

## THE PRISONS MEMORY ARCHIVE: A CASE STUDY ON FILMED STORYTELLING ARCHIVES AS A TOOL FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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### **ABSTRACT**

Filmed storytelling archives have become a growing trend in societies emerging from conflict as a way to both “account for” and “undo” the past. This study examines Belfast’s Prisons Memory Archive (PMA) as a case study for the efficacy of such projects as a tool for transitional justice. The research utilizes a basis of existing literature and theory regarding archival studies, history, transitional justice, storytelling, memory studies and psychology to then provide a qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with PMA participants and the project creators. The analysis of the interviews outlines how the interviewees perceive the PMA as a project within the context of transitional justice. From these conclusions, this study asserts that through the experiences of the participants and creators of the PMA, the PMA can act as a transitional justice mechanism for its subjects; additionally, the conclusions made regarding the PMA case study provided a basis on which to make best practice recommendations for other filmed storytelling archives or perpetrator-focused media after conflict.

Keywords: Northern Ireland, transitional justice, media, archive, storytelling

### **INTRODUCTION**

An archive of filmed stories within a transitional justice framework recognizes “the absolute uniqueness in the experience of the promise (the future) and the injunction of memory (the past). But the two are not added or juxtaposed: the one is founded on the other” (Derrida, 1996, p. 76). If memory truly acts as a basis for the future, then methods to deal with the legacy of violent conflict are absolutely necessary to any transitional justice process. This study will explore the concept of filmed storytelling archives as a method for dealing with the past through a case study of the Prisons Memory Archive. The Prisons Memory Archive (PMA) based in Belfast, Northern Ireland, is a digital archive of filmed life-storytelling recordings of former prisoners, prison guards, and other individuals who interacted with the Maze Long Kesh and Armagh prisons throughout the period of conflict in Northern Ireland referred to as the Troubles. The archive has utilized a life storytelling approach to film participants at the prison sites they formerly interacted with. The PMA takes into account experiences within the contested space of the prisons during the years between 1960 and 2000. It holds 175 film recordings of former prisoners, prison staff, prison guards, and family members of the formerly incarcerated. This study will analyze the PMA through an exploration of the following question:

Can a filmed storytelling archive contribute to the experience of transitional justice for its subjects?

Looking to the PMA as a case study for this question is an opportunity to identify the PMA's strengths and weaknesses as a potential tool for transitional justice, and to situate those findings within present-day Northern Ireland. Within the broader context, this analysis of the PMA considers the effectiveness of filmed storytelling archives in transitional settings for purposes of individual processing and provision of agency and facilitating cross-community contact. This case study may also be able to inform similar projects on best practices for filming, archiving, and disseminating stories after conflict so that they may influence the process of transitional justice.

### *Defining transitional justice*

Transitional justice refers to “the full set of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuse, in order to secure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation” (Annan, 2004, p. 4). Very often and in seminal texts on the topic, transitional justice is referred to as a normalized process that is mostly comprised of an official set of legal and political steps that have been internationally recognized as “the” way to transition (Bird & Ottanelli, 2015). However, redress following violent conflict must take into account the social context, which also involves bottom-up non-judicial means (Hinton, 2010) (as cited in Bird & Ottanelli, 2015). These informal mechanisms are often less structured but more responsive to societal context and need; they develop with immediacy as well as years after the ‘end’ of conflict. These are an essential compliment to the legal and political forms of transitional justice. They ensure fuller participation by society and

possibly greater buy-in, rather than forcing transition solely through a peace agreement that is handed down from top-level political processes (Lundy & McGovern, 2008). This study examines filmed storytelling as a replacement in situations where statutory calls for ‘truth’ are lacking, or the ‘official’ narrative of what happened is exclusionary.

### *The Northern Irish context*

The consideration of the PMA as a tool for transition fits into wider society and the fields of conflict resolution and reconciliation because in an increasingly digital age, filmed storytelling is a growing trend (Henige, 1982) (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003). Despite this, there is little academic discussion surrounding best practices for such projects and potential issues that may arise in their creation and maintenance. This is a discussion which is necessary to have in the context of conflict narrative archives, which attempt to ‘undo’ and ‘account for’ the past simultaneously (Bell, 2000).

