

Walking together as protest: Collective identity transformation in sectarian Northern Ireland

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Abstract

Although thirty years of violent sectarian conflict ended with the 1998 peace agreement, public spaces and politics in Northern Ireland remain contested. Paramilitaries and violence persist, affecting daily lived experiences. Following the death of journalist Lyra McKee in April 2019 at the hands of a dissident paramilitary group, a grassroots social movement developed, demanding to “re-boot” the peace agreement. *Lyra's Walk for Peace* engaged in a three-day 68-mile walk across Northern Ireland to acknowledge shared memories of loss and protest persistent sectarianism in politics and public life. Using embodied walking ethnography, I examine what meanings participants assigned to participation and what these narratives tell us about the embodied experience of walking in protest. Participants and organisers initially created a collective identity based on three themes: history, collective suffering, and an imagined future. This identity did not remain static throughout the protest. Instead, the meaning and identity of *Lyra's Walk* evolved through embodied experiences of public hospitality, solidarity and the bodily pain of walking which together generated strong emotions. Although the protest began with an orientation towards the past and future of Northern Ireland, by the end, the focus had shifted towards the embodied present.

KEYWORDS: protest, embodiment, emotions, memory, collective identity

Introduction

On 18 April 2019 a dissident paramilitary group shot and killed 29-year-old journalist Lyra McKee as she reported on a police raid-turned-riot in a heavily sectarian neighbourhood of Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland (J. O'Neill, 2019). Lyra's death was heavily politicised, sparking public outrage at ongoing social divisions, the lack of a government due to its collapse in 2017, and persistent paramilitary violence. Consequently, her death and the grassroots social movement, *Lyra's Walk for Peace* (hereafter referred to as *Lyra's Walk*), that arose out of it are best understood within the broader context of Northern Ireland's complex history of sectarian conflict.

In 1922, the Catholic-dominated Irish Free State gained independence from the United Kingdom, separating from Protestant-dominated Northern Ireland. Paramilitaries emerged on both sides in response to tensions between the Protestant majority, the Catholic minority, and the British government in Northern Ireland. The situation peaked with a period of violent sectarian conflict from 1969 to 1998, referred to as *The Troubles*. After thirty years of violence, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA) established peace (Bryan, 2017; Graham & Nash, 2006). Although often referred to using terms of religious identity, the conflict is not about religion but national identity, governance and rights with Protestants/Unionists seeking to remain in the United Kingdom and Catholics/Nationalists desiring reunification with the Republic of Ireland.

Today paramilitary groups and political divisions remain, and violence continues to disrupt lives (Balcells et al., 2016; Bryan, 2017). The death of Lyra McKee serves as a recent example of persistent violence and its connection to complex identity politics that structure daily lived experiences in Northern Ireland. Sectarian divisions determine where and when people feel safe, where they spend time, and how they engage with people and spaces around them (Jarman & Bell, 2012). Public spaces remain contested with widespread residential, social, and educational segregation. Additionally, the two communities regularly contest territory by marking public spaces with symbols of sectarian identity (e.g., flags, banners, murals, graffiti and public parades) (Balcells et al., 2016; Bryan, 2017). These symbols and activities maintain perceptions of difference and hostility.

Sectarianism also structures the region's politics and government. The GFA served as a peace agreement and framework for the government of Northern Ireland, establishing a power-sharing Executive between Unionist and Nationalist political parties. This arrangement continues to structure politics and inter-community relationships today and has entrenched sectarian divisions, polarising the political landscape (Graham &

Nash, 2006). This situation led to the collapse of the Executive in January 2017, creating a great deal of public uncertainty and frustration until the government re-formed in January 2020, seven months after Lyra's Walk (The Guardian, 2020).

Lyra McKee's death took place within this complex landscape and led to public demands for the government to reconvene, for paramilitaries to no longer be tolerated, and for a return to the spirit of the GFA. In the month following her death, several memorialising activities took place. A mural of Lyra appeared on a wall in Derry/Londonderry, crowds marched through the streets on vigils, songs were sung in her honour, and social media exploded with condolences and commentary on the significance of her death (@LyrasWalk, 2019c).

Wanting to take this public outrage further, a small group of Lyra's friends came up with the idea to organise a protest walk across Northern Ireland, from the capital city of Belfast to Derry/Londonderry where Lyra died. One organiser explained, 'the thought occurred to me the night after Lyra had been killed. It came really from a conversation among friends, in the annoyance of what happened and the fear of going back to this pervading violence' (L. O'Neill, 2019). Taking place one month after Lyra's death, in May 2019, the walk acted as more than a protest, providing friends, family and the public with a mechanism to consolidate their collective suffering. It presented a direct counterpoint to sectarian violence and ongoing social and political divisions. By walking across Northern Ireland, protestors used their bodies to embody the protest and lay claim to the landscape as belonging to neither side of the conflict. They made visible a third non-sectarian option: of peace, reconciliation, and togetherness.

