Behind the Research

EDITOR:
GARY HUSSEY
POST DOCTORAL FELLOW

In this second edition of our new school magazine, we peek behind the curtain to reveal some of the personal stories and motivations that shape our research and academic lives. Our varied paths through academic life, as students, as researchers, as educators, as administrators, tend to be obscured by our intensive focus on the outputs of our work - the books, the articles, the grants, the awards, and so on. So this issue strikes a more personal tone, as some of the members of our school discuss their routes to academia, as well as the values that help them navigate these pathways.

We are also excited to share the findings of an ambitious research project by some of our excellent undergraduate students. Supervised by Dr Sarah Carol, final year students conducted research on the social structure of Dublin neighbourhoods, and we are very proud to showcase their work in Socio Spotlight.

And finally, my time as a post-doc as a UCD post-doc comes to end at the end of August. It has been a great 12 months, and I wish you all the best.

University College Dublin
**Ireland's Global University**

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF DUBLIN NEIGHBOURHOODS

Caja-Lucia Connor, Ronan Costello, Zindzi de Barra, Nicole Holland, and Adriana Paragados. Supervised by Dr Sarah Carol

As part of our final year undergraduate degree, we took part in a research module that enabled us to carry out primary research and produce a report that illustrated our findings. Our topic of research was the social structure of Dublin's neighbourhoods, with a specific focus on the areas of East Wall and Shankill. This report aimed to answer the question of how inequalities are visibly present within these two neighbourhoods. These areas were chosen to be examined, as East Wall's location as an inner-city, residential area, wherein gentrification is currently taking place, was seen to be an interesting region to explore in order to draw conclusions as to the similarities and differences between it and Shankill, which is a suburban residential area.

By using census data and direct observation, we were able to analyse the make-up of each neighbourhood, which allowed us to find several differences in these areas that indicate the presence of inequalities. For instance, census data showed that renting from a private landlord was much more common in East Wall, whilst most people own their own property in Shankill, which showcases inequalities in regard to housing.

Our observations found litter to be an extremely prevalent issue throughout the entirety of East Wall. It consisted of items that indicated anti-social behaviour which were present on the street and even next to bins, in amounts simply too large to capture in our report. In contrast, litter in Shankill appeared more sporadically and consisted mostly of empty food wrappers. There was also a higher level of graffiti that indicated vandalism in East Wall than in Shankill, with pieces that were larger in size and located in more public areas. Another distinct inequality that was observed was in regard to the availability of green space, wherein East Wall only had 2 green areas open to public use, whilst Shankill had 36. In Shankill, the strong presence of community initiatives – such as Tidy Towns – encouraged community care and discouraged acts of disorder.
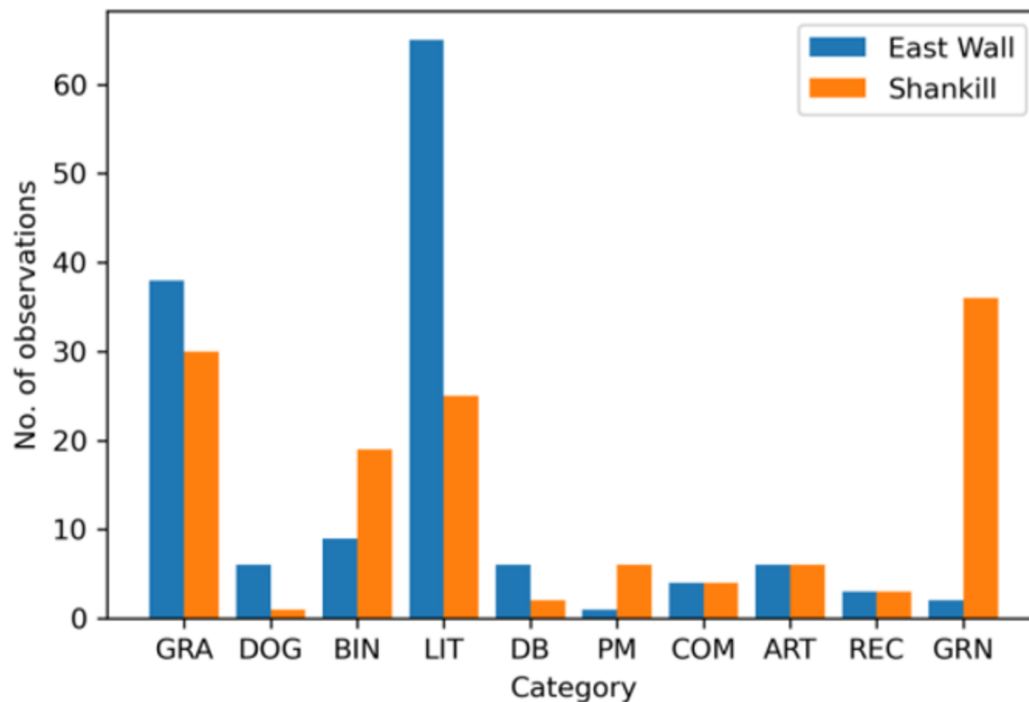
*Note: Legend: GRA = Graffiti, DOG = Dog poo, BIN = Bin, LIT = Litter, DB = Derelict building, PM = Political mobilisation, COM = Community centre, ART = Art, REC = Recreational use, GRN = Green area

The results of our study showcase that there does indeed appear to be inequalities visibly present in these two Dublin neighbourhoods, which were made clear through our observation and analysis of the presence and scarcity of several features, including litter, graffiti, and green spaces. Our primary research supports previous findings and research regarding the broken glass theory and inequalities regarding the availability of green spaces in inner-city areas.

