Simultaneously inhabited lifeworlds: A phenomenological approach to understanding peace and conflict

Roger Mac Ginty iD

Abstract

This article seeks to show the value of a phenomenological lens in understanding conflict-affected societies. In particular, it uses a phenomenological lens to unpack how individuals and communities simultaneously inhabit a number of lifeworlds as part of navigating through life in conflict-affected contexts. A lifeworlds approach, and its emphasis on the micro-dynamics of everyday life, sheds light on the apparent contradictions experienced and lived in conflict-affected contexts. The article utilises Van Manen's four-part framework of 'existentials': lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality) and lived human relations (relationality or communality) to show how people construct lifeworlds that hold contradictions. In one reading, these contradictions help perpetuate division. In another reading, this ability to inhabit multiple and often contradictory lifeworlds represents everyday diplomacy or a non-escalatory conflict management that allows society to function, even in a dysfunctional way. The article draws on detailed and highly localised research in Colombia, Lebanon and Northern Ireland.

Keywords

everyday, lifeworlds, micro-dynamics, peacebuilding, phenomenological, phenomenology

Introduction

This article seeks to show the value of a phenomenological lens in understanding conflict-affected societies. In particular, it uses a phenomenological lens to unpack how individuals and communities simultaneously inhabit a number of lifeworlds as part of navigating through various (in)conveniences, awkwardness and possible dangers in conflict-affected contexts. A lifeworlds approach (Gorichanaz et al., 2018), and its emphasis on the micro-dynamics of everyday life, sheds light on the apparent contradictions experienced and lived in conflict-affected contexts. Individuals can, for example, be

Corresponding author:
Roger Mac Ginty, Durham University, al-Qasimi Building, Durham, DH1 3TU, UK.
Email: roger.macginty@durham.ac.uk

simultaneously extremist and non-extremist or inhabit multiple temporalities in ways that illustrate the multiple forms of agency deployed to navigate through the awkwardness, and potential dangers, of life in conflict-affected societies. Exposing simultaneity helps puncture narratives that project unidimensional views of conflict-affected contexts. Such narratives portray individuals, communities and contexts as being 'stuck' in a particular time and circumstance, and risk essentialising and totalising a population, thus stripping away its agency and masking the diversity, dissent and sheer awkwardness of humans.

The chief merit of a phenomenological approach is its ability to focus on life as it is lived rather than more mediated or curated versions (Van Manen, 1990: 53). The article draws on phenomenological data from the 'Getting On With It' research project that examined the micro-dynamics of everyday life in four locations each in Colombia, Lebanon and Northern Ireland. Daily pattern of life interviews, walking interviews and community mapping were employed in a bid to capture how life was lived, and the nuances of inter-group encounter. All three case study sites have experienced major peace accords, but significant divisions remain in Lebanon and Northern Ireland, while considerable violence and structural inequalities persist in Colombia (Nnoko-Mewanu, 2023). The article allows us to reflect on the extent to which conflict is totalising or the extent to which individuals and communities are able to eke out spaces insulated from conflict. Linked to this, it also allows us to consider the extent to which individuals and communities co-constitute their environment, thus raising issues of structure and agency.

In terms of structure, the article is tasked with answering the following question: How does the phenomenological approach of lifeworlds help analyses capture the simultaneous and often contradictory attitudes and stances of people in conflict-affected contexts? The article proceeds by making the case for a phenomenological approach and draws on van Manen's four-part framework of 'fundamental lifeworld themes' or 'existentials': lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality) and lived human relations (relationality or communality) (Van Manen, 1990: 101). The prefix 'lived' is useful in relation to these existentials in that it has an affective and ontological dimension. Lived time, for example is subjective, personalised, subject to interpretation and reinterpretation, and marbled with feelings such as hopefulness, boredom or fear. In its second part, the article justifies the micro-dynamic lens or a level of analysis below formally organised politics that can capture the everyday lifeworlds of individuals and communities. In its third substantive section, the article returns to the four themes of space, the body, time and social relations and seeks to illustrate, using data from the Getting On With It research project, how individuals can simultaneously inhabit and construct multiple lifeworlds. These existentials are inter-related but for reasons of comprehensibility they are illustrated separately.

In its concluding discussion, the article considers the implications of this simultaneity or 'a temporal coincidence of events' (Jammer, 2006: 13) and particularly the sometimes contradictory nature of these socio-political spaces. In one reading, simultaneity such as dissembling in situations of inter-group encounter perpetuates division. It involves a 'dishonesty' or, at least, a failure to deal directly with conflict contributing factors. It is, at best, a form of conflict management or negative peace. Yet, in another reading, simultaneity or the ability to inhabit multiple and often contradictory lifeworlds, represents everyday

diplomacy or a non-escalatory conflict management that allows society to function, even in a dysfunctional way. This 'functional co-existence' involves a sustained negative peace (Arai, 2022) meaning that conflicts can be stuck in a holding pattern that does involve significant de-escalation but also does not involve escalation. At the same time, this functional co-existence also involves significant tactical agency by individuals and communities to make life liveable and indeed, in many cases, enjoy more than bare life. The article raises fundamental questions about 'peacebuilding' and the ability of individuals and communities to act in a conflict-calming manner.

Lifeworlds and a phenomenological approach

The promise of phenomenology and the concept of lifeworlds is that they are able to capture life as lived. The quest for 'authentic' narratives has been a major concern in scholarly activity, with worries that some narratives are overly curated, rehearsed (Kelly, 2021) or subject to politicized gatekeeping (McAuley, 2021). Much research is impacted by processes of filtering and self-censorship by research subjects (Yanos and Hopper, 2008), and possibly a desire to portray oneself as socially acceptable to the researcher. A lifeworlds approach does not provide a silver bullet that might completely obviate these challenges of guarded or sanitised narratives, but it does offer a way of capturing 'poly-contextuality' (Iliopoulos and Valentinov, 2017: 1067), or the situatedness of individuals and communities in their immediate context. In-context studies are particularly useful in capturing the diversity of experience in conflict-affected societies whereby conflict is experienced in very different ways according to gender, race, location and (dis)ability.

The study of lifeworlds originated from Husserl's phenomenological investigations and is interested in the concrete fullness of life. Husserl (1983) was interested in 'originary experience' and 'experiential cognition' (p. 6). His regard for 'pure essences' (Husserl, 1983: 68) was motivated by a desire to capture 'phenomena as we are immediately acquainted with them in life' (Lindseth and Norberg, 2022: 884). From the perspective of the researcher, phenomenology and the lifeworlds that people construct and occupy have an inductive dimension (Gorichanaz et al., 2018: 883) and have qualities that are 'more felt than known' (Lindseth and Norberg, 2022: 884). In the words of a later exponent of a phenomenological approach, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), 'the immediate becomes the sense, the structure and the spontaneous arrangement of the parts' (p. 58).

