paramilitary organisations. Influential factors include long-term unemployment, poverty, relationship breakdowns, alcohol and substance abuse and, at times, the existential anxiety of the 'terrible futility of the things' they were involved in (Gallagher, Hamber and Joy, 2012: 66). Recent research by the author of this article with loyalist ex-combatants revealed a further layer of interlinked negative emotions, including the mourning of lost friends and family members, guilt, fear, regret and humiliation experienced during interrogation and imprisonment (Lawther, 2017). This assessment is further evidenced by research with former politically motivated prisoners which found that among loyalist ex-combatants, 38.4 percent reported feelings of despair and not wanting to go on living, 53.3 percent experienced intrusive memories and 65.8 percent used avoidance techniques as a coping mechanism (Jamieson, Shirlow and Grounds, 2010). Across loyalist and republican ex-combatants, the same survey revealed that 68.8 percent of respondents engaged in hazardous levels of alcohol abuse, while 32.6 percent had received prescription medication for depression in the previous year – a prevalence rate that is 5 times higher than the Northern Ireland average for men. The following statement by an ex-combatant well illustrates the haunting influence of the past: '...personally a lot of them struggle to live with the effects of what they have done, never mind speak about it....You are taking tablets, you are taking drink and a brave lot of them are committing suicide.'²³ Given that at least 15,000 people were incarcerated during the conflict, the effect of the unresolved past on individuals and the knock-on effect onto extended families cannot be underestimated.

The second element of the haunting influence of the unresolved past is transgenerational trauma. Perhaps most prominently associated with the Holocaust and explored in the field of psychoanalysis, transgenerational trauma is the unconscious transference of emotional, physical or social pain from one person to their descendants. This unconscious transmission is what Abraham and Torok (1994) define as the dynamic of transgenerational haunting. It is understood in a number of ways. Adonis (2016) for example points to the transgenerational haunting of colonialism, slavery, exploitation and discrimination among African Americans and the intergenerational effects associated with the traumatic history of the First Nations peoples in Canada. Others have used the term transgenerational haunting to refer to the way trauma is secreted in families and passed across generations (Luhmann, 2009). Thus, while victims of trauma live with its physical and psychological scars, the recipients of transgenerational trauma live with a second hand 'post memory' (Schwab, 2010). Such 'post memories' are received through the actual stories of parents or guardians, but also through unexplained silences and the expression of grief, rage and despair (Hirsch, 2008). Transgenerational haunting thus speaks to the capacity of atrocity memories to develop a 'durational time' that disrupts chronological time, but also, in its physical and psychological

²³ Author's interview, 22 July 2015.

manifestations, how the ghosts of past traumas - 'that which appears to be not there' are in fact a 'seething presence' (Langer, 1995; Gordon, 1997).

The existence and impact of transgenerational trauma in Northern Ireland has been the focus of recent attention. A number of contextual and background factors have been put forward – coping with the death or imprisonment of a parent(s); growing up with a parent(s) who has PTSD; living in the shadow of a brother or sister killed during the Troubles; suffering from domestic violence and various forms of physical and sexual abuse; and being forced to relocate as a result of political intimidation (Gallagher, Hamber and Joy, 2012). The effects are multiple. The impact of violence, traumatic experiences and social segregation can impact upon parenting practices which affect early attachment and the capacity of the child to self-regulate, thereby increasing the risk of mental health disorders, behavioural problems and as discussed above, suicide (CVSNI, 2011). For one interviewee who lost a sibling during the conflict, the experience of trauma itself and the transgenerational transmission of their mother's trauma erased the memory of their own childhood:

I look at my own life growing up, I was only 7 when we lost our brother, it has a huge impact on you. Yes, we lost our brother but we also lost our mother because my mother then suffered from mental health and depression then for years and years after it and she was only 28 when she lost her first one, ... Yes, we lost our brother but we also lost a whole part of our mother as well, we lost our own childhood, I have no memories of my childhood whatsoever.²⁴

Alternatively, the experience of trauma and/or victimhood may result in a parenting style that is characterised by over-protectiveness and over-identification with assumed 'dangers.' In children, this urge to 'protect' can lead to resentment and frustration, but can also translate into a hypervigilance and pervasive mistrust of others, compromising the child's 'own sense of security' (Danieli, 1985; Rowland-Klein and Dunlop, 1998: 367). Children of ex-combatants and serving and ex-security force members may be at particular risk. Speaking to these themes in Northern Ireland, Black has reported that children of serving policing officers were impacted by fear, social isolation and their parent's mental ill health (Black, 2004). The impact of arrest, prison visits, stigmatisation and the fear of recrimination are similarly believed to affect the children of ex-combatants (Rolston, 2011). In other cases, and as is well documented in respect to the Holocaust, many parents who have survived trauma have employed silence on the past as a way to cope with their own experience and as a way to protect their children. Yet, the unspoken can be omnipresent as this victim support group worker explained:

There would be a picture on a wall of a man who they have never met, who is an uncle, who is dead before they are born and they go at Christmas, birthdays and Easter to the graveyard, speeches are made and stuff is done. They don't directly ask their parents or their grandparents about that person because when they do so they are upset. But it has such an effect on their lives, transgenerationally, that why does their mummy cry at night, why if the TV is on at particular times it offends them and they get angry.²⁵

²⁴ Author's interview, 6 March 2017.

²⁵ Author's interview, 24 May 2011.

