# LOOKING TO THE PAST FROM BEHIND THE WINDSHIELD OF A CAR: CAR RIDING AS ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH TOOL IN BELFAST

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**Abstract:** Moving through the city by car can bring about methodological as well as substantial insights into post-conflict society and culture. Identifying the general and specific advantages of car riding, and its potentials and limits as an ethnographic tool in the Northern Irish context, I demonstrate the importance of method contextualization in doing fieldwork on memories of conflict in Ireland. The article contributes to the formulation of methodologies for studying memories of conflict, thus highlighting what anthropological approaches to the past in Northern Ireland have to offer, while also bringing useful perspectives on post-conflict contexts outside the Island of Ireland.

**Keywords:** Memory, Methodology, Car Ride, Belfast, Post-Conflict

## Introduction

Driving in cars with people is something anthropologists find themselves doing from time to time, as part of a 'mobile method' including 'moving along' interlocutors (Kusenbach 2003: 475; 2018: 345), an 'ethnography on the move' (Jagetić-Andersen 2013: 44) a 'passenger-seat ethnography' (Dawson 2017: 3), or because it is acknowledged as an ideal occasion for casual conversations (i.e. Knudsen 1995: 24). Whether riding together by car forms part of a method for the structured elicitation of 'traffic talk', or whether car riding and driving arise spontaneously on the road as the subject of conversation in 'car talk' with interlocutors, moving through the city by car can bring about methodological as well as substantial insights into conflict and post-conflict society and culture, politics and transition (Jagetić-Andersen 2013; Bishara 2015; Dawson 2017; Kruglova 2019).

As a method, car riding may be seen on par with other 'moving methods' such as walking methodologies like walk-and-talk interviews. In the research context of Northern Ireland, scholars have argued that walking methodologies carry new and innovative potential for Troubles research that needs to be further explored (Robinson 2020; Robinson and McClelland 2020a; Robinson and McClelland 2020b). Robinson and McClelland have highlighted the positive contribution that walking methods can bring to the study of 'place-memory' in post-conflict spaces and argue that such methods can '"trouble" dominant productions of post-conflict space, revealing its storied depth, multi-temporality and the alternative narratives of the past that frequently remain hidden in places touched by violence' (Robinson and McClelland 2020a: 654). Others have

highlighted how moving though the landscape can indeed serve 'as an aide-memoire' (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006: 9; Hocking et. al. 2018: 13) yet stressing that interviewing while walking 'clearly exclude certain types of participants' (Evans and Jones 2011: 849, cited in Hocking et. al. 2018: 13). I ask: What problems do walking methodologies raise in contexts where for historical reasons 'place' and 'memory' are highly contested phenomena? And what alternative tools are available to researchers working along interlocutors who might not necessarily feel capable or safe to 'walk-and-talk' about their memories in particular places? In other words: What to do when 'walking' is not conducive to 'talking'? How might we understand the car - and moving through the city of Belfast in it - literally, as a vehicle for exploring particular memories of a conflicted past?

Exploring these questions, I seek to continue a scholarly conversation about what particular methods can achieve when engaging specific individuals and groups in talking about the past in the particular Northern Irish context. Recognising the limits of walking methodologies as a supplement to the conventional interview, I proceed by identifying the general and the specific advantages of the car ride for anthropological exploration, as well as its implications and limits as an ethnographic tool in this specific context. Rather than focusing on driving as such, I focus on particular peoples' experiences of driving and riding in particular places, and the kinds of memories that emerge when driving in the post-conflict city.

**Entering Girdwood / "I used to hate this intersection"**

To document how this work**s**, let me now turn to one ethnographic situation when, early in my doctoral fieldwork in 2018, I was offered a lift with Pete. This was not the first time I had been offered a drop-off near my place of residence by an interlocutor[1]. I use it as an example here because it was this rather short ride – actually two short rides – that made me question the taken-for-granted-ness of car riding in Belfast and the connections between this particular practice and how people remember the conflict in their everyday lives.