The protest was a temporary, one-time event (see Lubit & Gidley, 2020 for further information). Organisers explained that they were ordinary people making a one-time statement as part of the grieving process. They had no intentions to take the movement further or to repeat the walk. Within two months, they removed their Facebook page, and no further posts appeared on Twitter. Additionally, although politicians did acknowledge the significance of Lyra's death, they made no significant response to the protest.

In this paper, I seek to answer the following questions: what meanings did participants assign to participation in the walk, and how did these meanings shift through the act of walking? I also consider what these narratives of meaning tell us about protest construction and transformation, and the embodied experience of a walking protest.

I primarily used ethnographic data collected through participation in Lyra's Walk. Walking has been the focus of research on such diverse topics as hiking (Menzel, 2017),

protest (Russo, 2014), urban spaces (Watts, 2016), and spirituality (Cova & Cova, 2019) and also serves as a methodology (Lee & Ingold, 2006; Pink, 2008), and a performative art (Pink et al. 2010). I used embodied walking ethnography to examine the experience of walking in protest and conducted unstructured interviews with fifteen participants while walking. I complemented that with an analysis of news articles, blogs and posts on Facebook and Twitter by organisers, participants and observers. Social media did not significantly influence the protest's evolution in contrast to other well-known protests (Papacharissi, 2016). Organisers used Facebook to communicate with participants and the public in advance while participants used Twitter primarily to share photos and thoughts during the walk.

I identified that the meaning of Lyra's Walk shifted as the walk progressed. Initially, participants explained their participation through personal memories and traumas that were situated in the region's history of conflict. As the walk progressed, individual understandings of meaning shifted with embodied experiences constructing a collective identity amongst walkers.

Lyra's walk for peace

Lyra's Walk took place over three consecutive days (Saturday through Monday), covering 68-miles, from Belfast to Derry/Londonderry. Participants travelled around 20 miles each day, with a portion of Day Two travelled by bus due to road closures. Image 1 shows the path taken, with overnight camping stops at Randallstown and Dungiven.

The organisers publicised Lyra's Walk via news outlets and social media, with participants asked to sign up through Eventbrite 'for one mile or the lot' (@lyraswalk, 2019a). People participated in several ways, not just through walking. Non-walking forms of participation included spectators lining streets; donors providing funds or supplies; volunteers driving alongside to carry belongings and provide the opportunity for breaks; a truck carrying camping supplies; stewards managing walkers; police helping with traffic control and safety; first aid providers; and individuals and organisations providing rest stops with bathroom facilities, food and drinks. The organisers provided walkers with high-visibility vests and t-shirts. They also provided some backpack flags that broadcast slogans: '#NotinOurName', 'Peace Walk Belfast to Derry,' 'Re-boot the GFA', and 'Lyra's Walk' (see Image 2).

Approximately 300 individuals participated as walkers, including a few children and dogs. Based on my observations, walkers were an even mix of men and women, with

ages ranging from early-teens to early-seventies, and mostly from Northern Ireland though I also met individuals from France, England, Venezuela and America.

