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Game of Thrones to Game of Sites/Sights:
Framing Events through Cinematic Transformations in Northern Ireland

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Introduction

The invitation of Viator, a TripAdvisor online engine, to consider how the Game of Thrones (henceforth GoT, 2011-ongoing), HBO's epic medieval drama 'has more than just plot twists and CGI wizardry up its sleeve' pre-empted the touristification of various filmed natural landscapes (especially, but not exclusively, in Europe). As early as 2010 and 'while the on-screen War of the Five Kings [was] rag[ing] on', the TV series' fans were advised 'to play out their own adventures in the real-life filming locations' (Viator, April 2015). The online 'rundown' of filmed locations on this webpage was soon to be replicated by holiday operators, who sought to integrate the *GoT's* grand mythistorical backdrop into the mundane exceptionalism of multiple tourist performances of its plot, its landscapes and values. This combination of representations of realist fiction (a plot of murder, sex and betrayal) with non-representational (embodied) tourist practices in such digital business spaces stands at the crossroads of events mobilities as products of digital-cinematic markets and their individualised interpretation. By operating as an assemblage of film fans/tourists, digital and cinematic technologies, and natural landscapes, GoT events mobilities (the story, the filmed landscapes' staged tourisms and the fans' actual pilgrimages to them) are prone to multiple interpretations. even when they are not bound by memories enclosed in specific physical sites, such cinematic-come-tourist productions of meaning retain a rudimentary connection to one or more social contexts (Büscher and Urry 2009;

Büscher et.al. 2011) – at least, this is what Baudrillard’s (1973, 2006) thoughts on simulation suggest in a postmodern fashion. Giddens’ conception of ‘double hermeneutics’ (1987), which suggests that most human communications emerge within a social structure (provided in our case by the GoT tourist services and their connection, as we will see below, to national identity myths and institutions), acknowledges how mundane and epic mobilities are not disconnected but part of global cultural and political complexities. The interplay between these two mobility modes (one slow and mythical, the other fast and everyday) defines the motion of events as “a change of the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage in it” (Zizek, 2014: 10; see also introduction to this book). The potency of such hermeneutic work is certainly more evident, where it guides collective action – as is of course the case with the layers of meaning-making we will explore in the GoT digital-cinematic tourist industry, which maintains interpretative flows through sets of texts, images, embodied or even virtual practices.. More precisely, this study focuses on a notable convergence of slow and fast ‘events’ within the *GoT*’s media-tourism-tourist assemblages that opened up new developmental opportunities in Northern Ireland and more recently enabled the simulation of human socialities. My focus is the adaptation of George R. R. Martin’s popular fantasy novels, *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-ongoing) into a TV series under the title *A Game of Thrones* and the subsequent advertising of filmed locales in Northern Ireland as tourist destinations.

Showcasing Northern Ireland as the fictional home of some of Martin’s fantastic regions already encloses a hermeneutic move by certain Irish and British stakeholders, so we could consider it as part of a marketing enterprise. We need a large dose of

critical realism here to assess this: filmed in multiple sites – including a Belfast studio and on location elsewhere in Northern Ireland, Malta, Scotland, Croatia, Iceland, the United States, Spain and Morocco - and rolled over to six successful seasons by HBO, the GoT developed into a popular culture in its own right. Realpolitik enters our tale further down the line, when the filmed locations became enmeshed into reconfigurations of space as (home)land, now ever more spectacularised with the help of old and new media technologies (Shields 1991). The transnational nature of *GoT's* filmed locations and the 'Oriental' feel of its mesmerising music (composer: Ramin Djawadi) transposed the series' fantastic plot of family intrigue and power games onto real territorial contexts of tourist policy-making. I illuminate the Northern Irish political-cultural context of cinematic tourism to consider how the series' hyper-real plot (of kings, royal families, dragons and witches) has informed territorialised claims over tourist flows in the province's filmed locations. Defined by folk legends and gifted with natural riches, these Northern Irish sites are implicated both in World Heritage complexities and the ethno-national sensibilities of the island's 'troubled' events. I contend that the fictional plot feeds into the filmed Northern Irish territories' political, cultural and natural histories and vice versa, producing profitable 'hermeneutic cycles' (Tzanelli 2008: 14) that, despite their 'apparent' circularity, actually enable Northern Ireland to build its cultural future as a tourist destination both within Europe and globally.

