



Digital Storytelling

Co-Creative Media and Community Engagement on the land Border of Ireland

A thesis for the degree of PhD

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Abstract

My research in Co-Creative Media and Community Engagement on the land border of Ireland explores the process of applied artistic practice in a mutually beneficial relationship based on knowledge exchange between participants and researcher / facilitator.

I have adopted and developed the practice of Digital Storytelling to explore individual and communal border experience in an attempt to remove professional interpretation and ventriloquism while empowering individuals to represent themselves in the process.

This work is based on a constructivist hermeneutical approach, which values accounts of personal experience based on social actions and outcomes. The work builds on existing theoretical knowledge through an alternative form of knowledge generated within communities of interest.

Using a mixed methods approach I have been able to establish a more comprehensive and complete picture which combines complimentary data from PAR, Field Work, Case Study, Focus Groups and Interviews. Participatory Action Research (PAR) ensures collaboration, power, ethics, knowledge and building theory, are central to the community engagement process.

Through extensive community facilitation and process development I combined several narrative practices from Digital Storytelling, Life Story Method, Every Object tells a Story and Story Circle to facilitate the recovery of difficult and traumatic narratives enabling participants to rediscover their voice around complex and volatile experience. Working on the land border it is difficult to encounter anyone who has not experienced some form of trauma as witness, victim, survivor or perpetrator. The process was not about truth recovery or reconciliation but exploring the potential for engagement and participation and communication.

The significance of merging traditional narrative practice with Digital Storytelling lies in the capacity for authentic individual self recovery, discovery, expression with the support of the community in the age of New Media. In a post-documentary age, Digital Stories function as performances of mediatised actuality.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACP - Ardoyne Commemoration Project

BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation UU - Ulster University

BREXIT - British Exit from Europe

BRMR - Border Roads to Memory and Reconciliation

CAIN - Archive of Conflict & Politics in Northern Ireland (Ulster University)

CDS - Centre For Digital Storytelling - Story Center

CRN - Catholic, Republican, Nationalist

CVS - Commission for Victims and Survivors

DS - Digital Storytelling

DUP - Democratic Unionist Party

EU- European Union

FAIR - Families Acting for Innocent Relatives

FRU - Military Force Research Unit

GFA - Good Friday Agreement 1998

HIU - Historical Investigations Unit

HTR - Healing Through Remembering

ICIR - Independent Commission for Information Retrieval INLA - Irish National Liberation Army

IRA - Irish Republican Army

IRG - Implementation and Reconciliation Group

IRPWA -Irish Republican Prisoner and Welfare Association

MI5 - Military Intelligence Section five

MP - Member of Parliament

MP3 - Digital Audio format

MRCI - Migrants Rights Centre Ireland

NIO - Northern Ireland Office

NISRA - Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

NGO's- Non Government Organisations

NMN - New Media Narratives

OCG's - Organised Crime Groups

OFMDFM - Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland

OHA - Oral History Archive

PAR - Participatory Action Research

PMA - Prison Memory Archive

POV - Point of View

PPS - Public Prosecution Service

PRONI - Public Records Office Northern Ireland

PSNI - Police Service of Northern Ireland

PTSD - Post traumatic Stress Disorder

PUL - Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist

QC - Queens Council

QUB - Queens University Belfast

RCN - Rural Community Network

RFJ - Relatives for Justice

RUC - Royal Ulster Constabulary

TRC - South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

TV - Television

UCD - University College Dublin

UDR - Ulster Defence Regiment

UFF - Ulster Freedom Fighters

UK - United Kingdom

UVF Ulster Volunteer Force

VSS - Victims Survivor Service

WWII - World War II

“To be a person is to have a story to tell”

Isak Dinesen (2001; 1)

Introduction

My research in Digital Storytelling aims to explore individual and communal experiences of border residents through the sharing of stories. The research uses a Digital Storytelling approach to create collections which highlight lived experience and ways of life at particular points in the recent history of the Border in Ireland. In an age when communication in all its forms has never been more accessible, difficulties remain in the Border region of Northern Ireland between opposing communities around ideologies, historical public imbalance in existing narrative, and personal hurts relating to the period of conflict more commonly known as the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland.

My Background

I have worked in film and local television since 1992 and I have worked in theatre and live performance for twenty years in a range of creative technical roles. Since 2009 I have been working at Ulster University, primarily supporting teaching and learning in technical areas of performance, but importantly also as a collaborator / researcher on multiple iterations of performance practice research. I originally began working on border performance with the late Dr. Paul Devlin in 2010, culminating in the production of *‘Data Roaming’* (2012) performed on the Derry / Donegal land border, as part of the Irish Theatrical Diaspora Conference (2012) at Ulster University. *Data Roaming* was a performative journey weaving back and forth across an international, contested, abandoned land border exploring absence and presence, space and identity with international performance artists in Drama, Music and Dance. Professional artists engaged with border residents, communities and spaces to create multiple performance pieces, which included a dance performance, storytelling, and choral music all supported by a multimedia digital framing piece tracking the geography of the Border area in the North West.

My role as producer was to gain access to different people and spaces along the border while also contributing artistically to the event through a digital triptic installation, accompanied by an original composition by Dr Lawrence Roman and chamber choir performance. As I got to know individuals within communities along the border I became aware that while they thought our work was interesting (to a point), we were imposing our creative ideas and interpretations on their stories and experience. Not all of these stories were nostalgic and there is the inevitable conflict of interest in taking elements of the stories that worked for creative outputs, diluting the experience of some contributors and disregarding others completely. Community engagement at this point was minimal and was solely for the purpose of story collection to provide raw material for the artistic work. I began to consider how as academics, facilitators and producers, we could approach narrative practice on the border, working with amateur storytellers in a way that would be mutually beneficial for researcher / artist and participant. I wanted to explore ways in which I could utilise my skill set to make a much more inclusive offer to communities when engaging in this multimodal, applied performance practice. I was interested in Digital Storytelling and its potential development within the community sector because of its level of achievability among amateur producers, its relevance as a digital product, and its accessibility. I was aware of its sporadic use in education and its relative success in engaging students to present literature and history-based assignments in an alternative, digital format which can activate the literacies of reading, writing, talking and listening. I began to consider the potential of Digital Storytelling in a post-conflict environment, working with members of the community and exchanging training for their stories. I designed a pilot study which could develop some of the ideas and thinking that I encountered on my initiation to border research in *Data Roaming*.

In addition to my work as an artist and producer, however, I was also motivated by my own biography. I have lived on the land border of Ireland my entire life and have witnessed the changing landscape in response to social and political shifts at different times. I am therefore embedded in the project as both a subject and a researcher, and while this generates a tension I

have aimed to use it productively, to gain insights into the work and to facilitate my entry into particular community groups. As a result of both these circumstances, this study has been an iterative process from its inception. The first stage of this was in developing a conceptual framework; in the following section, I begin to lay out the key ideas that constitute that framework.

The Context of the Study

In this section, I will lay out the broad context for the project within the unfolding peace process in Northern Ireland, before outlining the specific context of the border region (hereafter NI), predating its official partition in 1921 from the rest of the island following the War of Independence.

Following the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement of 1998 by which the conflict was officially ended, a system of devolution through an elected Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly was adopted to distribute power over a range of devolved issues. A ruling Executive is formed according to a formula derived from the D'Hondt system, based on the number of seats won by each party in elections to the Assembly. The Executive is constituted then as a mandatory coalition and does not have a formal opposition in government as this might serve to further political divides. According to the website of the Assembly, "the power sharing system of government is based on a consociational model of democracy" designed by Arend Lijphart, specifically for societies "emerging from conflict, or those with the potential for conflict". Successive Executives have had to find ways to work together despite being ideologically opposed on many issues. In a recent study for the *The Guardian* newspaper into power sharing in Northern Ireland, Leach et al (2021, online) found that "even when Stormont is operational, [...] extreme partisanship results in nationalist and unionist representatives herding into green and orange blocs. Of the 871 votes taken since 1998, 442 items received no support from one or other community" equal to 51% of all votes.

Twenty years into a period of transition from violence to peace, many contested issues remain. I will outline some of these here: the lingering sectarian nature of the society, now often expressed

more through geography than religion, and as prejudice against the 'new' communities of Central European and other immigrants; the continuing presence of paramilitaries and violence, particularly in the poorer housing estates across NI; issues of the status of those affected by the violence of all kinds; and failures to address the legacy of the forty years of violence and its ongoing impact on the lives of generations born since the Ceasefire. I will then outline how the impact of Britain leaving the European Union has created additional pressures on the internal and external border areas of NI as the focal points for the continued outworking of these issues of contestation, some of which has become increasingly visible since the conclusion of this research project.

Firstly, then, one of the biggest problems facing NI society remains sectarian division. Schools and some housing estates largely function as single identity groups and create little or no opportunity to encounter the 'other'. These communities are socially and economically deprived areas and exist throughout Northern Ireland. The absence of opportunity for casual socialising can lead to avoidance of contact with the 'other' through fear of the unknown and lack of understanding. Boorah and Knox (2015) highlight that "many young people in Northern Ireland never experience cross-community education until they attend University. The segregated school system has resulted in ethno-religious isolation, which reinforces intra-sectoral bias, stereotyping and prejudice." (2015:197) This type of nuance leads to intense levels of distrust of the 'other' community, heightened by personal and communal experiences of violence, murder and many cases of collusion between armed forces in N.I. and the British Government. As a consequence of this sectarianism, Northern Ireland has many internal borders separating local communities. These areas are demarcated in many ways, including through physical barriers known locally as 'peace walls' which serve to protect one community from another. Elsewhere, boundary lines are determined by painted kerbstones, murals and other cultural symbols prominently placed such as flags, memorials and commemoration plaques.¹ James Anderson suggests "attitudes and

¹ Other international cultures of dissent are represented alongside the internal struggle between predominantly British and Irish cultures, such as the Palestinian (Irish) / Israel (British) conflict.

behaviour patterns are shaped by a whole variety of factors and the particular effects of the border and ethnonational identity must be seen in this context” (2006:14). Although the ‘peace walls’ are a geographic feature of urban Belfast, in rural areas, flags and kerbstones mark out territory along rural roads and in small towns.

For many rural communities the socioeconomic issues of the day take precedence while for others in more populated and visibly segregated communities the political and sectarian intransigence remain and the status quo endures. However, as I was to discover working with communities, community sub-groups in the border region many express feelings of having been abandoned and betrayed as a result of the signing of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement. Others feel abandoned due to their geographic location in rural communities like northwest Donegal for example due to their perceived lack of community services and resources.

Secondly, and in part as a consequence of enduring sectarianism, paramilitary organisations still operate in the shadows long after the official decommissioning of arms as part of the official peace process. Although they have much less public support than they enjoyed at the height of the conflict, they may still have a major impact in the progression towards a shared society. According to the latest PSNI ‘Paramilitary Activity Update’ [3rd June 2021] “Republican and Loyalist paramilitary organised crime groups (OCGs) continue to impact all areas of society” through “all forms of criminality including supply and distribution of controlled drugs, blackmail, punishment shootings, intimidation and money laundering”. Different public bodies and stakeholders are working on the ground in communities to negotiate local settlements on contentious issues like parades. Such groups include the City Centre Initiative and the Chamber of Commerce with the Orange Order in Derry, however many underlying problems of the period of conflict have yet to be addressed through a lack of interaction and communication between communities.

A third contested issue is around those who have suffered as a consequence of the violent conflict, disputes over what has been termed a ‘Hierarchy of Victims’. McDowell states “the victim debate

has been ongoing for thirty years and that the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator fails to consider the complexities of victimhood in post-conflict societies which includes the possibility that some people can be seen as both victims and perpetrators.” (2009:1). McDowell suggests that “different victims groups represent different “types” of victims all of which display very different understandings and perceptions of what constitutes a victim”. (2007: 4) Dillenburger et al, (2005) highlight that ‘increasing numbers of people sought acknowledgement of their status as victims since the ceasefires, based on the work of Covran & Miller, (2001), who concur that “it is only in the post-conflict phase that the full psychological and emotional impact of armed conflict can emerge (2001: 61). A complicating factor is that many perpetrators claim to have been victims prior to their membership of violent organisations and at other periods in their lifetime such as in prison under extreme, arguably self imposed conditions, on top of the brutal regime prisoners endured at the hands of the Prison Officers. Any hierarchical approach to victimhood will disenfranchise many ‘victims’, such as victims murdered by state forces which account for 10% of all deaths in the conflict between 1969 and 1998.

Dividing people into groups and contrasting their oppression further exacerbates the problems faced by society on the down-curve of political conflict. The whole community has suffered directly or indirectly. However, politicians and public bodies cannot speak for victims, survivors, and perpetrators as a single group. Individuals, community groups, and organisations want different outcomes from any legacy initiatives; some pursue justice and others seek truth. It is essential to establish equality of opportunity rather than hierarchies of suffering and victimhood to address the outstanding concerns of the past.

The further area of contestation is over how to deal with the legacy of the past. In Northern Ireland, as numerous scholars point out, there has been an emphasis on ‘forgetting’ and in such a politically contested society, it is easy to understand why. At present, it seems there was a tradeoff in terms of peace at the expense of some formal process of truth and justice, in order to facilitate a transitional power sharing government forced to work together in pursuit of democratic outcomes.

None of the parties cited a formal 'truth process' as a prerequisite to the signing of the Belfast Agreement 1998, (GFA), potentially due to the inherent difficulties in addressing truth and justice through formal channels. Michael Ignatieff states that "Truth commissions only reduce the number of lies that can be circulated unchallenged in public discourse" (1996:113) highlighting some of the limitations in what truth commissions can actually achieve. There are many reasons for this state of wilful forgetting. Jennings (2009) attributes it in part to 'Troubles fatigue' as "ordinary people want to move on". (2009:114) Lundy and McGovern highlight "the need of the British state to preserve the 'legitimacy' of its institutions into the future [and therefore] makes it highly unlikely it would be willing to countenance a wholesale inquiry into the past actions of its agents and functionaries". (2010:30) There are many variables in dealing with the recent history of the Northern Ireland conflict and Hamber and Kelly state that "following violent conflict, relationships need to be built or renewed, addressing issues of trust, prejudice and intolerance in the process. This results in accepting both commonalities and differences and embracing and engaging those who are different from us" (2018:109) It seems many parties have something at stake in a process of truth recovery that will bolster their claims in the present, while other victims of violence have become largely marginalised by being silenced and forgotten.

The culture of complicity and silence propagates a form of cultural and systemic oppression where citizens become disenfranchised in many ways, but especially through the act of silencing victims in pursuit of the perception of peace. These stories are difficult, from the perspective of victims and arguably more so, perpetrators of violence. In a recent publication by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) 'Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past, Analysis of Consultation Responses', some respondents suggest that 'perpetrators of violence should not be afforded equal standing with families who lost loved ones' (2019: 26) [online], however from my own experience I suggest that this would neither be ethical, democratic, nor beneficial to the process. These individuals possess difficult knowledge and many answers to many questions, and there is an appetite to disseminate this information in pursuit of a transition toward reconciliation under the right circumstances. As Simon states,

difficulty happens when one's conceptual frameworks, emotional attachments and conscious and unconscious desires delimits one's ability to settle the meaning of past events. In such moments one's sense of mastery is undone and correspondingly one may undergo an experience that mixes the partial understanding with confusion and disorientation, the certainty of another's fear and suffering with diffuse anxiety and disquiet. (2011: 436).

Until a decision is made at governmental level on a collective approach to the past, it remains open as to who will take responsibility to break the dominant culture of complicity of silencing and wilful forgetting and encourage dialogue.

Partition created a land border between NI and Ireland that led to judicial and economic divergence between the two states, differences that have only been exacerbated since 2016. Post-Brexit, there is not just a border across the island; it is also the only land border between the United Kingdom and the European Union. The border region is then a contested space which serves in the present as it did in the past as a "bridge or barrier" (2006: 2) depending on your identity and cultural background: for nationalists a bridge to the wider Ireland (and now Europe); for unionists a bulwark against them. This problem in the external border of NI has served to raise tensions once more between communities living adjacent to its internal borders, resulting in sporadic violence at flash points mainly in Belfast and Derry / Londonderry. Exploring the cross-border impact of Brexit, Murphy (2022) states "such is the level of Unionist opposition to the Protocol, that it has involved legal challenges, serious rioting and ongoing protests in loyalist communities, within a broader context of growing community tensions in Northern Ireland (2022: 205 - 216)

As political representatives and business leaders on a local, national and international level are contesting and fighting for their views to be heard on the developing border crisis, there are remedies that might address the ongoing issues laid out above. In the next section, I will explore how storytelling has been utilised as one means of bridging between different communities of identity.