A resident of Belfast and army veteran[2], I first got to know Pete through a colleague of his and I was later invited to his family home in connection with an interview. Coming to Belfast as a researcher – and a foreigner, that is, as 'someone from the outside'[3] - without an active driving license, I have most often relied on public transportation to go out to such invitations, and yet, have just as often been offered a helpful ride by private car to return home. I have never had to ask for such favours, though, as Knudsen remarks with Mauss, asking someone to drive one somewhere as a favour to be, or not to be, returned indeed could be seen as part of the anthropological method too, underlining the status of interlocutors as superior 'givers' in relation to the ethnographic receiver' (Knudsen 1995: 22). In my experience, actually asking the favour has never been necessary. Besides, the willingness expressed by people to show one around or to participate in

an interview have always seemed to me a favour in itself. One is then – and here I am happy to echo Knudsen's point about reciprocity - in debt to the people who pay attention to ones' research by spending their time on it in the first place. It is beyond doubt nevertheless that acts of generosity, such as being offered a lift, have not only proven essential for how I have come to appreciate Belfast as a city, as well as the hospitality of its people. It has also – and often by coincidence, if not by sheer serendipity - become a crucial means by which I have come to understand and learn about its distinct history and geography, including the visible and invisible markers of belonging and division that continues to straddle parts of the city along sectarian lines. But first of all, passengering with interlocutors has in Belfast been a matter of practicality in addition to building rapport. So it was this time too. My driver this October day served in Belfast during the height of the Troubles in the 1980's. He first went into the army general service, later to become part of the Ulster Defence Regiment, the locally recruited part of the British Army in Northern Ireland. I had been directed to him while attending an event organized by its veteran community, advised by a colleague of his who assured me that Pete's view on 'what happened over there' (in Northern Ireland) would be valuable to my research[4]. It is as our interview came to an end that Pete offers to take me back to the place near the city centre where I stay. I then jump into the front seat of the car to join him back along the Antrim Road. As we approach my temporary place of residence in Kinnaird Street, it becomes clear that our destination is that very street where Pete spent parts of his military service. It takes a while for him to realize that this is, in fact, surprisingly that place – Girdwood, or, at the time of his service, Girdwood Barracks, an area located just off the Antrim Road, squeezed in between the Crumlin Road and Clifton Park Avenue. We are still sitting in the car when he starts gesturing towards the corners of the street, demonstrating with his hand the position of the military installations of the Barracks that used to be in the neighbourhood: Pete said 'this was where the sanger was, here was the "pig", you know the "Flying Pig" that I told you about?' I recall the picture Pete has showed to me in the office we just left, of a heavy military vehicle – some would say a 'windowless moving fortress' (Richardson 2015: 10) - with large squared iron 'wings'. Pete changed the topic as if something else comes to mind. 'I don't understand how they could live here' he says with a thoughtful expression referring to the residents of the area we have just entered who, at the time of his service, he says, were 'cut off from the main road' by army fortifications. 'It must have been horrible', he adds. Then he continues. 'Supposed to be mixed, but ended up all Catholic' he notes, directing my attention to some newly built social housing estates at the end of the street. 'No Protestants want to move here'. We say goodbye. Later the same day, Pete sends me an e-mail admitting that he 'had a bit of a shock' when he learned that I was staying next to the site of his former workplace and that he had 'some flashbacks there'. He also sends me a number of photographs – about 10-12 – some of which are of Kinnaird street taken from up the sangar, the view obstructed by a massive military grid of the kind used to barricade British Army installations in the '70's and '80's. I take a couple of photographs myself and send them to Pete in return, letting him know that I think

something very interesting can come out of this and that I would like to talk more about it next time we meet.

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Here I want to slow this ride down to reflect on its value as an object of study in the first place. As opposed to other rides with other interlocutors, something this time turned out to be different, if not because of the kind of conversation that emerged between us *en route*, which in many ways was like most car conversations informal and full of comments on traffic. What was different was that our ride happened to bring us quite literally into the heart of Pete's military experience in Belfast: the site of the former Girdwood barracks – and quite serendipitously so. This proved to become an important prompt for the continuation of our conversation, opening for new questions to be raised and new nuances to be brought to the fore. A brief note on entering Girdwood is suitable here: Until 2005 the Girdwood Barracks were Northern Ireland's largest British Army base located in North Belfast at the New Lodge/Lower Oldpark interface just off the Crumlin and Antrim Roads and Clifton Park Avenue. The barracks have a contested history and to some extent are still disputed. They are located at a so-called interface – that is, between a Catholic-and a Protestant part of the city – and have been the subject of political disputes as to how to transform the site into a civic space upon the dismantling of the barracks. In 2016 a community sports hub opened at the premises to be transformed into a 'shared space' for ('mixed') social housing. Here I do not want to go into the history of the area more than to say that it proved significant for the turn of our conversation and that as an 'everyday place of memory' - to use Alyssa Grossman's term (2019: 339-340)[5] – it inspired Pete to talk about his past as someone working in the area, as well as to reflect upon the meaning of the presence of his workplace, the barracks, for the area's residents.