Our involvement in this research project encouraged and facilitated communication between members of our group and our supervisor Dr Sarah Carol, in order to develop approaches that would be beneficial to this particular topic of study. Participation in this research was a brilliant experience, with our mixed methods approach – which involved the analysis of census data alongside direct observation -, allowing us an opportunity to both examine existing material and gather our own data, thus allowing us to contribute new information to the study of urban sociology.

Link to report:

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4864219

Map showing the presence of green space, graffiti, bins, and community centres in Shankill.

Shankill variables co-ordinates

- ● green space
- ● graffiti
- ● bin
- ● community centre

Shankill Neighbourhood Boundary

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Figure description: Map showing the presence of green space, graffiti, bins, and community centres in Shankill

Public Green Areas in Shankill

Shankill Neighbourhood Boundary

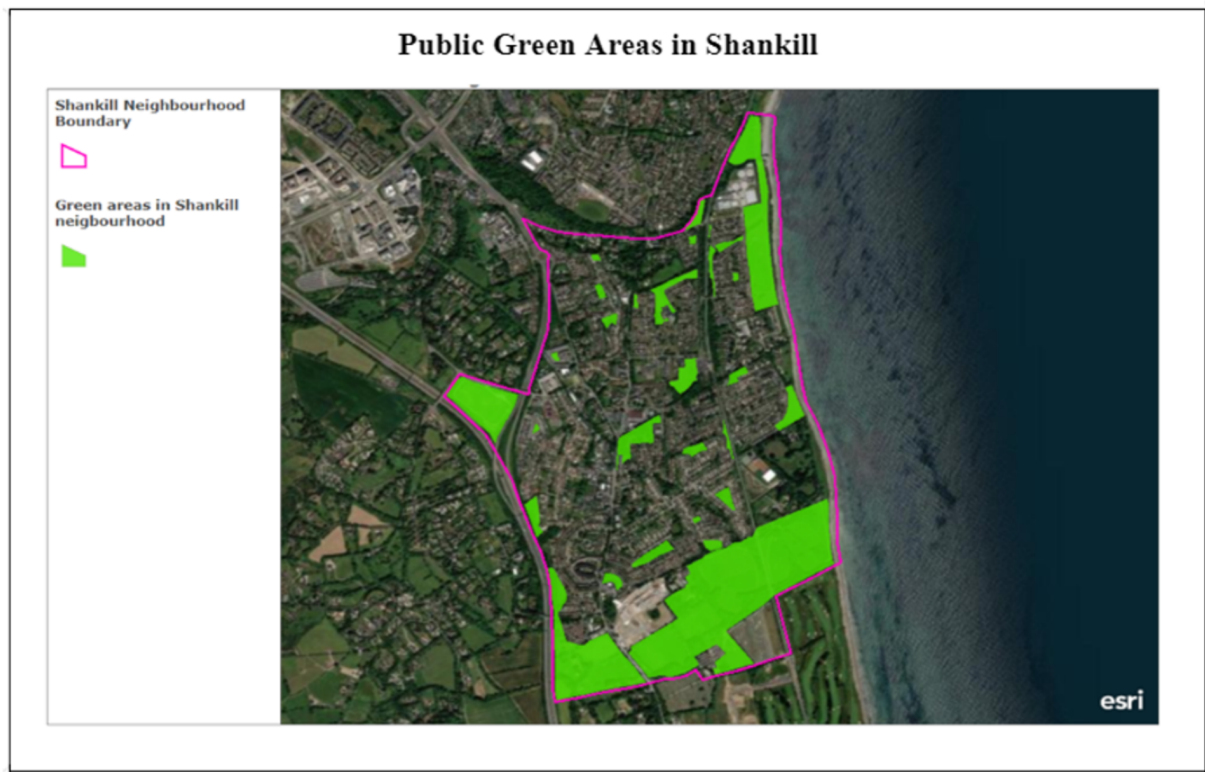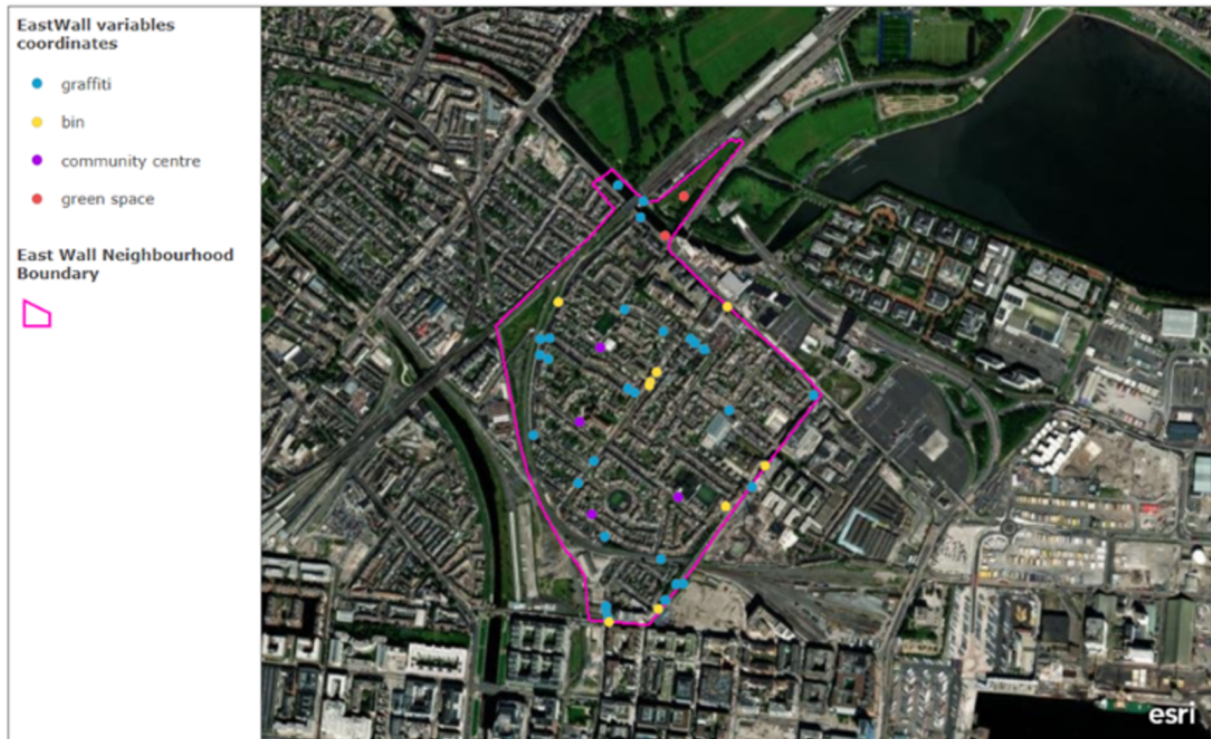Green areas in Shankill neigbourhood

