

3/15 - DAY 0

Getting to Dublin was a challenge in its own. The first night, our small cohort of co-travelers attempted to fly to Dublin, our first leg of the flight (from Boston Logan Airport to Newark's EWR) was delayed, deplaned and rescheduled. Our best bet was to leave Boston on the afternoon of Saint Patrick's Day, which we were a bit dismayed to hear. But with a pair of rescheduled flights in hand, we left the airport (some without our bags) ready to head to Ireland in two days.

3/18 - DAY 1

The Dublin airport was almost barely marked by Saint Patrick's Day, barring a few columns and arcs of orange, white and green balloons. You could almost barely tell where you were from the airport's décor alone, save for these balloon structures but the color symbolism was relatively neutral. The passengers on the plane were hard to identify as "Irish" or "Tourist" just by observation – but a few college-aged passengers wore bright green socks, and another middle-aged woman wore a "Kiss Me I'm Irish" shirt, which for some reason ironically felt out of place near the baggage claim in Dublin. Are clothes like this also culturally acceptable in Ireland?

Before leaving the airport, I withdrew cash at a Bank of Ireland kiosk. With Euros in hand, I thought I was prepared for the week (but realized soon after that this was only going to be relevant for small parts of the trip). A contingent of us took the bus from Dublin to Belfast, about an hour ride. Despite connecting two cities, the ride was largely dominated by rural landscapes – green hills and plains dotted with small houses, cows, and sheep. Many of the plots were easy to identify, because their borders were defined by tree lines or bushes. We had learned from an interview during class that the notion of property rights is a deeply ingrained part of the Irish identity – perhaps this was an extension of that?

I ran the Network Collector that I had set up on my phone during part of the ride, and realized the connectivity was actually quite good despite the rural nature of the path. Apart from the agricultural infrastructure that largely dominated this route, cell towers (mainly 3 typologies of them) took over the skies.

I also tried to pay attention to the commercial buses that passed by us on the road. These were decorated in branded material from different companies, and I was curious to see if the colors would reveal the origin of the companies. Around 1 in every 4 bus was orange or green, but several were blue. It was unclear how strong the symbolic link

was between brands and colors (at least from this ride alone), but the frequency of green and orange was striking.

After reaching Belfast, Keting and I purchased tickets for the 11:10 train from Belfast to Derry-Londonderry. We initially planned to spend a bit longer in Belfast, but the rain tempered our plans (and I was personally ready for an extended nap). We entered the City Centre to pass time until our train ride, and were introduced to a small shopping center of five to six shops, five of them closed at the moment. Among them, a clothing store, a Mexican restaurant, two additional local restaurants and a Boots. The title “City Centre” was unexpected for the place that it was. Maybe shops open later? Though the transit center, for both rail and bus connected into this building, it seemed less like a cultural center of Belfast, at least from our quick inspection. While waiting, I also connected to the WiFi in the station, greeted by a connection screen with rules prohibiting the use of the network for video and audio streaming, file sharing and downloading large files. While these rules are generally standard to prevent users from generating unreasonably large requests on networks, the presentation of it felt a bit controlling (though I also think that I would not have given this any attention if it were in the US).

Along multiple sites in the train station were signs labelled “Don’t be antisocial.” Outside the restrooms, the embedded convenience stores and near the ticket counter, these signs were divided with the top section saying “We are watching you” and the lower covered in logos of TransLink, and the police. In the US, antisocial usually is suggestive of a person who sulks, is individualistic or stays apart from a pack and prefers to be alone. It must mean something different here (unclear if it is a note to terrorism or suspicious behavior).

I settled by a window on the train with my bags when it was time to board. The train ride was characterized by the couple sitting in the row in front of me, and the father and son to the left. With a slow start, each stop in the beginning was in close proximity to the last, and the train cars began to fill. A woman with a snack cart also came by, droning “Tea, Coffee, Tea, Coffee...” The young boy (maybe around 5 or 6 years old) began to mimic her. The couple in front of me ordered one of each, and resumed their conversation until the man received a phone call. For the next hour, this man was engaged in what seemed like a difficult and stiff conversation. I’m not entirely sure if he was speaking English or not during many parts of the conversation, but found a familiar melodic motif in his speech – and one that I was beginning to notice more often. Many people I had overheard spoke with the same melodic sequence, and often repeated questions a few times when trying to establish emphasis. This man in particular seemed to be on a stressful defensive in his conversation and often repeated the same questions when it seemed like he wasn’t getting the answers he wanted. He spoke in terse

sentences, and the thickness and expressiveness of his accent was abundantly clear, even in the short excerpts I overheard from my seat.

