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Narrating a National Space



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Abstract

Recent approaches to landscape and identity have attended to the movement of people in both space and time as a means through which landscapes are personalised and identities created. This has facilitated a move away from a perspective that emphasises fixity and rootedness in the creation of identity, belonging and place and moves towards an approach informed by a focus on narrative and place. This paper develops the intersection of narrative, place and identity in relation to a 'national space'. Drawing on an ethnography of a park in Dublin, ideas of national identity and space, with particular reference to cultural and material artefacts, are explored. This relationship is discussed through recourse to two important events in the park and the things they have left behind in the landscape.

Key Words: Landscape, identity, national space, material and cultural artefacts

Introduction

The abstract concept of the nation informs the way we approach ideas of identity, place and belonging, but it is more difficult to understand what this idea of nation means ‘on the ground’, to people who live their day to day lives supposedly in this nation, who make sense of what this means and negotiate and construct this meaning. This paper engages with the landscape of a ‘national space’ as constructed by people, through their experiences and engagement with the world around them and the way they embed this in particular narratives. This is done by looking at a park in Dublin that has, through various relations, been constructed as a national space – a space that is important and significant in the imagining of Ireland. Of course, ‘the landscape is never inert, people engage with it, re-work it, appropriate it and contest it’ (Bender, 1993: 3), and it is the way this occurs in the park, and the ways in which different identities are facilitated or marginalised through this process that underpins this discussion, located at the ‘junction of history and politics, social relations and cultural perceptions’ (Bender, 1993: 3).

This paper presents data from a three year ethnographic study of Phoenix Park, Dublin. It explores how this place is constructed into a national space through authenticating and authorising official narratives and how there are narratives that subvert and expand from these. This will be achieved through focusing on two key events in the park, and the material and cultural artefacts that these have produced. By drawing on these two events, it is possible to think about how events, histories (both authenticated and authorised and personal and problematic versions of events) impact upon the space and the people who visit the space. The park landscape, which incorporates various symbols and ideas of Irish nationality, is understood in this paper as actively contributing to the different national identities constructed through the participation of its visitors and residents, and their different

understandings of the nation contribute to the construction of this national space. In this way, the relationship is understood as co-constitutive and cyclic in nature.

The interaction between the social and the spatial imagined through this paper means that the park is not a backdrop to the ideas of nationality and nation put forward here; instead it is understood as part of the complex, interwoven narratives and discourse that constitutes these ideas and their representations within the park. Space and place are not being used in the abstract; instead the story presented here stems from a *particular* place at a *particular* time. Following Bender (2006) it is understood that landscapes are contested, worked and re-worked by people according to particular individual, social and political circumstances. As such they are always in a process, rather than being static, of being and becoming (Tilley, 2006: 7).

Phoenix Park is continually being worked and reworked as a national space. This is particularly reinforced through the story of the park that is presented within its official discourse. Many of the 'monuments' of contemporary and historic 'Irishness'; events, gatherings, buildings, statues, structures and spaces, are represented in Phoenix Park and, as such, the space acts as an important location for the development of shared memories and commemoration, and understandings of state, culture, nature and history. The landscape of the park was created in order to have social affects, including producing social identities, and there are traces of these, plus new identity formations that have been created in the contemporary park. The landscape is one of 'structures of feeling, palimpsests of past and present, outcomes of social practice, products of colonial and post-colonial identities and the western gaze...' (Tilley, 2006: 7), as will be shown through the historical and contemporary contextualising this paper presents.

Positioning the park

Phoenix Park is located in the north-west of Dublin. It is very central; a short walk from the very centre of the city along the quays. It was developed initially as a Royal Deer Park in the 1600s, during which time the Viceroy of Ireland lived in the park. Lord Chesterfield, after whom the main avenue that runs through the park is named, opened it to the Irish public in 1745. Áras an Uachtarain, the President of Ireland's official residence, and the American Ambassador's official residence are both located within the walls of the park, as are the Gardaí (the Irish police) Headquarters, the Irish Army Headquarters and Farmleigh (a state house for entertaining visiting heads of state). When Ireland was colonised, the Viceroy lived in what is now the home of the President, and the British Army were located in the park, where they regularly performed parades and spectacles of strength and dominance.