Many subsequent iterations of phenomenology have sought to temper Husserl's 'pure phenomenology' and its emphasis on capturing the transcendental moment of the subject, with more context-aware approaches. The balance, and one hoped for in this article, is to retain Husserl's subject-centred approach and the advantages offered by 'naïve and prereflective' views (Dahlberg and Dahlberg, 2020: 461), but to recognise that experiential approaches do not preclude elements of consciousness and categorisation. The 'pureness' of classical phenomenology has had some doughty defenders who have sought to 'put phenomenology back into phenomenology' (Van Manen and Van Manen, 2021: 1080) and retain a focus on the experiential, pre-conscious dimension. Others have sought to move towards post-phenomenological approaches that are onto-epistemological in which subjects have an awareness of context and are shaped by experience (Ash

and Simpson, 2016: 49). Merleau-Ponty's (1962) rather hedging language seems to sum up the tightrope to be traversed '. . . this lived world is not absolutely unknown to naïve consciousness' (p. 59).

This article seeks to maintain the usefulness of the phenomenological motif, especially its concentration on the immediateness or 'Nowness' (Vrobel, 2008: 4) of how life is lived and how versions of those life patterns can be conveyed in relatively unmediated and non-curated ways. At the same time as seeking to maintain the essence of phenomenological approaches, this research is aware of the 'forestructures of understanding' (Wojnar and Swanson, 2007: 175), or the pre-knowledge, situatedness and biases held by both research subjects and the researcher. A pure phenomenological position seems impossible given the communicative nature of life, the impositions of society and politics, and the ways in which individual identities are constructed intersubjectively (Bianchin, 2003: 631). This seems particularly pertinent in conflict-affected societies, especially those with identity-related conflicts, in which social categorisation plays a major part of life. Often individuals live in single-identity communities and life is so patterned by in-group activities and markers that aspects of conflict encompass multiple aspects of life (Halpern, 2014: 69).

From the point of view of this article, the critical value of the phenomenological approach is its introduction of the concept of the lifeworld and its interest in the 'frictions and correspondences between a person's world (Eigenwelt) and the worlds of others (Mitwelt)' (Kalfelsi and Knodel, 2021: 8). A focus on lifeworlds awards the researcher a number of advantages. While striving to unpack 'the complexity of existence' it is hoped that the researcher can access the everyday and the micro-sociology of how life is lived (Bramsen, 2024). An actor-centric approach offers the possibility of going beyond the 'scripts' or ready-made profiles often associated with particular identity groups or locales (Bamyeh, 2019: 5). Indeed, focusing on the individual rather than the group opens up the possibility of researching areas regarded as personal and private. It decentres us from over-generalised and imagined versions of how people live and focuses on actual life experiences and social entanglements. It allows for the possibility of seeing deviance from the group, something that may be difficult to access in conflict-affected contexts where transgressions of group norms may be policed and thus individuals and sub-groups may be anxious to keep them hidden from view. Crucially, it is hoped that lifeworlds allow us to see the full vitality of life and the 'embodied, practical, meaningful, sensory orientations' of life (Vannini, 2015: 322). They can capture the complex interactionism of life, its relationality, and how individuals and their experiences co-constitute wider structures and processes. Of particular value from the point of view of this article are the ways in which a lifeworlds analysis conceives of the multiple dimensions of the person, thus the person is embodied, communicative and social, lives temporally and in a place or places.

The focus on individuals as the base unit for study does not preclude other approaches that look at the group. The empirical examples deployed later in the article show how individuals value groupness and are relational, but they also show how individuals use their own agency and can deviate from the group. Thus they show that groups are not the mere aggregation of individuals. Instead, it is realistic to think of a dynamic ecosystem

in which multiple fuzzy lifeworlds collide, compete, conflict and co-exist in a complex swirl.

A lifeworlds approach opens up the possibility of challenging narratives that totalise groups and contexts. Instead dissent, deviation, and minority and nuanced views may become visible. This adds to analyses aware of the complexity of conflict contexts and thus the need for appropriate responses. Literature on non-linearity, adaptation and complexity (Albrecht and Jackson, 2021) is useful here in illustrating the extent to which conflict, and particularly personal experiences of conflict, are often individualised and rationalised in different ways (De Coning, 2016, 2018).

As will be developed later in the article, a lifeworlds analysis allows us to examine the multiple dimensions in which individuals simultaneously operate. So rather than regarding temporality, for example, as a stand-alone dimension, a lifeworlds perspective allows for the integration of concepts to produce a whole-of-life perspective (Rogaly and Thieme, 2012: 2086). Thus time intersects with the body, allowing us to gain an 'age and stage' perspective. Moreover, within these dimensions there may be contradictions, something that allows us to see the complexities of life as lived in conflict-affected contexts. This study uses van Manen's quadripartite framework of lifeworld themes to capture the fullness of existence (Van Manen, 1990: 101). His schemata of spatiality, corporeality, temporality and relationality emphasises the dimensions along which life is lived and allows us to think through how the various dimensions may operate in conjunction with one another and how individuals can be part of, and construct, everyday entanglements. Crucially, a lifeworlds lens allows us to examine the tactical agency that individuals may deploy to navigate through the potential awkwardness or dangers of life in deeply divided societies. This tactical agency, or the actions, stances and forms of communication utilised in everyday life, is an important evidential trail of how deeply divided societies operate. Everyday actions help co-constitute the lifescape of conflict contexts (in conjunction with structural factors). They provide indicators of the *modus vivendi* constructed, maintained, modified and used by 'so-called ordinary people' (Mac Ginty, 2021) at the inter and intra-group levels. This tactical agency can tell us much about the extent to which interactions are variously escalatory, non-escalatory or de-escalatory. In other words, are they conflictual, co-existence focused or conciliatory?

A lifeworlds approach allows us to see the multi-dimensional (space, the body, time, and relations with others) aspects of life that might be compressed through other lenses. To briefly conceptualise these four aspects, spatial phenomenology reminds us that space is constructed by perception and experience. For Ash and Simpson (2016), 'space is a product of a "taskscape" that emerges through human activity' (p. 183). In this view, and as well-argued in multiple publications by Doreen Massey (1994, 2005), space is as much a verb as a noun and is under constant construction, reconstruction, contestation and change. This is particularly pertinent to conflict-affected territories in which particular places and place-names have associations with events or identity groups. Certainly, a key trope in the interview data from the Getting On With It research project is the extent to which individuals associate particular spaces (often the micro-spaces of particular spots on a pavement, or road intersections) with incidents of violence or tension. Peace and Conflict Studies has benefitted from a spatial turn (Macaspac and Moore, 2022; Souza, 2024), with the literature on the everyday navigation of space being particularly

relevant to this article (Coyles et al., 2023). For Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel (2022), 'researching spatial practices brings forth research concepts such as identity, exclusion, segregation, belonging, territoriality, and cognitive space to understand peace and conflict as an emplaced practice' (p. 662). The emphasis of this article on micro-practices allows us to see that they are often enacted in intimate geographies, and spaces deemed safe or familiar for the in-group. Spatiality does not operate independently, as Susan Forde (2022) notes human phenomenon are 'spatio-social and temporal experience[s]' (p. 1).