The last section of the train ride was almost visceral and extremely atmospheric, and took us along the coastline. We were greeted with views of the water, and could actually see the urban/suburban density transitioning in and out as we passed by different stops (Colerain, Ballymoney, Belfast). Jackie Gough (our Airbnb host) greeted us at the platform when we got off at Belfast, and directed us to her Toyota Yaris.

JACKIE GOUGH →

The ride to Jackie's home was informative, warm, compact, and welcoming. She asked curiously about why we were there, about our flights (and delays) on the way, and told us a little about her family. Her eldest son had recently married in November, and moved to Dublin. Her other younger son moved to Galloway. With an empty nest, Jackie and Jim, her husband, got a new dog (Missy) who we'd meet shortly after. Jackie told us a bit about Derry, namely that it was a walled city. She recounted the festivities from Saint Patrick's Day, and explained that the town was largely empty on this Monday in particular because many were tending to their hangovers from the night before, and that it was a bank holiday. Jackie also mentioned the shifting tides in cultural norms surrounding Saint Patrick's Day, in that it was becoming a more family-centric holiday in the last few years. When she was growing up, it often was about going to church and immediately going to bars afterwards. She pointed to the Bog City, a portion of Derry with its own rich history, the City Hotel, and two different bus stops along the way.

As soon as we parked, we were greeted by a frenzied and excited Missy. Jim also came out to welcome us, and Jackie and Jim welcomed us into their homes. They mentioned that most people use their backdoors in this area, and guided us through their yard. Their home is resplendent and covered in textures and patterns. There is not a bit of any surface that was not treated to establish comfort. From the kitchen tiles, to the bright green carpets, to the layered rugs and floral wallpapers, the house felt immediately sweet and comforting. The Airbnb rooms that Keting and I were staying in previously belonged to their sons. As such, some of the drawers and half the closets were still filled with their things. In the room I stayed in, Jackie preserved some of her son's photos in a frame, along with an "In Memoriam" card from a friend of his who passed away a few years ago. The bookshelves in the house were overflowing with housekeeping magazines, classics, tourism guides (probably because of their turn to Airbnb) and fictional series from a small selection of authors. The beds were lined in heated blankets, and even the bathroom continued the textural motif, with several colors and textures that amplified its sense of comfort.

Jackie and Jim showed us how to work the TVs, noting that they did not have internet connection. “If you want connection, you need to go to the village.” They used to have it, but it became prohibitively expensive for them to maintain, and they resorted to the TV to collect news updates, going to town when they did need to address specific business.

We decided to rest and tidy up before joining Jackie and Jim for dinner in their dining room. As we set the table, Jim mentioned he used to travel to the US for work. He specifically travelled to Birmingham, New Orleans, Florida and other parts of the deep south. Jim mentioned that these parts of the US almost reminded him of home because of their shared small-town feel and shared family values. But Jim also asked if our TV is still censored – he said that in the early 1990s when he would frequent the US, the news often did not report a lot of international events and he was often more informed by Irish news. After a few snide remarks about Trump, we sat to eat. Jackie prepared a casserole with steak, carrots and potatoes, along with mashed potatoes and steamed broccoli. As we ate, we talked about the research we were hoping to dive into, and Jackie opened up about her own experiences with technology and connectivity (my research interest).

BETTER FORMAL ANALYSIS STARTS HERE



it's primarily descriptive before this

Because Jackie frequently made calls to her sons, and also for business, she still maintains two phones (despite the lift of roaming charges). She uses one phone to call her son in Dublin, and another to talk to her son in Galloway. With the friction between these devices, Jackie's son gifted her with a dual-SIM phone the year before but she actually refused to use it because the phone confused her and it wasn't clear to her when she was using the phone with one SIM versus the other. I found this dichotomy particularly striking. People often use technology to simplify their lives, but for Jackie who was conditioned to treat her interactions with people differently by SIM card (or really, by geographic borders) actually needed that divide to be clear to give her clarity when framing her use of a cell phone.

This kind of treatment of the border became apparent too, in the way people handle money. Jackie and Jim maintain different bank accounts on both sides to manage their money. For them, balancing the complexity of currency exchange between the Sterling and the Euro is an optimization game (as it is for many people who live in Muff, specifically). By extension, because import tariffs and transportation costs also vary in the Republic and Northern Ireland, Jackie and many living along the border choose where to buy certain goods based on price. TVs and cell phones are better in Northern

Ireland. Housing is cheaper in Ireland (Muff and Culmore are colloquially described as suburbs of Derry). And health insurance, the holy grail, is absolutely better in Northern Ireland (another motif I heard often).