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The relationship between 'everyday places of memory' and how they can be explored through driving is key to understand Pete's experiences soldiering in the city. Yet an example will serve to illuminate this so let's now return to the ethnographic situation of our car ride. At our interview the following week, Pete once again offers to take me to the centre. As we make our way southwards along the jammed road into Belfast, I notice a band that I like on the car radio. We begin to talk about music and concerts. Pete tells me that the new roads to Dublin makes it easy for him to go down to attend the shows of some of the bigger names and we exchange some of the names of our favourite artists. We talk like that until we reach the intersection just before Carlisle Circus where Clifton Street meets the Westlink.

The traffic intersection is located in between the neighbourhoods of a divided urban area with the Protestant Shankill stretching to the southwest and the Catholic New Lodge to the northeast. Pete stops the car for a red light. We are the first in a line of cars waiting to turn right onto Clifton Street - to the right in front of us, the Orange Hall, and to the left the road towards the city centre. We wait for a long time for the lights to turn green. As we wait, Pete seems to become impatient. 'It is always like that', he says. 'I used to hate this intersection'. 'We used to go this way, towards Girdwood, you know now where that is'. I think of our car ride into the Girdwood area a few days before. Pete lets go of the steering wheel and makes a gesture with both arms and hands to suggest someone holding a gun towards the window on his right side. 'You would sit here and be like this'. He does the gesture twice, the air of someone being alert: 'You'd just do like this'. He makes an abrupt gesture and shows how he would hold the gun tightly in his hands. 'We would come here…Because we were regulars, we would take over from the part-timers. We would come here maybe two or three in morning, it would be empty, and dark, you would just sit here and wait…'.

**Car Riding in Belfast: A Triad Analysis of People, Space and Method**

This article is based on research conducted through fieldwork intermittently in Northern Ireland between 2018 and 2019. Geographically focused on Belfast, this research centred around experiences of serving the British state in the city during the recent conflict to discuss issues of memory and remembering with former soldiers in and around the city. At the time, my return to Belfast was propelled by my desire to tell a research story that would be able to convey a perspective of soldiering at different periods during the recent conflict – and of those who did the job – that would grasp what it was actually like to be part of the army and security forces during times of violent political upheaval. Yet it was equally to understand what it is like to remember such experiences today, when most of the traces of the military conflict have been erased from the city, as part of what has been coined, and more recently critically analysed as, a process of 'normalisation' (Irish News 2005; Switzer and McDowell 2011: 89-90), yet continues to resonate with those who drove the vehicles, worked in the barracks, sat in in the watchtowers and the sangers so characteristic for the city's visual identity up until the military installations were gradually demolished as part of the post-1998 peace process.

The aim of this research then was to trace the complex dynamics, the affects and ambiguities of people's memories of their time in service during the conflict and after, up until the (partial) withdrawal of troops from Northern Ireland in 2007. Rather than focusing on formal outlets such as journalistic and policy analyses, my aim was to conduct what Alyssa Grossman has framed as a 'processual and interactive investigation of the dynamic and contingent ways that people' – in this case former soldiers – 'are interpreting, perceiving, remembering, communicating, and questioning elements of their daily lives' (Grossman 2010: 18). Without

reproducing stark dichotomies between the two, this investigation would focus specifically on elements of everyday lives pertaining to history and memory.

My concern in this article is a methodological one, however. I am interested in exploring the where, with whom and how to provide a perspective of what it was like to soldier in Belfast which takes into account the intersection of memories with everyday practices of moving around the city, the dynamics of social encounters and the effects of location and embodied experience on memory-telling in addition to issues specific to the post-conflict context such as considerations of security among interlocutors.