Stories, Identity and Community in Northern Ireland

Paul Ricoeur suggests that identity is the outcome of narrative (1991) and Decety and Somerville claim “our view of the self relies heavily on the concepts of shared representations between the self and others” (2003:527). Giddens highlights the fluid nature of the construction and maintenance of the self, suggesting “a self identity has to be created and reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day to day life and fragmenting tendencies between modern institutions” (1991:186). The stories we share with others not only have the capacity to transform us by contributing to a sense of purpose and belonging, but also connect us with something more powerful than the self; a community, which should reinforce our sense of belonging and provide a focus in our day to day experience, giving some subjective purpose to our existence. Cappeci and Cage state that “telling one’s story of self, is a way to communicate our identity, the choices that have made us who we are, and the values that shaped those choices – not as abstract principle, but as lived experience” (2015: 215)

One approach to building a post-conflict shared community in NI, has been through a variety of state-sponsored storytelling initiatives to use the power of narrative to bridge between communities of identity. These have been at best sporadic, neither sustained over time nor spread across communities. Much of my work has been informed by legacy reports from government institutions and public bodies and directly from research emanating from community projects in state sponsored storytelling initiatives, such as the Stormont House Agreement, (2014) The Stories Network, (2015) Healing Through Remembering (2005, 2009, 2014), WAVE Trauma (2015 -), Eames-Bradley (2009) and Connolly’s ‘Ethical Principles for Researching Vulnerable Groups’ (2003).

The state has supported storytelling initiatives as a means for individuals and groups to confront the past from the early years of the peace process. The Eames-Bradley report (2009) makes many

recommendations in regard to addressing the legacy of the past, and highlights storytelling as an effective form of communication between communities of difference. Actively engaging with stories of our 'discordant other' is recommended and this should facilitate "narrative and moral reassessment" (2009) among participants, and provide perspective and understanding from an alternative viewpoint. The report also states that storytelling must not be adopted "to fit a political agenda but rather serve to facilitate individual healing". (2009: 98)

The Storytelling Audit (2005) produced by Healing Through Remembering highlights many different narrative approaches to addressing the stories of victims in the conflict and they make recommendations in regard to storytelling as part of dealing with the legacy of the past. The authors highlight the need for a "critical examination of value and impact of personal stories and narratives related to the conflict for the narrator and the receiver" while also highlighting the need for increased communication between organisations currently involved in Storytelling practice related to the conflict as there is "little sharing of best practice between organisations". (2005:108) The report also suggests a need for continued reassessment of the methodologies including appropriate modes of dissemination and a need to "engage academic and community based researchers to explore archiving and dissemination practices". (2005:109)

The Stormont House Agreement of 2014 suggested the creation of four new legacy institutions to meet the needs of victims and survivors involved in the Troubles of Northern Ireland agreed by the five main political parties. They include: The Historical Investigations Unit (HIU); The Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR); The Oral History Archive (OHA) and The Implementation and Reconciliation Group (IRG). All of these rely at least in part on the capacity of witnesses and others to tell their stories.

According to the NIO's Public Consultation Summary Document (2018) the OHA would facilitate listening to victims and "enable therapeutic intervention, allowing voices to be heard by providing a platform for people from all backgrounds to share experiences and narratives related to the

Troubles". (2018:9) The report states that of all the new institutions which could be set up to deal with the legacy, the OHA could be used more than any other suggesting "anyone who has been impacted by the Troubles could tell their stories for the archive". (2018: 9) The OHA would be based at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). The logistical issues of such a broad initiative could prove a monumental challenge however it is my belief as a practitioner of DS that the alongside the readily available, personally owned technology and targeted training of the DS process among community members, would facilitate as many people as possible to record their testimony for the archive throughout Northern Ireland.

In July of 2019 the NIO published an analysis of responses to "Addressing the Legacy of the Past". There were over seventeen thousand respondents to the survey and they were made up of private citizens and organisations. With regard specifically to the OHA, the main findings of the survey note that some respondents felt former terrorists should have no role in the work of the archive "as perpetrators should not be afforded equal standing with families who have lost loved ones". (2019: 26) There were concerns from respondents that the archive could be used to "justify and potentially glorify acts of terrorism" while others felt there should be balance and accuracy in the records by widespread inclusivity.

However, one important finding highlighted how similar projects at community level could be utilised as part of the process, engaging a number of approaches to collecting the stories, so all participants get a choice and have equal access to any storytelling initiative. Many respondents felt that "storytelling represented an opportunity to acknowledge the pain, suffering and unique experiences of those who have not yet had the chance to have their voices heard" and others stated that the OHA should expand in scope beyond oral history to "include digital records and physical exhibits". (2019:26) The main concerns raised by organisations around Northern Ireland included issues of independence and "the potential for propaganda in an attempt to rewrite the past" while highlighting the potential of "re-traumatising participants and ensuring steps to assist those who engage with OHA". (2019:27) [online]

Cultural memory projects framed as social action in Northern Ireland such as Ardoyne Commemoration Project (ACP) WAVE Trauma's Stories from Silence, Duchas, Prison Memory Archive and all the other grass roots community projects are an important yet only partial "response to state sanctioned forgetting" sharing "the demand for societies not to forget to preserve communal collective memories of the conflict, struggle and resistance as a counter weight to official histories in the future". (2010: 32). There are many pitfalls and problems in the pathway to a stable and lasting resolution to the conflict but it is vital concerns are addressed at all levels within society. As Crooke states, in the absence of any permanent and national initiative "what we have is a collection of diverse projects, many based around storytelling, art and drama. Dominating these are single identity truth and justice social projects associated with nationalist/ republican and unionist/loyalist communities". (2018: 124) It is apparent that there is an appetite among these communities to document their experiences and present their stories, yet they are rarely offered a meaningful opportunity to undertake these pursuits through a shared and collective approach. Lundy and McGovern further question the ability of society to move on if the experiences of the past are not acknowledged in the public realm stating 'arguably reconciliation is impossible in the absence of a truth telling process, when a section of the population can continue to deny that the state ever acted wrongly whilst another section feel their sufferings have never been acknowledged".(2010: 30) While there will never be equality of outcome for victims and survivors, perpetrators and state actors, they should all be afforded equality of opportunity to address and acknowledge the past, no matter how difficult, for the sake of a more peaceful and shared future. On this issue, there is a long way to go.

It is into this contested border space, in which storytelling and silence are each strategic responses, that this research project sought to intervene, utilising a new set of approaches to storytelling, broadly captured under the practices of Digital Storytelling. This process aims to address some of the concerns discussed above, while handing authorship of the stories to the participants in the process.

Digital Storytelling

Digital Storytelling (hereafter, DS) is a creative artistic process which enables individuals with limited digital skills to produce a highly personal digitised account of their life which in essence looks like a short film made up of voice over, images and soundtrack. Jason Ohler suggests that “through creating digital narratives, students, [participants] become active creators rather than passive consumers of multimedia”. (2006:44) DS facilitates the sharing of meaningful stories in digital format, as a process of knowledge exchange, yet is not restricted to online sharing. In my experience, the work produced in this body of research were community curated collections, stored offline on DVD, for participants to control, view and share privately among members, family and friends due to the sensitivity of the stories being shared. The significance of the work is that participants come together in a community setting to share experience and in doing so develop skills in communication, problem solving, negotiation and digital literacy. This is a principal of practice where a community of interest can frame, question and contest their past experiences both collective and individual. DS has been adopted in educational and public health environments internationally, and has been employed in non-contested communities with an emphasis on nostalgia and sentimentality for some a by-gone age, in the lives of participant collaborators. (see *BBC Capture Wales*, 2001) Participants reimagine and reconstruct the past collectively and then complete deeply personal stories which can be shared online. These stories are described by Daniel Meadows as “sonnets by the people for the people”. Daniel Meadows - *Photobus* [accessed online]

It is important to distinguish DS from other forms of presentation of the self in a wide variety of online spaces. The online presentation of self is a radically autonomous pursuit requiring thought, control and continuous editing on the part of the user if the desired image is to be maintained. Social media has severely disrupted the level of interaction between people and as time goes on it

is revealing its negative impact in all areas of communication, understanding and context. Jonah Lynch highlights the fallacy of the neutrality of social media as a tool, and points out that 'technology also uses its user' connecting the convenience of the 'cell phone and the resulting elimination of space' and privacy. (2012: 33-34) Through social media platforms users are continuously seeking or creating their best self and want to present this to their audience of followers and friends. This often requires a significant personal editing in order to present the perceived best version of self. The DS community in contrast, is a physical community who share experience in the presence of each other. This is where change happens in the life of each participant to a greater or lesser extent. Their natural behaviour is not distorted through a virtual self, and the group inform, manage, and control narrative content through collaboration and interaction. They are encouraged to consider the potential for 'narrative and moral reassessment', (2009: 98) and many do, once they have become accustomed to the process of speaking without fear, in the story circle. Through the presence of the physical network participants have access to real people with similar experience who provide balance, support and accountability.

Increasingly with developments in modern technology, individuals in western societies are performing in more radically autonomous ways in the virtual world, with all the perceived attributes of a physical community and where traditional geographical boundaries no longer determine or limit the functions of the community. Virtual communities lack the regulatory devices in society which moderate behaviour and uphold some sense of personal accountability. Individuals have much more power over their identity in the virtual realm to self-style and brand in a space where it has become ubiquitous to do so. This is an individual endeavour, behind the screen where masquerade is part of the charade. Christakis and Fowler determine "one important way in which virtual worlds differ from real worlds is our ability to control our own appearance. [...] Our physical appearance affects how we perceive ourselves and therefore how we act. [...] It turns out that these seemingly arbitrary manipulations of online appearance affect online interactions as well" (2010: 260)

In contrast to online self-representation, the Digital Stories produced in the community are an outcome of the engagement process, rather than an end in themselves. They are not the focal point of the practice for participants. Personal accounts and contributions in the presence of the group are much more significant, as this is an environment where participants can express their feelings and emotions and work out where they stand on many issues. Participants experience a re-discovery of self through the stories they tell, by developing a clearer understanding of their own experience and forging deep personal connections between the participants, through the personal narratives expressed. Shifting the participants' emphasis from the subject of their trauma, to their broader life experience, gently facilitates an increased confidence in participation and removes many barriers to communication. In time the group will decide upon a theme for their story collection once they have had the opportunity to explore various narratives and themes. Developing relationships between participants and building confidence in the individual must be the focus of the work in the early stages. As Baron-Cohen suggests "the capacities we all possess to transform ourselves and this world are only activated and developed through dialogue (with others and within ourselves), centred in our knowledge, our needs, our questions, our critical imagination, and the creation of a community of solidarity". (2001: 13)

The intention in my use of this particular practice was to explore whether or not DS might empower communities to tell their own stories in often difficult circumstances along the land border of Ireland. If successful, it might then have two outcomes. The first would be to challenge the 'expert paradigm' in media and story production that has dominated discussion of the land border in such work as 'Border Roads to Memory and Reconciliation' and various works by 'Healing Through Remembering'. A second intended outcome was to provide a space for some of the most difficult stories and testimonies from the recent violent past in Ireland to be articulated in new ways. Many victims participate in story projects where they share their experiences on camera and professionals edit and arrange these contributions into well rounded documentaries for public consumption such as the work undertaken by WAVE Trauma Centre in their most recent series 'Stories from Silence'. But what purpose does this serve the participant storytellers without the

development of an understanding, supportive and active community? The process of DS is based on community engagement and interaction and facilitates real life face to face encounters, ownership of stories and the continuous development of communication. Having worked on several iterations of community storytelling practice, I considered it necessary to do more than simply curate stories of individuals and communities who provided narratives which are artistically beneficial to my work. By trading skills for knowledge, it is my belief that participants can be much better equipped to challenge the status quo and agitate for change which may benefit their communities in a more progressive manner, but will have the most significant impact on the personal experience and well-being of each participant.

Research Question, Aims & Objectives

My research aimed to explore border experience among individuals and communities through Digital Storytelling. By adopting this practice and developing it in a post-conflict environment, I sought to explore many of the current issues which might inhibit DS in culturally sensitive environments. My project examined the capacity for DS to 'amplify' the voices of those who have been marginalised or silenced, offering them a tool which might enable them to consider and respond to their own issues through the practice of engagement and use storytelling as a device for rebuilding the self and making improvements in their lives as a community. My aim was to develop methods that might prepare individuals for the performance of their stories, while also developing the understanding of archiving and disseminating culturally sensitive digital arts practice.

The project tested whether amplification might mean an emphasis on publication, or if it could be focused on engagement. If the latter, it would raise a question about whether the practice might promote a more intimate form of sharing which facilitates personal and collective identification and understanding of contemporary issues within single identity networks, where individuals and

communities gain a more compassionate and sensitive understanding of each other before making attempts to reach out to their discordant 'other'.

Dissemination is an important aspect of any story project and work should be much more available when produced in digital format. However, it is not as simple as one might imagine in a post-conflict environment. There are many reasons why participation in such projects is relatively low and public performance or accessibility to the output is not always possible. Working with different groups along the border I aimed to explore and highlight some of the issues impacting engagement and participation at community level. The Digital Storytelling process is structured and based on knowledge exchange, so engagement should not only amplify individual voices but stimulate learning and positive communal interactions through social connectivity, starting in communities of sameness with the aim of establishing relations among communities of difference.

The work was delicate in involving people in the process of transitioning from a protracted period of violence, regardless of the role they played or personal community background. It required on-the-ground exploration of the practice of authorship or co-authorship, communication and self expression, as well as promoting and engaging 'multiliteracies'² for the benefit of each participant in a process of knowledge exchange between facilitator / researcher and the group. It forced me, as researcher and facilitator, to consider iteratively and repeatedly what it might mean to be engaged with marginalised groups through digital storytelling as an alternative artistic practice, and the extent to which it has the capacity to be realised by each participant regardless of 'artistic' ability.

Early Projects in the development of my practice

In the initial phase of my practice I developed two projects in rural Donegal featuring two distinctly different groups. One was made up of young people between the age of 18 and 22, and one group

² The term 'multiliteracies' was created by New London Group (1996) to represent "the multiplicity of communication channels and media and increase saliency of cultural and lingual diversity" (1996:63)

was composed of retired women. This work was founded on the established principles of Digital Storytelling and its five-day model, and highlighted the significance of the narrative expressed in the process rather than any digital output as the key to understanding different groups or sub-groups within communities. At this point I had not considered developing practice with predominantly vulnerable groups in general, understanding that I might have vulnerable participants as part of any potential group which may form to collaborate on border stories. However, when people have experienced forms of conflict related trauma, due to their geographical location, regardless of the many story opportunities presented to participants when working on the land border of Ireland, it is difficult to escape the 'Troubles' as a frame for storytelling projects.

The group of retired women in rural Donegal offered a gentle introduction to the DS workshop process for me. It was framed as a social encounter which provided insights into often difficult experiences of people who endured personal hardship as a way of life. Yet they shared their experience, rich with personal detail and nostalgia. This was a gathering which was witty, moving, and great fun with mature women who have developed the skill of communicating and storytelling over a long life. They told stories of heartache and survival, of leaving family and going to America to pursue a better way of life, of childhood, school and work life. Two elderly participants described radical technological advancements in their way of life in their adopted homes of San Francisco and New York, yet expressed content that the place they call home in rural Donegal had remained largely unspoiled and undeveloped upon their return many decades later.

Others made their lives in rural Donegal and endured a way of life which still affects them in the present, maybe more so, as they are in the autumn of their lives. They highlight issues such as limited medical services, irregular transport around the rural community, lack of social community events which bring people together due to lack of provision and resources. Yet these issues did not become the focus of any personal experience as family and people long passed were more central

to their thinking and memories. These expressions highlighted the stoic nature of the individual and the value they placed upon people, family, friends, and community.

The difficulty with the retired women's group was a lack of personal, suitably advanced technology (such as smart phones) which could produce the digital stories. In reality this group would need desktop devices for access to larger screens so they could differentiate between the elements on the editing software and arrange their assets accordingly. Their capacity to learn to use video and sound editing software no matter how simple, in only 5 days, was a step too far. By the fourth session (over five weeks - one afternoon per week) they recorded one story each on their phones in audio format only. I did not have the opportunity to bring the stories together as a collection however, as the workshop ended a week early due to severe weather which damaged rural roads, bridges and housing. The community became intensely focused on the clean-up and local public transport schedules remained limited for four months with roads and bridges needing to be rebuilt or repaired. For many elderly participants with limited access to transport, this brought a premature end to an immensely enjoyable experience.

Following from the work with the retired women, I engaged a group of younger participants between the ages of 18-22, also in rural Donegal. Their personal interest was to take an issue that they felt was significant to young people in their community and attempt to use DS for advocacy of their experience. They highlighted the need for provision of mental health services in rural Donegal and bravely shared their personal experiences of lack of access to treatment and health care, with the members of the group.

To take this information and make it public would raise many ethical and moral issues which needed to be consistently monitored between me, my research supervisors, and the participants. Ulster University have strict ethical guidelines and these guidelines ensured the protection of all participants in the development of the work. We had agreed the time, dates, and location several months in advance and I was working from the existing framework for digital story workshops. I

realised that I needed more tools to develop narratives with participants who have experienced some form of trauma, as well as much more time with groups to explore and develop each part of the process. On reflection I could see the young people were attempting, if subconsciously, to substitute the unavailable or limited mental health services with the story circle as a form of group therapy. Many of their stories were deeply personal and moving. Yet I had to balance these narratives with the potential for adding to the problems of each participant through indirect trauma or stigma as a result of publicising the content. We discussed 'labelling' and the negativity that is apparent especially within the social media environment, where participants considered the potential for stories to be shared on personally held accounts in an attempt to raise awareness.