In Northern Ireland, many policy documents and discussions have expressed a belief in the importance of storytelling as a tool to address the past. This call for storytelling within the transitional justice framework can be found in the Bloomfield 1998 report, the Eames-Bradley 2009 report, the Haas-O’Sullivan talks of 2013, and most recently, the Stormont House agreement in 2015, which proposed the need for an oral history archive, but no official statutory provisions have followed. Several grassroots storytelling organizations have been established in Northern Ireland, possibly in response to this gap. This research focuses on the Prisons Memory Archive as a case study because of its uniqueness among them, specifically in terms of its ethical framework of co-ownership and practice of on-site recording, as well as in its focus on the prison narrative, a perspective which is often suppressed.

Ex-prisoners' perspectives and experiences are often ones that people may want to leave out of the general narrative as a protection for victims or for political reasons (McLaughlin, 2010). However, all parties must feel that they have agency within transition in order to be satisfied and to promote future reconciliation (Lutz, 2006), thus the PMA is a worthy setting in which to study the ways in which agency can be provided by storytelling. Additionally, the PMA holds stories of individuals who interacted with the prisons in a multitude of capacities; this inclusive nature allows an investigation into the cross-community contact aspects of transitional justice mechanisms.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Transitional justice and storytelling***

The linkage of private experiences to public knowledge is the basis on which a filmed storytelling archive works as a transitional justice mechanism. Within informal approaches to transitional justice, "historical inquiry and narrative play an important transitional role in linking past to present" (Teitel, 2000, p. 8). Storytelling archives encompass both of these aspects. This linkage is essential not only for those who encounter the archive materials as viewers, but likely even more so for the participants and creators of the archive. This is especially so in the Northern Irish context because the official political stance has, thus far, been to take no real stance on the past at all. Through grassroots filmed storytelling archives as well as other oral history collections, the community attempts to provide the multifaceted view of truths that Teitel (2000) insinuates is needed to connect past and present, beyond what is perpetuated in an overarching narrative. If oral history is to work as a transitional tool in Northern Ireland, it can in no way promote a single overarching societal narrative of the

conflict due to the fact that much of the residual issues have to do with the meta-conflict, or the conflict about what the conflict was about in the first place (Lambkin, 2014). By allowing space for stories without concern for *the* truth and instead looking for truths-- plural-- a storytelling archive can act as "justice and resistance to injustice" (Harris, 2007, p. 256) (as cited in Motha & van Rijswijk, 2016, p. 3) in that it resists a meta-narrative that is exclusionary and therefore detrimental to transition.

### ***Storytelling: Healing and agency***

The practice of storytelling can be a pathway through transition after conflict because of the healing aspects narration may have on the individual; this occurs when storytellers feel that their perspective is validated, and because talking through an experience may help the storyteller create new meaning out of old stories. Informal mechanisms of transitional justice have harnessed these dual effects of agency and healing through storytelling initiatives. Harter et. al (2005, p. 152) emphasize that self and story are inextricably linked; that "stories do not simply describe the self; they are the self's medium of being."

Michael White & David Epston (1990) developed the concept of narrative therapy in psychology, an idea which has been picked up throughout literature on transitional justice as well; they center the argument on the idea that narrative allows people to create new meaning out of old stories, which facilitates movement past the initial trauma that stagnates them (also in López, 2015; Madiera, 2009;). Social psychology asserts that language is a "vehicle for important cognitive and learning processes following an emotional upheaval," and that talking about an event can help to organize it into a more productive thought pattern (Pennebaker & Banasik, 1997, p. 8). Brandon Hamber (2015) continues this discussion of 'meaning-making' situated

in the context of transitional justice, especially in situations where this transitional justice is not provided in a state-led manner. He states, “Outside of formal transitional justice, individuals and communities of individuals can also seek to create meaning in various spaces that are often more aligned with the everyday impact of political violence. They can do this, for example, by using museums and archives... community storytelling and sharing... and cinema. Opening up these spaces is as important as thinking about the formal mechanisms of meaning-making” (Hamber, 2015, p.11).

Narrative projects give agency to stories that might have otherwise been neglected but provide insight into the experience of that time and place (White & Epston, 1990). The general narrative often represents the interests of the dominant groups or the interest of the state (Howarth, 1998); when initiatives give space to otherwise unheard stories, it dismantles the existing knowledge-power relationship. Power comes from accepted forms of knowledge and understandings of truth (Foucault, 1998). Based on these theories, if a storytelling archive can be accepted as a holding space for individuals’ knowledge and experience of their own truth, the archive has the potential to give individuals across all divides a sense of agency and power within transition (López, 2015), and can work as “a form of therapy both for the individual and for the nation writing its history” (Colvin, 2003, p.157). “Approaching someone to record them shows that their life is of significance and value in itself, quite apart from any history which may result... The respect implicit in this can be of tremendous importance to a wide range of people” (Counce, 1994, p. 25).