The key contribution of phenomenology in terms of the body is its ability to see the body as operating in conjunction with consciousness. It recognises the 'ontological centrality of the body' with selfhood and a sense of social interactionism operating alongside the physical body (Bizzari and Guareschi, 2022: 128). The body is thus a marker of time, perhaps recording conflict-related injury or displaying skin marks related to poor public health and sanitation. This corporeal palimpsest moves through time, space and society. As Dolezal (2015) notes, the body is often 'a tacit frame of reference' (p. 9) with interviewee's lived experiences often incorporating or indicating their presence in a place, or the interaction or observation of others. Feminist literature in particular has been useful in identifying the 'microsociology of corporeality, vulnerability and relatedness' (Väyrynen, 2019: 146) and the extent to which bodies act in relation to other bodies. Brett et al. (2024a) remind us that, 'bodies are always gendered and otherwise positioned socially, economically, culturally and legally' (p. 105) and thus the body offers a lens through which to view intersectionality.

The phenomenological literature has had much to say about time and particularly time consciousness (Heidegger, 1992; Husserl, 1964) whereby linear notions of time are complicated by the social world and perception. Thus, time is lived, embodied, gendered and socially contextualised (Schues et al., 2011: 9). Of particular importance for this study and its interest in the simultaneous occupation or embodiment of different phenomenological spheres, individuals experience and construct multiple time planes. In Rosa's (2013: 11) schemata, these are divided into daily time, biographical time and historical time and help individuals communities and others understand and narrate their existence. Certainly phenomenological interpretations of time chime with the temporal turn in International Relations and its arguments in relation to non-linearity. The phenomenology of social relations relates to people-to-people interactions as well as wider relations in society as experienced. It involves constant processes of orientation of the self, and the self towards others. It involves sense-making and, potentially, recourse to a wide array of emotions and assumptions that help individuals understand their place in the world and encounters with others. In a conflict-affected society, this is likely to involve the deployment of much emotional intelligence, telling and face-work as individuals and social groups seek to read social situations and react accordingly (Carrabine, 2019; Goffman, 1990).

The aspects of space, the body, time and relations act in conjunction to give a 'whole of life' perspective. An individual might associate a particular space, with a particular incident (temporally logged) that they experienced directly bodily, by observation, or by proxy. In a conflict-affected society, this incident may be associated with an identity group (in-group or out-group). In other words, a single incident or place can span all four

existentials. Consider, for example, a short passage from an interview with a carpenter in Siloé, a city in Colombia. In the passage the interviewee explains how, because of fear of attack (corporeality) he will only work outside of his neighbourhood (spatiality), if accompanied by the householder whose house he is working in (social relations) and will not travel when it is dark (temporality):

> The times I have gone up is with the owner of the house. He takes me and brings me . . . because people know him . . . I go alone, they don't know me. There, there it is a little complicated. Because there are parts above where if you are not from around there, they will target you . . . not at night! Just for the day.[1]

Or the following quotation from Beirut shows the interplay of temporality (reflections on the civil war), corporeality (a feeling of safety), social relations (contentment with in-group living) and spatiality (a sense of place associated with the in-group and out-group):

> Well, I don't remember the start of the war. I was only 2 years old. The war started just two years after I was born. But life was excellent. This area was divided between East and West Beirut. We lived on this side. You could not cross the green line into West Beirut, into Chiyah. It wasn't possible. There were large piles of sand and dirt, sandbags. There were also snipers who would aim and shoot at anyone passing through. But we didn't need to cross. Our life was here. We had everything we needed. Here in Ayn el Remmaneh, the society was as one, living all together, there was no mixing/muddying [with the other side].

> Life was affluent/comfortable. For one reason: there was money and the money stayed within the community/society here in this area. The bakeries, bakers, the shopkeepers, their money was traded or circulated within the community, and therefore no one struggled. They looked after each other. Things were better then.[2]

The quotation also shows a simultaneity whereby the civil war was on-going with snipers 'who would shoot at anyone passing' but 'life was excellent'. The simultaneity involves an assessment of in-group and out-group living in close proximity. A phenomenological approach allows us to see how social experience is lived, multi-dimensional and complex, but also seemingly contradictory. It also allows us to see the social navigation skills utilised by individuals and communities to make life liveable.

A phenomenological and lifeworlds approach helps us understand that spaces are felt and understood through the accretion of experiences and memories, as well as vicariously through the experiences, memories and assumptions of others. They are spaces of inclusion, exclusion, civility and incivility, much of it performative, operating according to pre-ordained social mores, and restricted to the in-group (Jeffrey et al., 2018: 126). Work by Pain and Staeheli (2014: 345) is useful in outlining the importance of intimacy as a lens and how it is comprised by the simultaneous operation of spatial relations, a mode of interaction and a set of practices – all of which may operate at different scales. The lifeworlds approach shows how individuals and communities construct, but are also subject to, emotional geographies. Conflict and identity means there is often deep association with particular spaces (De Backer, 2022: 14), associations that encompass space,

time, the body and social relations. Much of lifeworld construction occurs in the intangible sphere of feelings, neighbourhood reputation (Zavattaro, 2019) and a privileging and de-privileging of particular groups, classes, races and genders (Militz, 2020) in ways that are rarely explained in explicit ways.

A micro-dynamic lens

The focus of this article is on the micro-sociology of how life is lived in conflict-affected contexts. Micro-sociological inter-group encounters in conflict-affected societies have the potential to tell us much about how the society operates. The frequency, nature and tone of encounters all provide evidence of how the conflict is managed at the local level. Indeed, non-encounter or the absence of interaction between in and out-group members tells a story. It is not the case that micro-sociological encounters factor up in totality to give a replica picture of the society at large (the macro-sociological) (Bramsen, 2024: 18). The messy interplay of structure and agency complicates matters. Yet, at the same time, the micro-level can show us how a conflict is embodied, lived, perpetuated and confronted at the ground level. It is recognised that societies are multi-scalar and a dynamic confluence of processes and structures that meld into one. The current approach does not privilege one perspective over another. Instead, it is cognisant of the contributions available from multiple vantage points in terms of imposed and supposed 'hierarchies' (Hellmüller et al., 2023).