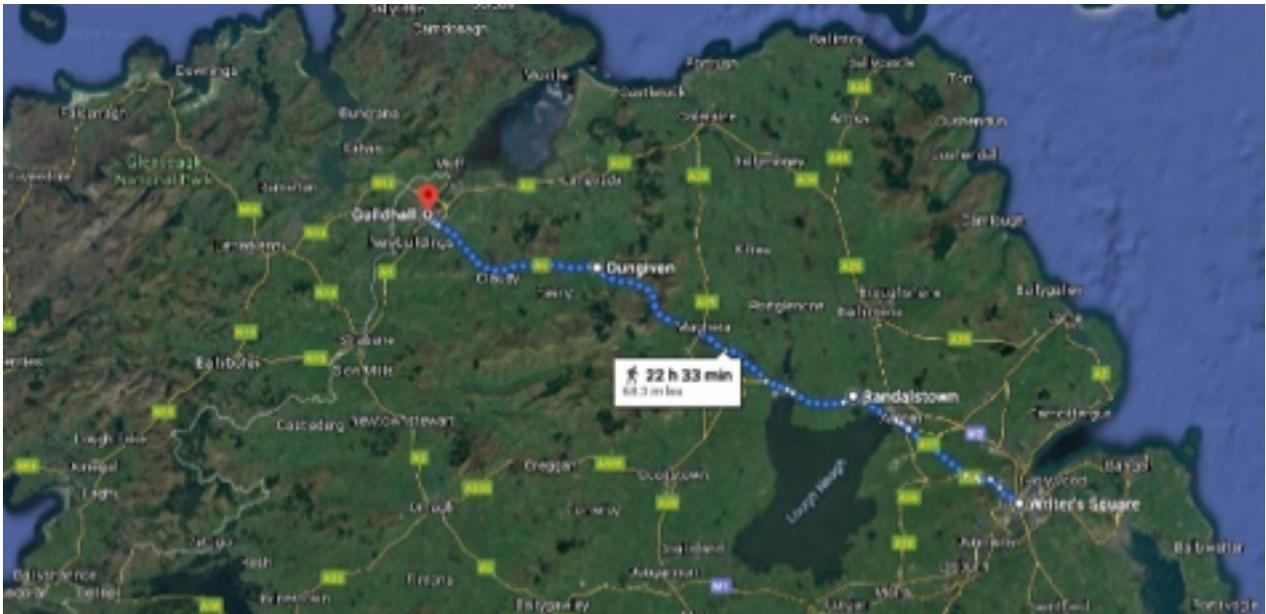


Image 1: Map of Lyra's Walk route, from Belfast to Derry/Londonderry (Adapted from Google Maps 2020)



Image 2: Walkers carrying backpack flags broadcasting slogans (Source: Author)

While 70 people formed the core group of walkers who walked all three days and camped overnight, the majority only participated in part of the walk. As the organisers explained in email communications, 'Lyra's walk is not about walking every physical mile.' Around 30 individuals began the walk in Belfast then left after the first few miles. Another 100 to 150 participants, the largest group, joined throughout Day Three to com-

plete the walk into Derry/Londonderry. Others came and went at different places and times, making them difficult to count. Some walked only a few miles on one day, others walked part or all of several days but returned home to sleep in their own beds before re-joining. This included participants with physical limitations and disabilities who wanted to take part but could not complete the entire walk. One participant posted: 'I'm doing this. I don't know how far I can walk or how long I can walk for, but I'm going to be there for as far as I can and as long as I can' (@LyrasWalk, 2019c).

Few participants had known Lyra. Some of the reasons they gave for participating were out of solidarity with Lyra's family and friends, having also lost people to the Troubles or to paramilitaries. Others identified with Lyra's sexual identity and activism. Several were motivated by the challenge of the walk, with the cause being of secondary importance and others just wanted to be part of something important. The organisers made it clear that the walk was conducted in Lyra's spirit meaning that everyone was welcome, regardless of their motivations or identity. Through walking, Lyra's Walk brought together people from diverse backgrounds who shared a desire to change existing power relations and contribute to a better future.

In the “spirit of protest, hope & determination”

From its creation, Lyra's Walk made connections between the protest and past legacies of violence. Two slogans that appeared on flags carried by walkers made this connection visible. The slogan Not in Our Name first appeared written on a wall where Lyra was killed in Derry/Londonderry and was later adopted by Lyra's Walk (Sawer, 2019). Walk organisers wrote it on T-shirts and backpack flags, and crowds chanted it when the walkers reached their destination in Derry/Londonderry. This statement declared that the public no longer tolerated paramilitaries using violence on their streets. The second slogan to re-boot the GFA also appeared on backpack flags and in the walk's charter. It referred to the public's desire to resurrect the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998 and implement its stated objectives of diversity, tolerance and reconciliation. This connection between Lyra's death, the walk and the GFA came up repeatedly in official communications and conversations with other walkers as a focus of the protest.

The organisers of Lyra's Walk explained the reasoning behind the walk in their charter (excerpt below). I identified three themes that commonly arose as sources of meaning for the organisers: history, collective suffering, and an imagined future. They framed the protest in relation to the region's history and experiences of collective trauma, declaring their intent to walk as a means of contributing to a better future:

... 21 years ago, we agreed on a fresh start, dedicated to 'the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all' and committed to 'partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between these islands'.

Yet 21 years later, Lyra's death reminded all of us of the loss, suffering and tragedy in our shared past. Our peace is still not mature. We cannot stand and watch while there is still work to be done...

Lyra's life has inspired us on this walk in her spirit of protest, hope and determination.