esri

Figure description: Map showcasing public green areas in Shankill

Map showing the presence of green space, graffiti, bins, and community centres in East Wall.

EastWall variables coordinates
- graffiti
- bin
- community centre
- green space

East Wall Neighbourhood Boundary

Public green areas in East Wall

Green areas in East Wall Neighbourhood

East Wall Neighbourhood Boundary

Figure description: Map showcasing the public green areas in East Wall

DEIRDRE BROPHY
SOCIOLOGY'S SCHOOL MANAGER
THE LONG ROAD TO UCD!

When I tell people that my first job in a University was typing names onto degree parchments using a typewriter, they used look at me like either I'm far too young to remember this, or that world was so much less sophisticated then. That look is getting more lengthy and analytical the more years I add to my career, but I'll happily file that under "denial" for the moment. The eyebrows raise even further when I tell them that signing my first contract in Trinity College Dublin was done on a large ornate mahogany desk. My shaking hand scribbling my name on the official document, witnessed by Pat, the Human Resources. Pat welcomed me by setting down her cigarette in the huge ashtray and pumping my arm - "welcome to Trinity". It was 1997 and I was 20 years old.

I hadn't thrived in education as a student. A tendency to only want to learn what I was really interested in, and then delve into that in depth - what I now know as "monotropism", led me down paths and rabbit holes that got me A's in some subjects and F's in others. Teachers despaired at my handwriting but lauded the content. I once wrote a summary of a book that was longer than the book and learned that was called "critical analysis".

I grew up the kind of town everyone left at 18. I enrolled into night school whilst working a couple of part time jobs and sleeping on my siblings sofas. Courses in philosophy and theology attracted me at first but while I loved logic and language, I couldn't make those theological leaps. Nor eventually the payments, as it emerged, so instead I joined the unemployment line and found myself compelled to undertake a state provided course called Business and Office Technology via Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS) - now called Solas - if I wanted to receive any state payments.

It was there that my love of order and structure found expression - via the keys of a typewriter and eventually when deemed fit, onto a real computer. Armed with these skills, and a little bit of business French, I took to the job market and found rejection at every turn until, desperate, I found an agent to whom I told my story. I was given a two week trial in Trinity College and during that time I worked hard to put everything in order. One in and one out systems were imposed as cupboards were furiously tidied, degrees were typed, efficiencies discussed, and working relationships were formed. I secured a position in TCD's Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology supporting the Professor and Chair of the Department both in his academic and clinical roles. My night studies continued following interests as they emerged: a Teaching Diploma in IT Skills, a Management Diploma, a Certificate in Legal Services, a Diploma in Public Relations.