The case for a micro-sociological approach is as follows. First, it encourages us to calibrate our focus towards the individual and groups of individuals, and consequently to temper any temptation to naturalise the state or other imaginaries as a primary unit of analysis (Picq, 2013: 454). While mindful of the group, and the importance of group identity in deeply divided societies, a micro-dynamics approach is able to comprehend in-group variation, and thus individuality and transgression of group norms. Second, by taking seriously the micro-sociological we are invited to think about notions of hierarchy in levels of analysis and question assumptions that promote a vertical linearity that places the state or other political institutions at the top and other levels below that (Barder, 2015). While states and other formal political institutions can wield considerable material power, it is worth noting that in many contexts such institutions may play a limited role in the daily lives of inhabitants. In Colombia and Lebanon, for example, the state is often absent or incapable. Third, and relatedly, a phenomenological approach to the everyday and the micro-sociological allows us to think about power and particularly the various types of power in circulation (Foucault, 1980). While material power is often more visible than other types, and is particularly associated with institutions, a focus on the micro-dynamics of the everyday facilitates other views of power such as the immaterial power associated with identity, spiritual belief systems, kinship and other forms of association. A focus on the multiple types of embedded power (Karlberg, 2005: 9) nudges us beyond realist notions of power or what Kenneth Boulding (1990) referred to 'threat power' or 'power over' (p. 10) towards more variegated and Foucaldian notions of power (Harding, 2003). While those with material and institutional power are often empowered to set the parameters and tone of debates (Cruz, 2021; Kosmatopoulos, 2021), there is often room on the margins, in communities, around kitchen tables for other interpretations.

A fourth recommendation for the micro-dynamic lens is that it brings to the fore issues of intersectionality. By concentrating on everyday lived reality, issues of gender, race, age, (dis)ability, class and caste become apparent (Harding, 2003). Issues that might somehow be regarded as secondary to 'real politics' are given due weight and properly regarded as political. In this regard, feminist literature is useful in puncturing the often portentous narratives surrounding official or formal politics that often discount the private and personal as secondary or somehow a-political (Moran, 2010: 261). With this comes an awareness of the complex interactionalism that defines life: humans are social, inconsistent, able to use multiple forms of communication (including dissembling), and operate on transcalar planes.

A focus on micro-dynamics encourages the observer to look at the small details of peace, conflict and everything in-between. It places an emphasis on close and detailed observation of social interaction, and an awareness of the sensitivities at work in conflict-affected contexts. As such, it is in keeping with thinking on 'slow peace' (Lederach, 2019) that can be observed in some localities, at an inter-personal level, and are embedded in social and cultural ecologies. A micro-dynamics lens is in keeping with studies of the everyday (Berents, 2015; Mac Ginty, 2021) and requires a multi-disciplinary approach that is aware of sociological, anthropological and feminist perspectives and is prepared to look beyond official and top-down narratives (Firchow and Mac Ginty, 2016). This granularity has the potential to bring apparently anecdotal material into play and to illustrate that vignettes (Demetriou, 2023) contain wider insights into power and the organisation of society.

Simultaneity in action

Having discussed the merits of a phenomenological approach, and the micro-dynamic level of analysis, this article now deploys Van Manen's four-part framework of space, the body, time and social relations. This illustrates the complexity of life as lived in conflict-affected contexts. Specifically, it is interested in the apparent contradictions that shape life in these spaces and how socio-political spaces can be both deeply divided *and* constitute a society with elements that are pro-social, stable and conciliatory. This simultaneity reveals a parallel safety and unsafety or how people eke out lives that are somehow 'normal' and fulfilling in the midst of anticipatory violence and identity or grievance-based fractures in society. The idea helps us get beyond an implied binary of normal and abnormal and move analysis towards multiplicity, plurality and complexity. On first sight, some of the multiple perspectives revealed in the research data appear contradictory yet, as will be argued in the concluding discussion, these contradictions contribute to making life liveable. In a sense, they are a conflict management tool. They involve a compartmentalisation and 'switching' whereby individuals transition between forms of expression and self-rationalisations. As Stehr (2022) noted,

> One should not underestimate the abilities of actors to overcome the limits of apparently contradictory expectations, moral concepts, world views in their everyday behavior or to orient themselves between different social systems. In fact, one does not encounter completely closed systems in reality. (p. 416)

Stehr's observation, although not written in relation to conflict-affected contexts, is certainly applicable to them. Actors are often able to eke out spaces in which they can adopt apparently contradictory stances, can engage in dissembling when required and can manage the complexities of inter-group and intra-group relations. All of this requires a balancing whereby there is a deft deployment of multiple forms of tactical agency to navigate through life.

Simultaneity – or the ability of individuals and groups to simultaneously maintain and project more than one identity, narrative or stance – provides a riposte to unidimensional views of individuals, communities or contexts. Here, the notion of superposition from quantum mechanics is useful whereby matter can occupy apparently contradictory states with, for example, an atom spinning upwards and downwards at the same time (Tzouvaras, 2018: 149). The potential of such thinking is that it liberates us from static interpretations of a conflict-affected context and allows us to contemplate fluidity, contradiction and a much wider array of permutations. Thus, rather than temporal homogeneity (Israel/Palestine = always at conflict), mono-dimensional identity (all Israelis or Palestinians = conflictual) or very singular interpretations of place (Israel/Palestine = violent), notions of simultaneity allow for the possibility of a 'variable geometry' as would be expected in a complex adaptive system (De Coning, 2018). Simultaneity allows for 'plural aspects of the self' (Albrecht and Moe, 2015: 8) and a fluidity in and between categories that might otherwise be seen as firm.

Crucial to simultaneity is the emotional intelligence of individuals and their ability to deploy a range of social skills to interpret contexts and act accordingly (Rapp, 2003). The repertoire of social identity and social categorisation skills are important (McKeown et al., 2016). While the deft use of these skills apply in all societies, their utility is heightened in deeply divided societies and are required at the intra and inter-group levels and they involve a conscious and unconscious tactical agency to navigate around everyday encounters.

The following insights are gleaned from ethnographically informed and detailed research in four locations each in Colombia, Lebanon and Northern Ireland that involved life history and daily pattern of life interviews, walking interviews, focus group discussions and visualisation exercises. All data were collected between March 2022 and August 2023. In total, 208 interviews (excluding the visualisation exercises) were conducted and the quotations in this article are drawn from a mix of life history interviews, walking interviews and focus group discussions. All research was with adults, on the basis on informed consent, guided by local partners, and conducted in accordance with ethical protocols, including data management plans, set down by the Universities of Durham and Bristol where the project was based. Interviews were with adults mainly aged 18–70, although some interviewees were 70+. Sampling was not stratified, although an effort was made to sample a range of adults that was balanced in terms of social identity (Lebanon and Northern Ireland), gender and age. Colombia, Lebanon and Northern Ireland were chosen as case study countries because they had all experienced major peace accords. There are significant differences, however, in the nature and scale of the conflicts, and their post-peace accord trajectories especially in relation to levels of violence. The in-country locations were chosen, in association with the local partner organisations, in order to include a mix of urban, semi-urban and rural places. All of the

research sites had experienced violence during the wider conflict, and all had some heterogeneity of population that allowed for encounter between in-group and out-group members. The focus of the study was on everyday activities, especially in relation to encounter with out-group members, but mindful that much encounter is in-group. All interviews were conducted in local languages. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and translated into English (where applicable) by the researchers/professional transcribers. Where participants did not give consent for a recording (which was only in a few cases in Lebanon and Colombia), detailed notes were taken during the interview, in some cases transcribing as the interview proceeded. The local partner organisations helped, in some cases, with participant recruitment but much emphasis was placed on snowballing. The research was mindful of conflict sensitivity, and the research schedule in Lebanon and Colombia was disrupted by security concerns.