- By walking for Lyra we protest against the use of violence and the return of killing to our streets as a means to resolve our problems or for the pursuit of political goals...
- By walking for Lyra we are making a public demonstration of our belief in diversity, equality, dialogue and inclusion as important principles for our society...
- By walking for Lyra we are showing our belief that our political leaders should make every effort to ensure that the promises made 21 years ago are not lost for another generation and to support them in all efforts to recover 'the spirit of concord' which made agreement possible 21 years ago. (@lyraswalk 2019b)

The charter began by connecting Lyra's death to Northern Ireland's history of conflict and peace. The timing of Lyra's death held significance, happening *21 Good Fridays* after the signing of the GFA. The organisers positioned this link to the GFA as central to the movement, quoting the agreement to demonstrate their intention to create a peaceful society as promised by the GFA but not yet achieved. By weaving the past into the present protest, Lyra's Walk organisers situated themselves within a decades-long struggle for peace and equality, positioning themselves this way provided the movement with legitimacy, aligning themselves with the historical peace movement and against sectarianism.

Due to deep divisions, memory is highly contested in Northern Ireland, with historical events having vastly different meanings for the two communities (Conway, 2007; Johnson, 2011). Divided societies commonly contend with conflicting narratives of the past that result in the forgetting, transformation and disputing of memories (Pušnik, 2017). Instead of focusing on different interpretations of the past, I instead consider how the

past is used in the present. As Conway (2007, p. 118) states in his examination of collective memory in Northern Ireland, 'the way the past is remembered has a lot to do with contemporary needs and issues.' Memory work occurs regularly in Northern Ireland through commemorative practices by both sides of the conflict. Marches, monuments, murals, and other forms of remembrance commonly appear in public spaces as an attempt to control the historical narrative and lay claim to suffering and injustice (Bryan, 2017; Conway, 2007). Less commonly, alternative forms of commemoration seek to achieve reconciliation and peace by acknowledging the pain of the past as a foundation for a better future (Johnson, 2011). Lyra's Walk sought to do this by making those opposed to violence visible and using this visibility to mark public spaces as belonging to everyone, not just the two conflicting parties.

Through elicitation of the past, Lyra's Walk engages with what Daphi and Zamponi (2019) refer to as *memories of movements* and *memory in movements*, terms they use to distinguish between strands of research on social movements and memory. *Memories of movements* refers to how the public remembers past social movements, such as the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, which I discuss further in the next section. By making connections with past social movements, current movements gain authenticity, establishing themselves as part of a larger tradition (Kitch, 2018; Watts, 2016). *Memory in movements* refers to how the past provides context that shapes protest in the present (Daphi & Zamponi, 2019). For Lyra's Walk, this context comes from the Troubles and the GFA. By drawing inspiration from a document that the public "voted for" and "agreed on", the organisers sought to create a collective identity that the public would identify with and support.

The charter ended with a list of reasons for *walking*, a term used in place of *protest*. Walking allowed participants to demonstrate their commitment through collective action that moved through and engaged with public spaces. De Certeau (1988, p. 97) discussed walking as an everyday practice that shapes spaces of the city through 'pedestrian speech acts.' Similarly, in her history of walking, Solnit (2001, p. 217) discussed moments 'when bodily movement becomes a form of speech ... Such walking is a bodily demonstration of political or cultural conviction'. By "walking for Lyra", the organisers declared their intention to use walking as a form of speech that responded to past government failures to secure peace, protested the present use of paramilitary violence, and sought a better future that reflected GFA values of *diversity, equality, dialogue* and *inclusion*. These statements framed the protest in terms of the past, present, and future. Walk-

ing participants made similar connections to temporality, initially explaining the meaning of present participation in relation to past memories and future hopes.

Memories of the past & hopes for the future

Conversations with participants in Lyra's Walk illustrated that everyone participated for their individual reasons, though they agreed with the protest's overall intent. As Lyra's friend stated to the group as the walk began, 'we are all here because we want a better life'. In their introduction to an edited volume on the role of emotions in protest, Goodwin et al. (2001) identified several mechanisms that motivate individuals to participate in a protest including: the *cognitive liberation* of individuals who recognise an opportunity to act; *injustice frames* which allow people to act on outrage generated by injustice; recruitment through *social networks*; the generation of *collective identity*; and *emotions*. While each mechanism affected participation in Lyra's Walk to some extent, I focus upon the connection between *collective identity* and *emotions*.