#### ***Cross-community contact***

A filmed and digitized storytelling archive after a period of

conflict has the ability to facilitate real, imagined, and/or extended cross-community contact. The contact hypothesis, or intergroup contact theory, argues that exposure or interactions with other groups under positive conditions can reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Pettigrew, 1986). Allport suggests four criteria that should be met in order to create optimal conditions for contact and the reduction of intergroup contact. These criteria are that there is equal status between majority and minority groups, and also the pursuit of common goals. Additionally, contact should be sanctioned by institutional supports, and it should show a perception of common interests and humanity (Allport, 1954; Hewstone et al, 2006).

Contact theory can apply to both real and imagined interactions; in Allport’s (1954) first assessment of contact hypothesis, he ponders if intergroup contact is not only able to but *should* begin on an imagined level of some sort. The type of imagined contact that occurs when a viewer watches clips from a filmed storytelling archive is called the vicarious experience approach, in which imagery of the ‘other,’ such as what can be found in film, is part of this milder and less direct form of contact (Allport, 1954) (as cited in Crisp & Turner, 2012). Crisp and Turner’s analysis of the effectiveness of imagined contact and vicarious experience found that “mentally simulating a positive contact experience will create... more positive feelings about outgroups, that will result in more favorable outgroup perceptions and enhanced intentions to engage in future contact” (Crisp & Turner, 2012, p.15). This vicarious experience of imagined contact is helpful in situations of deeply divided societies such as Northern Ireland, in which opportunities for contact may be less common. This is especially important as a

conflict resolution tool because the segregation of groups “is believed to play a major role in establishing and maintaining conflict between two communities” (Gallagher, 1995)(as cited in Niens & Cairns, p. 337). Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society, and large portions of the community experience a “lack of extended opportunities for contact” (Crisp & Turner, 2012, p. 16). In today’s digital age, the opportunity for imagined contact is expanding. According to Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna (2015, p. 826), “the Internet is the “best tool yet for effectively putting the contact hypothesis into practice.” Imagined contact and vicarious experience, especially by utilizing digital methods such as a filmed storytelling archive, can address challenges that may occur in facilitating real-life contact, such as practical barriers like geography, as well as the anxiety that comes with encountering the ‘outgroup’ (Amichai-Hamberger et al, 2015). It does so by allowing the viewer to have anonymity, more control over the situation, and more equality in the interaction because the physical aspect of it is taken out and there is less room for nonverbal judgment or aggression (Amichai-Hamberger et al, 2015).

Contact theory can also be non-direct; the extended contact hypothesis argues that the benefits of association with outgroups can also extend to friends of those who are interacting with the outgroup; the knowledge that ingroup members have friends in the outgroup is likely to reduce ingroup prejudice towards the outgroup (Wright et al, 1997). This theory is significant because it means that even small-scale initiatives that involve cross-community contact can have a ripple effect within the wider community. This is another way of solving the issue of lack of contact opportunity, in the same way that imagined contact, such as through the

internet, may address it. Direct contact theory, extended contact theory, and imagined contact theory through methods like the Internet and film all come into play in filmed and digitized storytelling archives. Such contact happens through the interactions during creation of the archive itself, the discussions and events happening around the archive, and then through the finished product that is then accessible for viewing.

## ***METHODOLOGY***

This research was focused on participants’ experience within the Prisons Memory Archive, including their perspectives on the initial telling of their narrative as well as their interaction with the archive since then. The research attempts to ascertain the level of individual agency that interviewees felt as participants in the PMA, and the level to which they believe the PMA is working in place of statutory transitional justice mechanisms, particularly for the former prison community. The conclusions reached on both of these subjects may point to whether such projects should remain a bottom-led initiative or become more formalized, and outline best practices for similar future projects. The questions asked of the PMA participants and creators could be asked of any storytelling archive after conflict, and the findings are consistent with what the theoretical framework would have suggested. The findings are broadly based and should be applicable to storytelling archives in transitional settings beyond only the PMA case study; the applicability and consistency of the research are the two main ways through which this study pursued research rigor (Krefting, 1991).

## ***RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION***

In order to answer the stated questions on storytelling archives in the context of the Prisons Memory Archive, this case study has used the literature as a theoretical framework. The multiple and interdisciplinary theories within this provide theory triangulation (Denzin, 1978), which provides a foundation for analysis of the interviews with the creators and a selection of participants from the Prisons Memory Archive. The cross-section of six interviewees chosen provides a “multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context... collected using a single method from people with different perspectives on what is being observed” (Lewis, 2003, p. 52), thus achieving data triangulation through perspectives from multiple persons (Denzin, 1978).