The phenomenological ambition of capturing life as lived was only partially met and, as a result, the author gives two cheers for the approach. The aim of seeking to capture an unfiltered and authentic version of life in situ has much merit. Efforts to develop researcher-researched trust were especially useful in achieving this end and included introductions from trusted persons, repeat interviews, a slow burn approach to making contact and conducting interviews, and transparency about the research project and process. Meeting interviewees in their homes or location of their choice (Jackson, 2021), or asking them to give the interviewer a walking tour of the neighbourhood also seemed to enhance interviewee confidence. Focus groups were held among pre-existing groups (e.g. a women's community group) and so members already knew one another.

Attempting to access the fullness of life of conflict-affected contexts seems a necessary research aim. There is a risk that people in such contexts are seen as one-dimensional beings; members of a largely homogeneous identity group or linked to a particular territory that itself is full of identity connotations. As this paragraph is written, the BBC reports that Israeli jets have bombed the 'Hezbollah stronghold' of Beirut's southern suburbs (*BBC News*, 2024), yet our project data finds examples of a richness and diversity of opinion from that seemingly uniform area of the city. A phenomenological approach, and especially the four-part schemata to assess lifeworlds, encourages us to see people in more than one dimension. By teasing out relationships, temporality, the story of the body, and how people interact with territory, the project was able to move beyond simple conflict narratives as told by local people, into pen-portraits of the quotidian. The research was able to access the complex interplay between these dimensions and illustrate the sophisticated reasoning, changes over the 'age and stage' of the lifecycle, and repertoire of social agency involved in daily life in conflict-affected contexts. Crucial in all of this has been the centre-piece of this article, the observation that people can construct and inhabit lifeworlds that contain contradictory elements. The lifeworlds approach has been particularly useful in the post-data collection analysis phase of the research and thinking through the complex repertoire of agency that individuals have and how agency and structure co-constitute one another and exist in a messy interplay.

The research was not participant observation though and did not seek to observe people as they 'got on with it' and conducted their daily lives as if uninterrupted by researchers. Research participants made time for the researchers and thus the research process was an unnatural interruption in everyday life (Hume, 2021: 309). The researchers did, however,

seek to make that interruption a gentle one. By focusing on everyday life, and especially daily patterns of life, the research was able to access intersectional aspects of life such as the gendered division of labour in the home or social networks available for care. The research necessarily wanted to capture the mundane rather than the extraordinary. Indeed, in its early phase, the research started out by conducting life history interviews but pivoted to daily pattern of life interviews as the former tended to deliver biographical narratives punctured by extraordinary events such as neighbourhood shootings and bombings, or references to major conflict events. This need for reflexivity and change was a humbling reminder of what can happen when office-based research design meets reality.

Having said all of the above, some circumspection is required. Being interviewed by university researchers is not an everyday occurrence for most people and there is an inevitable tension between seeking to capture the everyday through non-everyday activities. The risk of performance bias is always there in some interviews (Williams, 1968). This may especially be the case if interviewees feel that their story, and that of their community, has been neglected and needs to be heard (Kostovicova, 2023: 111; Levy, 2019). Even in the most trusted relationship between the researched and the researcher there will be some element of curation and self-awareness *on both sides*. Other than using concealed or ethically unsound means of surveillance, the completely authentic research subject is probably beyond reach of most qualitative research. Multiple studies have shown that the Hawthorne effect, or how research subjects may change behaviour in the knowledge that they are being observed, is real (McCambridge et al., 2014). Moreover, we need to be realistic about what even a large and well-funded research project can achieve. Resources are always going to be limited, and the researcher-researched interactions had to occur within the time frame of the research project, for resource and ethical reasons. While there were 'feeding back' sessions in communities, and some follow-up interviews, the project was not constructed or resourced in a way that would allow longitudinal tracking over extended periods.

Working in conflict-affected contexts adds an additional layer of sensitivity, and perhaps suspicion. The author has previously advocated 'good enough methodology' (Firchow and Mac Ginty, 2020: 152), or a recognition that conflict-related research is conducted in sub-optimal environments and so reasonable adjustments need to made, especially in relation to the safety of the researched and the researched. At the same time, researchers need robust methodologies to collect as high-quality data as possible. Ultimately, recourse to phenomenology and a lifeworlds approach is an epistemological issue rather than the utilisation of particular field methods. It is a way of seeing the world, and in particular a way of seeing individuals holistically and as part of ecosystems that they make and remake through their daily actions. It values experience, being in a particular location or locations and witnessing. At the same time, and mentioned earlier in this article, there is a recognition that individuals and groups reflect, discuss, filter and engage in, and are subject to, group narratives and experiences. As a result, pure phenomenological research, somehow seamlessly transmitting human experience directly to the researcher, seems unlikely.

It is worth restating that spatiality, corporeality, temporality and social relations are best seen as operating in concert. Together they constitute lifeworlds and help shape the lifeworlds around them. For reasons of clarity, they are discussed individually in the next

sections, but in reality there is much overlap whereby they represent a complex phenomenological assemblage with each aspect impacting on the other.

Spatiality

In terms of the sense of the phenomenology of space, the research data contains multiple examples of individuals who feel both safe and unsafe in their locality. There is a spatial dualism, in which the home or locale offers security but is also a site of insecurity. A resident in Buenaventura, Colombia, for example, noted what she liked most about her neighbourhood was 'the human warmth of the people' and how she would let her grandson go alone to play for the local soccer team. But if they were to play in a nearby area then she would accompany him, 'or his mother goes . . . Otherwise he would have problems, since there are always people looking . . . That is what you have to do'.[3] This, and other interview material, fits with understandings of spatial heterogeneity in which localities are sites of multiplicity; 'micro-sites used differently depending on time, context, and user; districts playing different roles in city life; and infrastructural networks generating connectivity across the city and beyond' (Gusic, 2022: 624). In conflict-affected contexts, of course, this multiplicity – space having multiple meanings, uses, and identification – has an additional character, sometimes involving risk calculations.