It is an important part of peoples' Dublin; childhood memories often include visits to the park, different for people who are from Dublin and for those who are visiting. Some are lucky enough to have grown up with it as their own playground, changing the way they remember the space. As people grow older, the park changes meaning again; the Furry Glen, an area of natural beauty in the park, is a place associated with 'courting', and many Dublin couples took their first walks there. This has transformed the park again in memories; into a romantic place. The park can also be variously understood in different people's narratives about it as a natural place, a historical place, a magical place and a place where key events, both personal and national, can be located.

The park creates an illusion of nature and history and presents it back to the visitors and spectators in a cultural performance. The park was produced within a particular discourse of

control and colonising (of Ireland; of the landscape; of the space and place; of the people), and this is writ large on the landscape of the park. The one historical narrative that has been adopted by the park Management is used as a way of authorising action and as a way of suppressing change. For example, while the park was formed in 1662, the Management and the Management Plan rarely mentions history that predates the 1740s. One of the objectives put forward in the Management Plan is to conserve the historic landscape; but this historic landscape is the one that dates from the 1700s, and specifically the formal layout of 1746, encompassing the Victorian landscape overlay designed by Decimus Burton. This differed from the original design of the park, which followed a French design of goosefoot type layout. This marks the start of the historical narrative of the park, and through its position within the official narrative, everything that falls outside of it is marginalised. The park retains the Victorian 1740s layout and the underlying philosophy of control and regulation that this encompasses.

The official narrative of the park's history presents a certain idea of the park, and as part of this is a particular understanding of the nation and of national identity. The main ways in which the official discourse is presented is through the literature produced by the park Management, the Visitor Centre and the Heritage Trail. The Visitor Centre is an interpretive centre that presents the history and natural landscape of the park for visitors. In the Visitor Centre there is a 'Key Dates' poster, which presents a linear narrative of the park's development; the events that have shaped it into what it is today. There are many things that have happened in the park that are not included in these key dates, far more significant events to some people than the dates featured. For example, while the Key Dates poster includes the 1537 confiscation of the lands by Henry VIII and the 1611 allocation of the lands to Sir Richard Sutton by James I, it does not include an Irish Volunteers Review that over 100,000

people attended in 1780. The 1860 takeover of control of the park by the Office of Public Works is included but a Fenian Amnesty meeting with over 5,000 in attendance in August 1871 is not; and the 31st Eucharistic Congress that took place in 1932, marking an important positioning of the newly independent Ireland on the world stage is not included, though the 1925 enactment of the Phoenix Park act is. In fact the two key events in the park that this paper will move on to focus on are omitted from these Key Dates – the Phoenix Park murders in 1882, and the Papal Visit in 1979. The heritage trail around the park also marks certain events while others are not commemorated and so do not feature on the official historical landscape of the park. The heritage trail purposefully now attempts to avoid conflict and confrontation as discussed in relation to the Cross in the Ground below.

Through the construction of the park's historical façade to this replication of a certain period there is a certain amount of parody involved; we are made to believe that this is the 'authentic' Phoenix Park, whereas it is simply the story that has been chosen to be represented, a choice based on a particular preference for an aesthetic and ideals. Following Zukin (1991) Phoenix Park can be understood as positioning an established historical product (established through the legitimating practices put in place by the park's Management, Visitor Centre and Heritage Trail) in a framework that renews its cultural legitimacy through narratives. This narrative framework has clear parameters about what is included in the Phoenix Park historical and material landscape, and the narrative is authorised through particular techniques. And, through this narrative, the park is constructed as a national space, which in turn constitutes a particular idea of the nation.