What I do then is to focus on the particular affordances[6] of the car ride as a means to allow for sometimes surprising perspectives to be brought to the fore in spaces that do not always allow for casual *walk* and even less for *talk*, that is, where talking about memories of conflict in public cannot always be considered unproblematic. Belfast is a historically divided city in which the conflict continues to be felt and to resonate among many of its residents who experienced up close the terrifying violence unfolding in the city for decades. Belfast is often analyzed as a divided and conflicted city and it has been argued that academic analyses tend to thereby marginalize other academic representations of Belfast that are 'not-the Troubles' (Lane 2019: 65). From a methodological point of view, however, and considering the city as a particular research context for anthropological inquiry, it is necessary to understand the effects of division on people's everyday practices. Anthropologists working in Northern Ireland have made important contributions to understanding these divisions, but also highlighted the need to look 'beyond the divided city' towards 'policies and practices of shared space' (Komarova and Bryan 2014). The 'post-conflict' city of Belfast (Shirlow 2006; Hocking et. al. 2018:878),[7] has then been the subject and setting for a diverse set of anthropological inquiries. Some have critically engaged with issues such as the persistence of ethno-sectarian and class-based segregation (Shirlow 2003a; 2006), including how 'memory and the reproduction of low-level violence are intertwined' (Shirlow 2006: 105) while also highlighting political processes in the conflict and post-conflict period to 'normalise' the city through various forms of economic development (Shirlow 2006: 100). While stressing how relations between movement, sociality and space in the city often cannot be defined singularly as a function of the conflict and the ethno-national tensions it has created, ethnographers have recently documented the persisting role of the Troubles – and memories of it – in processes of place-making (Svašek and Komarova 2018: 14). These contributions make clear how contemporary life in the city remains framed – though not exhausted by – experiences of the recent conflict and its aftermath, including the divisions it created. As a particular research context however, society in Northern Ireland is, as McLaughlin has phrased it, a context 'where identification with a particular experience might suggest a political position and therefore vulnerability to danger in the present' (McLaughlin 2018: 308). Analysing the relationship between

ethnosectarianism and what he calls the 'reproduction of fear in Belfast' Peter Shirlow has argued that the 'sectarianised readings' (Shirlow 2003a: 86; 2003b: 89) of the city and 'fear of being a victim' of 'paramilitary and state violence' (Shirlow 2003a: 80) - means 'that many people living in conflictual arenas developed a comprehensive knowledge of' , what Shirlow, drawing on Frank Burton's ethnographic study (1987), calls '"safe" and "unsafe places"' (Shirlow 2003a: 80). This 'acknowledgement of spaces of fear and the location of unsafe places' (Shirlow, 2003a: 86) has left what Hocking and colleagues call an 'attendant fear' of finding oneself in the 'wrong place' (Hocking et. al. 2018: 877) and, so I argue, produced a concomitant sense of vulnerability when moving around in public spaces which is manifest in what McLaughlin has coined a 'heightened awareness of recognition' (McLaughlin 2018: 308).

**Where, Whom, How: Car Riding as Research Method**

Drawing on similar observations made with regards to other divided cities such as the city of Jerusalem, Hocking and colleagues stress how the fractured social context often left in the wake of violent conflict inevitably impacts upon 'the ease and safety of movement' (Hocking et. al. 2018: 877). Indeed, what researchers have coined the 'triadic relationship between people, place and mobility' (Fallov, Jørgensen and Knudsen 2013, cited in Hocking et. al. 2018: 3), is in Belfast 'complicated by violent legacies and sectarian associations' (Hocking et. al. 2018: 3). The post-conflict condition of segregation then conditions people's movement in particular ways, which must be taken into account when thinking about moving methods in the contemporary post-conflict context.

In this context, I argue, there is a *general* quality to moving methods, which is their capacity to capture the relationship between people and their movements in and between places. Yet there are *specific* qualities of them too, which depends on who these people are, what their position as research subjects is, what kinds of social places they are moving in and by what means of mobility. For this inquiry, I use an approach that I like to consider loosely along the lines of what I here, following Wacquant's discussion of Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' (Wacquant 2016: 64), will call a 'triple historization' (2016: 64) inspired by a concern with researcher reflexivity in the study of practice. With a nod to Bourdieu's 'Weber moment' (Wacquant 2018: 6) of social inquiry and vision of knowledge (see Wacquant 2018: 6), this principle entails the 'triple historicization' of people (the agent or interlocutor), the world (the social space that is the post-conflict social setting) and the method (researcher reflexivity and categories) (Wacquant 2018: 6; 2016: 64-65)[8]. Thinking with this approach allows me to pay attention to the relational aspects of and historically constituted social dynamics of the post-conflict city as a space for remembering and to see how the method of car riding can illuminate important facts about the specific ways in which people remember in it.

Note that this is to tentatively suggest to the development of methods for investigating issues of memory, remembering and the past in the particular Northern Irish context and not to conduct a systematic 'test' of the method itself. Rather, I argue, performing a triad analysis of car riding in Belfast, suggests how car riding, if available to use in systematic fashion, can be seen as a medium specific condition opening avenues for certain kinds of knowledge about the past and memory work which would otherwise be unavailable for historically grounded anthropological inquiry – and that there are specific reasons why this is so.