An interviewee in Northern Ireland noted the necessity of 'a sectarian mind-map'[4] or a psycho-geographical way of designating safe and unsafe space. A Catholic male in his 40s in Northern Ireland reflected on the duality of his homeplace in that it was dominated by the ingroup but was also heavily patrolled by the military, the militia, and the police. He also noted that military and police bases were located in the proximity of public service locations:

> And everything there was the safe area as far as you knew everybody was Catholic, but not a safe area as in it was much more patrolled by the army and the UDR [Ulster Defence Regiment, a pro-state militia] and the police and whatever. We also lived near enough to the police station, which was beside the hospital, and again, police stations and bases were beside schools and hospitals to keep them safe. You had to navigate through Protestant areas to get to the safe place.[5]

The quotation is also a good reminder of the importance of ontological security and how it is as much a sense or feeling as a physical phenomenon, a point that rhymes with the section on corporeality below. It is also worth noting how a phenomenology of spatiality relies on an acute geographical knowledge. An interviewee in Colombia reflected how his locality was divided into 'territories' each controlled by a violent gang. Yet there were 'invisible borders . . . No one was going to get into their territory . . . They were not marked, but it was obvious that they [the gangs] were involved . . .'. This points to a simultaneity in which borders were there and not there, seen and unseen. Living as part of this requires a particular cognitive dissonance, or an understanding of the illegitimacy of local boundaries while complying with them and thereby help legitimise them.

Corporeality

The interview data makes clear that corporeality overlaps with space, time and social relations. It also makes clear that danger is very much a felt experience. While there are

multiple examples of interviewees recounting violent incidents and their reactions to those incidents, it was also notable that anticipatory violence is prevalent in all three case study countries. This was particularly understandable in Colombia in which high levels of violence prevail in the aftermath of the 2016 peace accord. Yet direct intercommunal violence in Lebanon is muted, while Northern Ireland recorded no conflict-related murders in 2023 (Kula, 2024). One Lebanese interviewee recognised that Christian-Muslims relations in Beirut had improved, '. . . but there is still fear in both groups. And it will always be on both sides towards the other'.[6]

The interviews contain many accounts of taking cover or avoiding violence. A female interviewee in Colombia recalled 'if something happened, we'd just lie down on the floor'.[7] A male in Northern Ireland hinted at the wearing nature of vigilance, 'your sort of self-preservation thing is always there. I remember running for my life on different occasions'.[8] The following interview extract captures how the corporeal is physical, felt and ontological. The effects of the conflict in Colombia were 'felt' but also had physical manifestations:

> That was when I felt the conflict and I still did not understand, but I began to feel the conflict because there were confrontations and it hit me very hard. My mother, that is what she remembers the most, that I was the one who was most affected.

> I was in shock. My mom says that I came home pale and I didn't say anything, absolutely nothing . . . My mom always says that . . . I was the one who cried the most, I mean, I cried, already at home we cried and I despaired, and since my dad had a gas cylinder and I already understood these things more . . . so what if a bullet went in.

A very similar reflection was found in an interview in rural Northern Ireland:

> I think that even that having to be super hyper vigilant, especially at night. Even my own personal experiences growing up and when we would have been at my grandparents' house, we would always have heard the army moving about at night, like walking through their property and their feet crunching on the stones . . . as a child, that's a very innocent, scary experience to know that there's somebody, *anybody* outside your house but you never went to check . . . the realization that you were very isolated and very vulnerable in that moment of somebody outside your property because there is nobody close by to call for help.[9]

Both examples illustrate the felt nature of threats and, given that both draw on childhood memories, they intersect with temporality. Memories of childhood fear persist and are told in evocative ways. In terms of simultaneity, another childhood memory points to a corporeal ambivalence. A Belfast woman reflects on riot situations in her teenage years during which she 'would throw the odd stone' but would 'mostly stand back'.[10] The simultaneity suggests someone prepared to take some risks in defence of her community, but also to follow a self-preservation strategy. The interviews from Northern Ireland in particular contain multiple references to not wearing clothing that would identify the wearer as a member of one group or another. A male Catholic interviewee, for example, remarked, 'If I went into Ballymoney [a mainly Protestant town] with my GAA top on, I think that'd be very silly'.[11] The GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) is associated with Catholics in Northern Ireland and is viewed negatively by some Protestants. In this

context, wearing the jersey would act as an identifier, making clear that the wearer was Catholic. This points to a population alert to sectarian geographies and able to navigate through (perceived) social restrictions. The simultaneity comes in the flexibility of the wearer, able to modulate his wearable technology to match the context.

Temporality

A temporal simultaneity was evident throughout interview transcripts. Childhood, for example, has been routinely mixed with involvement in, or experience of violence. A Colombian interviewee was working alongside gangs from the age of 6, '. . . from a very young age I threw myself into the street'.[12] A 'best of times/worst of times' perception attended recollections of times of violence. An interviewee in Northern Ireland recalled, 'You know something, to quite honest, through the Troubles, like, we went to the pub, played darts and walked up the town. There was no problem'. This was contrasted with an assessment of the more recent situation, 'let's say this last five years or more, we wouldn't walk up the town at night'.[13] An interviewee in the same town shared the nostalgia for past times, even while acknowledging the social deprivation:

> But this was a fantastic community. There was no wealth in this end of the town. In fact, some of the people were very poor . . . Everybody knew, everyone was friendly with each other . . . Some had communal toilets . . . The town has completely run down in recent years. It's a very poor town now with a lot of very poor people living in it.[14]

All of the conflict case studies have an intergenerational or chronic dimension and so 'nested timescales' (Vrobel, 2008: 5) are in evidence with people holding multiple timescales in play at the same time. The present is informed by both the past and the future, in that individual and community lifeworlds are shaped by the conflict (often specific acts of violence) and this informs an anticipation of violence. It is as though the present is being constantly 'corrected' or tempered as part of a process of negotiation between the past, present and future. Information from the past not only includes individual and community historical memory, but also – in areas still prone to violence – a constant monitoring and updating of the local security situation. An interview with a former FARC combatant, for example, is laced with references to current or recently passed insecurity and imminent violence: 'they have said that an armed group is coming', 'They can displace us from all of this', 'I don't feel safe over there', 'I couldn't go out then because they would shoot me'.[15]

Social relations

The interview transcripts reveal the complexity of social relations, both at the inter and intra-group levels. One interviewee in Colombia reflected on the choices young people had to make on whether or not to become involved with armed groups:

> . . . although there are many young people, who are part of the armed groups, there are others who do not like that life. There are many who say, no, I don't want to live that life. I like my life. For example, today you can go to the neighbourhood and see the young people playing normally. But there are others who are on the corner.[16]