I came to UCD Sociology via a very circuitous route following a number of disappointing roles in the private sector and a realisation that the diversity and variety of the University environment and a life in public service was where I wanted to be. I joined UCD in 2003 in a PA role to the Dean of Medicine, jumped ship to Sociology in 2009 into an Undergraduate Administration role with the intention of staying just a few months. 15 year later, I manage the School!

My arrival into the School of Sociology coincided with a directive to implement a Virtual Learning Environment into the school and I upset more than one sociologist in making this transition from paper based essays to online submissions. We've been making transitions ever since - but without upset at this point, mostly. There's a new finance system coming in January next year so I guess there may be tears then!

I have learned so much from working in Sociology and see so much more now that I've learned a bit about seeing via a sociological lens. It has helped me to contextualize my own experiences and to work further towards providing supports in meaningful, nuanced, and equitable ways. I feel privileged to have supported so many students who needed the right combination of warmth, firmness, and clarity, and to share in their educational journey. To have the opportunity to listen to academic staff and PhD candidates as they grapple with the various demands of teaching, research, external and administrative responsibilities. Sharing in their achievements when they publish a book, their thesis, or make an impactful change. Supporting and representing them and our School in the best way I can.

As School Manager right now I am excited by developments in accessibility, Universal Design for Learning, being part of the digital transformation, and the continued professionalisation of administrative staff. I'm working with a colleague on a first generation to university programme, for which I received a UCD Values in Action Award. We are hoping to achieve our Athena Swan Bronze Award in the coming academic year, an exercise which highlighted the changing culture of our school as a workplace and the gender inequality that exists in academia and beyond.

The talent, expertise, and passion of everyone in the school is palpable and being given the opportunity to be what has been described as "the soul" of this school is a privilege for which I am grateful.
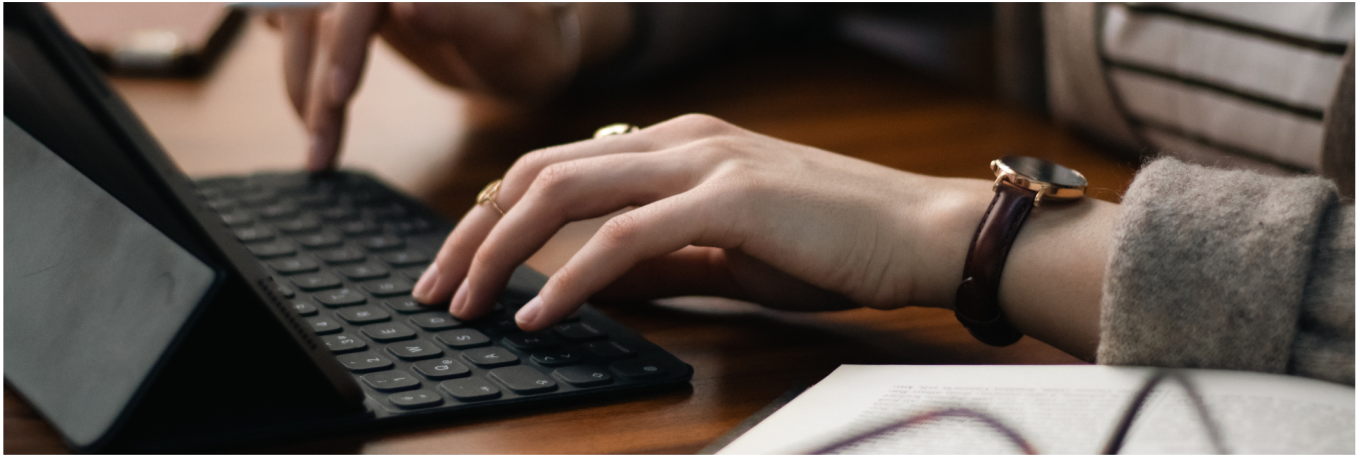
FROM ADOPTION TO ACTIVISM TO ACADEMIA

CLAIRE MCGETTRICK
BORN LORRAINE HUGHES

My route to academia is somewhat unusual. I am an adopted person who grew up under Ireland's closed, secret adoption system. This means that as a child, I had no contact with or knowledge of my mother or other members of my family of origin. Although it is now over thirty years since I first met my mother, I am still denied access to the full dossier of records associated with my adoption. This personal experience of inequality brought me to the world of activism and advocacy.

I am a co-founder of Justice for Magdalenes Research and Adoption Rights Alliance. I also co-direct the multi-award-winning Clann Project and the Magdalene Names Project which has recorded the details of over 1,900 women who lived and died in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries. Over the past two decades, my colleagues and I have gathered thousands of pages of documentary evidence and witness testimony from people affected by so-called 'historical' injustices.'