This paper focuses on two important dates in the park's history, the 1882 Phoenix Park murders and the 1979 Papal Visit. These are key events in the park's history, one of which,

the Papal Visit, is positioned within the official narrative readily (despite being omitted from the Key Dates in the Visitor Centre there is a section of the exhibition about it and the Pope's chair is prominently displayed), and the other, the murders, are much more contested and are not included in the same way (though they are also included in the Visitor Centre displays it is done so far more problematically, as discussed below). These two events have undoubtedly left cultural marks on the landscape and, interestingly, they have also both left material marks on the ground, though of a very different scale. Using these material artefacts, the cultural and social marks are also uncovered, developing an idea of how these events and monuments are incorporated into the authorised park's narrative, and how this impinges on the idea of national space developed, and by implication the idea of nationality associated with it. These events and the material traces they have left behind will be used to explore the authenticating and official discourses but also, as significantly, ways in which it has been undermined, contested and interpreted through different people's narratives.

These events, the Papal Visit and the Phoenix Park murders, can be seen to represent the high and low points of the park – a time for celebration (as a nation) and commiseration (as a nation). The way that these events are represented in the Visitor Centre and the Heritage Trail make up the particular way the park is presented through its official narrative; and the way that the idea of a nation is communicated within the park. This paper will now turn to these two events, first the Papal Visit, and then the Phoenix Park Murders, using accounts and data gathered during the ethnography.

The Cross on the Mound – The Papal Visit, 1979

In 1979, the Pope visited Ireland for the first time in the nation's history. It was, for an overwhelmingly Catholic country, a very important event. Over 1.25 million people, about a

third of the Irish population at the time, attended the main meeting on the 29 September, which took place in Phoenix Park. This visit had important social and political timing; Pope John Paul II warned against turning away from faith as a way of organising your life, and his speech was underpinned by an idea of 'oneness', one Roman Catholic church uniting its followers across the world and, in Ireland's case particularly, across borders. The message from the Pope was a warning to the Irish people about the negativity about the breakdown of a united society, and the necessity to remain true to their faith. The Pope also visited Galway, Drogheda (which had important spatial significance, as it was the closest the Pope could be to Northern Ireland, without crossing the border), the Knock Shrine and Limerick, where almost all of the other two-thirds of the Irish population attended.

At 11.00am on the September Saturday morning, the Pope's Aer Lingus plane called St. Patrick, which had been specifically designed for the Pope, flew over the Phoenix Park on its way to Dublin airport. The crowd cheered and waved flags, and the Pope is reported to have risen out of his seat in the plane and blessed the assembling crowd (Nolan, 2006). Following his landing at Dublin airport, the Pope was taken by helicopter to the park, where he addressed the masses. The Pope announced to the gathered crowd, 'Like Saint Patrick, I too have heard the voice of the Irish calling to me. And so I have come to you, to all of you in Ireland' (quoted in Nolan, 2006: 135). He went on to talk about the missionaries Ireland had sent to different countries, including his native Poland, to preach the gospel. He talked about the history of Roman Catholicism in Ireland, tracing its roots through from medieval times to the nineteenth-century mass rocks in fields and forests when Roman Catholics were penalised for practising their religion. Drawing on the Eucharistic Congress that had happened in the Phoenix Park in 1932, the Pope said that the huge numbers that filled the Phoenix Park at this time were at one with those who had filled the park during the Eucharistic Congress.

Following the mass, the Pope mounted what had become known as the 'Popemobile', and travelled at walking pace through the corridors between the corrals. Following this circuit, the Pope got back into his helicopter and took off for Drogheda, where he would address another 400,000 people (many of whom had travelled down from Northern Ireland).

The event was a clear demonstration of what was a cohesive society; that level of attendance and the good behaviour that characterised the day could not be reproduced in today's Ireland. However, this outward cohesion masked coercion and social pressure to attend. For one person interviewed, volunteering at the local hospital was the only legitimate way to avoid the stigma of not attending. The social and political power of the Roman Catholic Church was being demonstrated and reinforced through this visit.