Four of the interviewees were individuals who participated in the PMA by recording their stories for the archive, and the other two interviewees were the two individuals who have acted as the main driving force behind the project. The interviewees will be referred to as Participants 1 through 4, Filmmaker, and Project Manager; the study will represent the participants anonymously due to sensitivities of the prison backdrop, and the project creators will be referred to anonymously for consistency. The subjects include three former prisoners, each from a different organizational affiliation. Participants 1 and 2 represent two former prisoners from different branches of republicanism; Participant 1 is a male leader of an ex-prisoners group, and Participant 2 is a male not associated with an ex-prisoner group at all. Participant 3 is a female loyalist former prisoner, and Participant 4 is a female former prison teacher who identifies with a Protestant background. The four “Participant” research subjects have had different experiences and roles within the prisons Armagh and Maze Long Kesh, and were chosen because they are

representative of the stratification (Lewis, 2003) in political background and gender as is amongst the actual recording participants in the Prisons Memory Archive. It is possible that interviewees’ previous experiences affect how they perceive the PMA’s effectiveness as a tool for transition. Therefore, by taking a diverse cross section of interviewees, this study attempts to obtain the most balanced outcome possible in the results and to reach saturation. The political and gender background remained balanced not only in the Participants chosen, but also because the Filmmaker (male) associates with a Catholic background, and the Project Manager (female) with a Protestant background.

The interviews conducted were qualitative and semi-structured because of the nature of the subject. The core ideas of truth, memory, identity, and transition that are interweaved in the making of a storytelling archive are “deeply rooted in personal knowledge and understanding of the participants’ understanding of themselves,” has an “intricacy that relates to the level of unpacking that is needed to formulate a position” (Lewis, 2003, p. 43). None of these aspects can be objectively quantified, so it is essential to explore them qualitatively in order to achieve the ‘level of unpacking’ that is called for, to still leave room for emergent themes (Roth, 1970).

## ***DATA & DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS***

The following discussion is an analysis of the Prisons Memory Archive in terms of its contribution to transition. It examines the recurring themes that surfaced during the interviews, including the feeling of agency through participation and cross-community contact.

“Walter Benjamin, chronicler of modernity, called for a history that would redeem the past by catapulting it into the present” (Rabinowitz, 1994). The Prisons Memory Archive works to relate the contested history of prisons during the conflict to present day with goals for the future always in mind, operating under the supposition that “the meanings and narratives of the past that we live with are of critical importance in establishing our sense of ourselves and our cultures” (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003a, p.5). This analysis of interviews outline how the past is “redeemed” and made relevant to the present through a filmed storytelling archive. The Project Manager summarized how she believes the PMA can do this:

“The continuation of the conflict as an ethno-sectarian divide [in Northern Ireland] is what in itself needs to be deconstructed, and the PMA itself can do that if you’re to look within each one [recording]” (Project Manager, 2016).

Despite the awareness that the Project Manager and the Filmmaker now have of the transitional justice aspects of their project, transitional justice was initially a latent effect. The Filmmaker discusses the surprise he felt when one participant stated that it was “their own mini peace process,” because he had begun the project as “a frustrated filmmaker, who simply saw the potential of a good film because of the rich story” (Filmmaker, 2016). Despite the accidental nature of the transitional justice aspects of the PMA, it was apparent that from the view of the participants, this has possibly been the most important aspect of the project. The interviews conducted with participants and creators of the PMA have helped to illuminate why and how this filmed storytelling archive has worked as a transitional justice mechanism.

*Perspectives on healing and agency*

The concept of reflexivity was emergent in all of the interviews with the Participants, the Filmmaker, and the Project Manager. In the literature, this concept was referred to within the academic frames of healing through narrative therapy and meaning-making. Participant 2 outlined this experience as he reflected on telling his story:

“The boyhood glamour had to take its place with physical reality. That it wasn’t all that great, brilliant, wonderful. It wasn’t a Hollywood movie set. It was hard, real life. The emotions and memories of that played a role in making my contribution to the recording of stories as objective and honest as it could be” (Participant 2, 2016).

Realizations such as this that occurred through the storytelling process relate back to Pennebaker and Banasik’s (1997) assertion that storytelling can allow new cognitive processes that help people redefine their identity. In this case that process has manifested in how Participant 2 perceives his identity after conflict in relation to his experiences within the conflict, particularly within prison.