Jackie dropped Keting and I off in Derry, on the way to the hospital to visit her aunt in hospice care. We wandered the town for a bit, but with the darkness setting in (it was around 7:00pm by this point), and warnings from Jackie not to walk by the walls at night, we settled instead in Jackie's favorite bar, Sandino's. On the way, a stranger catcalled in probably the most unique call I have ever received. "What is 53 times 7?" After walking away silent, he called out again "If you don't know the answer, it means you're stupid." Other than this interaction (which was comical, even at the time), Derry, Muff and Culmore felt exceedingly safe and my interactions with strangers on the street were marked with frequent nods, "hellos" and smiles.

SANDINO'S →

At Sandino's, Keting and I met with Koby and Christian, and fell accidentally into a game of pub trivia. It was Irish-themed this week, so we performed dismally but joked with the quiz proctor about how horrible we were and gained some pity points. A woman sitting near us called out to Koby and I asking if we were "brother and sister" which I also found funny. Earlier that day, Jackie and Jim asked whether Keting or I was Chinese because they knew one of us was. My skin is very clearly brown, and while I respect them not trying to make assumptions, I thought this was a bit funny. Later at dinner, Jackie made a comment implying that I was Hispanic. Now, someone thought Koby and I were siblings. There are several Indian restaurants dotting Derry (and some Punjabi immigrants that I later spoke too as well), but the jump to assuming that I am Indian was one that many people I later interviewed did not make. 15/90 points later, we parted ways.

GENERAL DAY 1 TAKEAWAYS →

- *Feeling out of place*

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3/19 - DAY 2

Exploring Derry

THE BUS (1a) →

I left for Derry from Muff, aiming to spend the day orienting myself around a local telling of the history of the town, and gathering my bearings around local transit, social dynamics and the surrounding area. I purchased a TransLink weekly pass on my phone but didn't realize the pass would be mailed to my permanent address (in New Jersey!). The bus drive made this clear to me when I showed him the receipt on my phone, but allowed me to board anyways, in an act of kindness. The bus from Muff (Ireland) into Derry (UK) seamlessly crossed the border, and I didn't even notice it except in retrospect when I checked GoogleMaps to cross-check that it had happened. At the next few stops, many people joined and the bus immediately grew louder as a community of regular riders had assembled. Everyone knew each other.

LIBRARY →

I wasn't sure where to start, so I stepped into the familiar comfort of the library, one of the first buildings I saw when leaving the bus. I couldn't get on the WiFi, so I asked one of the volunteers how I might join. At the service desk, Koran helped me set up my own library card and I became a "digital citizen" (their words, not mine). Programming from the BBC was playing on the TV, and a few older men were sitting on the couches. I spoke to an older woman (whose name I was too shy to ask for) sitting by the computers, who warmly smiled at me and asked me if I was from around there. I explained that I was here for research, and she invited me to interview her if I wanted to. With great relief, I asked her about her use of the internet, the library and her opinions on Brexit. She mentioned that she only connected to the Internet when in the city walls of Derry and primarily used the library computers to read email, connect with her grandkids studying in Dublin, and read the news. I asked about Brexit, and she immediately rolled her eyes.

"No one knows what's going on around here."

Derry itself has WiFi within the city walls, and scattered across the envelopes of private shops and public sites like the malls, museums and landmarks (Guildhall, Peace Bridge). It's called the WirelessCity, administered jointly by the Derry and Strabane District Council. Muff and Culmore do not have public WiFi connectivity, but small independent shops do (which is how Jackie and Jim stay connected).

GEORGE, BOGSIDE WALKING TOUR →

I left for a Bogside Walking Tour starting at Guildhall, by my tour guide named George. We were joined by a family of 4 (the father grew up in Belfast) from Canada. Throughout the tour, George waved to many folks passing on the sidewalk (and the roads). He explained his own lived experience of growing up during the Troubles, and took us through several important sites along the Rossville Flats where he ended the tour.