All mobilities produce geographies of power (Cresswell 2006), maintaining a socio-cultural kinetics that impinges on physical borders and virtual/imaginary boundaries. Indeed, the novels' cinematic adaptation produced a 'constellation of mobilities' that brought together practices of technological movement (film-making), professional migration (successive relocations of artistic and technical communities to filmed sites),

virtual travel (setting up GoT Internet sites) and embodied (film-induced) tourism. My consideration of these phenomena as aspects of a singular ‘cinematic tourism’, following the moves enacted from within and around films (Tzanelli 2007, 2013), dovetails with Cresswell’s (2006) emphasis on ‘mobility constellations’. I examine how the series’ disparate filmed sites (its territorially existing ‘node’ that spreads across countries, mostly located within Europe) are currently being filtered through its plot and ‘reconfigured’ (interpreted) as Irish cultural capital (a ‘heritage node’) online, in sites regulated by transnational, Northern Irish and Irish tourism and event providers. Although I do not examine tourist interpretations of this marketing, I maintain that industries mobilised particular aspects of human intimacies so as to appeal to their projected clientele (ideal tourist types). Of paramount importance in this process is the uses of Northern Irish ‘dark tourism’ or ‘thanatourism’, by which I refer to the embodied, emotional and now virtual/digital visits to physical sites and landscapes marked by death and suffering – in particular, terrorism, massacres and civil conflict (Slade 2003; Korstanje and Tarlow 2012). On this, it is worth recalling once more, the way Zizek (2014) clusters both brutal political changes, natural disasters, intense experiences of work of art and intimate decisions under the same definitional rubric of ‘events’. The marketing of filmed Northern Irish sites draws on combinations of Northern Ireland’s thanatic heritage matrix (its dark history of civil strife and terror). This matrix only apparently clashes with the province’s natural beauty (its legends, fantastic-literary and real-natural imagery), and the TV series’ synaesthetic (multi-sensory) content, thus facilitating synergies between capitalism and nationalism. This synergy favours capitalist necessity, which dictates historical oblivion (Northern Ireland minus its terror) as a way to deal with collective trauma.

I proceed to explain how such flows produce highly politicised mobilities. These mobilities' synaesthetic digitality – otherwise put, their online representation of combined (syn)-sensory (aesthesia) tourist performances - enhances especially, but not exclusively, Irish identity's ocular properties. As is the case with other post-colonial nations that reside at political and geographical margins (of Europe), the role of image has been pivotal in the twin Ireland's battle for legitimate self-presentation to the world, first as a solidary community, and later as an exotic tourist destination (see Delanty and O'Mahony 2002; Bolan and O'Connor 2008). Northern Ireland's GoT mobilities market tourism's quotidian events while also reiterating the 'nation's' sacred time and essentialised existence – only now, in global spaces of flows (Castells 2004; Jensen 2010, 2013, 2014; Jensen and Richardson 2004) and for purposes extending beyond those supporting the traditional nationalist logic, which dwindles alongside Irish separatism. The following two sections examine allegorical associations between the literary-cinematic plot and real socio-political developments in the region. The fourth section addresses the mobilisation of such national-come-global complexities (e.g. Urry 2003) in the digital advertising of Northern Irish sites, which replaces historical trauma with fantastic scenarios more palatable to tourists.

GoT's dark potential and Northern Irish memory flows

The novels' fictional characters and the selection of actors and filmed sites were not random but constitutive of the literary plot's dark character as well as its association with blends of ethno-national habitus (e.g. a 'propensity to conflict and feud). At the same time, this association did not turn the literary-come-cinematic narrative from a