Storytelling as healing has shown to be especially important in the context of prison involvement because many of the participants felt that they didn’t have space to talk about the experience otherwise. Participant 4 acknowledges,

“I think people being able to talk about that experience is important. At the time I wasn’t able to talk about it very much... There’s lots of things that play out after political conflict and to be able to talk about what happened is probably a healthy thing” (Participant 4, 2016).

She goes on to note that she feels this need for space to process was not hers alone:

“[One of my students] never taught his children that he was in prison until they were in late teens- that’s a lot to carry. So, I think that’s a huge strain on

somebody. And in the PMA management group, a loyalist man did the same thing. There was a shame involved in it for him. So, it's really important for people to have that space to say their truth and talk about it. Regardless of if they decide that can be shown to anyone or not" (Participant 4, 2016).

She asserts that this space is key in order to work through experiences, especially because it is often a story that individuals might not otherwise have a platform to tell.

Participant 3 expressed that part of her reasoning for participating in the PMA had to do with this idea of creating meaning. In her case this meant taking control of the memories of prison: "Personally, I wanted to go back and see, and for my own benefit. I did it for personal, for me own self" (Participant 3, 2016). The Project Manager further elaborated on this response when she explained:

"What could have happened easily is that with former prisoners, it could be retraumatizing, but it turned out that many of them found it very liberating, to go into their place of incarceration and walk back out of it again" (Project Manager, 2016).

The feeling of liberation was a theme that surfaced throughout each of the interviews with former prisoners (Participant 1, 2, 3, 2016).

The focus on former prisoners can be contentious, and most certainly requires further exploration of the term 'victim' and the victim hierarchy in Northern Ireland, as well as a deconstruction of the problematic victim-perpetrator binary, concepts that will not be touched on due to study constraints. However, it is important to address why there is an argument for the prison narrative to be heard; although the terminology of victim may be applicable, it will not be explored, so perhaps more ubiquitous term 'trauma'

can be applied to those who experienced imprisonment or contact with the prisons:

"This shift from the trauma of the victim- the backbone of trauma studies and of related theories of memory and recovery- to the trauma of the perpetrator calls for a reconsideration of many assumptions centered on the status of the victim" (Nichols, 2016, p.193).

Through filmed storytelling, the PMA may allow this particular group of traumatized people, many who are categorized as perpetrators, to work through some of those experiences:

"While accepting the impossibility of complete closure for trauma narratives, nonetheless we can accept degrees of closure; stages that people can work towards where experiences can be integrated into their lives rather than be allowed to dominate and distort them" (McLaughlin, 2010, p. 49).

This is extremely applicable to the prison population, because the identities of "ex-prisoner" or "ex-combatant" have become a core signifier for some individuals in post-conflict contexts, an issue which is combatted in the PMA by striving to provide a space in which "story-tellers are not reduced to their experience of loss and trauma but are the subjects of their own story" (Hackett & Roston, 2009, p. 369). The PMA provides agency because its entire approach is structured around the recognition that "life stories are not to be plundered. They are not to be taken away, deconstructed" (Project Manager, 2016).

Participant 4 is a former prison teacher who argued that everyone, beyond just those that fit the traditional criteria for victimhood, needs room to process their own experience within the conflict:

"There's men in prison who were victims, that's why some got involved. Nobody in my opinion is special in terms of having suffered. A lot of people suffered... and if you've suffered loss

then you've suffered loss. And you may have then joined the IRA or UVF. There still is very much a strong sense of ownership and who are the real victims, and that's problematic. And I think people being able to talk about their prison memories helps in the healing process somewhat. I think being able to talk about your experience if it has hurt you, helps in some way. It will always remain a scar here, and it is a wound in society here, but I think people have to find their own way through it, and I think this [storytelling] is one of the ways it can be helpful." (Participant 4, 2016)

The PMA is especially helpful because the prison narrative is often suppressed:

"Ex-prisoner stories, both republican and loyalist, have rarely been accessible in public discourse because of their categorisation as 'perpetrators,' the symbolic and political opposite as victim" (McLaughlin, 2010, p.55).