For the Pope's visit a large, white forty-tonne cross had been constructed behind the twelve metre high platform that the Pope had used to address the crowd. It was meant to be removed, but a petition was lodged with the Office of Public Works asking for its preservation, and so it was not removed. It remains in place today, a material reminder of the Pope's visit. The cross marks the spot where he addressed the crowds, and there is a stone inscription reminding visitors 'Praise God Forever (in Irish). Pope John Paul II offered mass at this place in the presence of more than one million people on 27th September 1979. Be converted everyday.' The area around the bottom of the cross has been redeveloped, with a car park, a tree lined path to the bottom of a mound with steps that lead up to the cross. The view across the Forty-Acres (a vast, open stretch of flat ground in the park) and the usual presence of deer makes it a very attractive spot, and the car park is often full of tourists who are visiting the park. The car park has also been appropriated by joy-riders at night, which poses a particular problem for the limited Garda presence in the park. This adds to the layers

of meaning that make up this particular monument, and also the park itself, as the ‘dark side’ of the nightlife, such as drug use and prostitution, continually impinges on day time understandings and uses. This marks an interesting ambivalence in the use of the space; the cross marks the position of a particularly holy event in the history of the park, and it is now being used as a marker for the occurrence of some of the more ‘profane’ events in the park. These two uses of the space demonstrate one of the superficial understandings of the cross and the place.

The Visitor Centre, one of the main voices of the official commentary on the park’s history and contemporary position, presents the idea of a unified nation through the narration of the event. The display says, ‘We Irish people did all of that – and did it in 8 weeks – and did it magnificently. If we can all do that – then we, as a nation, are truly capable of great things. It was indeed a beautiful, beautiful day.’ This puts forward a very strong sense of a united group achieving something important – as indeed it was; it was the Irish people positioning themselves on a world stage. Though on a more local level, the awareness of this or the interest that most people would have regarding it was probably usurped by the social and cultural pressure to conform and ‘walk the line’ of attending. It was first and foremost a statement of conformity and unification by the Roman Catholic Church; and the unification that the Visitor Centre highlights was an effort to pull together the unravelling strands of Irish society and bound them tightly into a unity Roman Catholic coil.

The sense of optimism espoused by the Visitor Centre display, ‘if we can do that...we, as a nation, are capable of great things’, was unsustainable in relation to the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. While the visit prompted a rise in vocational applications for that year, the first since the 1960s, it dropped again the following year. The patch that the visit put on the

problems facing the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland was only temporary; the cracks began reappearing soon after the Pope left. The entertainment of the young people in the Galway mass before the Pope's arrival was by the charismatic Bishop Eamon Casey and the 'singing priest' Father Michael Cleary. Their presence was severely overshadowed in retrospect following the discovery that the Bishop was the father of a 17-year old boy with an American mother, and that the Father had conducted an affair with his housekeeper that produced two children. Following these, there was an avalanche of allegations and emerging stories surrounding the physical and sexual abuse of children and the Magdalene laundries. Casey and Cleary are clerical bookends on either side of the Ireland of the 1980s; they embodied the optimism, captured by the Visitor Centre, of 1979 and they precipitated its crisis in 1992.

Another level of understanding around the Papal visit is provided by the interviews conducted during the research in the park. These interviews took place in and around the park. They occurred either when the researcher was standing still and people chose to stop and talk to her, or when they were standing still and the researcher approached them, dotted around the park. The interview extract used below was the latter; two older men were standing at the base of the cross, talking. They were prompted to remember the Pope's visit:

KM: What about the Pope?

V1: Oh yea I was there.

V2: He was there.

KM: That must have been a good day?

V1: *Well I suppose it was, I suppose it was. Em, again, it's ... I'm not a totally religious person and I wasn't just that impressed. Especially when two of the priests on the alter have had kids and knocked off money, ya know it doesn't impress you. But yea it was an amazing day in that a million people all came with the one thing in mind. And eh they were up-lifted I presume you know. Yea it was an amazing day.*

(Visitor 14 and 15, Papal Cross, 3rd March, 2006)

This extract summarises an important position adopted by many people interviewed; the day itself was 'an amazing day', echoing the Visitor Centre display that describes it as 'a

beautiful, beautiful day'. There was a real sense of unity that transcends the religious meaning, as the account above shows the visitor is 'not a totally religious person', but states twice that it was 'an amazing day'. However, there is a distancing evident, '*the people* all came with one thing in mind' and '*they* were up-lifted I suppose', it's as if he is distancing himself from this unity because of the events that later distorted the meaning of the event in relation to its religious meaning.