A few points that were particularly marked were:

- (1) The strength of the Irish identity, despite Derry being situated in the UK
- (2) A lack of bitterness from this period, and the desire to move on
- (3) A hard Brexit conjures images of the troubles

LUCKY SINGH, MANGO, RICHMOND MALL →

After George's tour, I felt energized to speak to people, armed with at least a glimpse of the local stories that many experienced first-hand, growing up here. I started at Richmond Mall, a shopping center that felt much the same as any generic one in the US. I targeted stores selling phones, phone accessories and network services. At Mango, a phone and phone accessory store, I spoke to Lucky Singh, who lived in Muff but grew up in Punjab, in India. As I walked toward the counter, he asked "Why are you here?" with a deep sense of curiosity. Feeling a bit exposed but welcomed, I mentioned the project. Singh said he didn't expect his business to be impacted, since he knew that for many, phones were expensive purchases and people would cross the border (even in the event of a hard border) to make a purchase where costs were better. He didn't want to plan for what he did not know, and didn't think it was worth wasting his time worrying about Brexit's impacts on his private nor professional lives. He didn't have a green card yet, but wasn't at all concerned.

"No one knows what the hell is going on. Last week, some people from UK came with cameras to interview me but I said no. No one needs to have me on camera talking about something I don't know But no one is worried."

Lucky noted that the collective memory of Troubles was too strong for anything remotely similar to happen again, and invited me back if I wanted to talk more. He also mentioned that Ireland was a safe place for Indians as we parted, which I felt was odd but found comforting.

RORY, GAME.CO.UK, RICHMOND MALL →

At Game.co.uk, I spoke to Rory, a sales associate. Rory joined the company in November, and only spoke to his regional manager about Brexit the week he joined,

when his manager asked out of curiosity what his thoughts were. The company did not formally have a policy or a strategy, with the same “*shoulda, woulda, coulda*” mindset. He was jaded about Brexit, and about speculating about Brexit. Despite this, Rory was surprised his company had not discussed this further with its impending proximity.

Some insights from talking to Rory:

- (4) The lack of structure was uncomfortable but people generally preferred to ignore Brexit rather than discuss its potential impact. (He personally preferred to talk about it)
- (5) His company was not planning to change their product offerings, and he was surprised and impressed when I asked about increasing their stock of dual-SIM phones. He said he would deliver the idea to his regional manager.
- (6) 9/10 customers are from NI.
- (7) Rory says Game.co.uk hasn't been impacted since the vote to leave, and notes that sales during Christmas were actually better than usual. Many customers come from the South because prices here are better.

“A good sign that people actually aren't changing their behavior yet”

CHRIS AND ???, CARPHONE WAREHOUSE, RICHMOND MALL →

At Carphone Warehouse, I met Chris and ???.

*“You want to know about Brexit? You're in the wrong place.
We don't have any idea what's going on, dear.”*

When I mentioned this, everyone's eyes rolled. The other customers even sighed and nodded in approval when they told this to me. Management has not spoken about it. Chris doesn't know what their position is, and personally felt distant from it. But he did mention that it hadn't affected business much yet. Most of Carphone's customers came in from the North, and it was cheaper to buy unlocked phones here (100 euros cheaper on this side than on the other) because of fees **not** related to the exchange rate. Only seasonally did customers come from the South.

ANOTHER CHRIS, VODAFONE, RICHMOND MALL →

“Oh, Brexit?” Chris was immediately confident and didn't shift or sound even a bit phased by my mention of it (like everyone else). Vodafone's model is inherently international and Chris was confident that if anything, it would strengthen their business because of the lack of territoriality afforded by the VoIP foundation that Vodafone is built on.

CONNOR, EE, FOYLESIDE MALL →

Connor was almost the same as Chris. EE's sales had been on the rise, and the seasonal trends weren't different than they usually were. Management issued a statement that they were discussing Brexit, but guaranteed customers to keep the service contracts that were already in place for at least 24 months regardless of changes to the roaming policy. People asked about Brexit in passing, but didn't rely on information about it to make decisions.

GEORGE, O2, FOYLESIDE MALL →

When I walked into O2, and asked about Brexit/the research, all of the sales associates who were clustered together pointed to George in unison. "He's your guy." They joked that George was the most opinionated about it, and that I should speak with him. George started by mentioning that corporate wanted everyone to get on the same page, so he gave me this statement.

"We are committed to supporting you, and will let you know about updates about Brexit as they come by."

George also told me to check out the company's formal statements online (they're more detailed than what he is allowed to say as a sales associate). Switching hats, he candidly offered his personal opinions about the situation.

"It's dreadful, just dreadful."

He said this three times.