simulation to straightforward representation of ‘real events’. It is better to consider the GoT as an allegory from which regions in need of economic bolstering benefit. Frederic Jameson’s original claim that ‘all [third-world] cultural productions...are necessarily allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as...national allegories, even when...their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation’ (Jameson 1986: 67) needs to be tailored to Martin’s and the GoT screenwriters’ (D. Benioff, D.B. Weiss, J.R.R. Martin) historical and fictional hybridisations. Such hybridisations are offshoot of new global complexities (Urry 2003), in that they disseminate ethnically rooted narratives outside (alloú) their cradle, in global market networks (agorá: the ancient market also space of public exchange). Such neo-liberalisation processes should not be projected onto artistic creativity uncritically, but placed amongst successive hermeneutic chains by different agents in a disorganised socio-economic map, where different mobilities are designed and staged (Lash & Urry 1987; Jensen 2013, 2014). Following Lash & Urry (1994) we may argue that, in the case of Northern Ireland, a potential hermeneutic chaos – potentially prompted by the coexistence of competing interpretations of the same tourist signs, landscapes, histories and products at the expense of their coherent marketing - was stabilised due to the global recession, which called for a reliable and unchallenged version of (their) meaning. I return to this below.

Martin’s novels, which follow the violent dynastic struggles among the families of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros to control the Iron Throne, certainly resemble conventional family friction. However, their inception from fusions of true events and characters from European history (Holland, 24 March 2013) (including the English War

of Roses (1455-85), the adventures of Isabella of France's (1295-13-58) family or the uses of the Byzantine 'Greek Fire' in anti-Islamic warfare) produced an artistic displacement of times – a heterotopia. Michel Foucault's (1986) term was used to describe places and spaces functioning in non-hegemonic conditions and thus hosting forms of otherness in safe states of in-betweenness and indeterminacy. Without discarding this definition, I prioritise the role of time in communal narratives of otherness, as well as its marketing in tourist industries today. In other words, instead of inducing hermeneutic and emotional chaos, historical traumas and dissonant events (e.g. Zizek's (2014: 1) ruptures) can inhabit a contrived (by the state and/or tourist/digital industries) heterotopia as a safe mental and geographical 'space'. This temporal displacement is accompanied by a spatial one to endorse neoliberal strategisation in movie tourism for example, it informs a common practice in location-hunting for films with no real or accessible sites (Bolan 2010) that is endorsed by the deterritorialised Internet, where relevant cinematic holidays are sold. For the first season exterior scenes were shot at Sandy Brae in the Mourne Mountains (the 'Oriental' Vaes Dothrak), Castle Ward (Winterfell), Cairncastle (Lord Stark's execution site), Magheramorne quarry (Castle Black) and Shane's Castle (tourney grounds) (Josh, 1 April 2012), all in Northern Ireland; Doune Castle near Stirling in Scotland (exterior Winterfell scenes) - already 'a place of pilgrimage for movie fans after it featured as Castle Anthrax in the 1975 film Monty Python and the Holy Grail' (BBC, 23 October 2009); finally, Malta and Morocco (the southern scenes). The second season moved the southern setting from Malta to Croatia (Dubrovnik), whereas 'Frostfangs' and the 'Fist of First Men' were filmed in Iceland. The third season returned to Morocco to film the scenes of the city of

Essaouira and Daenery's (the exotic Dothraki Queen) Essos stay (Phelan, 29 April 2014).

The overt association of Northern Ireland with ancestral origins is matched in this place-assortment with sites standing symbolically or physically at the margins of European 'civilisation', as a, by now antiquated, but still potent 'Orientalist' discourse would purport (Said 1978). Hence, the *GoT's* narrative node is based on a peculiar Oriental-European cultural fusion of violence, exoticism and natural beauty. Indeed, Martin's and his cinematic companions' critical take is based on a discursive bricolage of realist approaches to violence – what with Morocco's crypto-Islamic identity, or Irish associations with a crippling civil war in the British post-colonial context. Conflict is explicitly relocated in the exotic domain of mystical pasts, castles, rock formations, deserts and nomadic people who happen to marry exiled princesses, determined to claim back their place in civilised parts of the world. The play on cultural as 'structural hybridisation' based on imaginary civilizational borders and crossings (Nederveen Pieterse 1997) finds a synaesthetic extension in composer Djawadi's use of decidedly non-medieval renditions of songs from the series source novels by noted Indie bands. German-Iranian Djawadi claimed that he was inspired to write the main title music by an early version of the series' computer-animated title sequence, but the music's use in key moments of the main characters' lives certainly turned it into part of the series' central scenario of adventure, scheming, murder and horror (Savas, 22 December 2012). Its contrapuntal theme can be likened to Said's contrapuntal epistemology (Chowdry 2007), which sets different worldviews side-by-side to highlight meeting points (of cultures and world civilisations). Such artistic hermeneutics were complemented by the

maintenance of regional, especially Northern and Southern English, accents in cinematic dialogue, to denote spatialized difference as a form of ethnic habitus (Tzanelli 2007).