I thus allow myself to perform a 'triple historization' heuristically using the principle as a device to think about the meaning of context for how certain practices – such as car riding – acquire meaning and how exploring such meanings can be methodologically useful. Based on this, I perform three contextualising moves at once describing and analysing the specifics of practices of car riding in Belfast according to the specific post-conflict context and experiences of car riding among specific interlocutors in this context – in this case using the case of someone formerly employed in military service. Proceeding from this analysis, I draw out the empirical insights that may be derived from such an emphasis. The article therefore also contributes to ongoing conversations about the different meanings and uses of driving and riding in different cultures (i.e. Bishara 2015; Dawson 2017; Kruglova 2019).

Taking cue from studies of driving and car riding elsewhere, how might we understand car riding as an ethnographic research tool in a study of memories of conflict in Northern Ireland? Writing from the context of the occupied West Bank, Bishara has analysed the car itself as a material space and 'the road system [as] an everyday site [for] "embodied experiences"' (Bishara 2015: 33, 35). She explores how driving entails 'practical knowledge', what she calls a 'knowledge-in-motion' using Marcel Mauss (1973) to argue that driving is a 'technique of the body' and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' (1977: 72) to argue that the embodied skills it takes to direct it can have cultural and political dimensions' (Bishara 2015: 36). Driving, she notes, 'is replete with affect' (ibid 2015: 34). It is 'a site of embodied politics' and 'as such makes up an element of [Palestinians] political habituses', that is, to 'everyday embodied experiences conditioned by social and political positionalities' (Bishara 2015: 35). As such, she points to how 'riding in cars generates specific kinds of socialities both within the car and between those in the car and others' (Bishara 2015: 36) and aptly coins the road a site for 'political', 'ranging' 'analysis in motion' (Bishara 2015: 48) through which interlocutors (in this case drivers in Israel and the West bank) may sometimes challenge 'prevailing assumptions about statehood, space and politics' (Bishara 2015: 48). In a similar fashion Kruglova explores the relationship between practices of driving and riding and the present-absence of the state in Russia, finding '"car culture"' a suitable 'lens through which to view how people articulate their relationship with the state' (Kruglova 2019: 458). She sees the car and driving as a site for people to comment and 'monitor' (ibid,

2019: 458) people and things around them, including the relative presence – or absence – of state power and signs of 'development' (2019: 458) in the urban or natural environment. She identifies car riding – and the language of automobility – as a site for 'political anthropologists [to expand the language] use[d] to write about the state' (Kruglova 2019: 457). Following these inspiring analyses leaves no doubt that driving and car riding play a role for how anthropologists approach their subjects. As a methodological technique and object of cultural analysis in itself driving and car riding with interlocutors however deserves further attention.

**Car Riding as Ethnographic Research Tool**

As a fieldwork device, cars have an advantage: Driving is something that people already do, all the time. More specifically, driving is something people do because it is practical, and especially so in a city built for cars. In Belfast specifically this is indeed the case. Along other UK cities (Martire 2017: 55), the city has been recognized as one of the 'most car-dependent' cities in Western Europe' (Martire 2017: 51), it has a complex infrastructure; it can be difficult to enjoy by foot and interlocutors know far better than anyone the often cumbersome–hassle of getting around. One interlocutor put it to me succinctly explaining his upbringing 'within a square mile' of one of those Belfast neighbourhoods in which the recent conflict hit most violently: 'you rarely frequented any outside [area] unless you had a car'.

Besides, cars are at once and the same time private and public, that is private spaces within public space. Following Dowler's analysis of 'the geopolitics' of mobility (2001: 160) and political subjectivity (2001: 173) in Belfast, cars provide a means for 'the expansion and restriction of public and private space' (2001: 160). The car can therefore serve as a useful device for facilitating mobility across boundaries and barriers to mobility in Belfast and in some regards also within them, which reflects larger social movement patterns in the city. This has an everyday dimension to it. Recent studies by an interdisciplinary group of researchers working in Belfast have explored the spaces residents of north Belfast move within everyday life and the extent to which these are influenced by segregation (Davies et. al. 2019: 1740). They conclude that residents are significantly less likely to move within mixed and out-group areas. Interestingly, they also find evidence to show how residents are more likely to travel along out-group sections of the main road if they are in a vehicle. More specifically, along main roads, people were 'more likely' to move within mixed or outgroup spaces 'when in a vehicle, rather than on foot' (ibid 2019: 1740, 1741). Segregation then, and the fear of finding oneself on the 'wrong' place to use Shirlow's phrase (2003b: 85) is an important contextual factor influencing the nature of social encounters in the historically divided city – but so is the vehicle, the car.