Emotions can be difficult to identify and articulate, yet they 'pervade all social life, social movements included ... permeating our ideas, identities and interests' (Jasper, 1998, 398-399). Within social movements, emotions have the capacity to inspire and transform both protestors and public audiences (Andits, 2018; Cayli, 2017; Goodwin et al., 2001). To gain support, social movements intentionally appeal to and arouse emotions in others, either as a temporary or lasting response to an inciting event (Goodwin et al., 2001; Jasper, 1998). Collins (2001) examined the emotional dynamics of protest, identifying that individuals join a movement because of a negative *initiating emotions* like moral outrage, pity, despair, anger or concern; through participation these emotions transform into a positive *emotional energy* of confidence and enthusiasm associated with belonging and solidarity. Lyra's Walk initially motivated others through *initiating emotions* of sorrow and outrage, rooted in the past. Through participation, the focus shifted to a present *emotional energy* of excitement generated through participation, connection with walkers and audiences, and triumph in completing a meaningful and challenging task.

Emotions also relate to the concept of collective identity in social movements. Social movements construct, negotiate, and maintain their identity by developing 'a sense of themselves as a collectivity united in their beliefs, goals, and actions in opposition to some other group, body or force' (Einwohner et al., 2008, p. 1). Protests actively create a sense of identity throughout the life of a protest, navigating contradictions and conflicts to build solidarity among a diverse group of participants. They also construct identity in relation to external audiences, differentiating themselves from those they oppose and

highlighting similarities with those whose support they seek (Einwohner et al., 2008; Ghaziani, 2011; Jasper, 1997). Throughout Lyra's Walk, participants continued to engage in identity negotiation, shifting their understandings of participation.

On Day One, many participants explained their reasons for participating in terms similar to statements made in Lyra's Walk's charter, identifying history, collective suffering and the imagined future as sources of meaning. For example, one walker in her seventies said:

We woke up on Good Friday to the news of Lyra's death, and realised it's been twenty-one years since the agreement, and we're upset we've not gotten further forward. The idea is to go back to what the agreement is about and get the peace process going again and the politicians back in Stormont working for us. (May 25, 2019)

Her reason for walking mirrored statements made by organisers, referring to the past and future to explain the protest. In addition to references to the GFA, several walkers made historical connections to civil rights marches in Northern Ireland and the United States, which hold meaning for Catholic/Nationalist communities today (Campbell 2018). One man in his sixties referenced the 1969 People's Democracy March, which modelled itself after Martin Luther King's march. He stated that 'there is a connection between the civil rights movement here and there in the US' with walking used now and in the past as a form of protest. He mobilised this memory on behalf of *Lyra's Walk* to argue that the present protest fit into an established tradition. Although often described as new and unusual phenomena, social movements do not occur as singular ahistorical events. Instead, 'every episode of collective action takes place in a context that has been influenced by previous actions' (Daphi & Zamponi, 2019, p. 401). Through references to the past, walkers wove history into their current experience, allowing the past and present to share time and space, and using history to frame their current endeavour.

Walkers also identified collective suffering due to violence as another common theme, identifying personal and societal traumas over the previous five decades as reasons for participating. Two women in their late sixties and early seventies discussed the impact of the Troubles on their lives and the ways that trauma relates to the act of walking. The first proclaimed herself a "child of the Troubles" who has engaged in walking since childhood because it "was a way to be free". She chose to participate because she equated walking with a feeling of freedom from the difficulties of life in sectarian Northern Ireland. The second woman explained that she was 'very traumatised by the Troubles ... The thing that saved me, I walked every day. It saved my life.' She shared several trau-

matic childhood stories, including her escape from a bombed movie theatre and witnessing several people shot in the streets. Those incidents 'had just become part of a normal day, so you don't get upset by these events but just keep going with your life.' When she left Northern Ireland in her twenties, her trauma caught up with her, leading to years of severe depression and night terrors. She identified the healing power of walking as the source of her eventual recovery. Like the first woman, she drew connections between participation in Lyra's Walk and the ways walking helped her to address the emotional effects of past violence.

Other participants explained participation in relation to shared past trauma. One woman in her fifties explained that Lyra's Walk was a 'very emotional event' for her because her son was shot and killed by a paramilitary group in front of his three-year-old son two years before. Although she did not know Lyra, or anyone connected with her, she reached out to Lyra's partner to offer consolation and understanding for her pain. This connection to others through shared loss inspired her, and others, to walk in solidarity with the living and commemoration for the dead. A twenty-year-old woman demonstrated the role of intergenerational trauma, stating 'I have a family connection to this violence' because her uncle was killed by paramilitaries seventeen years before. Collective trauma in Northern Ireland affects not only those who lived through the conflict but also subsequent generations (Dawson, 2017). Together these stories show how past losses inspire emotions and action across generations.