This project raised many ethical considerations when working with groups who want to express very personal experience. My major concern was that having made an offer of raising the voices of this particular community group, in order to protect them, I now needed to reconsider how this work might evolve so that they could complete the practice without being labelled or stigmatised as a result. We created what I referred to as 'generic stories'. These could frame personal experience but would not consist of any identifiable artefacts such as names, locations or images. The participants had sole responsibility for their content. They produced and stored content on their own devices and at no time did I have access to any of the individual collections of material. The digital training provided the necessary skill set for them to tell a more personal story at a time of their choosing, either as a collective or as individuals, and to create a working example of a digital story to which they could refer in the future. The participants gathered stock images which they thought might convey their message in a way which was perceived as personal. Five of seven participants completed a digital story as part of the workshop process. The stories were well structured and paced. The participants needed limited training on the process of creating and editing digital stories. However by design the 'finished' stories shone no light on the personal unique experience of each individual storyteller in a way that might compel a listener to action, having been changed somewhat by the listening encounter. We had little time in the process to acclimatise to the personal experience of each individual, to have that intimate understanding that

comes only with time and space to develop the necessary trust and confidence in the self and the chosen narrative. The participants had no time to rehearse and develop their presentations nor master the recording equipment. In any instance as an outsider who is accessing communities and initiating collaborations, it is paramount that the process has as much purpose for the participant as it may produce for a facilitator / researcher. Without the investment of time these difficult narratives are often too difficult to convey in an ethical manner and therefore I realised that in its current form, the DS workshop process needed to be developed to facilitate more difficult expressions in narrative.

The workshops provided valuable insight into a process which I knew was achievable, that required no additional development in terms of creating outputs, but required much more investment in terms of how to select, prepare and present stories with often vulnerable participants. The five-day workshop model is fully workable if starting from a nostalgic, non-consequential form of storytelling. From this period of practice I was able to reflect on the experience and cross reference existing projects I have studied, such as the work of *Border Roads to Memories and Reconciliation* (2013) and WAVE Traumas' *Stories from Silence* (2015-). Up to this point I had exposed some of the shortcomings of the DS process in practice, which was not my intention, yet I was able to use this information when planning the next phase of practice with a new group of participants. Regardless of the shortcomings I believed in the potential for DS to be used in manner that might benefit its participants if only I was to explore the more intimate, early stage of the story circle process.

After several months of further study and expanding my network, I was introduced to members of the *Irish Republican Prisoner and Welfare Association*, (IRPWA). As an organisation they recognised an opportunity that might prove beneficial to its members on several levels, for its capacity to engage their immediate community in discussion around difficult and contentious matters while learning tangible skills in digital literacy creating new opportunities for community and self expression. Together we developed a plan through intricate and detailed discussion with

participant associates around the process of Digital Storytelling, inputs, outputs, engagement and expectations. For several weeks in planning, I highlighted the shortcomings of my work so far and their representatives conveyed past experience of collaborations in return, noting areas where they thought facilitators and groups might work better if there was more equal balance in the relationship. I deliberately framed the participants as experts in their own experience to underscore the importance of any contribution that they might offer. The representatives from IRPWA arranged an initial meeting with their Loyalist counterparts and discussions continued for some time about a potential collaboration in this particular study. While for reasons I will clarify in chapter 6, the collaboration did not happen, this partnership presented an opportunity for a much more protracted process of engagement where I could get to know the individuals over a period of time and spend much more time on the story circle / story presentation phase. More than ever, I required a distancing technique, which might build trust among the group and myself, but also find a way to manage the contentious stories which I as facilitator would encounter, and which might end up in the public domain.

Adapting the methodology in the early phases of practice, I encountered and explored 'Life Story Method' (Rahaman, Bakhar and Mohd, 2008) as a means of preparing individuals to work up to telling stories that had a severe impact on their lives, where the consequences still affect them daily. This was one crucial element which I added to the practice and it was pivotal in unlocking an insular and usually closed community. Working with this group of men in partnership enabled them to forge a relatively successful process of engagement over which they felt they had ownership, and this positively impacted on their ability to address difficult memories and experiences, to find their voice and acknowledge their experience, actions, and current viewpoints in pursuit of understanding themselves and their community. It is apparent that communities need to continuously reassess their functions and goals so that they can respond to the societal climate and don't become stagnant, marginalised and ultimately obsolete.

The Research Design Principles

DS has its foundations in constructivist epistemology, in that it deals with how knowledge is constructed from information generated by previous experience, through exploratory encounters with the world in which we live. Constructivism's ontological approach is that of localised and specific constructed and co-constructed realities, where everyone fully anticipates and acknowledges the multiple perspectives of narrative and contested aspects of reality. The methodology of a constructivist approach to research is hermeneutical, that is a theory of human understanding which includes written, verbal and nonverbal communication in pursuit of a long term dialectical approach between opposing communities where 'discourse between two or more people holding different points of view on a subject who wish to establish the truth of the matter guided by reasonable arguments' (Bertrand,1994: 105-117).

McNiff and Whitehead suggest "action research is systematic inquiry undertaken to improve a social situation and then made public - it is about processes of improvement and making claims that something has improved" (2009: 11). My main methodology was Participatory Action Research (PAR) involving the identification of a problem or range of issues by the community of interest and researcher then taking steps through the developing framework of DS to address some of the existing problems. According to Ballum et al, "PAR differs from most other approaches to public health research because it is based on reflection, data collection and action that aims to improve health and reduce health inequities, through involving the people who, in turn take action to improve their own health" (2006: 854) They suggest that [PAR] "reflects questions about the nature of knowledge [...] it affirms experience can be a basis of knowing and that experiential learning can lead to a legitimate form of knowledge that influences practice" (2006: 854). McNiff and Whitehead summarise that "Action research is about improving knowledge about existing situations, each of which is unique to people in the situation, so the solutions cannot be applied or generalised due to specificity of the circumstances, although the practice can be shared and the process repeated. A key aim is to share knowledge and the learning that led to the creation of that knowledge" (2009:

13). The purpose of this research was to develop an alternative opportunity for narrative practice where all participants have much more control over the process and output, where they can learn about themselves while developing new skills in technology and communication and become part of an active re-imagined community of storytellers. Rahman claims that PAR has the capacity to challenge the status quo from the ground up highlighting that “domination of masses by elites is rooted not only in the polarisation of control over the means of material production but also over the means of knowledge production including the social power to determine what is valid or useful knowledge” (1993: 83). DS is referred to as a ‘movement’ by Lundby (2008) as a form of grass roots activism precisely because the work facilitates individual voices within sub-groups and marginalised communities.

My research was designed in a way that would facilitate equality of opportunity for each participant. Before undertaking any practice I studied other contemporary practice in-depth, to understand how and why projects are set up, levels of engagement, key demographics and the differing outcomes and expectations of facilitators and participants. This work was developed in the field, in response to circumstances and issues presented by participants throughout each collaboration and therefore the developments were consequential and each phase of practice and study, was revised and informed the next collaboration. Beyond the story circle and digital workshops the participants contributed to focus groups and interviews which would consider particular approaches or methods introduced, the relevance of the work to their life experience, issues with publication and publicity in general, and consider how the work might be rolled out among the wider community in future.

Through case study, I had a detailed understanding of victims’ voices and experience, practical formats for production outputs and various contemporary narrative approaches. Case studies highlighted many problems faced by organisers and participants and through the research I found opportunities which developed my own thinking, and the findings had a direct impact on the subsequent personal development of each participant through creating the correct framework to support the practice. There are many iterations of projects with victims and survivors but the

research also highlighted a lack of ex-combatant voices among the contemporary discourse. Some producers like Cahal McLaughlin have tackled the sensitive area of working with ex-combatants such as Prison Memory Archive (PMA). Discovering the limited engagement within this demographic, I wanted to explore the possibilities of collaboration, by introducing DS as a model for engagement and personal development among this community.

It is important that while I provide the basic framework for engagement, that participants felt empowered to question, challenge, and change any element where they found an alternative approach or technique more beneficial. Through the process of combining book-based study, analysis of other projects, and direct work with communities of interest we developed some worthwhile practice which has much scope for development and further research. By adopting the aforementioned methods, the practice of Digital storytelling will be tested, deconstructed and reassembled to facilitate the sharing of stories from arguably some the most marginalised members of Irish society, specifically to challenge the 'expert paradigm' in media and culture, and make an offer of true inclusivity and participation which in no way conforms to 'ventriloquism' or tokenism but has its foundation in grass roots activism. The power of the process is realised within each collaborating community, as a group and more importantly, as individuals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this review is to map the concepts explored in this project which have the capacity to support the delivery of the practice of Digital Storytelling within contested communities and geographical spaces, while informing the broader theoretical framework of the study. The review demonstrates the evolving knowledge within the field drawing upon a range of sources and backgrounds and further highlighting opportunities for research through identifying gaps in the current material.

The review is ordered to highlight the significant concepts which are explored in this research beginning with the notion of self. Before one can begin to understand communities and individuals, it is necessary to consider the idea of self and how self emerges as an entity. Authors such as Christakis and Fowler (2009), Dennett (1991), Woodward (1997), and Blackburn (1999), describe 'self' in its simplest form as a stream of consciousness, but there is also a subjective element to the understanding, so it becomes an elusive term. Hood states "who we are, is a story of our self, a constructed narrative that our brain creates" (2011: xi). The process of constructing a self is a continuous and subjective one as individuals,

learn to adapt to different situations and describe the self as multifaceted; as if we have, the work self, the home self, the parent self, the political self, the bigoted self, the emotional self, the sexual self, the creative self and even the violent self. They seem to be almost different individuals but clearly there is just one body (2011: x-xiii).

The self in this light combines the performing space and the performer drawing no clear distinction between them as each character, trait, action or situation is in service of some relationship with another complex, multifaceted self or group of selves. Hood suggests there is no single self or multiple selves and explains that it is the "external world which switches us from one character to another" (2011: xiii). The body is the vessel of communication in tune with the thinking brain which articulates and forms expressive outputs. There are well established sign systems for

communication and while outputs are formulated in the mind, Woodward claims “the body mediates the relationship between people’s self-identity and their social identity” (1997:80). If the self is largely shaped by individuals around us, and like us, such selves similarly have no control over many external influences, factors or events, how might this impact our everyday experience? Our existence is not entirely random, and individuals make choices which shape and inform their experience. There is a level of control which the individual can maintain over experience and that can be acknowledged, but much more of the lived experience cannot be explained in any rational sense, rather occurring as a series of fortunate or unfortunate coincidences or happenings. The individual’s story, which as Hood suggests, ‘creates the individual’, may determine collective responses to external influences, factors and events, however this cannot be determined in any predictable manner due to the personal nuance and lived experience of individuals, regardless of the presumed alignment of goals, perspectives or ideologies. In summarising my own understanding of the self, it is best understood as narrative, chronologically ordered by the individual, retrievable by memory either personal, collective or cultural, usually a mix of the three with clear connections to a past, present and as of yet, undetermined future.

Identity, Memory and Narrative

Identity and memory are ingrained and deeply personal; they form the basis for all one can understand about who they are. I explore how these memories transform in narrative and in turn, performance, through the individual and their communities considering personal memories with overlaps in cultural memory. Like all communities emerging from conflict there is personal trauma and the emergence of trans-generational suffering which is being recognised in contemporary discourse and demonstrable in young people who suffer indirectly as a result of trauma suffered within the family decades earlier. Later in the review I will explore the principles and approaches to DS and why it may prove a useful tool for knowledge creation through amplifying voices of individuals within communities of interest.

Manuel Castells explains “in a world of global flows of wealth, power and images, the search for identity - collective or individual, ascribed or constructed-becomes the fundamental source of social meaning” (2000: 3). Cashman argues that a community is continuously “imagined, constructed, maintained, negotiated and revised” (2008: 8), and the same principle applies to individuals within their respective communities. Identity is a construct which can and should be negotiated to challenge the rules of belonging. Individuals are not fixed entities and continuously evolve through the impacts of interaction and experience, organising that experience through memory and sharing it with others through speech (narrative) and behaviour. As Ricoeur states simply “identity is the outcome of narrative” (1991 : 33) and there are many external influences and factors which determine the stories that make us who we are.

Adopting digital storytelling for the purpose of creating community-based experience is one of many contemporary opportunities in new media which can challenge the ‘expert paradigm’ in story creation and production. Instead of telling a story about a particular group of people, members of communities are supported to frame their own experience by telling their own story and taking on the responsibility of editorial choices, assets inclusion and ethics. They share experience from memory which is curated and formed through the body, articulated through words. The stories affirm identity or show contradictory disconnects which are often unexpected, and demonstrate the power of the individual within a group and their capacity to give a group meaning and purpose. The work of DS aims to develop individual capacity for personal communication and expression on difficult topics among individuals who recognise and are aware of the sensitivities of the dominant themes of their community. Through sharing experience the individual can make sense of their lives, but how they engage and what they say about the self, is something which takes great consideration, especially when participants harbour a sense of having been previously marginalised or silenced.

The Presentation or Performance of Self

The 'presentation of self' is heavily informed by the narratives individuals share about themselves, the way they choose to project those stories, and to whom. Decety and Somerville claim that "our view of the self relies heavily on the concepts of shared representations between the self and others" (2003: 527). This becomes a more complex process in the digital age because while it is easy to find online networks which support our world views, it is much easier to be confronted by difference and 'otherness'. In *Stories of Identity* (2008) Castells states that "the search for identity with information overload is the fundamental source of social meaning". (2008: 2) This also implies that family and geographical community are no longer the only spaces where individuals can make sense of the world around them. Now each individual can draw on a range of possibilities for meaning from a myriad of online environments and the possibility of connecting to people beyond the actual spaces they inhabit within the realm of virtual reality. In the age of radical individualism, with an emphasis on the autonomous self associated with western culture, there is an endless stream of access to virtual platforms for self styling, branding and promotion. The world as Chrisaktis and Fowler (2009) suggest has become hyper-mediated. In order to reach people and communicate with them in the present, it is reasonable to suggest that an online virtual presence gives each individual, with the relevant hardware and software, the capacity to achieve this goal. However the formats for dissemination of this type of delicate community practice must be explored more deeply to facilitate a two way exchange between participants and audience. Within the room, participants shift between audience and teller, and the group collectively regulates and edits stories. The work is successful to the point of completion, but what happens after completion needs broad discussion between officials, NGO's, researchers, and communities of interest. However a successful engagement for the individual should not necessarily lie in the publication of their story but in the participation of the process, where they can take small steps to begin to positively reconstruct the self in the presence of others.

The presentation of self, identity and impression management is an important aspect of any digital storytelling project. Giddens states,

the task of forging a distinct identity may be able to deliver distinct psychological gains, but it is clearly also a burden. A self-identity has to be created and more or less continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day to day life and fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions. Moreover the sustaining of such a narrative directly affects and in some degree helps construct, the body as well as the self. (1991: 186)

Forging and maintaining an identity is a fluid and complex process made up through interactions with people and place. As Babad, et.al state

people are markedly different in the ways they perceive, explain and evaluate their own motivations and behaviours and those of others, and gaps between “self” and “other” are obstacles not only to the process of inquiry but to the actual interactions between person and groups. (1983: 56)

Maguire suggests “identity can be found at the intersection between conceptions of identity as sameness (*idem*) and identity as self (*ipseity*) (2015: 25) suggesting people do not wholly accept the ascribed traits of identity through ancestry, community and cultural narrative as fixed and non-negotiable. Instead individuals make choices about what is acceptable to them, such that even where identities are largely assigned, there are still levels of autonomy expressed by individuals and willingness to accept ideas and concepts vary from person to person as they develop through personal encounters and experience. Yet there is little consideration given to our sensory perceptions such as vision and hearing and their openness to misconstrued information processing. While few people set out to destabilise their own notion of deep-rooted identity through living shared lives with people from different communities, tolerance and acceptance of the ‘other’ and their ‘truths’, should be a goal, albeit a long term one.

Babad states that “persons tend to perceive others, interpret their behaviour, and make value judgements about it not from the points of view of the other person but from their own points of view” (1983: 57-58) This applies to single identity communities and subgroups within those

communities as it does to their 'discordant' other. I wanted to use Goffman as a starting point consider the spaces where participants create and share stories. Some of the places where the work took place will have meaning for participants and others will not, beyond its function as the meeting place. This may impact how participants behave with the facilitator / researcher and may also impact the way groups communicate and interact with each other. The place that the work is undertaken can influence the stories being told. In unfamiliar territory, or in spaces which are perceived as threatening, the structure and content of the narratives can change dramatically. This can have significant bearing when choosing a site to bring together diametrically opposed groups to produce digital stories or other artistic interventions.

There is also the virtual performance space which will require consideration as part of the process: what happens to the stories once they are produced and where are they archived? By producing short format films, they can be shared on any social network, but it is important to understand any implications of sharing, whether they should be stored on a purpose-built web repository such as that of Prison Memory Archive, or even if they should be shared online at all. De Bruyn highlights the need for forging effective and reliable connections while engaging with online platforms (2013). Christakis and Fowler define social networks as 'creative' spaces and suggest that "what these networks create does not belong to anyone, but is shared by everyone in the network" and state that they are not always positive spaces", [...] suggesting that "while they are distinctly human they need tending". (2010: 31) Every producer and listener has something at stake in the process of engagement. Miller suggests that "in an age of limitless artificiality and unrealistic role models that constitute the society of spectacle" it is imperative that we adopt more useful and meaningful ways of using Web 2.0 and its subsequent technologies, putting real people with real experience at the heart of the mediated experience. (2013: 134) Debord argues that "directly lived experience is in danger of being replaced by spectacle of mediated experience [...] and a dissolution of distance between the subject as self and the media as other". (2013:135) Miller suggests "these factors appear to be crucial in terms of how we relate to images and performances that surround us and how they in turn inform the way we understand and express our own sense of identity" (2013:137).