Through my personal experience, activism and advocacy work, I came to recognise flaws and inadequacies in the bodies of expert knowledge on adoption. Moreover, most adopted people are excluded both from knowledge production processes, and from accessing the knowledge that is constructed about them. Additionally, my activism taught me that being adopted, or being an experienced adoption activist was not reason enough to be afforded meaningful participation at the seat of power on matters that affect us.

TO ACADEMIA
These factors led me to enter the academic sphere with a view to conducting doctoral research. That journey began in 2011, when I participated in the Access to Arts, Humanities,

Social Sciences and Law course at UCD to facilitate entry into the Bachelor of Social Science undergraduate degree. I have just completed my PhD research, Making Up Adopted People: Pathologisations in Adoption Psychology and the Shaping of Adoption Policies and Identities.

I am grateful to my supervisor Dr Seán L'Estrange, who went over and beyond in supporting my research. Making Up Adopted People analyses the construction and circulation of a particular kind of expert psychological knowledge with respect to adopted people. I took this approach because the policies and practices affecting adopted people are closely associated with a common belief that these individuals are psychologically vulnerable. In turn, these beliefs are inextricably linked with the expert knowledge that is constructed about adopted people. Thus, the project challenges prevailing paradigms, presumptions, research findings, and the pathologisation of adopted people in adoption knowledge.

Having emerged from the other end of the PhD tunnel, I have no regrets about my decision to illuminate past and ongoing injustices through academia. In November 2023, the National University of Ireland awarded me an Honorary Doctorate in Laws. Given the academic route that my work has taken, this recognition was especially meaningful. Most importantly, I hope that Making Up Adopted People will have an emancipatory effect, and that it will empower activists, advocates and individual adopted people with new vocabulary and concepts.

IARFHLAITH WATSON: BEHIND THE RESEARCH

The main principle that motivates my research is the oneness of humanity. Within that oneness there is another concept of unity in diversity. I have always been interested in seeing the world through that lens. So many issues are relevant, whether it's about equality of gender, race, class, etc., or questions around nationality, economics, education, etc. My research has usually linked to questions of how we maintain or even increase diversity in the world while also finding forms of solidarity that facilitate, rather than hinder, humanity working together. This seems a more urgent (even existential) question today than it was when I started my sociology journey in the 1980s . Like many teenagers I spent a lot of time just staring into space - I almost took that literally to pursue astrophysics - but I also used to read anthropology books. In the months before the Leaving Cert I discovered sociology and, thanks to the CAO change-of-mind slip, I applied to study sociology at university.

Given where we are now, with so many global problems, I'm glad I made that decision back in 1988. My current and near-future research will focus on issues relating to nationalism and environmentalism. In the past few years I've been working a lot with Lorenzo Posocco (University of Copenhagen), which has been a very good collaboration for me. I find that bouncing ideas off a colleague regularly helps me think through some of the ideas, and gives me more motivation to do more research. If anything I've said here can be taken as advice, that's great, but I don't think I have any particular advice to offer - we each follow our own path.

astrophysicist?

GARY HUSSEY: BEHIND THE RESEARCH

In 2011, with Ireland still reeling from the 2008 economic crash, I returned to third level education as a twenty-five year old mature student. I went to NUI Galway to finally get my BA degree. Back in 2006, I had a less than successful stint at University College Cork (I did not make it past the first year), so this time I was more than anxious to make it work. Still, in retrospect, my decidedly brief time in UCC was not a total failure. There I became obsessed with social and political thought. Even though I felt I was, given my interests, somewhat languishing outside of the university space, I continued my reading in the broad areas of political philosophy and history. It wasn't all bad by any means. I have very fond memories of my 'inter university years' working in Lee Records. Lee's was very much a local institution, and I remain convinced that there is the potential for a half-decent sitcom based on time I spent there!

My time in NUI Galway was characterised by a near singular focus and a sense of purpose. Being from a working-class background, I felt that this was my opportunity 'make things right' and finally get my degree. I feared that it was unlikely that I would get another shot at university.

I knew very early in my undergraduate study that I wanted to pursue academic research. While I spent many years as a activist, I found the process of sharpening my critical understanding of society and politics profoundly rewarding. Marx famously said that philosophers had only interpreted the world while the real point was to change it. Much to the chagrin of some of activist friends, I was consumed with critical interpretation!

After I completed my undergraduate in Sociology & Political Science and History, I went straight to PhD at NUI Galway. My PhD research concerned the spatial dynamics of violence in the north of Ireland from the mid-nineteenth to the later-twentieth century. The project very much reflected my formation at NUIG, as my research was deeply historical in its use of archival sources and was also very much theoretical in its mobilisation of contemporary social and political thought. What somewhat differentiates my work from contemporary social theory is this reliance on the use of historical archives in the study of political violence.

Though very rewarding, combining deep archival research with theoretical work can be frustrating and very time intensive. Yet, no matter how many times I swear to myself that I am done with archival research, I soon find myself amongst piles of nineteenth century local newspapers or fumbling through state archives.