The selection of Northern Ireland as a sort of heterotopic area in the form of landscape markers signifies borderland European civility. Cinematically or technologically the province encloses both Eastern and Western influences (music, accents, aristocratic nomadic characters) and produces a mobility vortex (e.g. Hannam et.al. 2006; Sheller & Urry 2006; Tzanelli 2013), into which artistic technology sucks numerous histories about the actual filmed places. At the level of literary-cinematic narrative, Northern Ireland fits a centuries-old 'political bill', whereby first Celtic flows produced ancestral traces of Northern British heritage. Subsequently, these became enmeshed into regional anti-colonial struggles that past medieval and early modern times would solidify as a religious-nationalist split between pro-British Protestants and anti-colonial separatist Catholics. The infamous 'Troubles' that intensified the conflict between Unionists and Loyalists over the constitutional status of Northern Ireland lasted between the late 1960s and the 1998 'Good Friday Agreement', further sinking the island into blood and pushing Irish populations to (self-) exile (McKittrick et.al. 2007).

Such coerced mobilities produced global representations of Irishness – of relevance in this study as fragile moments contemporary cultural industries (media and tourism) transform into mundane consumption rituals (e.g. visiting and photographing sites, monuments, nature and histories). Historical research has highlighted that, especially the colonial era and periods of transatlantic Irish migration, consolidated the image of

the mobile Irish subject/vagabond as non-European, 'black' (Curtis 1971) – a nominalisation the Irish Protestant elites projected onto Catholic populations to consolidate their superiority and participation in British post-colonial nation-building. Interestingly, this 'bill' is nicely matched in the *GoT's* instance by the selection of Balkan sites for filming, which were also implicated in genocidal processes of ethnogenesis, first with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (early 1900s) and then with the demise of communist influence (1990s). The ubiquitous use of 'Balkanisation' in global politics as byword for unresolved civil conflict is firmly connected to the region: the Balkans have been repeatedly discussed as indicative of Orientalist tendencies and alleged civilizational clashes with 'Europe proper' (Todorova 1997). The addition of Maltese locations does not deviate from this theme, as the island is geographically distant from well-known European cultural centres and politically connected to histories of British colonisation: its rugged landscape, medieval ruins and Mediterranean climate make it picturesque in a dark and natural fashion.

As a highly complex case, these events in historical and mythical proveniences, change meaning and function. The extraordinary (*GoT's* magic, political intrigue and illicit love scenarios) is reconfigured into the everyday and back again into the political realm – for, globally Northern Irish sites are overdetermined by the island's dark histories. Perhaps currently the *GoT* informs 'geographically specific formations of...narratives about mobility and mobile practices' (Cresswell 2010, 17) from a fictional stance. Yet, Ireland is the site of ethno-nationalist memories; even mythical narratives of national formation survive primarily in realist contexts – for, 'it is always through [a] process of interpretation' that cultures 'are kept alive' (Kearney 1984: 38; Bleicher 1980: 225). We

should consider the *GoT*'s fictional lieux as clever modifications of Northern Irish histories of conflict – an abstraction of real milieux de mermoire (Nora 1989) in the province. Northern Ireland may be unrecognizable from the outside as Ned Stark's ancestral home, but the popular knowledge that it mythically served as the site in which a 'fictional family' met its end is vital. Its exchange with Croatian locations in the second season ('King's Landing might be the single most important location in the entire show, and it has to look right', explained Co-Executive Producer David Benioff (Josh, 1 April 2012)) turns an assortment of locations from Europe's geographical margins into a single mythical site of disaster. By audio-visual means, the Northern Irish locations partake in the *GoT*'s 'mediated centre' – the filmed places that the process of spectacularisation turns into a 'sacred' popular domain (Couldry 2003a, 2003b). The plot's sorcery background suggests that there is darkness in family feuds – a perfect accompaniment to the tourist staples that the Northern Irish Tourist Board wishes to offer to global cinematic tourist clientele. But in this effort, hard core politics dies hard.