The presentation of self has become a ubiquitous pursuit especially in the virtual world. As Rascaroli states “the foregrounding of the self and prominence accorded to subjectivity are veritable markers of globalised culture and society. Gestures of autobiography, auto-ethnography and self representation are to be found right at the heart of artistic practices [...] and in online forms of expression and communication”.(2014:229) Miller suggests “in the context of media performances of the self [...] as subjects of a media saturated world in which we are increasingly encouraged to perform ourselves as ‘user generated content’ we may start to feel that we only exist if we are gazed upon by an audience of sorts”. (2013: 159) Validation of the self is often misunderstood and misinterpreted by younger generations through online platforms, based on this reliance on an audience, although not exclusively. In 2019 the children's charity Barnardo's funded the study *Left to their own devices: Young people, social media and mental health* (2019). The authors Papamichail and Sharma, highlight many issues with young people engaging in online platforms. One popular misconception among younger users of social media is that the amount of social media friends and likes gained through platforms, perpetuates false notions of perceived worth and has in many cases had devastating consequences due to the complete distortion of reality.

Virtual presence provides users with a veil or a curtain which can be difficult to get behind where reality can be manipulated in a myriad of forms. Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) examines ‘regions and regional behaviour’ exploring the metaphor of ‘front’ and ‘back’ stage performance by individuals in many different relationships from professional to private life. The idea of ‘front’ and ‘back’ stage performance is a development of the metaphor coined by Shakespeare where he states ‘All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts’ - *As you like it - Act II, Sc. VII.*

Goffman highlights the potential for the “performer to be taken in by his own act” and in the world of online communities there are many more opportunities for self-deception. Producing works in non-virtual groups should suppress the desire for individuals to fabricate experience, because self-deception is no longer as easily maintained, and because the face to face interaction can often satisfy and replace the need for ‘likes’. As Christakis and Fowler suggest the “networks we operate within, especially online are like forests which need care and attention from each of its participants in order for it to flourish, survive and succeed”. (2010:31) Front stage performance, according to Goffman, is about maintaining standards and keeping up appearances and the backstage is ‘symbolic of intimacy’ in all its forms.

My work explores these boundaries within groups around the land border of Ireland. Digital Storytelling operates in these two notional regions, where the group undertakes the work collectively in story circles, in private, away from the gaze of the potential audience. This part of the process functions in the backstage region. Participants are producing stories and narratives which can agitate, aggravate, and intimidate and participants must develop their stories to an agreed standard in terms of content where they can be presented in the front stage region for public performance. The stories can be difficult to listen to whether they are told by victims or perpetrators of violence but are based on a pre-agreed set of rules produced within the group.

These regions defined by Goffman as ‘front / back stage’ performance spaces cannot be understood in simplistic terms. There are inner rooms within the ‘backstage’ space even among single identity groups. There are outer spaces in public fora, none which provide full disclosure of the self. All performances are framed for the audience. There are utterances which cannot be voiced among a group of peers for fear of upsetting the other ‘performers’. So as ‘performers’, the participants are maintaining a performance not only for the unknown, unseen potential audience, but for each other. There is a complex process of ‘impression management’ (1959: 136) at play and it can be difficult to decipher the behaviour of individuals unless one gets to know the participants on a deeper level beyond ‘reciprocal first naming’. (1959:1 27)

There is also the issue of causing further suffering through interventions into past lives of participants where Lambert states “what starts as well-meaning intention becomes a minefield of unintended consequences. The offer of help made with sincerity and compassion becomes instead a relationship fraught with expectation, interdependence, power and on all sides, vulnerability”. (2013:117) Allowing time to build relationships between facilitator and participant is a vital part of community engagement especially when working with participants who have experienced trauma. It is difficult to encounter any community in the North of Ireland (including the peripheral Republican counties along the border) who have not experienced some form of conflict related trauma, which will resound in the memories of those personally affected and exist on a wider community level as episodes of cultural memory.

The 19th century philosopher Pierre Janet stated that ‘Memory is an action; essentially the action of telling a story’. Memory is a construct of the present and a tool to reimagine, reconstruct and communicate past events. Memories form what Taylor refers to as the ‘repertoire’ which supports and enhances the ‘archive’ (2003) Memory is not history but as Adam Timmins highlights “memory is now an inescapable feature of the historiographical landscape”. (Review - Memory and History 2013) Memory can no longer be understood as an invalid form of knowledge. When considering memory there are issues around authenticity and truth which present issues for historians and archivists, but this however should not simply write off the importance of personal testimony which is authentic at the point of remembering. In the documentary *Austins; Memory & Place 2013*, Dr. Paul Devlin describes memory in this way when discussing Israel Rosenfield’s notion of memory as a ‘videotape inside the head’:

‘It’s more useful to think of memory as a system - like the immune system. I don’t actually remember you every time I see you - I just remember an approximation of you so I have to invest. There has to be a reason that I want to remember you and this is important when you bring this idea from individual to community level. Certain people agree to certain types of memory about particular events and ideas, authentic at the time the community is

deciding to remember, but memory is unfixed, not settled, not history or fact and all the more beautiful for it' (Austins Memory and Place 2013 - Vimeo)

According to Diana Taylor (2003) the 'repertoire' is the embodied experience of the people in what they remember, articulate and express about their past lives. One example of the 'repertoire', an example of what Assman (1995) refers to as 'cultural memory', is the annual Bloody Sunday march each year in Derry. Many of the contemporary participants of the annual commemoration marches were not born at the time of 'Bloody Sunday' (1972) yet they engage in the ritual of walking the route for the memory of those killed by the British Army. Taylor states the "I who remembers is simultaneously active and passive"; the thinking subject (producer) and the subject of thought (product) (2003: 191). These cultural performances are as important as the official or recognised archive. They are created and curated by the community of origin and ensure that the collective, cultural memory of a community endures; that the memory of their people live on in the hope that their lives have meaning in death, with the capacity to change the outlook for the living.

Taylor concludes that it is "the repertoire that holds the tales for survivors, their gestures, their traumatic flashbacks, [...] hallucinations; in short, all those acts which are usually thought of as ephemeral and invalid forms of knowledge and evidence" (2003: 193). While performing their stories the participants are restructuring their lives and making sense of past experience not only for others in the room or a potential audience of their discordant other, but most significantly for themselves.

In *The Politics of Storytelling* (2006) Jackson states "contrary to the expectations I had at the beginning of my research, I began to realise that the full story and its conclusion were not facts of history, finalised years ago, but events still in the making, events that include me" (2002, 2006: 239). All the organisations, community groups and film makers who have produced stories with and for victims and perpetrators of the Troubles, have had a small but significant role in the continuing the exploration of narrative which is presently at a whisper pitch, functioning in the

background of society in transition. Participation is a layered and multi-dimensional experience which affects each individual in very different ways depending on their own social, political and economic circumstances alongside their particular experience of the conflict.

Story is formed in the memory and expressed through the body. Lambert states that “we are perpetual storytellers, reviewing events in the form of re-lived scenes, nuggets of context and character [...] but the brain you are using to listen to me talk about stories and storytelling is very different than the brain you have when you hear me tell a story” (2013: 6). This idea is about intended meaning and perceived meaning, about clarity and understanding between teller and listener and places emphasis on the memory of the teller in the process of recall to articulate an experience for the listener, in the words they use and how they locate themselves within the story. This says a great deal about how the teller wants to be perceived by the listener. Tonkin states that “oral representations of pastness involves study of narrators and audience as all work is produced under specific social and economic conditions” (1995). There are many influences which affect the telling and it is vital to address these influences to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of communities where identities are formed through collective and cultural memory. Carr states what gives “real memory its richness and character [...] is its contingency. Once we bring long term memory back into working memory, it becomes short term memory again. When we reconsolidate it, it gains a new set of connections ; a new context” (2010: 191). Therefore memories are understood as entities with dual presence and not something which exist in the past but regularly become part of the present, expressed and embodied. Assman states they are a blend of “communicative memories which form part of everyday communication” interspersed with “cultural memories, as fixed points of fateful events of the past and institutional communication such as recitation, practice and observance” (1995: 129). As Tonkin argues “the principle that memory makes us is also the principle that we make memory” (1999: 117).

Brison states “Narration is a social interaction [...] actual or imagined, anticipated or remembered. One of the most difficult narratives to hear is the telling of a trauma. It takes its toll on the listeners

and it is not always therapeutic for the narrator” (2002: 182). There are, however, benefits to narrating traumatic experiences of the past as Brison points out; “In the case of trauma testimonies, the action could be described as transforming traumatic memory into narrative memory or as recovering or remaking the self” (2002: 72). As Dan Baron-Cohen suggests “the capacities we all possess to transform ourselves and this world are only activated and developed through dialogue (with others and within ourselves), centred in our knowledge, our needs, our questions, our critical imagination, and the creation of a community of solidarity” (2001: 13). Baron-Cohen worked in Derry (Frontline 1992) while the conflict was ongoing in an environment which was hostile and in a perpetual state of alert. There was little possibility of cross community interaction so the work was focused on individuals developing the self and their own tools for expression. The hostile atmosphere has long since dissipated. However, twenty years into an official peace process I am keen to explore how different communities have adapted and changed in a post conflict society, and attempt to understand their contemporary issues in relation to the past.

Our lives are managed through stories punctuated by our subjective sense of time and space. Stories order past experience and Jackson suggests “if it were not for stories our lives would be unimaginable. A story enables us to fuse the world within and the world without [...] in this way we gain purchase over events that confronted us, humbled us and left us helpless. In telling stories we renew our faith that the world is within our grasp” (2006: 245). In ‘A Typology of Post-conflict Environments’ , 2011, Brown et al. define a post-conflict society as one which has reached certain peace milestones such as: ‘cessation of hostilities and violence, signing of peace agreements, disarmament and reintegration, establishment of a functioning state, achieving reconciliation and societal integration; and, economic recovery’ (2011: 4-5). In post-conflict societies our stories reinforce our understanding of self, the ways one can change and grow, how individuals respond to adversity, a people who are adaptable to circumstances, as victims but also resilient survivors. Post-conflict societies must endure a period of reconstruction in order to move toward a new era of

cooperation. The reconstruction phase must involve people sharing experience to facilitate acknowledgement, truth, reconciliation and, or justice, based on the agreed outcomes that particular society want to manifest. This is a very complicated process in respect of Northern Ireland where opposing sides want to pursue different strategies in addressing the legacy of the conflict while victim and survivor groups want additional and often opposing outcomes. There will be no equality of outcome in any legacy initiative but it is important that equality of opportunity is extended to all quarters and no group or community is further marginalised, oppressed, or silenced. To ensure broad participation, it is important to explore the digital possibilities for forging links in and between communities by engaging with some of the developing technologies merged with traditional forms of communication.

The process of online communication requires no real investment, thought, engagement or connections to be established between individuals. The end user operates from the relative comfort and safety of their home. Within this vast network is a ready-made audience of subscribers existing in a virtual performance space who may engage by utilising the performative features of social media platforms rendering the medium a one way ventilation system. In *Oversharing: Presentations of Self in the Internet Age* (2012), Agger highlights “the great thing about the internet is that everyone can join in the conversation if they have access. The troubling thing is that everyone can join in the conversation! Cyberdemocracy is the upside; the decline of discourse is the downside” (2012, 22). As De Bruyn points out

due to the idiosyncrasies of Facebook’s interface, allowing the viral distribution of data and its performative features, (one click reactions and emojis) which turn it into an extremely popular forum, Facebook manages to forge effective and reliable connections between collectively shared opinion thus creating a collective or ‘connective’ experience that is unlikely to occur in the real world. Facebook gives each member a real face and as a result, what would remain, as Assmann describes as ‘communicative memory’ may now objectify in to cultural memory (2013: 235).

Miller notes that “mediatised experience bears an increasingly significant relation to our understanding of our own identities with significant potential for individual agency as we interact in increasingly intimate ways with content, technology and the process of mediation” (2013:167). That is not to say that it solves all problems. There is evidence to the contrary. Social media can heighten the social divisions of class and social background creating absolute positions of identification and otherness. Noyes (2003) argues that ‘communities continuously remember, reimagine, adapt and grow in order to survive’, but this must be facilitated on a micro level within communities to be meaningful, in order to give each individual a voice, or one dominant subgroup within the community speaks on behalf of the rest, whether their concerns and ideas align or not. This notion highlights the presentation of self in a changing, hyper-mediatised society. In the process of documenting the self, self-objectification naturally occurs; but with balance this can also be a route to self-acceptance and responsibility which can lead to a form of self-empowerment. DS has the capacity to forge effective and reliable connections among its participants and develop personal understanding and responses to a range of issues, however due to the nature of the circumstances of some participants and the sensitivity of the content, dissemination of practice through social media platforms might not be sensible or ethical. As dissemination of stories is an important part of the process and social media is widely accessible, it would be remiss to ignore its potential as a platform for connecting and sharing structured stories. As Christakis and Fowler highlight these online connections and networks are not always positive and need nurturing. (2009)

In relation to this, Lauren Berlant’s ‘theory of intimate publics’ usefully examines DS as a mode of ‘autobiographical storytelling focused on affective connection to audience which contributes to rising pretence of intimacy and affect as fundamental to the experience and construction of contemporary citizenship’ (2008: viii). Berlant argues that ‘the political as a place of acts oriented towards publicness becomes replaced by a world of private thoughts, leanings and gestures projected out as an intimate public of private individuals inhabiting their own affective changes. Suffering, in this personal / public context, becomes answered by sacrifice and survival, which is, then, recoded as the achievement of justice or liberty’ (2008: 41-2). Berlant suggests that ‘what

makes a public sphere intimate is an expectation that the consumers of its particular stuff already share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience' (2008: viii). The significance of this for potential uses of DS is revealed in Poletti's observation that 'The seven story elements, which guide participants in the process of DS, coax life narratives in such a way as to encourage individuals to shape their heterogeneous experiences into stories of personal reflection on dominant themes' (2011: 81) 'such as life, loss, belonging, hope for the future, friendship and love' (Burgess 2006: 212)

Narrative, Performance and Cultural Memory in Northern Ireland

Elizabeth Tonkin states that "we recall social relationships, and scenes experienced with other people; so memories are less individual than is commonly supposed" (1999: v12). Cappecci and Cage state "The story of Us demonstrates how the story of Self connects to a larger narrative, one that encompasses those in a community, organisation and campaign. When the story of Us is narrated fully, audiences understand the values they share, who they are as a community and what is possible for them to achieve' (2015:217). The self has many and often conflicting identity traits. The self is an evolving entity, continuously reconstructed of experience and memory. Individuals have a point of view which is unique to that person, made up of a range of differing factors, based on their own previous memories and experience. All the traits are assimilated within each individual and impossible to separate. Collective and cultural experience make the self and we rely on the community to maintain that self. Lakoff and Johnson suggest; there exists no Kantian radically autonomous person, with absolute freedom and a transcendent reason that correctly dictates what is and isn't moral [...] what universal aspects of reason there are arise from our commonalities of our brains and bodies and the environments we inhabit [...] since conceptual systems vary significantly, reason is not entirely universal (1999:2).

When considering 'Acknowledgement' in the context of working with ex-combatants, the significance of this interconnectedness becomes evident. At some point participants must address the past in relation to their role in the conflict and its relationship to, and impact upon, their community. Active paramilitary service defined their past lives and heavily influences their present experience; the precise level of this definition differs for each individual based on a range of psychosocial factors. Yet it cannot be brushed away and ignored by the participant or by society. In dealing with and addressing legacy, society needs perpetrators of violence to come forward and share what they know, while it should be underscored that there can be no equality of outcome for victims. Not everyone will get the answers they seek, but broader inclusivity and participation in projects could address community concerns through action. As Dylan Marron (2018) suggests "empathy is an acknowledgement of an individual's humanity of someone who thinks differently to me". It is necessary for local communities to evolve from apathy to action and only through communication, community building and national participation can this be achieved. DS used in this context can allow its viewers to humanise the people they disagree with, reaching beyond cultural memory, propaganda and stereotype, persuading us that while the 'other' may think differently, they are not as radically different as they may first appear.

Viewing stories created in the style of DS encourages both teller and listener to experience, create and reflect in relation to the story regardless of the meta-narrative they have come to understand. The storyteller invites the listener to go beyond stereotype, rhetoric and hyperbole and presents a fresh opportunity for an alternative perspective and experience. Reflections on sensations and experience creates narrative memory and this evolves as it is shared with others. Stories can have a profound impact on listeners. It is through narrative communication that we make sense of the world around us, locally, nationally and globally. Stories rationalise abstract and complex experience into reality. Stories clarify our identity positions and current stance, providing opportunities for acceptance among groups of people through the establishment of common ground. Equally it is in this process that individuals become 'other' to different communities and societal groups, even sub-groups within our own communities. Our stories have the capacity to

unite and divide. In telling stories it is possible to transform personal views and make the 'other' more recognisable to ourselves, however the act of telling only constitutes one half of the transaction. The 'other' must also be willing to listen.