Indeed, another Colombian male interviewee noted the complexity of social landscapes by observing that 'the gang is the strongest family in the community'.[17] A Shia from southern Beirut reflected on the simultaneity involved in being a member of a community but seeing oneself and one's family as a sub-group and therefore somewhat different from the wider group. He highlighted differences between rural originating incomers from the south of the country who tended to be more religious, militant and Hezbollah-supporting versus the original community who thought themselves 'more urbane, educated, worldly'.[18] The picture that emerges is of multiple stratifications, but all contained within one religious identity. A Protestant female from Belfast revealed how complex her lifeworlds became when she acquired a Catholic boyfriend. While her mother was 'fine' with the relationship, her father had indicated that 'it would never be acceptable for me to have a Catholic boyfriend' although he 'didn't mind' Catholic friends. When, after a year, she told her father about the relationship, 'I actually got hit and I got threw out'. The interviewee explained the tightrope she had to tread, simultaneously being from a loyalist (pro-United Kingdom) background but also recognising that 'his family was great' and how 'I loved it up there'.[19]

Simultaneity is apparent in the ways in which interviewees mixed tolerance and coexistence with suspicion of the out-group. As an interviewee in Beirut observed, 'There are good relationships. They have contact. But close relationships [friendships] – only to a certain extent. There are limits'.[20] A resident of southern Lebanon reflected more generally on relations with Israel and the need to come to terms with the likelihood of war:

> We, as the people who lived here, in this region, have gotten used to this lifestyle. We got used to it – I mean, don't think, you if you want – if you want to really think about it – if you want to live here, and you are still afraid that there will be a war, then no one would develop and no one move forward. People have adapted to the idea, living their lives normally . . .[21]

The quotation suggests a population at peace with the idea of war; a resignedness but also a determination to make the best of circumstances.

A final quotation comes from Belfast where a woman in her 40s reflected on growing up in an interface area where recreational after-school rioting was the norm:

> You just used to go out and riot and throw stones . . . And you would have went to school – if you had been at school, and you came home, you would have just went up . . . and people used to start to gather. The Catholics started together on their side . . . The Protestants would have gathered on their side. It would have started off by stone throwing, just throwing stones at each other battles. And . . . the police would have probably got word of it, and then the police would have came and then it just turned into something big. And the police would have been getting attacked and that went on long, for a long time, years. . . . You would have just made your way to the X Road . . . with friends. It was weird. It was almost like it was kind of like a social thing. Yeah, I'm sure it was the same on the other side as well. Groups of teenagers meeting up and then we'd fight and then the police coming.[22]

The excerpt contains a mix of danger with routine; a simultaneous energy rush with what happens at the end of a 'normal' school day. The rioting could not have happened without the 'cooperation' of the other side. Despite the conflictual element, there is a

baseline of some sort of predictability or willingness to engage in the same activity in a designated spot at a particular time. There was unlikely to have been formal communication to arrange the rioting, but there is an element of predictability or communication by mutual presence.

A key finding of the wider Getting On With It project is that most of life is lived at the intra-group level (Lebanon and Northern Ireland), carefully within the neighbourhood (all three cases), or within or outwith paramilitary, guerilla or gangs circuits (Colombia). The main point is that life is often lived in an in-group echo-chamber, with limited inter-group encounter. Where inter-group interaction does take place, it is often controlled and scripted so as to avoid confrontation. The research has found that the most significant micro-action that people undertake in conflict-affected contexts is avoidance – an avoidance of people, places and events (Brett et al., 2024b). This points to the careful navigation of space and human interaction and applies to intra-group interactions as well as those at the inter-group level.

Taken together, the four dimensions or existentials show how individuals and communities construct complex and dynamic lifeworlds that allow them to navigate territory, time and relationships. This involves a constant monitoring and awareness of the context, with this tactical awareness then informing behaviour. All three case study countries have experienced major political change (in the form of peace accords), along with a modulation of violence, and major social change (e.g. demographic change in Northern Ireland and Lebanon and large-scale displacement in Colombia). These changes have necessitated that individuals and communities apprise themselves of unfolding circumstances and behave accordingly. Importantly, many individuals are able to eke out idiosyncratic or personalised lifeworlds and pursue the career, family or cultural paths that they choose. The interview transcripts speak of people able to use ingenuity and persistence to achieve a balancing of the pressures of living in a conflict-affected context, but also the daily pressures of economic and family life, with strategies that bring fulfilment, enjoyment and survival. A complex and co-constitutive relationship between structure and agency becomes apparent with individuals using tactical agency to navigate through sensitive contexts.

The lifeworlds approach encourages us to regard structure and agency as blurred and in constant interaction. It is clear that the group is not the simple aggregation of individuals from a single community. Instead, the picture is much more complex and dynamic. Certainly, communities have reasonably typical members who constitute the bulk of the community, but the interview material makes clear that there is much heterogeneity in communities as well.

Concluding discussion

The general purpose of this article has been to use a phenomenological lens to illustrate the situated knowledge and tactical agency that individuals and groups use to navigate through the complexities of conflict-affected societies. It has been particularly interested in the seeming paradoxes or multiple realities that pertain at the same time. Individuals and groups construct and inhabit ambiguous lifeworlds that stand in contradiction to the certainties often used to describe conflict-affected contexts. These lifeworlds demand a

'conceptual liminality' (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2021: 268) or an understanding of the inadequate nature of overly rigid frames that see conflict and group loyalty as absolutes. One of the repeated findings from the Getting On With It research project has been the chronic and wearing nature of conflict. It involves vigilance ('hyper awareness every day' as one interviewee put it[23]) and the anticipation of violence, and often living in close proximity to members of the out-group or people who may pose a threat. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that individuals and groups find coping mechanisms to make life manageable. One of these 'work arounds' is to engage in simultaneity or a fluidity that allows for simultaneous existence of multiple narratives, stances and actions.

This everyday navigation involves an embedded plurality and complex positionalities that confound orthodox narratives of conflict-affected communities as being singular and 'stuck'. The phenomenological approach foregrounds liminality and an in-betweenness whereby individuals and communities are capable of instrumentalised dualism or multiplicity. Ambiguity becomes an everyday social practice in situations of encounter. Individuals and groups engage in a bounded tactical agency in which the primary purpose for most is 'to get on with it' or engage in those everyday activities required to make life liveable. The bounded nature of the tactical agency comes in the need not to transgress inter and intra-group 'red lines' or social conventions that, if crossed, could trigger offence or escalation. In order to be tactically agential, individuals require local knowledge, a flexibility an deftness of reaction, and a repertoire of actions to draw on (Bøås, 2013: 614).

The article has demonstrated how simultaneity along the existentials of spatiality, corporeality, temporality and social relations is, as much as a survival mechanism, also a sense-making tool. It helps provide both a real-time and retrospective rationale for the extremes and sometimes contradictions of life in conflict-affected contexts. It is an ongoing, indeed constant, process of situatedness that involves social awareness, social categorisation and emotional intelligence.