Network capital and memory: politicising, touristifying, modifying

We note then that the *GoT* evolving multi-industry is an example of how clusters of past and contemporary events are framed by global media-tourist systems – what I proceed to explore as the role of memory in the production and maintenance of 'network capital'. The implication of politics in the show has found some world-wide uses that are worth a mention here – for, not only do they belong to the *GoT*'s mobile hermeneutic matrix, they are decisively embedded into its tourist flows. First, global popular culture found a new term in 'sexposition' (exposition of secrets during sex, in

brothels). This was originally coined by the US blogger and critic Myles McNutt to describe the many scenes in the HBO fantasy series that play out against a backdrop of sex and nudity (Hann, 11 March 2012). Second, the Supreme Court battles of the US healthcare legislation figured in media platforms after the HBO series as a ‘Game of Robes’ to highlight the legislation’s dramatic and conflictual nature (Brescia, 6 July 2012). The figurative use of the series’ title in situations of intense conflict and deceit also connected to the Syrian conflict – in particular, Bashar Al Assad’s ‘killing rampage’ in order to stay on his throne (Varvasky, 4 July 2012) – and the power games within the Chinese Government (Garnaut, 1 July 2012). Amongst the series’ self-confessed fans are US President Barack Obama, former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Trimmermans, whose 2013 speech discussed European politics with quotes from Martins’ novels (Kirkup, 30 May 2013).

It is small wonder then, that with an eye to gaining ground next to New Zealand’s J.R.R. Tolkien-Peter Jackson’s literary-cinematic success (e.g. *The Lord of the Rings* cinematic trilogy (2000-3)), Invest Northern Ireland and the Tourist Board launched a concerted campaign to turn the filmed North Irish sites into a primary destination for cinematic tourist fans. Notably, the series receives funding from Northern Ireland Screen, a government agency financed by Invest Northern Ireland and the European Regional Development Fund (Northern Ireland Screen, 12 April 2012). As of April 2013, Northern Ireland Screen has awarded the show £9.25 million and according to government estimates, benefited the Northern Ireland economy by £65 million (Bradley, 12 April 2013). The series had already embraced real politics long before the announcement of Northern Ireland MLA and current Minister for Enterprise, Trade and

Investment Ariene Foster that ‘the Tourism Ireland adverts are especially designed to bridge the fantasy of Game of Thrones with the reality of Northern Ireland’ (Tourism Ireland, 2 April 2014). Her complementary comment in an Assembly answer that ‘throughout its lifespan it is likely that Game of Thrones will deliver the widest media exposure Northern Ireland has ever achieved outside of politics and the Troubles’ (McAdam, 16 May 2012) certainly falls back to the political interpretations the series found elsewhere in the world. Her attempt to read the fantastic through a series of traumatic events in Irish history wilfully uses the province’s most damaging ‘traumascape’ (Kaelber 2007) – one of twentieth-century’s civil conflicts that recycled the necessity for Irish partition in the post-colonial era. Based on a homology or likening rationale (just like *GoT*’s family intrigues, so the Irish civil conflict), Foster’s hermeneutics reproduces a communitarian logic to streamline Irish troubles into tourism mobilities.

Out of all potential interpretations of the *GoT*’s central scenario or ‘archplot’ (McKee 1999), the one that stresses the demise of ‘family utopia’ persists across countries and cultures. Its association with variations of the trauma of European modernity (civil war, genocide) is what marketing imperatives seek to ameliorate or repress (according to Foster, ‘outside politics’, Northern Ireland shines). The *GoT*’s mythical context bears the potential to aestheticize some of Ireland’s multiple realities (Dean 2007), to reconstruct an ‘image’ of the Irish imagined community as an Edenic place – a perfect heterotopian strategy in the management of events of rupture. The *GoT*’s politicisation is, in short, a ‘game of sites’, in which Northern Ireland stands for a collection of aestheticized image-places in global consumption domains, not bloody milieux de