SIOBHÁN, DERRY > WHEATFIELD (1a) →

I left to catch the bus back to Muff, and met Siobhán, a regular commuter between Culmore Point and Derry. Siobhán was in her mid-20s, just arrived from a quick shopping break at Primark, and had been working across sides for the last few years. She commuted frequently for work, and asked me how I was finding my stay in Muff. After some introductions, Siobhán told me about what it was like growing up in the area, and about her opinions surrounding Brexit. Almost immediately, our conversation about Brexit (dominated by feelings of confusion and uncertainty, but some level of detachment) went to the Troubles. Siobhán, who is anti-abortion mentioned that debates over abortion in particular were central to some of the local political gridlock that prevented people from getting along (Protestants vs Catholics). This divide ran deep, even generationally. Siobhan's school system was not well integrated, and had a much larger proportion of Catholics than Protestants. Her parents also were still a bit bitter about the Troubles and had grown up near Rossville. More recently, schools had formal integration initiatives and younger kids were being educated with a more balanced cohort of classmates. Parents in these districts were given surveys to see if they approved of enrolling their kids in these programs or not.

Siobhan only had one phone with one SIM, but connected with her friends who largely ended up settling in parts of NI (because of the healthcare). She also enjoyed these benefits and said that her medications were covered.

Finally, Siobhan's interactions with the Internet were interesting. She wasn't that engaged on social media (barring messaging apps that she used to connect with her friends and Facebook), but mentioned that she followed news from both sides. She recommended Channel 4 News and offered that it was an impartial news source, compared to BBC. Siobhan got off at her stop, and called out a hearty "See you later!" (I met her again on Thursday evening on the same ride).

GENERAL DAY 2 TAKEAWAYS →

- ***"Troubles"***

This sounded like a **euphemism** to me, personally. I thought there would also be another name and I understand the need for a less violent sounding name because it is still very fresh in everyone's' memories. It also seems gentle for what it was. There seemed to be a **resounding** feeling of the Irish sense of self (even in *Derry-Londonderry*), and at least from George's tour and passersby on the street, his generation had a strong sense of pride and agency. He described the civil rights movement as a terrible time, but one that was not marked by fear. He said people around here are stubborn, and fight for what they want, but the softened name "Troubles" does not imply the same.

- ***Brexit vs the Troubles***

People naturally relate Brexit's potential effects immediately to the Troubles, and to the hard border that preceded the current seamless transition. This sometimes stokes fear, other times confidence that Brexit can't possibly be as bad (and that government would have to be crazy to implement something like what had been there before, again).

- ***Being Indian***

I was worried that I'd stick out and feel excluded for it, but I felt particularly comfortable speaking to people because I already looked a bit out of place. This made starting conversations a lot easier for me.

- ***"Integration" / American Civil Rights Parallels***

They are awfully similar. George (tour guide) was very vocal about how the local movement was inspired by MLK, Selma and also mentioned other symbolism like the Peace Torch (MLK Jr III helped light it) or MLK's face on murals with other notable civil rights figures. Also mentioned how Gerrymandering was heavily used here for the oppression of the Catholic. Even language like "integration" that Siobhan mentioned in passing remind me of American civil rights.

3/20 - DAY 3

Pilot's Row Community Centre

On Day 3, I walked around Muff in the area immediately surrounding the Airbnb. Jackie mentioned that within a 10 minute walk, we could see the suburban gradient transform from small houses to mansions. The old owner of the Reddins Bus Service, which flanked Jackie's property on Cannings Lane lived in an enormous property very close by. Jackie was a planner, and had many architect friends. While her work was not based in Muff and Culmore, her friends often spoke about the large homes in this vicinity. The transition from small housing to larger villas was a gradient, only because of the lush greenery that made the differences between the homes so apparent. Behind these larger houses, sprawling views of water and greenery were finally visible. Though we were so close to the water, even at Jackie's home, it was not this abundantly clear.

Pilot's Row Community Centre is particularly striking for two reasons. The first is that its surrounded with large black slated fences, and barbed wire in some areas that make it almost read as a prison from its exterior. The second is that its embedded near the Rossville Flats, along the deep historic center of the Troubles. Keting and I decided to go to Pilot's Row Community Center together in the afternoon. Many of the people at the Community Center were pulled into activities in different rooms, many finishing breakfast at the time, so we wandered around aimlessly until we found Danny. Danny, a director at Pilot's Row, welcomed us warmly, asked if we were lost or how he could help, and immediately explored the center finding groups of people that would be open to discussing Brexit and its possibilities. Danny led us first to an adult art class. There we met Geraldine, Leila, Maryanne, Damien, and Anna.