There is more to practical dimensions of car mobility then, which has to do with perceptions of safety and the nature of post-conflict social encounters. Dowler points to how, through the turmoil of the Troubles

during the 1990's, the only 'safe and practical way' to travel between areas was to 'travel with a driver who was practised in getting around adversarial neighbourhoods' (2001: 161). Importantly, her analysis illuminates the ambivalent feelings of drivers in relation to (in)visibility, vulnerability and danger of riding but also the opportunities that driving affords in terms of traversing or even transgressing the visible and invisible borders of Belfast (Dowler 2001: 165). The empirical example of experiences among taxi-drivers during and after the conflict documented by Dowler highlights experiences of taxi drivers and the ambiguous sense of mobility and vulnerability experienced by individual drivers in interface areas during everyday practices of driving a taxi (Dowler 2001: 168). Driving a taxi in the Northern Ireland of the 1990's was, she notes, 'a peculiarly dangerous occupation' (Dowler 2001: 186). This point to the nearly constitutive relationship between car riding and specific occupational identities[9]. Along those of taxi-drivers crossing the boundaries between different communities, risking their sectarian or religious "purity" along that mobile trajectory, her analysis is useful for understanding another dangerous occupational practice: what John Hockey has analysed as the 'dangerous occupational practices' of soldiers 'on patrol' (Hockey 1986; 2013: 93-95).

Conversations in cars are in many ways illustrative of that which Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki has recently explored extensively to suggest how interview-related material that does not become part of 'the record' can be contextually important and of great research potential (2013). As Anne Knudsen has suggested in relation to her anthropological fieldwork among upper class strata of the Mediterranean south, 'car rides offer one of the most excellent ways in which to conduct a good conversation' (1995: 24, my translation). Not only, she argues, are cars enclosed spaces ideal for confidential information to be relayed or exchanged, they can also – and here this is more important: work as an isolated space for all kinds of conversations: no one is listening, only limited gestures are possible within the small space of the car and those that are possible are not easy to decipher from afar (Knudsen 1995: 24). Cars therefore can provide a certain degree of privacy, which together with its sense of familiarity is arguably not only conducive to any good conversation, as Knudsen remarks, but also for specific conversations that one (researcher and interlocutors alike) would rather conduct beyond reach of just any pedestrian or other random stroller.

**Ambiguous Objects, Dangerous Occupational Practices and Memories of Driving**

When I studied how people remember conflict in Northern Ireland, my point of departure was to focus on the experiences and memories of a particular group of people – that of those who served within the state forces during the conflict. At the same time, my attention was drawn to the everyday, embodied modes of remembering, in sum, to the articulation of memories that were different in kind from those I up until that point had been researching as part of public discourses, policy and media analyses. The car ride, I found here, was a powerful lens through which to study how people remember and articulate their relationship with the

past in such everyday ways. In the rest of this article, I discuss the merits of car riding as a tool to study memories of conflict by situating the ethnographic situations above in the historical and contemporary Belfast context for a memory study with former soldiers like Pete.