memoire. My focus on this oscillation between real-political and utopian discourse borrows from Schütz's systematic examination of stratifications of the 'lifeworld' as 'multiple realities', finite provinces of meaning or 'sub-universes' (Henning 2002: 170). Foster's or Obama's objectives (their realities) differ from Martin's more generic pursuits, which are closer to Tolkien's literary allegory on social 'disenchantment' in *The Lord of the Rings* - mirrored in the end of Hobbit and Elfish eras due to the rise of warfare that destroys natural resources to provide 'compensation on the symbolic level for the political and economic processes that have destroyed the traditional fabric of...societies' (Spurr 1993: 132; White 1978: 153; Smith 2008: 174). So, we evidently deal with the political management of meaning of a fictional plot with the aim to engender and sustain global social relations and to generate 'emotional, financial and practical benefit' (Larsen and Urry 2008: 93) for Northern Ireland in the tourist trade.

Hence, Northern Ireland's 'network capital', its tourist 'currency' in Europe and beyond, is currently managed for the market as much as it aspires to be a 'government of the market' (Foucault 2009: 146 in Bærenholdt 2013: 26). Tourist mobilities figure here as governing principles, incorporated social practices of control through the movement of information – in our case, also the modification of a British-Irish province's thanatic memory flows of conflict and war. As histories of civil war transform into auxiliary media-tourist staple, the memories of death and suffering become less harmful and more marketable. Normatively, Bauman's (2007) argument that any attempt to sacralise dying as a spectacle is the prelude of the represented tragedy's neglect, fits Northern Ireland's tourist 'sexposition': much like the medieval custom of the representation of the ailing King, who could not make a public

appearance, through a mask, a picture or a surrogate body (Belting 2007; Korstanje 2008), Northern Ireland's non-sovereign trajectory would better be represented through a TV series, a harmless spectacle. Given the strong ocular properties of both tourist advertising and nationalist discourse (Urry and Larsen 2011; Tzanelli 2013: chapter 2) the selection of one over the other for the production of network capital conforms to political imperatives.

As is the case with any sociological analysis, the analytical subsumes the normative discourse, but in this chapter I prioritise the former: due to the global prevalence of e-tourist initiatives, Northern Ireland's GoT tourist governmobilities work through technological and institutional forms of self-government, through objects and digitised relations (Bærenholdt 2013: 29; Urry 2007). Perhaps Northern Ireland has been globally earmarked as a dark site of terrorism and strife, but its new mythical acquisitions can help it claim back its stolen prestige in another 'meaning province', so to speak (Graml 2004: 149; Tzanelli 2013: 57). The 'nature' and 'character' of a place can be modified with the help of new technologies of governance/mobility, in other words. To this end, the following section explores the persistence of darkness as part of the filmed places' aesthetic branding and design in the cyberspace.

Digital governmobilities: mastering Northern Irish 'nature'

The gap between digitisation of cinematic narratives, real filmed landscapes in the GoT and the political discourse of Northern Ireland as an image-place are principally mastered in the cyberspace, where Irish GoT filmed locations are advertised by disparate stakeholders, regional-national and international. There, the series' musical

background disappears and, save vision, all other human senses find little use. We need to bear in mind that landscapes have always been (re-) produced at the intersection of tourism with (visual and informational-communicational) technologies of mobility – a phenomenon more systematised in the current context of e-tourism or ‘smart tourism’ (Germann Molz 2012: 39). In any case, the *GoT*’s ‘dark family narrative node’ and the global financial profile of its cinematic networks, terminates, so to speak, in a Belfast studio and the province’s e-tourist providers. This phenomenon is part of global mobility channels that connect locative media to international phantasmagoric communication centres, such as Hollywood and LA’s city of bits (de Souza e Silva and Frith 2011; de Souza e Silva and Sheller 2014). In this section I explore the interpretative power of these locative apparatuses, bearing in mind that they too obey to more powerful global governmobilities that promise regional regeneration.