A key implication of this simultaneity is a need to dispense with models of conflict resolution that foresee a unidirectional transition from conflict to peace. Instead, and drawing from the concept of agonism, it seems prudent to conceptualise individuals and groups as living with conflict and finding ways to adapt to it (Strömbom, 2019). This does not preclude attempts to lower tension or address conflict-related causes and manifestations, but it roots us more firmly in a realm in which conflict is regarded as part of social relations. Thus, for example, for many people in Colombia, Lebanon and Northern Ireland, conflict is not a time-bound episode or limited to a particular locality. Instead, it is a long-duration phenomenon that impacts on multiple aspects of life and requires an everyday navigation and tactical agency. It is intergenerational and encompasses large areas of territory (although with differing levels of intensity). The prevalence of anticipatory violence, or the sense that violence might return, was marked in all three case study countries. Not only does this raise profound questions for the nature of the 'peace' that was ushered in by the peace accords of 1990, 1998 and 2016, it also points out that 'peace' as well as conflict requires coping mechanisms.

Simultaneity has profound implications for peacebuilding and attempts to address conflict. The ability of individuals and groups to enact and embody simultaneity makes life in conflict-affected contexts liveable. Individuals and societies produce and

reproduce a *modus vivendi* in which everyday tasks, for the most part, can be completed and more than bare life is possible. Thus, the interview transcripts from the 'Getting On With It' research project contain multiple references to family or community celebrations and cultural pursuits that point to space, time and resources beyond mere survival. They also point to a security (often in-group security) that enables such pursuits. In one respect, this liveability is to be celebrated. It points to a workable negative peace in which conflict is managed through a mix of vigilance, acceptance and avoidance. Crucially, it indicates individuals and communities with an emotional intelligence that reins in escalatory behaviour. This can be seen as embedded conflict prevention whereby society is organised in a way that often minimises contact, or frictional contact, with the out-group. The built-in sectarian or identity separateness of residential areas, and patronage and social networks, is augmented by an on-the-ground and lived conflict sensitivity.

   Project data shows that so-called ordinary people often behave and communicate in non-escalatory ways when engaged in inter-group encounter, or fashion lives to minimise the potential of frictional encounter. Thus, for example, individuals might draw on a system of manners or other conflict avoidance techniques such as dissembling in their routine encounters with the out-group (Mac Ginty, 2014). Much of this corresponds with Tatsushi Arai's (2022) concept of functional co-existence or

> a paradoxical relationship in which historical adversaries view each other as an existential threat but refrain from using physical force to settle their intolerable differences. Functional coexistence suggests that within each of the conflict-affected societies and across them, there is a minimum liveable social space (MLSS). (p. 124)

The 'Getting On With It' research project took a micro-sociological perspective, rather than Arai's society-wide approach, yet the notion of a minimum liveable social space resonates. Individuals and groups use what agency they have to eke out space or lifeworlds. This involves processes of compartmentalisation of particular issues, stances or aspects of identity, the making and maintenance of physical and psychological boundaries, and engaging in justificatory sense-making. Complex social environments, many of which hold the potential for violence, require sophisticated navigation techniques. Often this is from the conflict management playbook, recognising the structural and long-term nature of conflict, but able to piece together lifeworlds that enhance liveability. As one interviewee in southern Lebanon observed, 'We, as the people who lived here, in this region, have gotten used to this lifestyle. We got used to it . . . People have adapted to the idea, living their lives normally, and leaving things to their own devices'.[24] This points to internalised coping mechanisms at both the individual and the group levels. These mechanisms include acceptance (or resignation), persistence and adaptability. Relevant here is the long-term nature of conflict and tension with, in some communities, repeated displacement, militarisation and violence. To persist in such circumstances requires navigation or what might be termed 'relative positioning', or the ability to place oneself in a social ecosystem in relation to others in both the in-group and the out-group. This positioning requires updating and dynamism, and therefore access to information to enable tacking or more substantial navigational change. Key to all of this is simultaneity or a juggling of time, space, bodily orientation and social relations and the construction of

lifeworlds that are flexible enough to be fit for purpose in complex and potentially violent contexts.

The downside of these simultaneity-driven systems of mitigation is that conflict is normalised and elongated. There is no push towards 'settlement'. Just as at the elite political level there is often political 'unsettlement' (Bell and Pospisil, 2017) or a series of issues unresolved by any peace accord, at the local level the conflict is embedded. Division, segregation and what might be seen as political 'dysfunction' are the norm and have been for generations. The routine of the everyday reinforces the normalcy of division. As the interview transcripts revealed, research subjects were able to rationalise life (especially past periods) as comfortable and fulfilled.

ORCID iD

Roger Mac Ginty [iD] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6411-5507

Notes

1. Interview with male in his 60s, Siloe, Colombia, 20 April 2022.
2. Interview with male in his 40s, Beirut, Lebanon, 29 September 2022.
3. Interview, female in her 60s, Buenaventura, Colombia, 29 April 2022.
4. Interview, female in her 60s, village, Northern Ireland, 1 June 2022.
5. Interview, male in his 40s, a town in Northern Ireland, 6 February 2023.
6. Interview, male in his 40s, Beirut, Lebanon, 15 June 2023.
7. Interview, female in her 20s, Policarpa, Colombia, 11 June 2022.
8. Interview, male in his 40s, a town in Northern Ireland, 6 February 2023.
9. Interview, female in her 30s, village in Northern Ireland, 28 May 2022.
10. Interview, female in her 40s, Belfast, 3 March 2022.
11. Interview, male in his 60s, village in Northern Ireland, 7 June 2022.
12. Interview, male in his 40s, Siloe, Colombia, 16 March 2022.
13. Interview, male in his 70s, town in Northern Ireland, 21 February 2023.
14. Interview, male in his 70s, town in Northern Ireland, 6 February 2023.

15. Interview, female in her 30s, town in Ricaurte, Colombia, 13 July 2022.
16. Interview, male in his 30s, Buenaventura, Colombia, 12 April 2022.
17. Interview, male in his 40s, Siloe, Colombia, 16 March 2022.
18. Interview, male in his 40s, southern Beirut, 18 November 2023.
19. Interview, female in her 30s, Belfast, 31 March 2022.
20. Interview, male in his 40s, Beirut, Lebanon, 15 June 2023.
21. Interview, male in his 60s, southern Lebanon, 24 January 2023.
22. Interview, female in her 40s, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 30 March 2022.
23. Interview, male in his 40s, town, Northern Ireland, 6 February 2023.
24. Interview with male in his 40s, southern Lebanon, 24 January 2023.

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Author biography

Roger Mac Ginty is Professor at the Durham Global Security Institute and the School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University. He edits the journal Peacebuilding and is founder of the Everyday Peace Indicators. His 2021 Oxford University Press book on *Everday Peace* won the 2020–2022 Ernst-Otto Czempiel Award for best book on Peace.