Former soldiers in Northern Ireland comprise a diverse group of people, and as a group they are numerous, yet relatively invisible in everyday public life. Comprehensive research has pointed to the reluctance of ex-soldiers in Northern Ireland to declare themselves as such at all, something which researchers tie to the specific history of violent conflict that is the history of the Troubles (Armour et. al. 2021: 20). According to Stephen Herron who studied the experiences of UDR-veterans in the rural areas of South Armagh (Herron 2014), peace time Northern Ireland has not stopped those who used to be soldiers from taking note of unwelcome attention from strangers: 'looking over your shoulder' – has become a lifetime practice among many UDR-veterans (Herron 2017). The experience of being constantly under threat – of there being 'no safe place' to use Armour and colleagues' phrase (Armour et. al. 2021: 14) – is widespread among the Northern Ireland population of armed forces veterans according to a comprehensive recent study by scholars at Queens University Belfast (Armour et. al. 2021: 14). Because of the Troubles, many veterans in Northern Ireland live in their former operational theatre. This in turn means that the feeling of threat and 'constant vulnerability' associated with service on and off duty alike (Smyth 2004: 561), has not been eliminated in the period following transition to peace and post-army life. A considerable proportion (45.3%) of home service veterans responding to Amour's study reported that they felt they were at 'severe risk' because they had been in the military (Armour et. al. 2021: 36). When I began my research in Belfast, I found this experience to be decisive for how my investigation unfolded. Well ahead of our meeting, Pete and I had a friendly correspondence about how and where our interviews were going to take place, until Pete suggested I come to his family home in the outskirts of the city. 'I am concerned about my personal security still,' he writes to explain how we might be better off conducting our interview away from public eyes and ears, 'as you can imagine what we are going to talk about might not go down well in some circles.' Our exchange suggests the need to find appropriate – meaning safe – locations for interviews, too, is something of which interlocutors are well aware. After all, they are the ones to carry that sense of vulnerability to the public gaze that comes with conflict produced suspicion about 'who is who,' and its manifestation in the subtle but culturally significant phenomenon and practice of being able to 'tell' (see McCormack 2017: 56). Pete was no exception. The car in which we both found ourselves on our way to Kinnaird Street this day became an important practical tool for entering Girdwood and for our conversation around its significant role in Pete's life to take place.

Yet, while providing a sense of safety and intimate space away from the from the public, cars in Belfast at least, are historically ambiguous objects: up through the conflict, vehicles played key parts in hijackings, in abductions of individuals, and bombings frequently went off from cars where they'd been placed by paramilitary (though fully militant) groups. Car riding means different things to different people on different sides of the conflict. For individuals employed within the army and security forces in particular, the danger of putting oneself into one still resonate as they are associated by many with threats of being targets of sectarian attack. At the time of writing**,** it is not more than a month ago that a bomb was found placed under the car of an off-duty part-time police officer[10].

The real or imagined risk of putting oneself into a car and starting to drive brings me to another aspect of driving in Belfast. Driving in cars is a corporeal experience, a particular way of moving through the city, which shares features with the dangerous occupational practice of being 'on patrol' (Hockey 2013). Patrols, Hockey argues, 'have particular rhythms varying with terrain differences, day or night, and absence or presence of "enemy"' (Hockey 2013: 95). For former soldiers like Pete, as evident from the example above, car riding and being alert to the environment while driving in Belfast brings to the fore embodied sets of habits associated with soldiering. Particular modes of remembering that are at once embodied and reflective emerge as the car is the foundation of bodily experiences that are similar to what Hockey has called the 'patterns of movement on patrol', that are being absorbed in 'individual and collective memory' among soldiers (Hockey 2013: 96). Driving can then be seen as a site of embodied politics which together with the personal biographies of interlocutors as well as the effects of post-conflict urban landscapes triggers memories that are hardly possible to trace in any other way than through the car ride specifically.

Here I want to wrap up my argument. First, however, there's a point to be made regarding the materiality of 'the record' and the methodological question of accommodating the role of interlocutors and the singularity of their narratives in defining that materiality. My interlocutor forwarded his images and comments to me after our car-ride conversation providing me with contextual knowledge of what he thought was important for me to know about his experience of driving into Girdwood that day. The car ride thus also worked as a prop for reflection which allowed for the exchange and further expansion of what Sheftel and Zembrzycki calls the part of oral history that goes 'off the record' (Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013) but which nevertheless 'provides context and texture' to a conversation (Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013: 7) and arguably thereby adding to the materiality and scope of knowledge about everyday memories of soldiering the city.

Next, I take two further points to be revealing, which I would like to suggest as points of departure for further empirical analysis. First, the car offers space for confidentiality within public space. This allows for casual

conversations to take place that would probably have been ruled-out otherwise, given the specific security context of Northern Ireland in general and of the Girdwood/Clifton Street area in particular. Secondly, the resonance of the car ride with the 'dangerous occupational practice' (Hockey 2013: 93) of patrolling Belfast experienced by soldiers in the past, become practical, material conduits for remembering certain routines, schedules, responsibilities, and, importantly, *vulnerabilities* associated with such a practice. Memories of driving can then be linked with the formation of political subjectivities and social positionalities centred on experiences of vulnerability associated with being part of fixed schedules and institutionalized routines. The latter points to (ex)soldier subjectivities defined by the particular vulnerability and exposure to (paramilitary) violence associated with being part of fixed shifts, official schedules and patterns of routine within state organisations as much as by the power of such organisations. At the same time, it opens for reflection on the effects the presence of state has on others living in proximity to military infrastructures and in turn, their exposure to state power.