Throughout the interviews, the most prevalent theme that emerged was participants feeling glad that they had a platform for their story; each participant expressed this in the sense of personal narrative but also as a representative for their communities. Words and phrases that surfaced as the interviewees described this feeling were, "recognition," "dignity," "empowering," and "valued" (Participants 1, 2, 3, & 4, 2016). Participant 4 communicated these ideas perhaps the most fully:

"The PMA is very valuable in those terms of recognition. It's saying, your experience means something, and as a community your experience means something. And it's valuable to know about it. And I think that means a lot to people, because they suffered a lot and to know that your perspective is valued is a good thing, for a lot of reasons" (Participant 4, 2016).

It was particularly important for Participant 1 to get to be the voice of his own experience. He believes, "we

[former prisoners] can't look to others to write our history" (Participant 1, 2016). Participant 3 was glad to think that as the sole loyalist woman former prisoner whose story appeared in the PMA, even though it was a personal narrative:

"Some of the stories there are very similar, experiences that different people went through, so it was good to get out.... I thought it important that someone from my background give their story... getting that out is very important, because a lot of people have their own judgments about that. So they should hear factual stories that actually happened, and I am very glad to be that person for loyalist women" (Participant 3, 2016).

In her ability to be a voice for the women who participated in and were incarcerated for loyalist paramilitary activities<sup>1</sup>, Participant 3 felt that she was able to gain validation in her experience, and "to have dignity as a person and as a community, [which] is much more empowering" (Participant 4, 2016). Participants 3 and 4 discussed agency and recognition the most; this may be because as a former teacher and a former female loyalist, neither are a part of the dominant conflict narrative or even the prison narrative both because of their positions and their gender. They also do not have access to support groups in the same way as male former prisoners.

This need for agency ties back to legitimization as discussed in the existing literature, particularly as outlined in Bell (2004) and Bird and Ottanelli (2015). Agency comes from feeling recognized, which can happen when an individual feels listened to and acknowledged. These effects can be even greater if a

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<sup>1</sup> Woman loyalists have generally been left out of the prison narrative and are especially left out of the Loyalist paramilitary narrative of the conflict (McEvoy, 2009).

story is placed in an archive (as referenced in the section on the transitional justice and timing of the project). From the perspective of the project creators, agency has always been a priority, and is worked into the PMA's ethical framework, which both the Filmmaker and Project Manager listed as the most important part of the project.

#### *Perspectives on cross-community contact*

The contribution that the PMA provides for present day Northern Ireland appears to go beyond the agency it provides to individuals; an unexpected theme that emerged throughout the interviews of this study is that of cross-community contact, in both real and imagined ways. Throughout the creation of an inclusive project that produces all of the aforementioned effects, the PMA facilitates and catalyzes the positive effects of cross-community contact:

"Individuals gather and share memories and interpretations, with the result that individual perceptions are in turn reshaped by these communal exchanges. Groups may therefore perform memory work by constructing areas of common knowledge which create social bonds between members" (Madera, 2009, p.419).

By working with the PMA, participants have broadened the ways in which they identify themselves, such as by political affiliation and community background; they now also identify with the wider ex-prison community.

All six of the interviewees in this study provided an anecdote about an experience of cross-community contact during or because of their interactions with the PMA. Participant 2 stated that this contact was the most important part of his involvement, and he regarded the experience of "Actually exchang[ing] viewpoints, opinions, ideas, and to remember we were all here in this

compound, sitting here 40 years ago" (Participant 2, 2016) with positivity.

Participant 1, a former republican prisoner, recalled a recent interaction he had with a former prison guard at a shopping center; the guard was someone he had spoken about in his recording with the PMA, through which the Participant was able to process that relationship, and upon seeing him in person, was able to tell the prison officer that he felt he was a "civil person during that time", and that he "understood he was just doing his job at the time" (Participant 1, 2016). He went on to say that this interaction was "an important factor in my own process after everything [imprisonment], and I hope they [the former prison guard] got something out of it too" (Participant 1, 2016).

The project creators were not only facilitators of cross-community contact, but also became a part of it. Both the Filmmaker and the Project Manager revealed that the cross-community aspects had effects not only on the participants of the recordings, but also on their own perceptions of whom they perceived as 'other.' The Filmmaker comes from an Irish-identifying background, stating that his background is clear at the outset of meeting someone because of the roots of his surname. He described an interaction he had with a PMA participant from a British loyalist background that made a profound impact on him:

"One guy gave us his recording, a loyalist, and couldn't get back to Belfast so I drove him back and he told me, although not on film, but he told me why he has gone to prison. Killing a Catholic in a drive by shooting on the Ormeau Road, where I grew up ... and we just looked at each other. So things like that are huge. And he was amazing, and is amazing to talk about that. He is one of those loyalists who questions whether it was worth it, and feels inside a deep

regret. So when you get people telling you stories like that, even though it wasn't on camera, you feel that its all part of the peace process" (Filmmaker, 2016).