Another man who was interviewed discussed the day in relation to a very specific part of it; the platform the Pope and his attendants stood on. He had been part of the team who had constructed the platform, and they had done such a good job that they were used for the subsequent European visits the Pope made.

'There were a million and a quarter people in that part where the cross is now. I was up there that time. I worked on the construction, the firm I worked for, we had a part of building part of the platform and all eh surrounding and all before the Pope came. He landed in the helicopter, it was a great reception. It was a special day for the people. Packed it was, I've never seen anything like it. It was a beautiful day and when he came oh you could hear the roar of a million people'

(Visitor 8, Chesterfield Avenue, 5th January, 2006)

Once again, this man highlights that it was a great day 'for the people'. The distancing evident in the first quote is found here again, though again the visitor calls it a 'beautiful day', and describes what must have been a very overwhelming 'roar of a million people'. The scale of the event has made an impact on this man, and his participation in the construction of the platform.

These examples are used to demonstrate the different layers of meaning that exist around one space and one time within that space. There are multiple memories and multiple narratives of the event. Some of these enable unification between people who were there and relate to the dominant, official discourse, whilst others unpack and pull apart the meanings 'officially'

associated with the day. From both the quotes above we can see a celebration of the day, an admiration of the scale and unification but also alternative narratives, at once complementary and counter. By associating the break down of the Roman Catholic Church with this event the first two visitors are undermining the very meaning that the visit supposedly portrays; that of the strength of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. In the second account, the scale of the event and the man's participation in constructing the platform are the two main things he has taken from the day.

Of course, both accounts do pay heed to the official discourse, and there is considerable social pressure to do so. And the dominant discourse, of 'a beautiful, beautiful day', conceals other discourses through its pre-eminence and the social forces which maintain the dominance. As the park is portrayed as a national space, and there are specific ideas of Irish identity related to it, the space and its material artefacts conceal the mundane realities of Irish people's experiences of the Pope's visit. There is a desire to perpetuate a particular narrative around the day, and it is only revealed by uncovering personal accounts that offer different perspectives and additions to the over-riding narrative.

The next account looks at an event that has a more problematic position in Irish history, and the cultural and material artefacts it has left behind. This historical importance of this event is as great as the Pope's visit, and is as much a part of the history of the park. However, this event is controversial. It is not a time of celebration for the park, but instead a time of commiseration and negative press.

The Cross in the Ground – The Phoenix Park Murders

On the 6th May 1882, the Invincibles, a Fenian splinter group, stabbed to death the Chief Secretary Lord Cavendish and his Undersecretary Thomas Burke with surgical knives. This happened within sight of what is now Áras an Uachtarain, and was then the Viceregal Lodge. Lord Cavendish had been Viceroy in Ireland for less than 48 hours at the time of his murder. The Visitor Centre describes it as a ‘tragic murder’, using accounts from newspapers at the time. The Management of the park acknowledge that this was a device employed to avoid making a political comment on it. The murders were linked to a fight for independence from the Fenians, and so were regarded sympathetically by those people who would go on to fight in the 1922 War of Independence. In an interview with the Chief Superintendent, he was able to discuss this in relation to Park Rangers’ opinions, and link it to how the Visitor Centre display was put together, as can be seen in the extract below.

Chief Superintendent: And when we were doing the layout [the displays in the Visitor Centre] some of the old Rangers here were in the Troubles in 1922, they used to call them the Cavendish assassinations, they wouldn’t call them murders you know, and eh so, when we came to do the video here, so the guy [name], who was a forester but became an environmentalist and there was a Professor from Galway was the consultant. And he said we’ll see what the papers of the day were saying, and that’s what we went with and the kids were shouting stop press stop press murder in the park, it’s more acceptable when you’re quoting. So it was reporting on what was said back then.