**Conclusions**

In this article I have focused on the ethnographic situation of a car ride to explore its merits as an ethnographic tool for studying memories of conflict in Belfast. Taking a cue from scholars stressing the potential of moving methodologies to study place-memories and 'troubling' narratives of the Troubles, and putting it into dialogue with research 'on the move' elsewhere, I have argued that any such methodology must be reflexively analysed according to the specific post-conflict context. Locating the value of the car ride in relation to anthropological research on car riding and driving beyond the Irish context, I have demonstrated how research in cars with key interlocutors across contexts resonate and supplement each other. Based on observations from the passenger-seat within the enclosed space of a private car, the article has illuminated that not only does moving through the city matters for how memories are articulated in public space, so do particular *ways of moving*.

Car riding is different from conventional walking methods in particular ways. Driving in a private car produces a sense of safety conducive to conversation and a sense of vulnerability to, as well as memories of, violent exposure. The car ride is dotted with surprises and memories – sometimes violent ones too – which can be articulated in the safe space of the car. I have demonstrated how driving in post-conflict Belfast allows for certain nuances in narrative to be articulated that complicates prevailing narratives about the conflict by adding to them recollections of soldiering that are centred on everyday experiences of routines, rhythms and vulnerabilities in addition to opening for a certain reflexive engagement with the fact of military presence in Belfast as such. Based on this I find that passing by everyday places of memory by car can open conversations around and potentials for reflexive encounters with the past in ways that may not be possible otherwise.

Secondly, there is a certain corporeality to driving that makes car ride conversations different from those undertaken during more conventional walk-and-talks. It is possible to take this argument further considering how vulnerability comes to be either associated with, or indeed, detached from, 'a particular occupational body' (Hockey 2009: 479), in this case belonging to the ex-soldier whose working experiences and the memories of these experiences emerge during car rides. What Boyer has called 'the corporeality of expertise' (2015) is evident in 'reflex and gesture' (ibid: 244) emerging while driving, and grounded in, in this case, embodied memories of being alert– what Hockey calls 'switched on' - during past experiences of patrolling (see Hockey 2013: 95; Hockey 2009: 481). Careful attention to the gestures, reflexes, stories, comments, observations and even silences emerging while driving, provide useful points of entry for understanding everyday political experience in the post-conflict city. Considering these substantial analytical insights, car rides can be operationalized as a methodological technique, which, when sufficiently contextualized, can be explored by anthropologists across contexts. If used in systematic fashion, riding by car with key interlocutors can therefore prove substantially helpful in bringing new nuances to narratives about experiences in the past, that are qualitatively rich, yet might otherwise remain untold when sticking with conventional interviews.

It is a daunting task to write about car riding together at a time when sharing a small, enclosed space with someone who is not part of one's inner circle of closest family seems in itself a thing of the past. The article has laid the basis for hopefully further exploration of memories emerging while driving – and what it might look like for a former soldier from Belfast to be looking to the past from behind the windshield of a car.

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[1] Personal names are pseudonyms.
[2] The term veteran as an official and formal designation to describe former members of the state army as distinguished from ex-combatants from pro-state militias is discussed by Brewer (Brewer and Herron 2021: 123).
[3] On researcher positionality and interviews in Belfast, see Skinner 2012.
[4] Personal communication via e-mail, September 2018.
[5] In her 2019 chapter on 'everyday places of memory in post-transition Bucharest' (Grossman 2019: 339), Grossman addresses what she calls 'places of urban memory that are not so deliberately or explicitly commemorational' (2019: 339), pointing to how 'ordinary places' can nevertheless be 'tied to powerful and visceral impressions related to the city's complicated trajectories through the past and present' (2019: 339-41)
[6] I use the notion of affordance here in the 'relational sense' suggested by Waltorp (2018: 115-116, 125)
[7] On uses of the term 'post-conflict' in this context, see Hocking et. al. 2018: 7.
[8] For a discussion of the analytical principle of "triple historization" and it's debt to Weber's sociological work, see Wacquant 2018. For a 'concise genealogy and anatomy' of the concept of habitus, see Wacquant 2016.

[9] For a comparative analysis illuminating this relationship, see Olma's analysis of taxi-driving – and taxi drivers - in the post-socialist Usbek capital of Tashkent (Olma 2021).
[10] April 2021, see: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56814575