What we receive visually in *GoT* tourist websites is a series of landscapes as naturalised signs, ready to be granted meaning by web designers who are interested in generating profit more than preserving history. Urry’s discussion of ‘places that die’ (2004: 208) to explain the shift from land (material forms of homeland) to landscape (its transformation into an ideal based on novel technologies of the eye) applies in this e-tourist context. This shift suggests that representations as such matter less than the ways they are produced, conserved or modified (Mitchell 1994). Controlled by national centres, such hermeneutics of place valorise culture in the technological spaces of late modernity, where imagined communities circulate ideas and customs for global consumption. But when we deal with both external advertising pressures (to enhance Northern Ireland’s network capital) and international business collaborations, the death

of place (the obliteration of its histories and cosmological moorings) can also give birth to (apropos Cosgrove 1998: 2) 'landscape ideas-as-ideals'. This does not merely denote a way of seeing-as-inhabiting material environments with the assistance of technologies of mobility but also encloses the utopian possibility to produce new memories of place as culture. Utopias are born out of heterotopian relocations of memory.

Lest we uncritically endorse neoliberal profiteering, it must be noted that the digital modifications of GoT actually filmed environments obey to the Western European principles of the picturesque, according to which landscapes matter principally as forms. Yet, by returning to the original sources of the series' visual inspiration (i.e. the 'real landscapes' of individual GoT episodes), especially Northern Irish e-tourist providers also capitalise on the alleged 'essence' of these places. Amongst them, the GoT's Dragonstone (Downhill Beach, Londonderry), is discussed in Discover Northern Ireland.com (2014) as 'one of the most iconic locations...on the Causeway Coast...home to Mussenden – a tiny temple perched dramatically on a 120ft cliff top, high above the Atlantic Ocean'. The spot is close to a conservation area and is also advertised as ideal for a 'family day out'. Connected to scenes of revenge and vendetta, Carrick-a-Rede, Larrystone and Antrim are also officially advertised for their 'special Scientific Interest: unique geology, flora and fauna'. This is especially significant for Carrick-a-Rede, which is located near Giant's Causeway, Antrim - a geological formation that resulted from a volcanic eruption 60 million years ago. The filmed site is discussed as 'focal point of a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty [that] has attracted visitors for centuries' (Discover Northern Ireland.com 2014). It must be noted that a great part of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site is

today owned and managed by the National Trust. However, the recognition of the Coast as World Heritage Site in 1986; as a national nature reserve in 1987 by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland; and as the fourth greatest natural wonder in the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland Tourist Board 18 August 2008) form a peculiar couple with the area's recent cinematic glamour. One wonders whose 'community heritage' is advertised – and to what ends.

Such unresolved questions are constitutive of the *GoT's* digital governmobilities, which promote analogical classification of ideals: nature and landscaped 'physiognomies' (e.g. unusual geological formations) behave like natural human bonds we find in families. Their ecosystemic management conforms and reproduces the biopolitics (Foucault 1997) of the nation-state (the management of its populations), while simultaneously turning this into the maiden of governmobilities (the global management of naturalised ethnic character). There is no mention of the Troubles online, only of the archaic legends of these sites, scientific information on geographical formations and even their management, in some cases, by proper scientific institutions (Giddens 2009; Urry 2011). The 'scientisation' of such Northern Irish landscapes transcends the imperatives of nationalism, as it responds to international-institutional calls. But such calls also enable the restoration of nature in the cybersphere's meaning province, were the *GoT's* cinematic reality matters less than its recuperation as a Northern Irish ecosystem. At the same time, such 'recuperation' assists with historical healing. A narrative identical to Discover Northern Ireland's figures on Tourism Ireland's (2014) website, where it is stated that 'of course, aside from the fantasy landscapes, there's a good reason why Northern Ireland was picked by GoT location scouts. There are castles everywhere;

incredible structures that catapult you right to the heart of the mythical land of Westeros', confirming the province's 'breath-taking natural beauty'. Note that Tourism Ireland was established under the framework of the Belfast Agreement of 'Good Friday' on April 1998, to increase tourism to Ireland as a whole. The institution has worked closely 'with its sister agencies on the island of Ireland, particularly in the development of this website, Fáilte Ireland, the national tourism development authority of the Republic of Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board' (ibid.). The harmonisation of the website's discourse on the GoT locations with that of Discover Northern Ireland is also in agreement with post-colonial and post-nationalist tourism policies. Agreement is achieved digitally by forgetting political disagreements in order to enable global tourist mobilities.