(Chief Superintendent, 13th December, 2005)

According to the Chief Superintendent, the park has a responsibility to the visitors to not be overly ‘explicit about historical events. People come to the park for ‘a nice day out’, and so to be confronted with murders could prove unprofitable; they might not want to return. In addition, the political levels of this murder have powerful poignancy in the history of Ireland. In the Visitor Centre, there is a purposeful avoidance of engaging with the political and social ramifications by reporting only what the newspapers reported at the time.

The political ramifications of the murders could have been far greater than they were; the Irish public were appalled rather than inspired, and the battles that followed were fought in the political arena rather than the social one. This doesn't mean that they did not mark the landscapes of meaning that people associate with the park; the murders are the most commonly invoked event that occurred in the park when you ask people about it, it has made an indelible impression. In 2006, *Today with Pat Kenny*, an Irish radio show, ran a segment about Phoenix Park, and the murders were described as being one of the most influential occurrences in Irish political history, and were 'very powerful'. However, the mark it has physically made on the landscape of the park is less impressive.

The only official testimony to the murders and to Lord Cavendish is in St. Margaret's Church in Westminster. In Phoenix Park, there are no official statues or memorials to any of those killed; Burke, Cavendish or the eight men who were executed for the murder. There is however an unofficial memorial to the murdered men in Phoenix Park, and it is not entirely clear which murdered men are being remembered. The thing of folklore, and something which was dismissed by many of the officials in the park as a myth, there is a small cross, about 75cm long and 50cm wide, cut into the bank of grass opposite Áras an Uachtarain where the murders occurred. The secretary of the head office in the park along with many gardeners and grounds men felt that it was put there by a taxi driver in an attempt to increase business through tourism.

The Chief Superintendent had his own version of why the cross was there, which added another layer to the story. Every year, on the 6 May, somebody would come and place a bunch of flowers to commemorate Cavendish and Burke. The Chief Superintendent had worked in the park for almost fifteen years before being enlightened as to who placed the

bouquet there, and it was only through recounting the mystery of the cross to the Old Dublin society about the history of the park that he found the answer. At the end of the talk, a man came up to him and told him it had been his family doing it since the murder occurred. As the Chief Superintendent recounted,

Now I was giving a talk at the Old Dublin Society, this guy that was actually chairing the meeting, he said I beg your pardon, and I said we suspect it's a taxi man to boost the trade, and he said I beg your pardon, it's been my relatives that have done it for three generations, and now my grandkids are doing it. And I said that's amazing stuff, and I said how did that start? And his great-grandfather was on the three-wheel bicycle [who found the bodies], and having witnessed what happened, he undertook to commemorate it some way.

[...]

So your man, a nice guy, [name] from Fishamble St, and I was coming through the park a few years ago on the 6th of May and I see another guy putting flowers on it, and so anyway, I said that's not the guy and he was an old guy as well, and picked him up [in his car]. I said what are you doing? He said I'm commemorating the murders, and I said isn't that fantastic. And I said but you're not the guy, and he said it was his brother. And I went to the house, I live in the park there, and I took a photo of the guy and we'd a cup of tea and a sandwich...

(Chief Superintendent, 13th December, 2005)

The importance of the event for the men who placed the flowers and the Chief Superintendent is evident in the above quote. The Chief Superintendent feels that there should be a memorial there, though he recognises the sensitivity of the event. In addition, he said there are problems with putting 'contentious' things up on display, many of which are vandalised or taken away. As he describes;

CS: Now, we put a little timber surround on it [the cross], and we might put a second one there, something I suppose a bit off the record but eh there's a block of stone there and it has been damaged, and we think that's because someone thinks that's the marker, but it's only a marker for traffic. [...] And the self-guiding heritage trail, some of them have been stolen [...] and now we've knocked some of them down ourselves moving timber but some of the more sensitive ones have been stolen. And we haven't got around replacing them.