Intergenerational effects of violence also arose when discussing hopes for a better future. Participants commonly made references to children and a desire for them to live without the violence and fear they experienced growing up. One woman explained:

I want my nieces and nephews to grow up with peace, not the way that we grew up with a lot of trouble and bombings and shootings. And I just don't want that for the... young people of today. (Q Radio News, 2019)

Several participants mentioned having children of their own and worrying about them. One man participated because his three daughters are around Lyra's age; seeing Lyra's life end so young left him heartbroken for her and her family, allowing him to imagine that the same could happen to his children. In these cases, current concerns for the younger generation inspired individuals to participate in the hopes of contributing to a better future.

Some protestors also made connections to the future by referring to the ongoing fight for LGBTQ rights. As Hayes and Nagle (2019) explain, a connection exists between the eth-

nonational conflict and LGBTQ rights in Northern Ireland. Although the 1998 GFA made a commitment to equality and diversity, the rights of sexual minorities remain a divisive issue; while Catholic/Nationalists support expanded rights, Protestant/Unionists oppose them and have repeatedly blocked the legalisation of same-sex marriage. Although Lyra's Walk organisers did not explicitly mention LGBTQ rights in their charter, sexuality played a meaningful part of the protest for many because of Lyra's identity as a lesbian activist. Rainbow symbols appeared on t-shirts supplied to walkers, on laminated signs attached to backpacks (see Image 2), and on signs displayed by audiences at rest stops and along the route (see Image 3). The recurrent use of these symbols demonstrated that individuals connected with Lyra on the basis of her LGBTQ identity and activism. Mary explained:

Part of my reason for doing this walk is because Lyra was a gay woman. It broke my heart to hear [about] this young woman, Lyra, who was a child of the supposed peace movement, growing up gay in Belfast... emotionally it impacted me. This young woman had such a brilliant life ahead of her. She was going to get married. We are still fighting for gay marriage. (May 27, 2019)

Several protestors similarly felt that they had lost a significant member of their community. They were not seeking to make a statement about LGBTQ rights but instead were inspired to walk in honour of Lyra because of their shared identity.



Image 3: Rainbow symbol on signs at a rest stop (Source: Author)

As these stories demonstrate, in Northern Ireland, emotional responses to violence 'are durational and involve complex relations between past, present and future' (Dawson, 2017, p. 95). Although participants spoke of past pain and suffering, they expressed and engaged with those emotions in the present in order to generate a better future. Participants were initially inspired to participate by personal *initiating emotions* of moral out-

rage, fear, anger, sadness, and concern that were situated in the past. Although they came together for different reasons, they were unified in their desire for a better future which they hoped to achieve through an active demonstration of solidarity and determination.

Transformation through embodied experiences

The practice of walking involves engagement between the body and the landscape; this process generates new and diverse forms of meaning. Examining an Australian social movement, Andits (2018) identified that protestors can undergo an emotional transformation through participation that alters their perception of the protest. This occurred in Lyra's Walk with the experience of walking together, shifting the meaning participants assigned to the protest. They experienced numerous hazards and hardships, including the physical toll on their bodies; a seemingly endless thirst and hunger; and extremes of weather. Suffering together and sharing in a physically challenging endurance walk helped to make Lyra's Walk a highly emotional experience for all participants. The emotions generated in the present shifted their focus from *initiating emotions* to the *emotional energy* generated by walking alongside others.

I identified this shift through my use of walking as a type of embodied ethnographic methodology. Walking with others involves an awareness of and emphasis upon participant and researcher senses that goes beyond what can be obtained during interviews or participant observation (Lee & Ingold, 2006; Pink, 2008). The body connects with the surrounding environment, sensing temperature, weather, inclines and declines, walking surfaces, proximity to other walkers and vehicles, and other aspects of the landscape (Lee & Ingold, 2006; Pink, 2008). The environment imprints upon the body through the skin (e.g., sensations of cold or wet), the limbs (e.g., perceptions of the landscape felt in feet and legs), the muscles and skeleton (e.g., through aches and bodily transformations like blisters or other injuries). By walking across Northern Ireland with Lyra's Walk, I gained deep and meaningful access to participant perspectives, sensations and emotions throughout their journey (see also Lubit & Gidley, 2020).