Many participant collaborators from the ex-prisoner community would be classified today in other regional conflicts as child soldiers. As young as fifteen years old, they carried out extreme acts of violence having made a choice that resulted in militant action in a fight they did not understand. Only when in prison, through the 'University of Long Kesh' (McLaughlin 2006:127) did they learn the Republican ideology and history of the cause for which they gave up their liberty. A toxic mix of patriotism, delusions of heroism, propaganda and real oppression from the British and dominant Unionist class in Northern Ireland at the time, impacted on their civil rights to jobs, housing and votes. In *Strategies for Social Change* (2012), Maney states "civil rights mobilisation resulted in a violent backlash from the hardline loyalist segment of the unionist population. This backlash in turn contributed to the renewal of an armed republican campaign for Irish unification" (2012:170). There was a clear need for rebalancing civil rights for all citizens in Northern Ireland but to take the fight directly to opposing communities on the streets, engaging in a perpetual cycle of violence further accelerated the injustice.

Lambert states that "we are perpetual storytellers, reviewing events in the form of re-lived scenes, nuggets of context and character [...] but the brain you are using to listen to me talk about stories and storytelling is very different than the brain you have when you hear me tell a story" (2013:6). This idea is about intended meaning and perceived meaning, about clarity and understanding between teller and listener and places emphasis on the memory of the teller in the process of recall to articulate an experience for the listener, in the words they use and how they locate themselves within the story. This says a great deal about how the teller wants to be perceived by the listener. Tonkin states that 'oral representations of pastness involves study of narrators and audience as all work is produced under specific social and economic conditions' (1995:38). There are many influences which affect the telling and it is vital to address these influences to facilitate a

more comprehensive understanding of communities where identities are formed through collective and cultural memory. Carr states what gives “real memory its richness and character [...] is its contingency. Once we bring long term memory back into working memory, it becomes short term memory again. When we reconsolidate it, it gains a new set of connections ; a new context” (2010:191). Therefore memories are understood as entities with dual presence and not something which exist in the past but regularly become part of the present, expressed and embodied. Assman suggests they are a blend of “communicative memories which form part of everyday communication” interspersed with “cultural memories, as fixed points of fateful events of the past and institutional communication such as recitation, practice and observance” (1995:129) and highlights “cultural memory is characterised by its distance from the everyday” (1995:129). Individual narratives can often be overlooked in favour of the community meta-narrative and regardless of which side of the community is in focus, they perform their cultural identity on public prominent displays which glorify and remember individual acts and historical occurrences of the conflict and in their performance, maintain the status quo of segregation. These cultural memories or episodes are etched into the memory of the community and each individual within the community.

Kleiman and Kleiman explain that societies remember in three distinct ways including commemorative rituals, inscriptions onto cultural texts and incorporation of social memory in the human body. What they remember is historical events, social change, cultural identity and ethnic and class gender differences” (1994: 708). This is significant because everything one can come to know about themselves is based on the past, or representations of pastness and with a broad range of narrative approaches to practice available to the researcher / facilitator one can incorporate multiple modes of remembering to facilitate different community groups in their own recovery of the past.

Ron Austin argues

the moral obligation of the artist is to transform conflict in such a way that it forces us to delve into the fundamental sources of conflict and violence, requiring a severe effort to take conflict to the deepest possible level where it can be shared and better understood...our objective is not to resolve or avoid conflict but to be able to truly and fully observe and probe it (2007: 10).

Evidence widely exists that suggests oral history is a way of understanding the 'other' and acts of the past, but is not held in the same esteem as other forms of official accounts of the past.

Elizabeth Crooke suggests "Oral history is often regarded as the radical redefinition of established forms of history. By these terms history is rejected as based on a tradition of state approved historical documentation undertaken by professional historians recording events and people important to the national story" (2007:125). Crooke makes an important point arguing that history of the people belongs to the people through their stories and experience, and cannot only exist through 'official' channels. In Northern Ireland, this was part of the problem. Not only was a violent sectarian battle being fought on the streets, but a propaganda war was also being fought and sustained through the broadcast and print media by the British government and in counter measures largely by Irish Republicans including those in the paramilitary ranks and their partners pursuing democratic outcomes.

The issue of divided discourse has been addressed by previously mentioned groups in Northern Ireland since the signing of the Good Friday / Belfast agreement (1998). including 'Healing through Remembering'- HTR, 'The Ardoyne Commemoration Project' and 'Prison Memory Archive'. A top-down approach is viewed with distrust in communities and a ground up approach is viewed as being of little significance among governing bodies, very much relating to Crooke's understanding of oral history points out. However, there must be more control given in the public space to accounts of individuals from all backgrounds as well as the linear historical facts. Diana Taylor points out that "Institutions come and go ...people remain". (2006:83) Langelier states that, "embedded in the lives of the ordinary, the marginalised and the muted, personal narrative

responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experience, claim identities and 'get a life' by telling and sharing their stories" (2001: 700).

Dan Baron Cohen proposes that "fragmentation is normal and present in every person. This might open a passage to thinking about different ways of building collective identities as there would always be different fragments to build upon, and there may be ways to reach an identity that accepts its fragmentation as a strength or a given" (2008:12). On an individual basis this could be an acceptable concept but on a broader scale of participation with community groups much more difficult to realise and embed as there will be resistance toward fundamental shifts in identity among groups yet initially at least, less resistance to tolerance and understanding.

Trauma, Trans-generational Suffering, and Narrative

The critical memory of the most recent period of conflict in Northern Ireland is in decline. This refers to individuals who witnessed events firsthand; those that can respond to the who, what, why, when and where, as victims, survivors and even perpetrators. Bloody Sunday (1972) was fifty years ago and is one of the few events that has been thoroughly investigated, with some unresolved questions, while many other atrocities have not had the same exposition. Many victims have not had any opportunity to engage in a process of self-recovery, community engagement, or public acknowledgement of their experience, trauma and loss. The families of these individuals are also impacted directly as a result of the pain and hardships experienced as a family. As I highlight in chapter four, the initial incident is traumatic for victims, yet it can represent just the beginning of a downward spiral for many, which in turn affects subsequent generations of the same family. This phenomenon is more commonly known as trans-generational trauma. Trauma can manifest in many ways and according to the Commission for Victims and Survivors (CVS) individuals "are much more prone to developing certain types of psychopathology including depression, anxiety, disturbances of emotional responses, psychosis, substance and alcohol abuse and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (2012:10).

In 2012 'The Commission for Victims and Survivors' appointed Queens University to conduct a study on the issue of trans-generational trauma. The report concludes that "Regardless of any strict classification that may be placed on trans-generational trauma, there does seem to be a growing body of evidence that trauma experienced by individuals can affect their children and grandchildren even when these generations have not experienced any of the traumatic events themselves" (2012 :12) Once the phenomena has been recognised, there are many considerations and challenges in responding to the problem of trans-generational suffering. Much of the experience of silencing, begins within the family unit as individuals cope in different ways to manage their pain. This can become more complicated for children of perpetrators of violence as there is an expected silence around the actions of the individual, which even years later, does not get discussed within the family. According to the Queens report the most "common method for dealing with trans-generational trauma is psychotherapy"; but the emphasis on silence clearly presents a barrier for talking therapies. (2012:10) However Becker highlights that "any attempt to address conflict related trauma should not be limited to one approach, as a mental health problem, detached from political or social reality" (2013: 4). And Grosz states, "closure is an extraordinarily compelling fantasy of mourning. It is the fiction that we can love loss and suffer and then do something to permanently end our sorrow" (2014: 209). Therefore, expressing memories through narrative with people who share similar experience, can have a positive impact on the individual as they discover new and alternative methods to cope. Collectively they share knowledge and experience and learn from each other while developing new networks for reciprocal and meaningful communication.

With over 3500 families suffering the direct loss of a loved one as a result of the conflict, the majority of which were innocent people caught up in sectarian violence, there is an understanding that an estimated 100,000 people could be living with some form of trans-generational trauma or conflict related 'mental health difficulties' in Northern Ireland. (O'Neill, 2015) According to the Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information service "Northern Ireland experiences 20-25% higher levels of mental health illness when compared to the rest of the UK, higher anti-

depressant prescription rates and higher incidences of self-harm. Northern Ireland has the highest rate of suicide in the UK.” (2015: online)

The need is great for individuals, families, and communities to acknowledge the past for the benefit of the self, the family, the community and wider society. Becker claims that “of equal or greater importance is societies’ acknowledgement of what has happened. In this way extreme suffering of individuals can be shared and collectively contained,” (2013: 4) and continues that “for many who have suffered bereavement or injury as a result of the Troubles, acknowledgement is as important as truth or justice, in the process of recovering some sense of health and well being” (2013: 13).

Digital Storytelling: Origins and Principles

Digital Storytelling has been used among community groups since its inception in the nineties at the Centre for Digital Storytelling, now known as ‘StoryCenter’ in Berkley, California. Daniel Meadows adopted the method in the UK in partnership with the BBC, producing ‘Capture Wales’ in 2001. The process of DS presents participants with the opportunity to represent and speak for themselves. Individuals become participant producers in the work of DS, different to participating in standard documentary practice where professionals develop and manage the production. As Gidden states “For even the most prejudiced or narrow-minded person, the regularised contact with mediated information inherent in day to day life today is a positive appropriation. [...] There are wide variations in terms of how open a given individual is to new forms of knowledge and how far that person is able to tolerate certain levels of dissonance” (1991:188). So not only is there value in the process of participation for collaborators in DS but also for the consumer of these stories. DS projects can benefit society by hearing the stories of traumatic experiences endured by victims and survivors of violence in post-conflict societies, and there may also be benefits of listening to the experiences of the perpetrators where society might begin to understand the motivations and ideologies related to such extreme behaviour in the hope of avoiding any repeat of the past. Current work in combating radicalisation of all kinds, can draw on the testimonies of those

who were previously engaged in radical and terrorist forms of action. However the fundamental issue remains about how best to engage with marginalised groups so that the process is beneficial to the participants in terms of experience through creating opportunities for post traumatic growth, and then consider the potential for making the work much more accessible.

According to Robin (2008) “the combination of powerful yet affordable technology hardware and software meshes perfectly with the needs of many [...] to thrive in increasingly “media varied environments” (Reisland 2005) and states that DS is an “especially good tool for collecting, creating, analysing and combining visual images with written text” (2008: 222). Once the stories are curated and prepared, then the technology is introduced to the workshop process and participants record their stories, arrange their assets of images, text and sound within the chosen software and complete their digital stories. Robin suggests that some of the most compelling stories produced in this format are those based on personal experience. “These stories can revolve around significant events in life, [...] can be emotionally charged and personally meaningful to both author and viewer. Many subcategories have been described by Lambert (2003) and include stories of specific people and places, or deal with life’s adventures, accomplishments, challenges and recovery” (2008:223).

Digital Storytelling is being used progressively within the education sector due to its availability but I have not encountered any projects which engage communities in transition from conflict to peace using the framework of DS. This presented a fresh opportunity in the research and development of Digital Storytelling as tool for community engagement around the border region of Ireland. As Barber highlights “DS may be quite appealing to those seeking new opportunities for cross disciplinary, iterative approaches to practice based humanities scholarship and pedagogy”. He continues, “The Humanities as a field of study, focuses on the cultural record of human experience. Those who study the humanities seek knowledge in stories about identity, origin and future dreams. Why stories? Because storytelling provides a way to make our world comprehensible. The humanities use stories to create, communicate, preserve, research and teach knowledge about our

cultural and creative record” (2016: 2). This is a mode of communication which engages the literacies of reading, writing, talking and listening and has the capacity to develop the digital skills of each producer rendering them digitally literate upon completion.

The Seven Elements of Digital Storytelling

There are seven elements which constitute the structure of a digital story originally defined by the Center for Digital Storytelling, and I will briefly outline these elements. These elements are defined in order to provide clarity and structure to the process and develop key skills in the process such as digital, technological and verbal literacies.

Point of View : Encourages the teller to clearly define the realisation they are trying to communicate in the story. The realisation is essential because DS as a movement believe ‘all stories are told to make a point’ and are “ordered by establishing a desire or need in the central character outlining the course of action taken to address it and then presenting the realisation or insights that occurred as a result of experiencing those events and their relationship to our original desire” (2006:46). POV also anchors DS as a medium of personal storytelling where “the frank admission of responsibility that the first person voice provides is seen as preferable to the authoritative seemingly neutral, obscure stance of the third person voice” because of its ability to create authentic narrative” (2006:49).

Dramatic Question : Keeping the audience engaged and providing a structure for the narrative. “This brings the practice of DS into the public sphere and the producer is encouraged to think about how to construct their vignette so the audience experiences the structure as an answer to the question they detected at the beginning of the story” (2006:50). Thus the narrator is responding to coaxing for a good story; one that will satisfy, surprise and engage the viewer / listener (2009: 629).

Emotional Content : Framed in terms of ability of the narrative to hold the audience attention. “the fundamental emotional paradigms of death, our sense of loss, love, loneliness, confidence, vulnerability, acceptance and rejection are presented as features that enhance a story’s ability to engage its audience and be intelligible” (2006: 52). Lambert warns of foregrounding emotional material for its own sake where outcomes may be exploitative or the producer feels vulnerable therefore the group must consider the lack of control once the work is published with the potential for unintended reaction or interpretation. He suggests that “ emotional content is presented as desirable but treated with caution and respect” (2006 :53). Neilsen suggests the characteristics of DS makes it a suitable genre for therapeutic life narrative. (2005: 3)

Gift of Voice : As a textual feature voice over does much of the work of engendering the identification between viewer and author where affect is used to communicate similarity and foster identity. (2006) Burgess suggests it is ‘voice over which gives the digital story its potential for strong affective resonances’ (2006:210) and Lambert suggests Voice over “enables a story to inspire reverie in its audience by producing a flow of associative memories that ‘wash over us’ as we listen (2006: 54).

Soundtrack : This element can give emphasis to the narrative unfolding depending on the track that is used which can be sound effects or an instrumental music track. For personal use one may incorporate favourite songs but in work that will be published as part of a collection in order to comply with copyright law, original recordings are the norm ideally produced or sourced by the participant based on the requirements of their story and their own creative choices based on personal stimulation.

Economy : Economy of the voice is desirable to produce effective “juxtaposition with images and in this element DST, in its pedagogical role facilitates understanding between different components of a multimedia text” (2006: 58). We can reimagine and recreate and begin to piece together all the elements we have been presented so long as our senses have not been assaulted and we can

focus on the narrative of the teller while the other elements act as stimuli to enhance the experience.

Pacing : As Lambert suggests 'Good stories breathe' (2006: 59). With correct pacing, which becomes apparent to the teller in the process of telling and sharing with the group, the audience can follow the story through to its conclusion, filling in the blanks, engaging imagination, knowledge, experience, simultaneously becoming collaborators in the work. The listener merges context, personal experience and understanding to the new narrative which we are being presented. The story should not feel rushed but complete, coming to a conclusion naturally even with the perceived limitations of time, words and imagery used to express the narrative.

The seven elements outline a process of DS in the pursuit of creating stories which capture personal experience effectively. The aim is to share stories across generations and between communities, which facilitates audience understanding and participant acknowledgement. The process gives agency and perspective on contemporary issues, promotes literacy development and a deep level of engagement. DS can connect disparate cultures and over a protracted period of time build the capacity for wider inclusive community engagement. Truth and authenticity are important concepts for consideration otherwise the teller can become stigmatised if found to be venturing beyond the confines of personal experience, creating what Goffman referred to as a spoiled identity (1983) which in the current virtual world can be much more prolific and damaging through the networked users of social media.

My expectations at the outset of this project were that through a process of knowledge exchange, I would trade stories for skills allowing my participant learners to frame their stories about lived experience in border regions of Ireland by introducing them to narrative based technologies. In doing so this kind work presents opportunities for engagement with contemporary society by fostering digital literacy and making it accessible. In exchange the participants will introduce a whole new audience to their former lives and experiences, through the life stories they share.

These narratives become part of a broader collection of personal stories which belong in a particular time and place, presented by the protagonist, preserved for fresh 'first hearings'. (Maguire 2015). The process of Digital Storytelling aims to extend insight on how participants might consider 'presentation of self' especially when dealing with difficult and often traumatic experience, through what they choose to talk about and how they talk about it, in a way that goes beyond conveying facts and general information. The format is short running up to two minutes and thirty seconds or 250 words as defined by Lambert (2013) & Meadows (2001). Hartley suggests that DS should run between two and five minutes. (2009) A major part of the process will be the editing and how participants form their stories in the visual, oral and aural choices they make. Participants are not required to feature and can present work in an abstract poetic manner if they choose, but the narrative - no matter how fragmented - must be their own. The primary concern is that participants are in full ownership of their contribution and not represented in any way by anyone else.

Therefore, at the outset of the project my contention was that, given the nature of the practice of DS and the level of engagement required on part of participant and facilitator, this approach might provide an alternative solution for victims and survivors to share their experience of the conflict and become a network of support for each other in the process. While their individual suffering is personal it is not unique. Sharing stories with people who understand the effects of conflict related trauma can help individuals to refocus and take steps to begin to manage the experience. Sharing the burden in the community and learning to express oneself on the issue, may unlock the traumatic event within families, where they may feel more supported and empowered to address the past.