The Project Manager summed up the sentiment behind this story and many others like it when she said, "being part of the process itself right from the outset taught me to never judge a book by its cover" (Project Manager, 2016).

Participant 3 connects her experience of real contact through the PMA with the potential of imagined contact for viewers now and in the future:

"Its about agreeing to sit in the same room and talk about dealing with the past, and agree to disagree or whatever. You know, as a child being brought up to be bitter about one particular religion, why was I like that? It made a great impact to listen to stories, so getting stories out there with the Prison Archive, it's made a great impact in me, so I'm sure its doing that for other people" (Participant 3, 2016).

The PMA has been successful not only in bringing together the small group of people who have made a recording for the archive, but also capitalizes on the potential for rehumanization through imagined contact via the digitalized content. The use of electronic contact seems to be an excellent start to exposing individuals to the 'other' that may not come into contact with them in daily life. The PMA draws on this:

"[The website's] interactive documentary structure offer[s] users opportunities to navigate their own way through the material and encourages them to hear and see the 'other', central to attempts at encouraging dialogue in a divided society" (QUB Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and Social Justice).

Although this study does not assess outside viewers' receptiveness to the PMA footage, multiple interviewees

discussed the importance of the online availability for themselves, and based on that, what they hope for other individuals who will watch the footage.

Participant 2 outlines the rehumanization he experienced when watching others' film clips, and discusses the educational value this tool has had for him:

"The transformative power of education can never be underestimated. To examine some of these things, what you thought you knew, what you were told, and many instances it was proven rather wanting, to say the least. It is important and still, the friendships that developed back then [when making the PMA recording] and today are important, especially when confronting those who would advocate none of this talking business" (Participant 2, 2016).

He went on to elaborate on the change this education of the 'other' has had on him in the sense of its realness, that is through actually being able to watch others tell their stories, rather than only hearing about them:

"Its helped a great deal that the impersonal became the personal, the theoretical became the — well, things started to take on game changing input, when we introduced humanism into the equation, pretty powerful. That your enemy is different than you thought" (Participant 2, 2016).

This sentiment exhibits the power of imagined contact facilitated by the PMA footage.

Participant 1 seemed to be aware of the potential for imagined contact when he set out to be a part of this project, and hoped that his story would contribute to that, vocalizing:

"Here, in Ireland there are a lot of people with stereotypical views of who or what was inside those walls during that very bad period of our history, and I just wanted somebody to have a look at the

face and say oh, there's a human being. There's a human face. It's a human being, not an IRA man" (Participant 1, 2016).

His experience of cross-community contact within the PMA was imagined. He didn't actually meet other participants from other backgrounds during the filming; however, he did express an interest in watching them tell their stories online and in the archive's collection. He said:

"During the filming of this, I would never have interacted with all of these sectors of society, and probably never will. But I can tap into their views at the time [by watching the film clips]" (Participant 1, 2016).

He noted that this was crucial especially in present day Northern Ireland, which remains a deeply divided society:

"People are still wary of going to places or interacting with people that are from a background that they don't overly know.... Now, things are considerably easier, people moving around and going to places that they didn't used to. But there's still properly people who don't or won't do that. So they can just get on the computer. The PMA is necessary for that" (Participant 1, 2016).

It is important to think about this potential to 'tap into others' views at the time' beyond segregated communities and also in a greater temporal scale. The project is in the process of being moved into the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), where it will be accessible for the foreseeable future. This allows the imagined contact to proceed even beyond the life spans of participants, giving the project longevity in its potential for imagined contact between segregated groups even when the individuals who lived through the Troubles are no longer alive.

The cross-community contact has gone beyond only the individuals that have

been directly involved in the making of the PMA, but some of the interviewees have described a perceived ripple effect for both real and imagined contact, referring to extended contact theory. The Project Manager described a moment between two wives of PMA participants that met at a PMA event:

"I remember one day we had a former prisoner and a former prison officer at that stage one had been released and the other retired. And the two wives were talking- I remember those two wives talking about how they'd raised their children alone. They never got to see their husbands. So many similarities there, similar life journeys because of the conflict. One husband, fair enough, was incarcerated. The other was always working. I can be a bit of a panic-er at times, so I would orchestrate it so that people don't meet, whereas it was those meetings that were the most important" (Project Manager, 2016).