Euphemisms or in Cohen's (2001) terms, techniques of interpretive denial, have similarly been employed:

One person's grandchildren referred to it as the accident – Granda's accident – the IRA put a bomb under his car and he lost his leg and other parts of his body. Another man who was shot by loyalists and left crippled said exactly the same.²⁶

While silence may be a form of protection or a way to cope with moral ambiguities in the case of contentious deaths, these techniques of denial and silence have been found to result in a number of maladaptive behavioural problems amongst children (Winter, 2010; McNally, 2014). In their research with families affected by the Northern Ireland conflict, Downes et al (2013: 590-595) found evidence that children 'invented [their] own explanations'; the existence of a physical and cognitive space where 'the truth [was] dangerous'; where facts were 'hidden but not hidden'; where children attempted to 'block out their feeling for fear of the consequences'; and a case in which one child developed the 'propensity to be the "good girl" [in] a conscious attempt to avoid causing her own mother any more stress'. These experiences are not of course unique to Northern Ireland. They do however illustrate that ghosts or practices of haunting are not some invisible or ineffable excess (Gordon, 1997). Rather, they speak to the capacity of unquiet ghosts to permeate the present, transmitting a 'memory of offence' that can remain painful or disturbing generations after the original violation (Levi, 1989: 47).

Conclusion

This article has argued that notions of ghosts and haunting can act as a prism through which to understand the intersection between unresolved pasts and the transmission of trauma post-conflict. Focusing on the case study of Northern Ireland, three conceptualisations of haunting were identified – the haunting of lost lives, the haunting of landscapes and the haunting of the unresolved past. These three aspects of haunting are of course not mutually exclusive, rather, they interplay with and potentially reinforce one another. This is evident in, for example, how the haunting effect of lost lives may drive conflict-related mental health problems and the transmission of transgenerational trauma. Alternatively, and perhaps more problematically, the physical haunting of geographical space and the freezing of geographical memory in commemorative sites, particularly in cases related to 'complex victimhood', has the potential to inscribe 'dead body politics' into the physical use of space and may govern patterns of movement in the interests of (presumed) physical and psychological security. Haunting and ghosting then is not about 'horrorism' or the paranormal. Rather, each theme demonstrates the enduring and unsettling impact of an unaddressed legacy of violent conflict and human rights abuses – on individuals, communities and societies.

For Northern Ireland, exploring the intersection between ghosts, haunting and the unresolved past points to three challenges. First, as detailed above, the past is being dealt with in a 'piecemeal' and incomplete fashion. For those victims and survivors who fall between the gaps between the existing legacy mechanisms, their needs remain unaddressed and their relationship

²⁶ Author's interview, 24 May 2011.

with the dead is uneasy. For some, in the absence of truth and justice, their loved ones are not considered to be 'at peace'. The past truly remains a haunting presence, affecting and demarcating physical space and evidenced through conflict related mental health problems and trans-generational trauma. Second, in the absence of agreement on a comprehensive process of dealing with the past, the dead have become a valuable political weapon, with certain deaths and atrocities lionised in the quest to 'prove' victimhood status and legitimise/delegitimise past actions. As such, the dead cannot 'rest', families remain at risk of re-traumatisation and the public appropriation of their trauma, while the 'political lives of dead bodies' are used to condition social and political debate. Third, competing interpretations of victimhood and the status of the dead has stymied progress on the establishment of a formal process of dealing with the past, most recently illustrated by the failure to progress the provisions contained in the Stormont House Agreement in a full and timely manner. The ghosts of the conflict thus cast long shadows in the present and society and politics are haunted by the unanswered questions of the past. A self-perpetuating downward spiral has therefore been created – without a formal process of dealing with the past, ghosts have begun to make their demands known with ever more energy and as increasingly controversial questions regarding state and paramilitary activity during the conflict are aired, the haunting presence of the past is ever more acute. These practices of ghosting and haunting subsequently make consensus on dealing with the past increasingly illusive, reinforcing a haunting that Northern Ireland has not yet been able to escape.

Northern Ireland's ghosts therefore represent a 'call to action' in the aftermath of violent conflict and human rights abuses. Two key lessons can be extrapolated from the Northern Ireland context that are relevant to other post-transitional contexts (for example, Argentina, Brazil and Nepal), those in the midst of or emerging from conflict (for example, Israel/Palestine, Colombia, Mexico, Syria) and in domestic contexts where victimhood as a result of institutional abuse or slavery for example, is part of a painful and contested past (for example, Ireland, Australia, Canada). First, is the recognition that the ghosts of the past rarely lie down quietly. Rather, where the past remains contentious and unaddressed, the haunting impact of the past can be felt in a number of different ways – the perpetuation of cycles of trauma and re-traumatisation, the impact of unresolved issues of truth and justice on victims and survivors and the destabilising impact on social and political life. Echoing Harris et al (2018), I would therefore argue that haunting be thought of as an 'ethical orientation' that requires us to seek out and embrace ghosts in the spirit of justice. Responding to victims' needs for truth, justice or acknowledgement is, for example, a way to recognise and deal with and potentially settle the haunting impact of past traumas. Second is the importance of recognising *all* ghosts of the past. As the Northern Ireland case demonstrates, where victimhood is contested, hierarchies of victimhood can influence 'who' is recognised as a victim and whose voice is 'heard'. Such selectivity, often predicated on subjective demarcations between 'innocent' and 'guilty' victims or 'good' and 'bad' victims fails to capture the messy reality of human rights abuses, the complexity of victimhood and almost invariably maps on to contested understandings of who is to 'blame' for violence. Little space is then left for a nuanced and reflective conversation on the impact of past traumas or how best to respond to the needs to all

victims and survivors. Responding to practices of ghosting and haunting in these ways as can thus contribute to the realisation of the ultimate hope of transforming ‘a shadow life into an undiminished life’ (Gordon, 1997: 208).

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