Jane Wolff concludes in 'The Aesthetics of Uncertainty' that "the work of art always meets the viewer, even at its most nonrepresentational, in the context of a specific social and historical moment in which the aesthetic, the ethical and political are never quite separable" (2008: 141).

Wolff makes an interesting observation in relation to the layers of representation of an individual in any piece of work which offers personal and universal gateways challenging the viewer to consider and question without ever getting a grasp on the life or reality of the producer behind the work. Abstract and literal art requires simultaneous reconstruction and deconstruction. Stories are no different. The viewer is not presented with all the facts and information. The viewer is presented with the culmination of a process of ideas, memories and creative activities which is largely private but is not insular or inward focused, and that has the capacity to be disseminated if the particular community group can see value in the sharing. DS is an opportunity to synthesise social and historical perspectives and to challenge communities to meet halfway in a process of societal and personal reconstruction through artistic and creative practice.

Conclusion

Identity, both personal and communal, is frequently formulated and supported through narrative. Storytelling is synonymous with everyday life. Every shared experience is relayed through the medium of story and our lives are constructs of such experiences, through the manner in which they are articulated and expressed. People learn by listening to experiences of others and sharing their own contrasting or similar experiences in a constant exchange of verbal and nonverbal cues, signs and information. When personal story is merged with community-based drama it can become a powerful tool for change because it is of and by the community. It speaks directly to the affected audience who by the act of engaging, desire some fundamental change, are willing to act, and can target those who have the capacity to activate and accelerate change at community level.

In a post-conflict society such as Northern Ireland, there remains a legacy of trauma. This legacy may be addressed through story sharing which has been presented as a recurrent finding in much of the research throughout the transitional period from conflict to peace, over twenty years.

Many story initiatives are created independently around communities in Northern Ireland and the individual outputs become what Rothman refers to 'pieces of peace' (1992). Much of the work is completed in isolation and while useful, it is a fragmented and disconnected approach to legacy. Until such times as the initiatives described in the Stormont House, Legacy Proposals (2019) are in place, and an official archive is created, which every individual and community can contribute to equally, projects, solutions and society at large will remain fractured and the trauma of the conflict endures. Joe Hinds from the Community Relations Council states "No other region of conflict has produced such a wealth of projects as a direct response to community divisions". He also states there are agencies and groups whose "remit is not to improve community relations," yet communities and individuals within communities still harbour the desire to remember and make sense of past experience through different modes of practice. (1994: V) Digital Storytelling offers opportunities to develop spaces through which to share stories that overcome some of the limitations of ephemeral time-bound face-to-face sharing. They have the capacity to preserve the voices of the victims, survivors and perpetrators over generations. Collectively these stories will provide not only context of the time in Ireland along the land border, but provide personal episodes of experience from the perspective of the author, who is also the curator and narrator of their story which is framed for contemporary audiences and those of future generations. Several geographical and territorial issues remain when addressing single identity, intra-community and cross community groups. It is in this regard where communities can make the most of the available technology and begin a process of reaching out to the 'other' while maintaining a safe distance. Technology allows for multiple forms of expression and interaction facilitating communication on a hyper scale, however making a digital story as part of a community engagement process is secondary to self discovery, the relationships and understanding that develops between participants based on intimate sharing of difficult experience and the potential for positive change in the lives and outlook of participants.

Through engagement with the literature I have been able to identify issues and strategies which can be applied and developed through practical community engagement, which seeks to support

communities of interest in storytelling initiatives. In the next chapter I will detail my research methodology which consists of field work starting with PAR - identifying issues within the community and responding to the issues through story workshops. I have also adopted focus groups and interviews combined with more traditional forms of research such as case studies. The case studies in particular will provide in-depth analysis of participation, input and output, in order to understand the demographics of storytelling projects, their goals, strengths and limitations and in turn allow me to respond to different elements in order create a framework for practice which is responsive to the needs of communities of interest.

Digital Storytelling (DS)

DS and Communities in Transition

'Healing Through Remembering' produced a report in 2014 called 'Are we there yet?' highlighting the benefits and challenges of using story in a post conflict society. Some of the key benefits identified by HTR, are the proper curation of stories, how story contributes to other processes of dealing with the past and how story facilitates sharing and learning. (August 2014) The report also presents the challenges of story practice such as archiving work in a way that makes it accessible while seeking appropriate consent for gathering and curating stories ethically and working on stories which cannot yet be told. This report has provided the basis for my research questions and in this chapter I will examine how DS might be adopted as another strategy for community building through ethnographic engagement.

In this chapter I will give insight to what Digital Storytelling is and also how it could be used in a post conflict society, where storytelling may not heal the hurts of the past but can help reconstruct the individual in the telling and in turn develop understanding among peers and wider community. I will outline some of the story projects that have been produced in the past in the context of a community emerging from conflict. There are no comparative examples of story projects which directly employ the techniques of DS in the context of life on the land border of Ireland in a society emerging from conflict. The significance and potential of this work is its capacity to bring groups of people together in a real process of exchange where private thoughts and memories are re-imagined and retold in the present, to be preserved for the future by the 'witness'. Learning, knowledge exchange, communication and empowerment of the marginalised and silenced, individual, group or community, is paramount beginning with the invitation to share their experience and tell their story.

Memory Discourse

Social networks (digital) are not ordinarily spaces where memories are created. They usually store offline experiences expressed through personal artefacts such as text, imagery and video. DS practitioners use those personal images and experiences to express personal truths through narrative and give these artefacts new meaning and significance framed within their digital story. De Bruyn argues that “due to the multitude of memory forms and discourses that social networks allow to solidify in one way or another, it has become more difficult for traditional memory agents to monopolise the construction of cultural memory” (2013: 235). Prensky suggests that “online outlets play an increasingly important role in the production of historical memory as they allow for participation and diverse representation resulting in a more active contestation of memory and identity (2013: 79). In this context DS as Meadows states is, ‘storytelling by the people for the people’. [www.photobus.com] I would argue that while there are countless opportunities for participation, I agree with Bright (2015) who states individuals rarely reach out beyond their single identity groups and as a result they are not exposed to difference in a way that they would allow their values or beliefs to be challenged, especially beliefs which are founded on suspicion and stereotype which can in turn evolve into archetype which perpetuates an unwillingness to engage.

A continuing debate rages around the potential for a ‘truth’ process which would require all sides to make concessions which has up to this point proved difficult to establish. According to statements by the former Prime Minister Theresa May in the House of Commons and published briefing papers by the Houses of Parliament (Mills and Torrance 2019) the position of the British government is to establish a statute of limitations giving protections to soldiers, police personnel and other agents of the state in any potential ‘truth’ or ‘justice’ proceedings. This would also be extended to all paramilitary actors who carried out acts of violence before 1998. As of writing the current British Conservative Government through the Northern Ireland Secretary, Brandon Lewis, is proceeding with such measures and the reception of these developments has not been embraced by any group or community including the British Army as they do not want ‘equivalence’

with terrorist organisations. The general consensus outside government is for cases where significant evidence exists regardless of perpetrator should be presented to the PPS (Public Prosecution Service) and it is they who decide when there is a case, historical or otherwise which can be pursued. An amnesty would be a difficult concession to make for families that have directly suffered at the hands of the state of which there have been many well documented cases. The Victims Commissioner Judith Thompson suggests “not all victims and survivors want an amnesty. Many victims and survivors have unanswered questions in relation to incidents and deaths that happened during the conflict. These individuals and families not only have the right, but they also deserve to have at least an opportunity to have these questions answered” [www.cvsni.org]. Healing Through Remembering and WAVE Trauma and many other local projects have been working on the development of participation for this reason. Lessons can be learned from the past which should encourage stakeholders to assess all options in relation to cross community collaboration and co-operation on a broad range of issues. Unless opportunities are created for exploring community life of the past, the status quo will prevail and energies will be invested in maintaining ‘otherness’ in what is a very small geographical and potentially contentious space.

The performance of Cultural Memory

Jan Assman states “Cultural memory is characterised by its distance from the everyday. Distance from the everyday (transcendence) makes its temporal horizon. Cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time. These fixed points are fateful events of the past whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice and observance)” (1995: 129). In the process of conflict transformation it is these fixed points that need to be acknowledged and addressed in and between communities. Not only does acknowledgement highlight the devastating consequences and suffering of the conflict but it can also draw a line acting as a reminder to wider society of the fragility of the current climate and the importance of interaction and communication.

Technology and story are merging together in many advanced and amazing ways in projects such as The 'New Dimensions in Testimony' series which places Holocaust survivors at the centre of installations presented as holograms, where future audiences can experience an approximation of the individual teller from their testimony and virtual physicality. It must be observed that no matter how intelligent the systems employed to produce and share the experience become, at the heart of each contribution is a survivors story, expressed in their own words using their own voice.

Aspects of the border regional areas have slowly developed socially and economically with support from European funding but it has not been applied equally. The notable change on the land border in Ireland is the demilitarised landscape, where only fragments of the past remain. The fluid movement of people and goods from one jurisdiction to another across the border was threatened most recently with the UK exit from Europe and while a protocol is in place where NI remains in the single market with Europe for goods and services, it has effectively placed a border in the Irish sea. This has caused not only logistical issues for commerce between N.I and mainland Britain, but has raised tensions on the ground among the PUL community. When the border was reduced to a common travel zone in Ireland post GFA, 1998, the communities had to renegotiate the space in economic and social terms. This may have resolved as many identity issues as it created. For the Nationalist community it produced a sense of liberation and reconnection to the Island as a whole, while for many Unionists there was a sense that the safety net had been removed causing anxiety and trepidation for the future of the union and prompting a sense of destabilisation of their identity. Perceived outcomes and actual circumstances can be interchangeable in the dialogue of Northern Irish society.

Due to the location on the communities on the periphery of both North and South of Ireland, 'post conflict aesthetics' have not applied in border areas in an attempt to induce historical amnesia', (1995,69) as it may have done in urban areas, therefore communities have been left with the memories and an obligation to pick up the pieces and rebuild at a pace much slower than its urban counterparts. Historical amnesia is most significantly visible in Belfast and Derry as part of the

rebranding exercise of 'normalisation', (1995: 69), supported with European peace dividends which has seen the landscape evolve in places to high and unrecognisable standards. The problem with such projects is that while the investment can open up communities which were once closed and separate, this does not address or resolve the more difficult and fundamental issues that continue to ideologically split local and regional communities. By exploring communities in-depth it is possible to identify the issues as this provides a baseline of contemporary understanding. Allowing communities to exist in isolation prolongs the problem and ingrains the sense of difference and 'otherness'.

Assman and Czaplika (1995) state;

humans must find a means by which to maintain their nature consistently through generations and the solution to the problem is cultural memory, a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation (1995: 126).

Mieke Bal suggests that cultural memory "signifies that memory can be understood as a cultural phenomenon as well as an individual or social one which links the past to the present and the future and states that cultural recall is not merely something of which you happen to be the bearer, but something in which you actually perform" (1999:vii). The performance of cultural memory is something which is intrinsically linked to our identities as learned in early years and developed individuals grow and experience the world, understood as values, beliefs and customs not shared by everyone in society. Woodward argues that;

identities are constructed as opposites, produced, consumed and regulated within culture, creating meaning through a symbolic system of representation. Identity is difference. It is the differences which set us apart or gives legitimacy to our views and beliefs (1997: iv).

McDowell concludes that "for many the war was far from over; (post GFA) political objectives remained intact and hostility towards the 'other' had not diminished. Physical violence was

replaced by other forms of contestation, often symbolic and inexorably bound to memory and identity” (2011: 706). This supports Girard’s conclusion that mimetic violence replaces actual violence in post conflict societies finding non violent but no less threatening means to dominate and oppress the ‘other’ and maintain the status quo” (1999: 698). Narratives are not factual representations of the past but rather offer tellers and listeners ways to reimagine the past” (2005: 7). Gerard Edelman states that “memory is a form of constructive re-categorisation during ongoing experience rather than precise replication of a previous sequence of events” (2000: 95).

Cultural memory is a tool for the arbitration and negotiation of topics which are restricted and normally out of bounds but must be acknowledged in a collective process in order to produce wider understanding. It must be respectful of everyone, considering the different perspectives offered. Storytelling is the instrument which can facilitate a process fundamentally understood by participants, tellers and listeners, and may in future function as one legitimate way to bridge the gap in a culturally divided landscape. According to McDowell “the memorial landscapes cultivated since the inception of the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994 privilege male interpretations of the past and therefore the present” and highlights the “often silenced experiences of wives and mothers” (2008: 335). Ward (2004: 505) states that the continuing absence of gender parity in peacetime is a significant factor in holding back the possibilities for a peaceful and shared future cited in McDowell (2008: 250). In a BBC interview on the troubles , renowned civil rights activist Bernadette McAliskey (nee Devlin) suggested that ‘women have not so much been written out of the story of the conflict, rather they were never part of it in the first place’ (2017). Memory is the product of the present as much as the past and as individuals create narrative memories which make the past manageable and meaningful. Narrative memories are ‘communicative or everyday’ memories, which are individual yet socially mediated and relate to a group’ (Assman & Czaplicka 1995: 127) A narrative memory has an emotional quality that makes it memorable for the individual and when triggered causes a physical and emotional response, therefore has the capacity to affect the sensibilities of others also. The act of sharing experience through story is an everyday activity

and when formed for community based activities toward understanding can become a powerful tool in the process of (re)engaging with the 'other' by (re)engaging with the self.

Trauma and Trans-generational suffering

While aiming to avoid exaggeration in the potential for the use of story to help individuals address trauma, Papadopolous determines; "the healing of painful experiences due to atrocities may not lie in devising sophisticated therapeutic techniques but to return to more traditional forms of healing based on assisting people to develop appropriate narratives.[...] the healing effect of storytelling, in its multiple variations has always been a well known phenomenon" (1998: 472). Levels of healing for participants is unmeasurable, however the potential lies in the reciprocal nature of the process where another human being, in the simple act of listening, can acknowledge the pain, suffering and experience. As one participant in the Ardoyne community project (1998- 2002) described, 'if you are going to have any healing you have to get some expression of truth even if it is only my truth. It doesn't have to be your truth or shared truth. Before any healing takes place I have to believe that someone has heard my story and if they have not then I am not going to let go' (2006: 83).

There are several aspects to the story; who is the teller and what is in it for the them through the telling, as well as what outcomes may be achieved in the process. This is an ongoing debate in the political sphere of Ireland where there is a current stalemate between the people who seek truth and those whom seek justice. A recent past Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Teresa Villiers, suggested there could be "no overarching truth process on the island of Ireland as this would have damaging ramifications for all parties involved", (BBC interview) [online] not least for the British government which she represented at the time.

Lessie Jo Frazier in 'Subverted Memories: Counter-mourning as political action in Chile', explores the circumstances of the 'Chilean people stemming from the transition to democracy, outlining the

dilemma regarding appropriate mourning and memory created by state controlled process of reconciliation which fails to deliver justice for historical crimes and injuries' and Frazier promotes fieldwork as a mode of cultural and political counter-memory towards civil reclamation (1999:14), This places ownership of narrative in the public sphere and rejects state controlled narrative or 'official accounts of the past'; what I have previously referred to as 'traditional memory agents'. Commonly known as the Rettig Commission, The purpose of the Chilean Truth Commission was established to "help the nation come to a clear overall understanding of the most serious human rights violations committed in recent years in order to aid the reconciliation of Chilean people" (1993:28). The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) similarly was created by the government of national unity to help deal with what happened under apartheid for the promotion of national unity and reconciliation.

Assmann highlights that "no memory can preserve the past so what remains is only that which society in each era can reconstruct within its contemporary frame of reference" (1995: 130). Assmann continues in summary to suggest "one group remembers the past in fear of deviating from its model, the next for fear of repeating the past. Those who cannot remember their past are condemned to relive it" (1995: 133). As Ireland makes slow progress evolving out of a turbulent and troubled past into a more stable and peaceful society it is important that the past is addressed for the benefit of the future by giving people opportunities to share their stories. Dennis Bradley, one of the authors of the *Report of the Consultative Groups on the Past - 2009*, suggested in a BBC news interview that there must be not only a statute of limitations that applies to government personnel but an amnesty that applies to every actor in the 'Troubles', so they can tell their truth without fear of reprisal. Bradley argues that the longer Northern Ireland goes without [an amnesty] the further away it gets from truth and justice (2018) [online].

Conclusion

My works builds on storytelling projects such as Ardoyne Commemoration Project, (2002) HTR's Everyday Objects, (2013) Prison Memory Archives (2007) Border Roads to Memories (2014) and Stories from Silence (2015). DS is a fresh approach to exploring the past in a process of knowledge exchange placing participants in full control of their stories and output. Participants in groups excavate the layers of narrative and meaning, shedding new light on experience and challenging the status quo, hearing from those who have been silenced, left behind or excluded altogether. Stories have the capacity to engage the hearts and minds of the listener due to their intimacy, honesty and authenticity. As Jackson argues, "Stories are redemptive not because they preserve or represent the truth but because they offer the perennial possibility that one sees oneself and discovers oneself through another, despite the barriers of space, time and difference". (2006:250) Self expression will be balanced with social competence allowing freedom in a way that is not boastful, but truthful, authentic and historically accurate if only from the perspective of the teller. As a collection is established over time, there will be opportunities for 'fresh hearings' (2015), as a legacy of contemporary storytellers, within the collective Nationalist and Unionist communities.