The precise motivation behind my research or the pull that lures me to academia in general escapes me. Though the ethical and political potentialities in developing critical analyses is certainly one powerful factor. For all the problems it can bring, my wife jokes that I have only 'one mode' - that I am always more or less switched on academically. So, I am still working on a healthy separation between my academic self and my other roles. When the stars are aligned, research does not feel like work. So, it seems that being a scholar is what makes me 'tick'. As Lacan famously encourages us, 'enjoy your symptom!'

SOFIYA VOLVAKOVA
BEHIND THE RESEARCH

I began my academic journey in political science in 2014 and graduated just before the COVID-19 pandemic. I enjoyed learning and writing, but there was something about my degree that never sat right with me. I never intended working in the government after graduating, and more importantly still, I got disenchanted with politics over time.

Seeing elitism and nepotism and learning about corruption scandals and politicians' immunity, I went through anger, sadness, and eventual acceptance that I am not the right person to join the ranks of a bureaucratic giant. For the first few months after graduating, I basked in the relief and joy of never having to talk about political theory and political violence in the classroom again. But those feelings evaporated quickly. I began feeling lost, empty, and disconnected. There is always something anticlimactic about finishing college that can leave many graduates feeling directionless. After four years of meeting deadlines, stressing about exams, and juggling full-time study with a part-time job, a crucial question hinges in the air: and now what? For me, there was silence. I prefer to describe this part of my life as a case of post-graduate melancholy. Even though my fellow classmates have managed to build envious careers by joining embassies around the world, moving abroad to work for the UK Parliament and the U.S. Congress, as well

as getting high-paying civil service jobs and quickly moving up the ladder in Ireland, I quickly learnt that feeling odd and sad were not unique to me. Other former students have similarly experienced what they called post-graduate blues, a bittersweet malaise following graduation from college.

For me that feeing was aggravated by an introspective sense of cognitive loss or intellectual deterioration. I profoundly missed exams, writing critical appraisals, and being engulfed by an interesting read which could only be interrupted by the librarian's bell announcing the closure of the facilities for the night. I missed talking to lecturers, enjoying stuffy debates in the classroom, and having long university conversations. I missed being part of college societies, attending guest speakers' presentations, and the satisfying feeling of being part of the academic community. There was this acute and upsetting realisation that my own value in the intellectual stock market had dropped and could never be recuperated again if I enter the corporate world.

After several years of working for non-government organisations at home and abroad, and discovering and re-discovering my passion for working with disadvantaged groups, I made a life-changing decision to return to academia and switch the fields from political science to sociology. Ireturned to college, obtained a second masters degree, and began my PhD journey in UCD in January 2024. Half a year into the programme, the passion is still there and burning high.

While my academic career has been bumpy and not without obstacles so far, I am grateful for every second of this imperfect and beautiful journey to who I truly am and want to become.

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JOINT ARCHITECTURE AND SOCIAL SCIENCES SESSION ON CARING COMMUNITIES:
MAPPING THE CARE MANIFESTO

Undergraduate Project organised by Hugh Campbell (Architecture) and Rubén Flores (Sociology

On 19 February 2024, social science students from the module The Sociology and Ethics of Care (SOC20410) joined forces with Architecture students in order to work on a project aimed at the redesign of a Dublin suburb (Mount Merrion) in the context of the climate emergency.