ADULT ART AT PILOT'S ROW →

We joined at the end of a large wooden table, and introduced ourselves quickly, though Danny had also introduced us as "Harvard Students." Ana immediately let out a small laugh, and mentioned she was an administrator and professor at Ulster University, and told everyone that we were "smart cookies." Everyone at this table had a general consensus on views about Brexit, but each had an extremely clear individual experience of it. We were greeted with a low but performative grumble as the topic was raised. Many admitted that they weren't that informed so they were not that sure to what extent they would be able to discuss the topic, but that they would try. They were all extremely humble because they spent the next hour providing deeply insightful and thoughtful comments on the subject.

Maryanne and Anna both received their pensions from Northern Ireland. Ana specifically even mentioned that her medical card was "gold dust" and she could not

imagine losing it. Everyone had family and friends on both sides, and though they did still continue to engage in conversations with friends and family about Brexit, they admitted to growing tired of it, because of its thickets of uncertainty. Geraldine was most concerned about the polarization.

“There are 17.5 million people... we cannot dismiss their opinions.”

Geraldine in particular felt most affected by this aspect of the vote. Not only in its logistical impacts on both life and identity, but also in its effect on her understanding of others. Leila and Damien also felt similarly. Leila introduced herself as a German expat, and the conversation gradually moved towards the rise of the far right. Scotland, Scandinavia, the US – our friends related their situation to cases in other countries, but were dissatisfied because it felt too reductive to them. Geraldine also mentioned a general feeling of disappointment in social media, and that it was at least in part responsible for propagating misinformation. Despite this, she felt worried that it was not only misinformation that caused the other side of the vote to lean the way that it did.

Maryanne taught us that the “Irish Way” often follows the saying: **“If you don’t know, say no.”** Everyone seemed to nod at this point. This is the custom of voting that she was raised with, and one she was surprised to see not more actively raised during Cameron’s initial referendum.

Additionally in this discussion of Brexit was a cheeky section on smuggling. Anna mentioned that we should visit her in a year because she might be rich then. Among other more serious concerns, Geraldine felt strongly that there was no one to speak for people along the border.

“Belfast has a suspended parliament...they’re on holiday. Who speaks for us?”

Maryanne recounted a story of her old job when the border stood firmly in place, in the 80s. She did not know when she would get home, and would leave early for work because some days getting past the customs post took longer than others. Sometimes her car was searched, and she was told to get out of the car. Damien joined in, affirming that if a border came back, people would tear it down. He mentioned that it would be like the troubles again.

A resounding sentiment was disappointment in representation, and that the border towns feeling the effects of Brexit (potentially the most) do not get to vote because they are from the Republic, though many major parts of their lives cross the border.

Keting and I left as the art class closed, and we stayed in the central foyer to compile our notes. There was a cozy series of sofas further down the hall, and Danny suggested I

move there to meet more of the frequenters of the community center. Danny led me to George, a warm middle-aged father of 2.

THE MEN'S TABLE AT PILOT'S ROW →

I sat with George and spoke to him about his life, his involvement in the Community Center. George usually came to the center every week, to meet with his peers and for the social community he built there. George grew up in the Bogside, and was friends with Jackie Duddy, and was surrounded constantly by memories of these events. He has two children who were in their 20s who he mentioned were growing up now and needed to think critically and form their own opinions so he preferred to guide them gently but not to overpower them with stories about his experience growing up during the troubles. George recounted stories of what it was like to cross the customs post, including colorful accounts of being kicked and patted down by the border patrol agents who intended to shake down the IRA. People would throw fruits and vegetables at the guards, and George even mentioned that the local butchers (who's butcher shop was just a few minutes of a walk away) would throw their chickens. After beginning this conversation, several others flowed into the room. Danny, the director sat to join us along with Liam, George, Brian, Eugene and Lawrence. Soon one turned into seven and I was speaking to a much larger cohort of friends. We traveled through several different subjects, all linked out of and rooted in the Troubles.

Lawrence characterized Ulsterscots as a joke – “[where's the alphabet?](#)” They all nodded. George mentioned his disdain for the Orange Order and other organizations that used violence during the civil rights movement, which continued to strike afterwards. The group nodded to this as well. They openly shared with me that they were happy I joined because they would not have been able to vent without, and that they compartmentalized these memories and subjects because they did not have a good place to talk about them. “[For 10 years, people didn't talk about it... it's hard to bring it back up again.](#)”

On generationality, Brian and Lawrence discussed their beliefs on how kids are the future. George joked that all the kids are “[on Facebook these days](#)” and that he wanted to sign up too, but that his kids told him he would get too addicted trying to reconnect with his students (he was a schoolteacher) and friends. George raised again that he didn't want to feed thoughts to his children and wanted them to form their own. Everyone seemed to agree that moving on is best, and I was constantly surprised. The resounding mentality was an extremely mature one, that aimed not to assign blame or even bitterly reflect but to move forward and learn from the past.