Nick Couldry has observed the importance of reinvigorating practices of storytelling about our experiences as a means of addressing the "disarticulation between individual narratives and social or political narratives [...] in social and political spheres through the inclusion of marginalised voices" (2008: 338). Nancy Thummin highlights the importance of self representation for the institutional uptake of Digital Storytelling in the UK (2009). This is a process in what Hartley and Couldry describe as 'democratisation of media'. Some theorists however highlight limitations in DS and its capacity to produce change in production and reception. Burgess suggests " it [digital storytelling] sits uncomfortably [...] with the available toolkit for textual analysis by acknowledging that the specific autobiographical act produced in any given digital story exists alongside a raft of other autobiographical acts produced by the 'citizen producer", (2006: 208-9) and thus recognises

that stories are told in the service of a relationship. Burgess concludes that “As a cultural form it is marked by fairly predictable, if not uniform range of ways to represent the self” (2006: 209). I agree with Burgess that stories are told in the service of a relationship, however it is my understanding that this relationship is between the participants. The facilitator, while integral to the group becomes just another member of the group and not always a fully integrated member. There will always be the distinction between facilitator / researcher, but the group learn more about each other with every story and once they can understand each other, then there is a capacity for much wider participation and understanding through knowledge exchange and outreach beyond communities of sameness. The act of presenting stories is ultimately in service of the relationship between members of the affected communities in order to develop and propagate opportunities for growth and self determination.

Methodology

Constructivist and Interpretivist approaches to Research

This study sets out to explore the process of DS among communities which on the outside bear all the hallmarks of a post-conflict society but from the perspective of the communities of interest, it is not so apparent. As Richard Winter states “our practices and our interpretations of those practices are inevitably influenced by ideologies which shape our awareness of the world in which we live but we can learn to interpret our experience in new ways and shift our practice in directions that- within limits- we choose” (1989: 193). The methodology of a constructivist approach to research is hermeneutical, that is a theory of human understanding which includes written, verbal and non verbal communication in pursuit of a long term dialectical approach between opposing communities where “discourse between two or more people holding different points of view on a subject who wish to establish the truth of the matter guided by reasonable arguments” (1994: 105-117). Siobhan O’Neill states “Constructivism influences instructional theory by encouraging the discovery of the self and others through project or task based learning and favours the Arts as practice for social purposes for building communities or enhancing community cohesion. (2015) Barry suggests “among constructivism’s many facets are an emphasis on the intersubjectively created understanding, (Verstehen), the inquirer as instrument, purposive sampling, value bound inquiry, contextualised description versus prediction or control and legitimisation of multiple ways of knowing (including the effective and intuitive)” (1996: 417).

The hermeneutical approach suggests there is no monological truth and all accounts are perceived to be trustworthy and authentic as they are founded on personal experience. Gellner points out ‘relativism is about the existence of one world and the conceptual unification of the world is, precisely, the work on one particular style of thought which is not universal among men but culturally specific’ (1985: 100). There is a process of exchange which is attentive and engaging of

diverse and opposing perspectives, allowing for multiple iterations and interpretations. According to McWilliams (2000) 'interpretivism' indicates "those strategies in sociology which interpret the meanings and actions of actors according to their own subjective frame of reference" (2000: 417). Due to the nature of story collecting in the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland and based on difficulties and sensitivities of individual reconstructions of past experience, in particular traumatic experience, facilitators and researchers must know the limitations of their work acknowledging there will be narratives and expressions remaining uncollected and undocumented. Relativism in research ensures conclusions cannot be applied elsewhere as they are not generic but rather specific to circumstances and individuals regardless of the community to which they belong. However many lessons can be learned and applied where DS is utilised and the researcher works with producer participants to explore the process and uncover narrative which can help to reconstruct networks within and between communities. A pluralist approach to practice as McWilliam suggests "Is much more an openness to the adoption of alternative strategies to improve the representativeness of research" (2000: 222).

In a post-documentary environment DS, as performances of mediated actuality, Daniels et al states they 'are more relevant to our understanding of the complex web of interconnections that have developed between media, performance and social identity' (2013: 221). Stella Borruci would classify this type of practice as 'performative documentaries'. Because of the omission of third parties such as director, editor, camera operators, sound recordist, DS presents an opportunity for a more purified form of mediated storytelling. Depending on the subject, objectives of the producer, the environment, digital stories can also be manipulated to support particular agendas especially in sponsored DS exercises. In most cases there is less scope for this to occur as participants, while part of a group, are representing their own personal experiences and therefore present the story and the self within their own context or frame of reference. Considering authenticity as a concept Timo Muller suggests "despite connotations of trueness and purity it [authenticity] is a construct. A postulated standard of truth that we can at best approximate and at worst turns out to be mere chimera. Authenticity is thus a paradoxical concept, a construct to end

all constructs and the name is as intangible as the concept itself” (2013: 240). Stephanie Rosenbloom describes authenticity as a stylistic choice, “a way to appear to others, an image one can choose to adopt in the ongoing task of performing the self”. Muller suggests in this context, that authenticity becomes one more version of self branding (2013: 241). Within the cultural memory of Northern Irish society, there is a certain level of understanding in regard to what constitutes victims and survivors understood through the lens of endless news reels for decades, with families destroyed through what deteriorated to sectarian violence. No victim has the need to embellish the narrative of their experience for extra affect on the audience. However this is not to say that individuals would not embellish their stories in some circumstances. Embellishment is part of the process of telling stories, creating detail and imagery for the listener. Memories and stories are structured and processed in the moment of the telling and therefore the environment and the people present, can also influence the telling of a story. Any story told in an average of four minutes relating to years of pain and struggle is going to be synoptic by nature, however this particular process of engagement is deeply involved so participants can carefully consider stories, feelings, emotions, problems and solutions while being afforded ample time to consider and develop their final outputs.

For older participants images are not so readily available so we use the internet among other sources where permissions can be obtained to gather images that help producers tell their stories in sequential collaboration, that is using the images, music, and artefacts that help tell their story but are not necessarily their own. This process does not render the work any less valuable but acts as a visual reference with significance to the teller and of benefit to the viewer in getting a step closer to collectively recreating the experience as they perceive it, understanding that what they produce is only an approximation of reality, but has layers of the individual embedded at each stage and therefore a considered means of representing the past in the present. Clay Shirky points out that “mass amateurisation is the result of radical spread of expressive capabilities, where web 2.0 has equipped amateurs to undertake once complex and specialised tasks and the obvious precedent is the one that gave birth to the modern world; the

spread of the printing press 500 years ago” (2008: 14). Web 2.0 has had a profound impact on our capacity to publish, create and communicate and therefore radicalise the performance of self encouraging engaged participatory experience rather than passivity in a community of interest where knowledge exchange is the foundation of the relationship and should be encouraged and nurtured.

Overview of Methods

This chapter sets out the mixed method approach to research that I adopted which served to provide flexibility in working with a range of communities with different backgrounds and experience along the land border. I will outline the different qualitative research methods used to develop the study and highlight elements of the practical research which participants co-created to produce a more considered and protracted approach to digital storytelling, due to the potential of collaboration with marginalised people and communities along the land border. Denscombe highlights several reasons why a researcher might adopt this approach stating “some researchers use a mixed methods approach to form a more complete picture by combining information from complementary kinds of data or sources [and] as a way of developing the analysis and building on the initial findings using contrasting data or methods” (2008:272). Leech et al (2010) suggest a “pragmatic researcher is one who is flexible in his or her research techniques, collaborates with other researchers with multiple epistemological stances, and views research as “a holistic endeavour that requires prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation” (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005a: 383) (2008: 272).

Research Aims and Objectives

The work seeks to explore the development of applied community practice in a way that facilitates self determination among communities of interest and removes the need for ‘ventriloquism’ (Maguire 2015).The proposition of ‘giving voice to the voiceless’ or more accurately

'amplifying those voices' (Maguire 2015) must be inclusive of the community of interest and seek to serve their needs through the methodology. Couldry states that 'DS requires that attention be paid to not just norms and styles of DS but to wider contexts and conditions in which digital stories are exchanged and referred to, treated as a resource and given recognition and authority' (2008). The methods I outline are complimentary and supportive of this research facilitating its evolution.

There are a range of approaches to narrative practice which have proved effective in engaging with marginalised communities in Northern Ireland. The starting point for this work is 'participatory action research' or PAR. I discovered this approach through the work of Lundy and McGovern (1998-2001) in the 'Ardoyne Commemoration Project'. PAR attempts to remove the inherent power structures between researcher and participants, and renders each participant (including researcher) 'expert' at relevant points throughout the study. McTaggart (1991) states the process of PAR 'begins with the general idea that some kind of change or improvement is desirable. In deciding just where to begin in making improvements, a group identifies an area where members perceive a cluster of problems of mutual concern or consequence. The group decides to work together on a "thematic concern' (1991: 170). This approach develops a democratic, bottom up, approach to work which engages a community in seeking solutions to their own problems with the support of professional practitioners. At the centre of this community practice is workshops which have been designed to give more space to participants emerging from conflict, to understand the self in relation to the immediate community and the 'other'. This involves elements of qualitative research which include focus groups, interviews and observations ensuring that each participant is not only producing a story output, but informing the development of an alternative approach to story collection and archive, around contentious issues of identity, sectarianism and difference, by collectively identifying and developing best practice, rather than imposing my personal sense of it. McTaggart states that PAR "develops through the self reflective spiral; a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and then re-planning, further implementation, observing and reflecting. The collective plays an important role in deciding where the group and individuals may exert their efforts most effectively" (1991: 175). PAR is about community empowerment and the

constructivist approach builds on existing theoretical knowledge through an alternative form of 'knowledge' generated from within a community of interest. Not only do participant contributions inform the viewer of a particular way of life at a particular moment in time, but the reciprocity of the exchange, based on a founding principle of 'knowledge sharing' means that they also learn tangible communicative and digital skills as part of the process. Each established group creates a research paradigm which frames their own experience as part of the engagement process, albeit presented in non-academic terms to facilitate inclusivity and participation.

Case Studies

Case studies are described by Yin as 'empirical enquiry to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in real life context, especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (2003: 13). Case studies facilitate understanding of individuals and communities. I selected this method of research as I was able to explore the phenomenon of border life, through a range of projects and voices combining observation in the study of outputs generated with project participants. This further developed my understanding of local project demographics, logistics, levels of participation and the range of topics individuals wish to explore through their personal narratives. I discovered that not all projects are created equal. Some projects have an emphasis on reaching out to the 'other' in a process of conflict transformation while others are developed to create community cohesion, understanding and training opportunities for its members. I think it is important to address that while this practice may have potential in the field of conflict transformation this process is focused on creating understanding on a local level within communities pursuing personal growth, development and training as part of the process.

Case Studies in this investigation were selected to explore the process of engagement where producers / co-ordinators make claims about giving voice to marginalised people, whether border dwellers, victims and survivors of the conflict. It is necessary to explore levels of engagement to

understand current practice and the significance of giving individuals and groups the freedom to explore, experience, express and acknowledge. With marginalised participants the five day model recommended by CDS does not give enough time to contemplate and address the delicate issues. The case studies highlight the complex issues of identity, expression and marginalisation of victims and survivors of the 'Troubles'. This helped inform the choices of groups that I subsequently worked with in DS workshops. Through case study, I had a detailed understanding of victims voices and experience, practical formats and contemporary practices. There are many iterations of projects with victims and survivors but the investigation also highlighted the lack of ex-combatant voices among the contemporary narrative of the past. Some producers have tackled the sensitive area of working with ex-combatants such as Prison Memory Archive and I wanted to develop this work by adopting an alternative approach. I wanted to explore the experience of ex-prisoners without labelling them and enable them to identify with whatever status they choose as perpetrator, combatant, activist and including the terms victim and survivor.

As a result of my case study research I was able to identify issues which are prevalent among community participatory projects in Northern Ireland. One major issue is the level of engagement for participants with other participants. The WAVE participants have been desensitised to discussing the past through participation and involvement with their regional centres, where they know and identify with other victims and have experienced the sense of acknowledgement through sharing. Alternatively members of BRMR had one group session and then had their contributions recorded at their homes or places of work. I felt an important aspect to any practice was to create a process where the participants are able to work together to create individual stories while remaining in full control of the narrative and content produced. I was also focused on the exchange of information and skills in peer to peer relationships, ensuring participants had some new skills which could be applicable in every day life in terms of self expression and communication with the added ability to engage with technology. The desired outcome was to get participants to acknowledge their past with the aid of 'distancing' in the present using personal archives to encourage dialogue on difficult subject areas among and between opposing groups in an attempt

to widen participation in the field of post conflict resolution or conflict transformation. The focus became about encouraging a marginalised, single identity sub-group of vulnerable individuals to acknowledge each others humanity by sharing and talking about personal experience with a view to understanding self. The scope of this study was to identify and test some methods which can heighten participation on the part of subjects and reduce the levels of 'ventriloquism', modelling or sign posting by researchers, enabling participants to express themselves in a more autonomous way.

Selection criteria of case studies

I chose two separate case studies representative of the broader phenomenon of narrative engagement on the land border of Ireland. WAVE Trauma's, 'Stories from Silence' was selected as a case study, as the group are influential in story sharing among victims and survivors on issues of the conflict and provide professional and peer support within their organisation. Many projects have limited resources and cannot produce archives or repositories which give access to the public so I chose 'Stories from Silence' for accessibility, as the entire collection of stories were digitally available. 'Stories from Silence' was created and curated by professional producers who collect stories from participants through vocal recordings and then edit those contributions into a neat package of hard hitting four minute stories on the devastating loss of a loved one. They are designed to assault the senses of the listener and fundamentally impact on how one thinks about victims. The complete series is available on Sound Cloud - *Stories from Silence* (2015).

Border Roads to Memories and Reconciliation (2013) was chosen for its perceived similarities to Digital Storytelling generally and because all contributions and some additional resource materials were available in digital format on a specifically produced website. The work was conducted along the length of the land border in Ireland and framed around 'border road closures'. From this case study I could potentially make discoveries and assessments about a less formal approach to narrative engagement with no existing community of storytellers. This would give insight on forms

of inquiry, best practice, limitations, logistics, participation and levels of engagement. When first published in 2013 this project had 162 individual story contributions of various lengths and qualities. From the findings I was able to identify and explore philosophical issues such as, narrating for the unseen audience and respond by developing techniques to desensitise the participant contributor to the recording technology. While participants are made aware of the concepts of the unseen audience which has a direct correlation to the 'presentation of self', the case studies highlight phenomenon and with consideration the researcher can present solutions and strategies to further enhance community engagement in many forms with marginalised individuals and groups. As Ponelis (2015) highlights "the case method supports both theory building (Yin, 2009) and theory testing (Eisenhardt, 1989)" (2015: 537).

Case Studies - An Interpretive approach

Ponelis suggests that "Epistemologically, the viewpoint of the interpretivist paradigm is that our knowledge of reality is a social construction by human actors [...] characterised by a need to understand the world as it is from a subjective point of view and seeks an explanation with the frame of reference of the participant rather than the objective observer of the action" (2015:538). By exploring what participants say in a process of qualitative content analysis it was possible to discover the emerging issues and work on solutions which are applicable in many instances of merging narrative practice and community engagement. Ponelis continues that "the underlying principle in selecting appropriate cases is the preference for cases that are information-rich with respect to the topics under investigation and therefore using purposive sampling as well as snowball sampling is justified" (Patton, 2002) (2015: 540). I adopted the snowball sampling method as my participants were not rare to find, but small in numbers relative to the population, and in doing so these communities could recruit further participants in the study through having the contact details and trust for particular individuals who might want to engage with this work. In deciding on the number of cases to research I looked at availability and accessibility of content and organisers / participants. This would ensure that I could draw on experience of participants as well

as have access to their project contributions. I have also explored other projects in-depth, such as Prison Memory Archives, however as this collection was not completely published (25% at time of writing) then I did not include as an in-depth study.

Case Study 1- *Border Roads to Memories and Reconciliation* (BRMR) 2013

I studied BRMR to explore the participatory and practical elements of working with individuals on the land border and the notion of bringing communities together regardless if they have directly and physically suffered from the conflict or if it had no significant or lasting impact in their experience.

The Border Roads to Memories and Reconciliation project was initiated by Latton Social Services and Development Ltd, based in county Monaghan on the land border of Ireland, in the Irish Republic. The work was conceived to present an opportunity for border residents right along the land border, on both sides, to express their feelings and share their experience in a storytelling project about the closure of the border roads and the impact on life and daily routine. The project was funded by the European Peace II Programme and was part of the drive for European territorial cooperation and active citizenship, promoting equality and rural development providing assistance to ethnic minorities in Ireland. The *Operational Programme for the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 2007 - 2013* made specific reference to the 'lack of cross community contact within the *Peace II programme 2000-2006* and that this must become a key part of the agenda'. (2006) In Irish border regions the research indicates a lack of participation and integration of the minority Protestant community citing that one quarter of respondents reported negative community relations as a result of their Protestant identity and more than half of survey respondents believe the 'Protestant community is not fairly and adequately represented by the political system' (2006: 16). Other respondents state that some Protestants in border regions find it difficult to 'fully express their cultural identity and interests and that the conflict in Northern Ireland has increased their

feelings of isolation and marginalisation' (2006: 16). During the 'Troubles' rural communities were segregated and marginalised due to the installation of military barracks which in many instances cut the community in half and these communities were required to reassess the community space and its configuration towards a shared space rather than a contested space in a post conflict environment.