Working in mixed groups, students produced a map that represented their suggestions for transforming suburban spaces in more caring and sustainable directions. There was no shortage of good ideas, from the creation of community gardens to public bathrooms and a centralised hot water supply system. The session, which was jointly organised by Hugh Campbell (Architecture) and Rubén Flores (Sociology), may or may not have been a first for UCD, but was a very vibrant gathering that was welcomed by participants from both Schools.
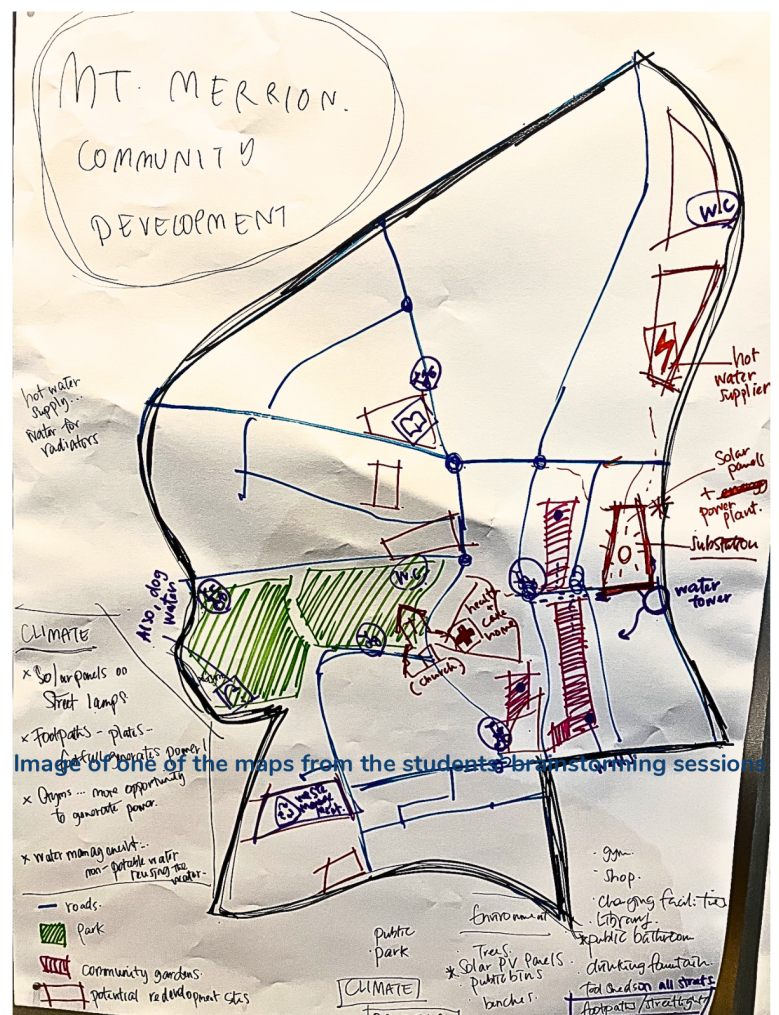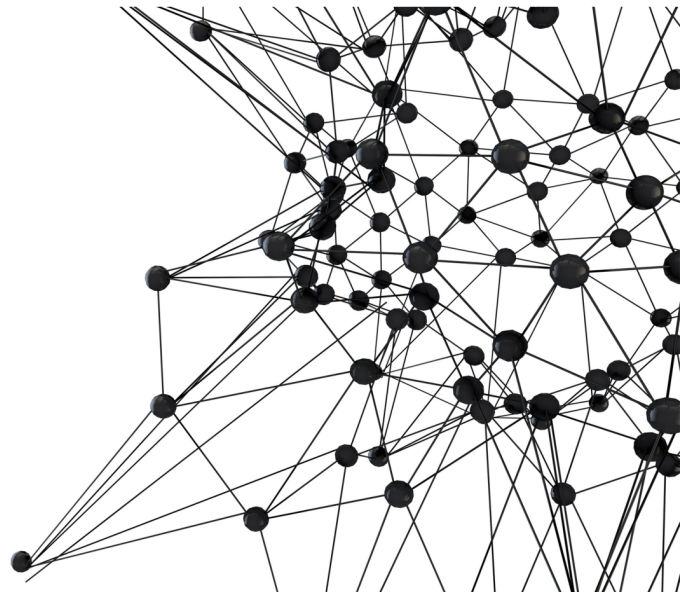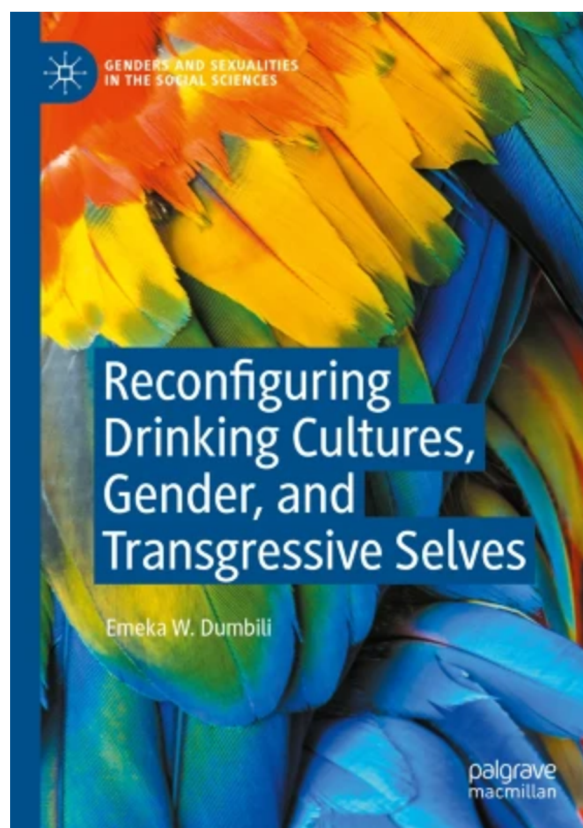

Image of one of the maps from the students brainstorming sessions

New Book!

RECONFIGURING DRINKING CULTURES, GENDER, AND TRANSGRESSIVE SELVES

Emeka W. Dumbili
UCD Sociology

GENDERS AND SEXUALITIES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Reconfiguring Drinking Cultures, Gender, and Transgressive Selves

Emeka W. Dumbili

palgrave macmillan

About the book

This book presents an in-depth analysis of young people's experiences of diverse drinking practices, including heavy drinking and drunkenness, as fun and pleasurable as they navigate gendered leisure spaces. Using qualitative data elicited through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, the analysis engages with theories and concepts of culture, gender, and transgression to foreground the roles that socio-cultural and material elements and human agency play in shaping alcohol consumption in contemporary Nigeria. It focuses on the enactment of hyper-heterosexual and alternative masculinities and the reconfigurations of passive and non-passive femininities through drinking practices. It also interrogates how and why multinational alcohol companies are targeting Nigerian women and youths and the extent to which their activities are contributing to changing gendered drinking and sexual practices, which are at odds with the extant local norms that promote abstinence, moderation among adults, and sexual purity among unmarried youths. Importantly, this book moves beyond solely Western theorizing by drawing on both Western and non-Western gender theories to analyze how contemporary Nigerian young men and women 'do' masculinity and femininity with alcohol and will be a valuable resource for social scientists, students, policymakers, practitioners, and the general public interested in youth drinking behaviours, multinational alcohol companies' activities, and decolonizing gender scholarship.

https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-53318-1

New Book!