The ripple effect that has come from extended contact is essential, according to Participant 2:

"If they [young people] could see this, and judge from where they're at maybe today... If they can see that so and so, he's one of our heroes, and he is talking to the enemy, he's doing something together with the enemy- maybe it is okay" (Participant 2, 2016).

Through reported interactions with others as well as imaginings like the above from Participant 2, it can be inferred that the PMA has shown the ability to facilitate extended contact, and that there is a perceived potential for more. The lengths of this call for further study.

The cross-community contact and rehumanization outcome of the PMA was surprising to both of the project creators. Similar to many transitional justice mechanisms in Northern Ireland, the effects of contact have been a latent effect rather than an initial intention:

“Cairns and Hewstone (2002) pointed out, little detail is known about the possible theoretical underpinnings of cross-community schemes in Northern Ireland, except that they involve some form of cross-community contact. Hughes and Knox (1997), for example, note that, though conditions such as superordinate goals, cooperation, an equal status are recognized as valuable in practice they are rarely given strategic priority. The problem lies with the fact that most of the research in Northern Ireland that investigated the impact of the contact hypothesis was outcome oriented rather than process oriented” (Niens & Cairns, 2005, p. 339).

The lack of strategic priority in cross-community contact schemes and the subsequent outcome-focused research on such projects calls for further research on the processes of contact hypothesis in practice through the creation and dissemination of filmed storytelling archives. It is clear the PMA is successful in facilitating cross-community contact in both real and imagined situations, however, the interviews have shown this occurrence to be haphazard rather than informed and intentional.

Conclusions on the PMA as a transitional justice mechanism

Recall that this study set out to answer the question, *can a filmed storytelling archive contribute to the experience of transitional justice for its subjects?*

The data extrapolated from the interviews outline multiple ways in which the PMA is successful as a mechanism for transitional justice, despite its accidental nature. The interviewees indicated that PMA’s efficacy lies in a few main facets. First, the PMA aids in transition because it allows individuals who have experienced conflict and trauma to utilize storytelling as a method of narrative healing; interviewees outlined the reflexivity experienced in telling their prison story, and how they

gained new perspective (meaning-making) of that particular time. The PMA’s efficacy as a transitional mechanism also lies in its potential to create a feeling of agency for individuals whose stories may otherwise be suppressed in the general narrative; this comes through being listened to, but the interviews showed that the agency-providing effect is compounded when the Participant knows that others may access their recorded stories either through the website or at the Public Records Office. Additionally, the PMA has functioned as a transitional justice mechanism through its unintended facilitation of cross-community contact and subsequent destigmatization of the ‘other’ in real, imagined, and extended capacities.

#### *Best practice recommendations*

Based on the findings in regards to the PMA, best practices for the creation and dissemination of filmed storytelling archives can be recommended (though tenuously, noting the relatively small sample size of this study and the influence of specific contexts, including culture and timing). That being said, should the effective practices of this particular project be extended, it can be asserted that a best practice for a filmed storytelling archive is to create a trusting relationship between the project and its subjects. Trust creates a space in which a storyteller may fully engage with their memory in order to pursue the healing aspect of narrative. This trust can be created if a project has a strong ethical framework in which the storyteller feels involved in decisions over their own story and where it goes after it is told. This control also creates the sense of agency for the storyteller that this research has outlined as important for marginalized groups in transition. In terms of agency, another best practice is to ensure viewer accessibility to the stories. The PMA has been criticized because of its lag in providing accessibility to a majority of

the recorded stories. Based on this, a recommendation for other storytelling archives is to ensure immediate capability for the storage and dissemination of digital materials, because the visibility helps storytellers feel “heard,” which is often a motivation to participate in the first place. Best practice for similar projects should also include intentionality in facilitating cross-community contact in meaningful and productive ways (rather than accidental) to ensure the positive effects of contact.

While an evaluation of the PMA and its work as a transitional justice tool is helpful in creating best practice recommendations in the greater context of Northern Ireland and transitional justice in general, it also needs to be recognized that “the question whether justice should be sought at the local, national, or international level is not an either/or question: multiple levels are needed” (Roht-Arriaza, 2006). The PMA does not work as a stand-alone mechanism, and many of its perceived shortcomings are not inherent in its work but because of the lack of a framework of more formal transitional mechanisms; “history should serve other needs than therapy. To think historically implies different orders of causality to those assumed by a model of guilt and reparation... it identifies problems that should be addressed by policy rather than therapy” (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003a, p. 9). So, although the PMA may serve individual needs, it also should be used as a valuable source to inform a larger approach to transition.

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