(Chief Superintendent, 13th December, 2005)

The people who were hanged for the murders were widely regarded as criminals whose actions were unreasonable and a disgrace to Irish society at the time, and this view predominantly continues in contemporary times, though there are alternative accounts. *The*

Blanket, a strongly nationalist journal of 'Protest and Dissent', uses the Phoenix Park murders as a means of condemning the political relationship between the Irish and British at the time, and cites the Irish Republican Brotherhood as saying the people who carried out this 'execution... deserve well of their country' (Dunne, 2003). There were some press reports at the time referred to the Invincibles as anarchists and, allegedly, Frederick Engels called the Invincibles 'Bakunists' (Black, 2005). In London the short-lived German anarchist paper '*Freiheit*' was shut down as a consequence of publishing an article 'applauding the assassination of Lord Frederick Cavendish by Fenians in Phoenix Park, Dublin, in May 1882' (quoted by Black, 2005). Another account explains the cross in a different way, describing how in 1938 James T. Farrell, the American novelist, came to Dublin to visit Jim Larkin, a prominent trade union and socialist leader in Ireland in the early 1900s. Farrell relates that while there Larkin,

...asked me if I wanted to see the monument to the Invincibles ... I imagined that I was going to see a statue, but this did seem passingly curious. The idea that there would be a monument commemorating the Invincibles in Dublin didn't make sense. We stopped in Phoenix Park, just opposite the Archbishop's palace. ... We got out. Jim walked along a path, looking down at the grass. I was bewildered. Jim became nervous, and he stared on the ground with some concern. Then he pointed. There it was. I saw a little hole where grass had been torn up. A cross had been scratched in the earth with a stick. I gathered that many Dubliners did not know of this act commemorating the Invincibles. Jim's boys always went out to Phoenix Park, and marked this cross in the earth. No matter how often grass was planted over it, it was torn up. The cross was marked in the earth.

(quoted in Black, 2005)

This account provides the alternative viewpoint that this cross is for the Invincibles and not for the murdered men. It would also seem to stand in contrast to the placing of flowers as discussed above. The most recent history of the park also claims that nationalist historians place the cross there each year as a means of commemorating the Fenian martyrs (Nolan, 2006).

The landscape is marked by the event, but the meaning behind the mark is contentious and far from being a simple memorial to murdered men. The mark exists in the landscapes of the memories of people I encountered in the park and they understand the cross variously across the spectrum of these accounts. In fact, some visitors had constructed meanings for the cross in the ground that drew on a wide range of, largely fictitious, understandings that bore little resemblance to any account presented here. Their landscapes of memory were not grounded in the narratives of history or official understanding, but were inspired by alternative things, such as childhood memories, stories or imaginaries.

Conclusion

Landscapes are made up of material and cultural artefacts that mark it through different processes and means. Events leave their traces on landscapes, and the way people remember these events and the different memories that are celebrated or commiserated mark the memories of people and their understandings of the landscape. Interactions between people and people, people and things, and between people and memories, produce the landscapes and topologies of contemporary spaces.

A national space is somewhere where ideas of the nation are produced and consumed, where material and cultural artefacts that hold important symbolic positions are located and the symbolism is strengthened through their positions within particular narratives. The examples in this paper are used to illustrate that these embeddings can occur within official narratives – as with the Pope’s cross – but they can also occur within lay or tactic narratives – as with the cross in the ground. Instead of national spaces being constructed through an official discourse that is all encompassing and unproblematic, national spaces are constructed through

the personal narratives, memories and traces that individuals associate with places, which are then pieced together to form a kind of story of the national space.

This is not meant to suggest that there is not an official account of the space; indeed there is a very strong one in many cases, as seen in the example of the Pope's cross. This event is positioned in the park and the national landscape as a symbolic, important event for the people of Ireland and for Ireland's position in the world. However, as also seen through this example, there are various understandings of the event, of the space and of the position of the event within the construction of a national space, that inform individual and cultural understandings of the occasion, some of which undermine the positive accounts officially celebrated. The different meanings of the space in which the important event occurred are also part of this process. The park in which these cultural and material traces are left is full of symbolic examples of nationhood, but what these come together to form is something multiple and diverse. The different ways people experience the agency of the landscape is contingent on their own understanding of how history exists within the landscape. And as such, following MacDonald (2006), this paper has engaged with empirical examples surrounding materiality and agency, and the ways in which particular cultural and material artefacts resonate in the contemporary with different individuals.

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