Most everyone started out as strangers on Day One of Lyra's Walk, but over time they began to connect with one another through shared experiences that generated a range of positive emotions. Regardless of differences and a lack of prior relationships, walkers came together through experiences of public hospitality and solidarity, physical vulnerability and discomfort. In his book examining features of protests, Jasper (1997, p. 186) identified that 'once a person begins to participate, she is subject to new social processes

that help shape her emotions, morals and cognition.’ In Lyra’s Walk, participation generated strong emotions in the present that combined with participants’ reasons for participating to generate deep and lasting meaning.



Image 4: An extended line of participants (Source: Author)

Meaningful experiences of hospitality and solidarity by the public occurred in various forms throughout the three-day walk. Since the protest walked along the main route between Belfast and Derry/Londonderry, walkers were highly visible to passing traffic. They walked alongside the road, side-by-side in a line that extended up to a mile at times, with walkers wearing fluorescent high-visibility vests, and colourful flags waving above them (see Image 4). In response to this sight, passing drivers honked their horns and waved to support the endeavour. The following Twitter posts demonstrate the meaning protestors assigned these small acts:

Drove by all the lovely people walking #lyraswalk in torrential rain. Beeped my horn as much as I could—people still mustering up soggy cheers and waves...

Those beeps kept us going... . (@LyrasWalk, 2019c)

The first message from a driver recognised the difficulty of conditions, with participants walking despite “torrential rain”. A protestor replied, expressing that these small acts of public support helped to energise walkers. In addition to passing cars, families also came out of houses and businesses to stand along the street watching, waving and cheering. In an email to participants after the walk, the organisers acknowledged:

All those people who helped us along the way... individuals and families who came out to wave and cheer, sometimes offering toilet breaks and glasses of wa-

ter; to every car that beeped its horn, every person who waved, every 'Yeeeoowww!' and 'Woo-hooo!' yelled out a passing car window; every person who simply said, 'Well done'. (June 2, 2019)

These interactions with the public generated positive feelings of enthusiasm, triumph and joy for walkers. The resulting *emotional energy* reinvigorated them and contributed to a sense of collective identity.

Another significant form of support came through the provision of food and drink. Walkers shared what they had with one another along the way but, more significantly, community volunteers greeted walkers at rest stops with prepared food, drinks, support and encouragement. The most dramatic example of hospitality came at the end of Day Two, when walkers reached the day's stopping point. Mary described the greeting they received:

People are coming out into the gardens to greet us and every car is honking ... As we walked into the town people had come out onto the street to greet us and to serve food ... Forty families in the small town of Dungiven came out to feed us and offered us a room, hot shower and breakfast if people don't want to camp. (May 27, 2019)

The plan had been to setup tents at a prearranged campsite for everyone remaining overnight; however, the community of Dungiven surprised the walkers by opening their homes and offering a place to get clean, eat, and sleep. These communal acts of hospitality had a significant impact upon the morale of walkers who felt exhausted, dirty, and in pain.

Shared physical vulnerabilities and sensations also generated meaning in the bodies of walkers. For this reason, it is important to explore the connection between the body and protest. According to Sasson-Levy and Rapoport (2003) who researched the role of body and gender in Israeli protests, some social movements focus upon the body as the subject of protest, while others use the body to carry the protest's message. Lyra's Walk falls into the latter category, utilising the bodies of protestors as an expression of the protest and its messages. The protest took place through bodily movement and that movement left its marks upon the body. Through the endurance of pain and injury, participants demonstrated their embodied commitment to the protest.

Physical aspects of the walk became a focal point nearly halfway through Day One and remained a common topic of conversation and social media posts throughout the protest. Walkers faced harsh weather conditions, exhaustion, hunger, thirst, bodily pain

and injury. They walked through cold, rain, wind and hail, up steep hills, and across extensive distances. Since most had no prior experience with long-distance walking, nearly everyone suffered leg or foot injuries with several visibly bandaged or using crutches. The farther they walked, the greater the impact on their bodies. Halfway through the first day, I captured this moment in field notes:

They told everyone we had to keep going because if we stopped for too long it would be difficult to get going again... I feel a strong tug of longing to sit in a chair and rest my feet which had developed several blisters. After leaving the church, everyone was much more subdued, myself included.

When stopping walking at the rest stop, walkers became aware of the ways in which the walk imprinted itself upon the body. Shoes were removed, muscles massaged, knees bandaged, and medics were kept busy moving person-to-person.