Nestled in our conversations were other interesting offshoots from our discussion on Brexit. Namely, the circle compared their car insurance updates, what they had heard

about green cards (Brian's insurance actually issued him one). It was really clear how messy this situation was in practice. Not only did people have a layer of thought formed on how Brexit affects their national and individual identities, but also challenged them to consider its minute effects in nearly every aspect of life. The dependency on institutions like insurance agencies, banks, and the government left them feeling generally uninformed, confused and with less power to improve their situation (some also lived in the Republic and did not vote for this, though no one in this circle voted to leave).

Other conversations about sports rivalries, the trial, and family that lived in the US pursued as we continued. Everything seemed to be inflected by Brexit and sectarian divides even though that was not central to each component of the conversation.

I felt very welcome with this group in particular. They were extremely kind – and brought me lunch, and asked me about myself with curious interest. I felt a real sense of camaraderie, especially because the group would burst out into song at times, or comfortably accept the silences when they filled our conversations, too. Lawrence accidentally spilled milk on me after he had set the table, and later joked that I had finally been baptized and welcomed into the community. The clouds parted and the sun filtered through the skylight on the ceiling, and Lawrence began to sing again.

“Im Irish.” - Danny

“Brexit...you can tell'em to take a hike.” -Danny

“A sinking ship is fine if the flag floats” -Lawrence, ironically

GENERAL DAY 3 TAKEAWAYS →

- ***Being Othered***

Not only did it make it easier for me to start conversations, but it made it easier for people to confide in me. 3 of the people at the community center told me that they trusted me because they knew I didn't have opinions about either side on this issue. I wasn't affiliated with a religion, a jurisdiction or any local history. The transience of this visit made it easier for them to share. Lawrence joked that because of me, he was able to have this conversation (otherwise they'd be talking about sports). George said he was glad he came in that day to meet me.

- ***Space to vent / mental health / Escapism?***

From these conversations in particular, it felt evident that even though support for mental health and counseling was plastered on the wall, that people did not feel like they still had a place to relive and process the Troubles. It seemed to

intersect with every conversation and find a way back in, without being prompted, and it felt clear that people wanted to discuss it. Lawrence and George explicitly thanked me for giving them a space to vent, and suggested that if I weren't there that day, that they instead would have talked about sports. For a topic that is so clearly reflected on by so many individuals I have encountered, I wonder if the current mental health resources and normalization are enough. I also wonder how much people choose to suppress these feelings until prompted to resurface them, because it seemed like even in the home, memories of the Troubles were usually not brought up often because they were often attached to death or would color the opinions of children.

- ***Humility/Feeling Qualified***

A pattern I saw on this day, and several others was that people did not feel qualified to speak about issues when I'd casually ask for their opinions. It seems like a combination of a deep sense of humility and a lack of information and support from the structures that are meant to offer it (ie. Belfast government on holiday, no local government in some areas to structure information, companies giving different information about the same services). The lack of information from the government and these fundamental institutions is somehow internalized in people as a lack of qualifications, and an inability to keep up (even though truly, no one can possibly know what is happening because even the origins of decisions on Brexit do not know).

3/21 - DAY 4

The Physical Border

The physical markings of the border in Muff/Culmore are sparse. There is an overgrown customs post that has been spray painted on and reclaimed by nature. There a small sign that a local organization put up about “No Hard Border.” There’s a dirt path in parallel to the sidewalk, on a small bridge that was built in part by the EU. The pavement on the road switches from one color to another, and the road still shows markings of where concrete pillars used to stand for more customs posts. Along the quiet road that runs along the border, there is a series of informal bridges that are now covered in overgrown plants, crossing the river that also divides the two countries. The bridges are sometimes hard to spot. But separately, on a separate path down from Jackie’s home is a small road that, on Google Maps, does not look like a real road. When you reach the border itself, there are large concrete blocks placed to limit the movement of cars between it, that still stand. There’s a Reddins Bus Company parking zone here. The owners actually prepared for Brexit and purchased extra land on the NI side to hedge their bets if they needed to legally exist in both places. There’s a mail pickup center (I spoke to their owner) that also exists on a precarious perch. I asked the owner about how he felt about Brexit, but he actually suggested that he was going to be just fine. Mail inevitably will need pickups from people close by, and most of his customers reside in the Republic of Ireland even though the physical location of his shop is squarely along the border.