Therefore, it is more accurate to argue that the governmobile ethos of such websites is geared towards the mastery, packaging and international promotion of Northern Irish landscapes as the only part of 'Irish character', habitus and history worthy of salvation from oblivion. Although clearly implicated in Northern Irish political intrigues, this move is constitutive of post-industrial ecological movements that haunted Western (post-) modernity with the condemnation of humans to rootlessness and eternal mobility (Urry 2007; Cresswell 2010). The occulocentric techniques of these websites enable potential film tourists to accept death as a spectacle that stands outside their own experiences – to speculate the mask or image of the King from afar, as distant cosmopolitans (Szerszynski and Urry 2006), with little affective engagement with local 'troubles'. This aesthetic emphasis on the distant picturesque corresponds to the American poet William Cullen Bryant's (1817) coining of 'thanatopsis' to denote the

speculation of one's own death through the eyes of others, while entertaining relief for avoiding it, at least temporarily. Thus, instead of considering thanatopsis as part of the dark tourist's fascination with other people's death, we may view it as the mechanism with which new technologies use consumerist prerogatives to enable prospective clientele to enjoy the gift of life. The promise of this gift is actualised through visual representations of tourism in filmed sites – as is the case with independent Belfast company 'Game of Thrones Tours' (2014), which warns prospective cinematic tourists that 'in Ireland, Winter is never far away. Winter is always coming, almost every day'. The likeness of rugged Irish climate-landscape to Martin's mythical domains allows for the transformation of thanatourist simulation into embodied performance for those who are not 'faint-hearted' (ibid.) and not interested in history's troubled events. Needless to add that such independent websites, which link the technologized phantasmagoric city (of Belfast and Dublin) to the 'dark' countryside (e.g. Williams 1974) still work in harmony with nationalist interests that wish to obliterate non-profitable traumatic 'events'.

Conclusion: GoT to game of sights/sites

In terms of theory, this chapter deliberated on conceptions of 'events' as both materialisations of histories and collective memories but also places of imagination and literary fiction re-framed by contemporary industries (film and tourism) into consumable products for collective (film, internet and tourist) gazes and ears. It did so via exposition of the ways a cinematically mediated heterotopia (of Irish dark and bloody histories) allowed for protective marketing of post-colonial violence as natural tourist spaces and visitor performances. Contextually, it analysed how the GoT TV

series has been placed at the centre of tourism policy-making in Northern Ireland and locative media sectors, not in spite, but because of its potential to hybridise Ireland's traumatic memories of civil war. Its developmental potential in film and tourism industries (its 'financial node') in the current global recession is supported by its narrative node (the demise of family utopia from feuds). Its new e-tourist industry is constituted by various regional (e.g. locative tourism media in Northern Ireland) and independent agents that currently market regional landscapes online.

The rationale of such GoT-inspired websites, according to which filmed Northern Irish image-places are beautiful sites for mobile viewing subjects (Larsen 2001: 88), conforms to conceptions of the Western European 'beautiful' world-image, picturesque renditions of Northern Irish cultural nature as a way of disinterested 'world-making' (Duncan 1999: 153; Dann 2002: 6; Budd 2003). This is achieved in practice through digital transformations of true Irish 'family' feuds – the original thanatic inspiration of GoT location selection – into potential family tourist destinations, global film-tourist pilgrimages, or mere ecotourist spots (Couldry 2003a; Beeton 2006; Tzanelli 2013). These blends are constitutive of the *GoT's* digital governmobilities, which promote analogical classification of ideals: nature and landscaped 'physiognomies' (e.g. unusual geological formations) are like naturalised human bonds supporting family socialities (Herzfeld 2001). Both can be scrutinised and understood by common mobile folk (tourists) only by visual means, if not purchased as tourism holidays. The cultural and political complexity of their nature is intrinsically connected to Northern Irish habitus, which can now travel the world in the form of images. The original nature of Northern Irish dark tourism as a means by which the living establish a relationship with death and

the dead collectively (as a nation) or individually (as mourning family members) (Walters 2009) is now replaced with dispassionate tourist engaging with dead landscapes (Urry 2004) that allows Northern Ireland to build a mobile future on oblivion.

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