The duration, distance and physical hardship associated with Lyra's Walk distinguish it from other more common forms of protest and demonstration. It shares similarities with other long-distance walks like the Migrant Trail protest (Russo, 2014) or pilgrimages (Cova & Cova, 2019) where participants experience similar types of pain and injury as a consequence of walking for a purpose. Although pain is commonly avoided and labelled as destructive in Western culture, some engagement with pain can prove productive (Cova & Cova, 2019; Schilling & Mellor, 2010). Through the experience of physical discomfort, individuals gain awareness of their bodies that can lead to greater spiritual and social connections with others going through the same experiences (Cova & Cova, 2019; Russo, 2014). As Lyra's Walk came to an end, one participant stated, 'we are all family now', verbalising the feelings of connection and affection generated through their shared struggle. Through a collective awareness of their physical selves produced by prolonged physical discomfort, the participants forged a new collective identity focused upon present rather than past experiences.

Engaging in 'sustained, difficult, emotional, even painful collective experiences' for a cause fosters a sense of empowerment that generates long-term support for the movement and solidarity between participants (Jasper, 1997, p. 197). Following the walk, participants demonstrated this through connections they made between their physical discomfort and positive feelings in Twitter posts:

Such footblisteringly painful happiness!

Thank goodness. Drenched and hungry on #LyrasWalk. Worth every step though.

I am absolutely wrecked, drenched, back home, and most importantly proud to have been a part of it. @LyrasWalk was an unforgettable journey, walking from Belfast to Derry over 3 days, my feet won't forgive me in a hurry but we made it.

Still emotional a few hours later. Let's never forget what happened and the powerful message sent today. People have the power. Don't stop believing. (@LyrasWalk 2019c)

Although "drenched", "hungry", and "wrecked", participants felt a residual positive *emotional energy* from the experience that they described as happiness, relief, pride, and empowerment. The positive emotions generated through participation transformed the protest's collective identity from its initial focus upon past suffering to present embodied experiences of the protest.

Conclusion

The meaning and collective identity of protests go beyond their stated purpose with participants experiencing a transformation. Russo (2014) studied the Migrant Trail, a border-justice movement that protests migrant deaths by recreating an embodied migrant experience through a 75-mile walk from Mexico to the U.S. Through the physical discomfort of walking, activists develop compassion and understanding. However, activists shared no common identity prior to the walk, with their experience taking place entirely in the present. While Lyra's Walk did involve identity transformation through bodily suffering, it differed in terms of temporality, with participants sharing a past, present and future. Even though Lyra's Walk was short-term, the experiences of the protest can be presumed to persist because of the pre-existing collective identity of walking and non-walking participants. Andits (2018) provided another example of transformation, examining the concept of success in social movements. Although a protest by Hungarians in Australia failed to meet its political goals, it succeeded in transforming negative emotions of fear and shame into empowerment through collective performance of identity. Lyra's Walk participants experienced a similar transformation of negative to positive emotions through the performance of the walk.

Protests have the power to transform participants through emotional and bodily experiences. They allow people to discover and develop new aspects of themselves as individuals and members of a collective. These transformations are often subtle and unintentional yet have the potential for a lasting impact upon participants, the protest, and society.

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Povzetek

Čeprav se je trideset let nasilnih sektaških spopadov končalo z mirovnim sporazumom iz leta 1998, javni prostori in politika na Severnem Irskem ostajajo sporni. Še vedno obstajajo paravojaške enote in nasilje, ki vplivajo na vsakdanje izkušnje. Po smrti novinarka Lyre McKee aprila 2019, ki jo je zakrivila disidentska paravojaška skupina, se je razvilo množično družbeno gibanje, ki je zahtevalo "ponovni zagon" mirovnega sporazuma. Lyra's Walk for Peace se je v tridnevnem, 68-kilometrskem pohodu po Severni Irski, odzvala na skupne spomine na izgubo in protestirala proti vztrajnemu sektaštvu v politiki in javnem življenju. Z utelešeno etnografijo hoje preučujem, kakšne pomene so udeleženci dodelili udeležbi in kaj nam te pripovedi pripovedujejo o utelešeni izkušnji hoje v znak protesta. Udeleženci in organizatorji so sprva ustvarili kolektivno identiteto, ki temelji na treh temah: zgodovini, kolektivnem trpljenju in zamišljeni prihodnosti. Ta identiteta ves čas protesta ni ostala statična. Namesto tega sta se pomen in identiteta Lyrinega pohoda razvila skozi utelešene izkušnje javne gostoljubnosti, solidarnosti in telesne bolečine pri hoji, ki so skupaj ustvarjale močna čustva. Čeprav se je protest začel z usmeritvijo v preteklost in prihodnost Severne Irske, se je poudarek do konca premaknil proti utelešeni sedanjosti.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: protest, utelešenje, čustva, spomin, kolektivna identiteta

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