Beyond this, the walk was extremely quiet with few passing cars. For a long stretch, the only signs of life I could see were children at a distance playing in the field of their school as I approached Culmore Point.

The abundance of telecommunications infrastructure on NI is extremely evident. In sprawling areas of green space, the only dominant infrastructures are cell towers and trees. These are concentrated very clearly on one side.

I’m going to compile my data into a separate visualization to be able to analyze it better.

GENERAL DAY 4 TAKEAWAYS →

- *NI seems much more prepared to handle networks along the border, and communities living on the other side at the border might lose connectivity if that’s folded into a hard border*

3/22 - DAY 5

Moville and Greencastle

Keting and I went off to explore Moville and Greencastle, up the road from Muff where we were staying. These neighborhoods were both significantly smaller. We were told in passing conversations that Moville is the site of the vacation homes of the middle class. With beachside property, Moville was an expensive second home to own, but it was more affordable than taking holiday in a place outside of the area. The homes we walked by were extremely large, many still with manicured grass and well maintained exteriors. However, we passed one empty house with a dilapidated roof and a single daffodil plant in front of it. Though Moville seems to be an affordable alternative for holidays, even living here seemed too expensive to sell. Had that house been optioned on the market before it was allowed to deteriorate?

The walking paths were sprawling, flanked by water and small sections of beaches. When we crossed back into the town center, we noticed two main axes upon which everything seemed to happen (and our taxi driver mentioned we could walk through Moville in a few minutes). After walking around a bit, we settled into coffee shop for lunch. We couldn't find a taxi, and spoke to the folks around the café for tips on acquiring one. In a few minutes, a "taxi" arrived, but it was an extremely large bus meant for the two of us. The folks in the restaurant saw us standing outside waiting for the taxi, even though it was directly in front of us and guided us forward.

In Greencastle, we spoke to Ana, who handled the front desk at the Greencastle Community Centre. She offered us tea, and spoke to us for the next few hours. In the same pattern of humility as several others I had spoken to earlier, Ana said she was unqualified to talk about Brexit but after pulling on a few threads, she was sharing stories about how the troubles had been embedded in her marriage, because she (from Greencastle) married a Derry boy. Ana told us about her children, her experience growing up and community dynamics. She recognized that Greencastle was small, so her children all pursued international jobs and educations, with the exception of one of her daughters who was studying in Galloway.

One striking thing about our conversation with Ana was the presence of death within it. She mentioned she had a son who passed away at 2 months, and was celebrating his *would-be* birthday that following Friday at Galloway. She was going to take her family and friends with her, and have a small gathering to celebrate and remember him. While recounting this to us, she was met by two separate people requesting to reserve space for funeral teas and ceremonies for recently fallen relations. Ana told us that her role at the community center was increasingly to help manage funerals, because, especially in Greencastle, they functioned as a community gathering and a party of sorts. Even her

office had a stack of boxes labeled “funeral tea” in it. She mentioned that earlier, people would have more expensive dinners or even cigars but that this became increasingly less PC because several folks had passed away from lung cancer.

GENERAL DAY 4 TAKEAWAYS →

- **Connection here is made in person**

Ana had poor connection and was trying to download something when another local musician dropped by the desk to print some sheet music. He commented that she should check her internet speed and it was a dismal <10 mbps. For reference, it is around 100mpbs on Harvard’s network. Ana also mentioned that in the last round of storms, lightning actually affected some local landlines leaving a few homes without telephones or television. They still had not been repaired and there was no promise that they would be soon.

- **People either get out of Greencastle or stay, they don’t come back**

People acknowledge that opportunity is limited here, and that children ought to get out to see the world. However, many do not want to come back and the jobs in Greencastle do not reflect what the generation of kids growing up there generally want to be. I asked Ana if she thought any would return to Greencastle to stay with her, and she wasn’t so sure. But she supported her children’s adventures abroad, and even traveled herself to see what their lives were like.

- **Funeral Teas and Customary Traditions**

Given the prevalence this had in our conversation, in others dropping by and in the room itself, it is hard to escape how present death is in the neighborhood, and also its role in bringing people together for events.

- **Digital vs Physical Reinforcing Borders**

On social media, locations have multiplicities of identities. Derry, Londonderry, Derry-Londonderry are all options on the Peace Bridge, and the digital actually reinforces the sectarianism present in the physical world instead of blurring the boundaries in this boundaryless space. Instagram is worth exploring to see how the technological border division manifests itself in a liminal space.