BETWEEN UTOPIA AND REALISM
THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF JUDITH N. SHKLAR

Edited by Samantha Ashenden and Andreas Hess
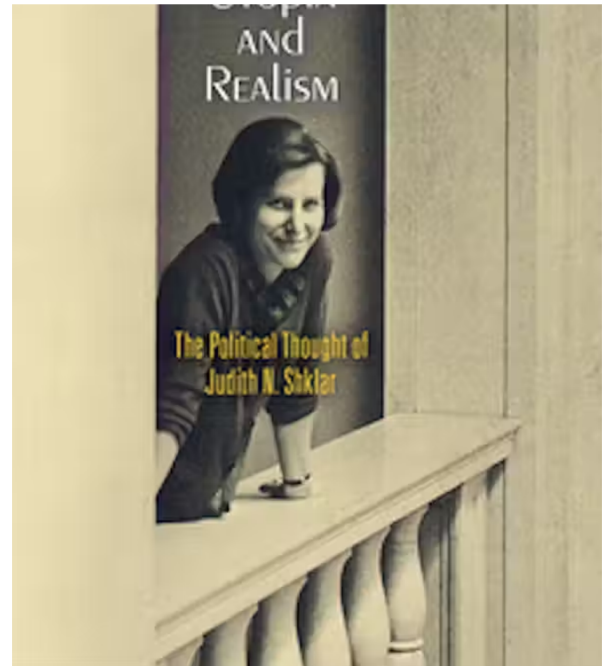
About the book

From her position at Harvard University's Department of Government for over thirty-five years, Judith Shklar (1928-92) taught a long list of prominent political theorists and published prolifically in the domains of modern and American political thought. She was a highly original theorist of liberalism, possessing a broad and deep knowledge of intellectual history, which informed her writing in interesting and unusual ways. Her work emerged between the "end of ideology" discussions of the 1950s and the "end of history" debate of the early 1990s. Shklar contributed significantly to social and political thought by arguing for a new, more skeptical version of liberalism that brought political theory into close contact with real-life experience.

The essays collected in Between Utopia and Realism reflect on and refract Shklar's major preoccupations throughout a lifetime of thinking and demonstrate the ways in which her work illuminates contemporary debates across political theory, international relations, and law. Contributors address Shklar's critique of Cold War liberalism, interpretation of Montaigne and its connection to her genealogy of liberal morals, lectures on political obligation, focus on cruelty, and her late reflections on exile. Others consider her role as a legal theorist, her interest in literary tropes and psychological experience, and her famed skepticism.

Between Utopia and Realism showcases Shklar's approach to addressing the intractable problems of social life. Her finely honed political skepticism emphasized the importance of diagnosing problems over proffering excessively optimistic solutions. As this collection makes clear, her thought continues to be useful in addressing cruelty, limiting injustice, and combating the cynicism of the present moment.

Contributors: Samantha Ashenden, Hannes Bajohr, James Brown, Katrina Forrester, Volker M. Heins, Andreas Hess, Samuel Moyn, Thomas Osborne, William E. Scheuerman, Quentin Skinner, Philip Spencer, Tracy B. Strong, Kamila Stullerova, Bernard Yack.

SPECIAL ISSUE ON NORMATIVE TURNS AND SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The journal **Civic Sociology** (University of California Press) has published a special collection on normative turns in social research edited by the School of Sociology's Rubén Flores & Elisabeth Becker (Heidelberg University, Germany). As the editors note in their introduction, this collection of articles "... illuminates the unity between sociological and normative concerns by reconstructing important chapters of the discipline's engagement with ethical reflection, and by chartering possible paths for normative sociology."

ABOUT THE JOURNAL CIVIC SOCIOLOGY
FROM THE JOURNAL'S WEBSITE:

Civic Sociology aims to be a forum for the cultivation of normative inquiry within the discipline, and to offer a space for the many conversations that different ethical turns have spurred. In order to contribute to this vision, this special collection invited contributions from across the social sciences and humanities that address questions related to the challenges and opportunities derived from these different normative turns. It also welcomed papers that reflect on the history of ethical reflection within social research, and on the possible futures opened by different forms of ethical engagement in the social sciences.

LINK TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE:
QUEST FOR NORMATIVITY SPECIAL COLLECTION

https://online.ucpress.edu/cs/pages/normativity_sc