Border Roads to Memories & Reconciliation was an opportunity to speak to individuals on the ground and map the border through the lives of the border residents in pursuit of inclusivity and getting to know the 'other' in the community. The process involved the organisation and delivery of 37 cross border workshops held over two years bringing together over 500 individuals from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds so they could share their experience of life on the closed or 'unapproved' roads. All 'unapproved' roads were blocked or blown up by the British army to stop citizens from crossing the border without going through the main checkpoints. The entire border has now been reverted to a common travel zone between Northern Ireland in the jurisdiction of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, so citizens are not required to carry documentation to cross jurisdictions. The effects of Britain's exit from Europe remain to be seen along the UK land border in Ireland. The participants defined themselves according to the role they played in society during the period of conflict. Many are victims of circumstance due to the geographical location where they reside and were fortunate not to have suffered more than daily inconvenience. The point was to establish new community networks and get people mixing and talking, building trust and attempting to 'reimagine the community' (2003) for a new era of peace.

Case Study Two - *Stories from Silence* - WAVE Trauma Centre

Stories from Silence, produced by the WAVE Trauma Centre is the second case study I investigated. WAVE currently operate five regional centres across Northern Ireland supporting families of those bereaved by the conflict and expanded to cater for victims directly impacted by the violence. Stories from Silence was co-ordinated by Alan McBride who lost his wife in the

Shankhill bomb of 1992 in Belfast. He states that “Victims and survivors are told by politicians almost daily that their needs must be at the centre of any attempt to take us forward. The reality is that they have seen precious little acknowledgement or recognition of what happened to them and the effect it had. One of the producers of the series, Susan McKay, states ‘these powerful testimonies literally give victims and survivors a voice to reaffirm their humanity’ [online]. This statement highlights the importance of victims and survivors getting a chance to tell their story. It is not just about being heard. It is to give dignity, respect and honour to those who lost their lives and to those who live with terrible injuries on a daily basis. The participants are making an active decision to acknowledge their grief in a public manner putting them back in focus after being long since forgotten by the media and wider society. It seems in some cases the stories are about keeping the memory alive of the individuals who suffered the most and providing some acknowledgement of the suffering of those left behind through sharing.

The Stories from Silence project consists of multiple episodes within three separate series consisting of Loss of a Parent, Loss of a Child and Senior Stories. The participants were recruited through regional partners including Relatives for Justice (RFJ) Families Acting for Innocent Relatives (FAIR) and The Pat Finucane Centre. The interviews were carried out by experienced broadcast journalists and recorded and edited by industry professionals. Like most accessible media based storytelling projects the work has a recognisable form with a consistent structure. Each piece is 4 minutes in duration, creating impact by getting to the heart of the issue. It suggests that the producers have a keen sense of time and as a result of competing in a digitally saturated environment they have gone for a short form structure. Through articulation and freedom of self expression the participants in Stories from Silence confront the listener with the blunt and harsh reality of extreme violence. The stories rely on the memory and voice of the teller, yet third parties make editorial choices on behalf of the participants.

The emphasis of my own practice was on the group dynamic and the participatory experience which not only informs and shapes the output but helps develop the confidence of the teller and

should impact on their capacity to begin to deal with other areas of their lives. My research was informed by the time I spent working in different communities using observation, focus groups, interviews and story circles. The case studies helped me explore and evaluate participation, scale, location, stakeholders and community engagement when dealing with the subject of the 'Troubles' in a post conflict society. As Yin highlights "the case study method may well be suited to the study of innovations, whether innovative practices, innovative policies or other kinds of innovative changes (2012: 188). Case study evaluations can cover both process and outcomes that can include qualitative and quantitative data" (2012: 136). I have used case study to explore contemporary storytelling projects and arts based practice in Northern Ireland addressing the issue of the 'Troubles', from the perspective of participants as witness, victim, survivor and perpetrator.

With all case studies there is the potential for the generalisation from the findings. Hammersly states that "Qualitative research is an approach in evaluation research with issues of generalisability. Studying a large number of sites can undercut the depth of understanding of individual sites which is the hallmark of the qualitative approach" (1993: 102). The empirical qualitative nature of the data collected cannot be understood as a snapshot of contemporary society but an individual experience and must be treated as such. The case studies highlight issues with mediatisation of stories, and explores participation, involvement and levels of engagement; is this something conceived and produced by the community of interest or something being done to the community of interest by someone else. As Yin points out "The contrasting characteristics between what is qualitative and what is quantitative [...] are not attributes of two competing types of research. Instead they are attributes of two types of data" (2012: 178). In Northern Ireland some groups are formed to work in pursuit of truth and justice and others seek engagement which provides acknowledgement, empathy and support. By studying individual projects in-depth one can understand issues which are not obvious to the casual viewer. One such example is gender balance, or imbalance in projects relating to the story of the 'Troubles'. In Border Roads to Memory and Reconciliation, women were outnumbered by men across the project by two to one. In individual areas the imbalance is much greater indicating the male dominated

narrative of the conflict in general but also in relation to the closed, unapproved roads highlighting that something must be done by project organisers to tackle the imbalance. This is something I tried to address as a result of this specific finding but which still had many stumbling blocks and was not a successful endeavour of my research in this instance for reasons I will explain in detail in Chapter 6.

The significance of technology is the potential to reach a much wider audience. As Zuboff suggests “information technology produces a voice that symbolically renders events, objects and processes so that they become visible, knowable and shareable in a new way” (1988: 376). I am not suggesting a hierarchical approach to story through all its various forms but rather suggesting DS as an alternative form of expression which allows the producer to focus on artefacts and images as stimuli to support the telling of the story in their own words. In essence this takes the emphasis off the teller and places it on the story being told.

This process of research merges scholarship with practice and using a combination of existing methodologies allows for a comprehensive understanding of the process. Case studies were used to explore existing contemporary projects where the researcher had full access to the outputs generated by participants. I completed the case studies before undertaking the practical phase of this research. This facilitated a deep dive into the demographics of existing projects and participants, which in turn highlighted potential entry points to practice, to explore the limitations of different approaches and to incorporate best practice from existing research. Once I had established groups to collaborate with the data generating methods changed to workshops, focus groups, interviews and observations. One process of engagement informed the next and the knowledge established through each engagement, developed the Story Circle phase to include the narrative devices of ‘Every Object tells a Story’ and LifeStory method, which combined, was a pivotal discovery in this research and facilitated a relatively successful period of practice with an established marginalised community in Northern Ireland.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

McNiff and Whitehead suggest 'action research is systematic inquiry undertaken to improve a social situation and then made public - it is about processes of improvement and making claims that something has improved' (2009:11). Action research involves the identification of a problem or issue by the researcher alongside a community and a process of discovery can begin. In the initial phases of my final project with republican ex-prisoners, their collective problems were clearly identified ranging from lack of opportunities in employment, travel, personal development and training. One of their main health concerns is the lack of support for PTSD. By not dealing with the issues of the past, other issues such as alcoholism and drug abuse become symptomatic of the problem. The men identified that since their release in 1998 as part of GFA / Belfast Agreement, they lack meaningful roles in society and several individuals acknowledged that as a result of their past actions, they now live estranged from close family and friends.

This type of reflection is the corner stone of Participatory Action Research which, with considered responses and resources, can allow communities to begin to address some of their own problems. Rahman suggests "a movement known as participatory (action) research has spread which seeks to stimulate and assist disadvantaged people to undertake their own collective investigations into their living conditions and environment. From this they can develop their own systematic thinking - their own science from which they can derive strength to negotiate with other quarters of society". (1995: 24) Rahman claims that PAR has the capacity to challenge the status quo from the ground up highlighting that "domination of masses by elites is rooted not only in the polarisation of control over the means of material production but also over the means of knowledge production including the social power to determine what is valid or useful knowledge" (1993: 83). There is a perception of authenticity about communities speaking for themselves as collectives having many iterations in Northern Ireland through mediated expressions of the past in the work of *WAVE, Healing Through Remembering* and other community organisations helping communities make sense of the past, one story at a time. Emphasis on community participation and empowerment should

support the transformation of cultural, social and political ideas. Bernailt claims that by using digital storytelling as an approach there is an “experience of inclusion and community building which flourishes as a porous affective scene of identification among strangers that promises a certain kind of experience of belonging” (2009). Thumin defines the site of storytelling as ‘authentic, powerful and dealing with universal themes that unite the community at the site of the workshop where empowerment and collaboration between professionals and amateurs is foregrounded’ (2009: 630).

I agree with Bernailt’s assessment that ‘inclusivity and community building’ are fundamental to practice and there is an immediacy to the community borne out of memory, experience and empathy expressed through agency, voice and narrative. As Mayo and Craig suggest “in developing such alternative strategies the importance of drawing on experiences of community participation and movements to promote empowerment is more vital than ever” (1995: 11). However Soep critiques the notion of authentic voice which she suggests is “romanticised by artists and facilitators or automatically assigned with emancipatory value” (2006: 201). Evidence suggests it is liberating for an individual to represent the self especially when they consider themselves, oppressed and marginalised. Etherington states that therapists and psychoanalysts value Life Story because of its therapeutic value expressed by participants. Rahman refers to this expressive nature of DS as “presenting a vision of peoples liberation” (1995: 25). When it comes ‘straight from the horses mouth’, the story of experience is conveyed in a manner that has capacity to move its audience to some sense of connection with the teller, yet Soep claims no originality in the authentic voice as it is a “product of interactive processes underpinned by mimicry and ongoing self and peer evaluation” (2006: 202). Ideologically I would suggest this accurate of the constructed nature of the self. Buckingham agrees that voice is structured by social relations and influenced by reflections about potential audience, genre conventions, social meanings and expectations attached to any cultural representation. While facilitators cannot ignore this fact, the fundamental position is on supporting opportunities for self expression. While Rahman refers to this view of development as a ‘release of peoples creativity’ (1990). This approach works at the

micro level, on the ground in small groups of people who while from similar background, community or subgroup, don't automatically share the same views and do not know each other on a personal basis. It is necessary yet difficult to work in manageable groups so everyone has an equal platform to communicate facilitating the understanding of perspectives through discussion rather than assumption. It is about promoting equality of opportunity for each participant and taking the time required to recover the narratives of each individual. For this reason my work with ex-prisoners became a more protracted engagement and could not function in the normal five day workshop model for digital storytelling. It was vital to allow each individual who had the courage to participate, the space to consider, reflect and share their own perspectives, stories and experience while listening to the voices of others and collectively acknowledge the past in the present.

Digital storytelling (DS) has been adopted for this practice as a form of PAR. According to Hartley and McWilliam 'DS is part of the changing ecology of communication' and Lundby highlights that 'it [DS] is a fertile ground for theoretical discussion around mediation, representation or participation' (2008). DS presents marginalised societies an opportunity for self reflection and representation, no longer requiring mainstream media to tell their stories. Working with ex-combatants who are represented through, a particular frame in Northern Ireland, I thought it would be interesting to discover their attitudes, ideas and philosophies, explored through their narratives, when treated as equal partners in a project and where they don't consider the process as something being done to them but rather by them. All participants have initial concerns at the point of engagement but at every stage it was iterated that they would retain complete editorial control over their own contributions.

Field notes are an important tool in documenting and contextualising the process of engagement, yet the researcher must show some restraint on note taking during sensitive and intimate group discussions. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017) highlight the significance of field notes suggesting they "document environment and interactions, encourage reflections and identification of bias, facilitate iterative study design, increase research rigour and provide essential context" (2017:

382). In the early stages of encounters with two of the three groups of participants I demonstrated my commitment to the group by listening and engaging in the moment and using notes at intervals. The participants had a heightened sense of awareness in my presence as researcher / facilitator and most significantly 'outsider' to whom they might divulge some very difficult and personal information. So it was important to find a balance in note taking. As Hammersly and Atkins state 'make notes during participant observation so details are not lost without disrupting the flow of natural participation, as open and continuous note taking could be viewed as a threat to participants or at the very least inappropriate' (2007: 147). I developed my own form of short hand to ensure I had enough information to reflect on while remaining fully engaged with contributors.

Analysing PAR data

According to the Institute of Development Studies,

in participatory research, control over the process is handed over from researcher to participants [...] its fundamental principles are that the subjects of research become partners [...] and that their knowledge and capabilities are respected and valued. Different approaches vary in purpose, levels of participation and representation [...] with emphasis on citizen participation and accountability". (2018: online).

The subsequent analysis stems from a mixture of observations, interviews, field notes and qualitative content analysis from participants outputs. As Danley and Ellison state "if knowledge is power then sharing knowledge is sharing power. For PAR to achieve its aims, sharing power among team members is essential. [...] When opportunities for learning become an essential operation within the team process, fear of losing power, or having it supplanted is diminished, team productivity is promoted and the rigour and meaning of the research is enhanced" (1999: 18). Workshops are a vital part of engagement for developing cohesion and understanding among communities. By adopting the workshop as a method of research as Bush suggests, is "a modest effort to move beyond the anecdotal, toward a more systematic approach to analysing and employing storytelling and story creation" (2009: 73). He continues that "evaluation must

appreciate the complexity, ambiguity, variability and time dependency of storytelling. It must also appreciate 'backsliding' - the possibility that events external to an initiative might account for failures or setbacks in apparent progress" (2009: 73).

Life Story Method

An innovation of my study is the combination of two existing modes of narrative expression in the context of border communities; Digital Storytelling and Life Story Method. Combined these methods facilitate personal self expression in a transactional exchange swapping storied lives for communication and technology based skills. Through a protracted period of Story Circles individuals specifically from the ex-prisoner community, are not coerced into discussing their actions during the troubles but can start at any point in their lives and help them understand the why of their own experience. Together participants and facilitator can learn from each other and the baton of expertise is passed equally around the group based on the particular stage of the process. This approach can produce varied results as a collection of outputs in the form of DS, however the combination of literature on both methods and the experience suggest engagement with the process does have a positive transformative impact on the life and outlook of individual participants. This varies from one person to another and is based on many factors from willingness to participate and seeking personal redress through acknowledgement for the past. The practice can be scaled up, yet the experience of the participants and the subsequent analysis is specific and localised. Rahamah, Bakar and Mohd explain life story as "... essentially telling or recounting of a string of events. The process involves the sharing of personal narratives and is defined as the "unfolding history of ones experiences". They continue that "life story takes into consideration the realist and constructivist approaches [...] an individual's life history becomes an entry into understanding the social and economic structures which shape the individual life" (2008: 4). Erik Sween suggests that "people use certain stories about themselves like a lens on a camera. These stories have the effect of filtering experience and thereby selecting what information gets focused

in or out. These stories shape peoples perspectives of their lives, histories and futures” (1998:5). Life story suggests a sequential and linear narrative but allows facilitators and researchers to go beyond the focus of any single issue and instead invite the teller to make sense of their world their own subjective experience. The nucleus of most experience combines family and place. The two sources which can profoundly impact on the experience of an individual based on lessons learned as a result of belonging to an established network which usually begins with family.

Etherington describes Life Story as a methodology as one which 'allows us to bring together many layers of understanding about a person, about their culture and about how they created change in their lives' describing that the stories 'resonate with others and outlast their telling or reading, sometimes with profound consequences' (2009: 225-226). This approach enables researchers and therapists to explore the narratives of participants, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of an individual through the things they say about themselves rather than initially focusing on any single issue. Life Story methodology is based on the concept of what Bruner describes as 'narrative knowing', (1986) where we understand culture and experience through story and acknowledge its subjective and fluid nature. By adopting this method I was seeking a way as a practitioner to enter into difficult dialogue with vulnerable participants without going for the jugular. I was attempting to understand individuals within a complex community sub-group and I wanted to avoid stereotype, preconceived ideas or projecting my own perspective into the work through the creative outputs.

Emphasising single events or issues from the outset would limit the experience for the participants in their capacity for free expression. The purpose evolved to a point where ex-combatants would be willing to share experience in a closed environment and then potentially create an archive in the form of DS as personal outputs for the project. Life Story presents many contradictions in terms of judgement, knowledge and morality. It has the capacity to reveal the layers of lived experience. It reveals the vulnerability of complex individuals and has the potential to re-humanise them. Cahal McLaughlin states that 'life story allows for [such] contradictions' where historical testimony does

not' (2006: 124). Ex-prisoner participants in particular expressed multiple contradictions.

Contradictions show the challenges, sacrifice and expense that people face in order to belong to something which is the pursuit of an idea through deadly action. With an open approach such as Life Story the facilitator is not predetermining the outcome, but allowing the group to determine their own focus and outcomes.

The key innovation of my research was to explore DS with Life Story methodology in a post-conflict context to investigate how individuals might be able to make better connections with the self and each other by trying to understand the self through the narratives expressed of our lives when storytelling. Many of the participants were suffering PTSD and my offer was not to overcome PTSD but recognising that talking about the past would at least present an opportunity for some form of post-traumatic growth. Paul Gallagher states 'post traumatic growth integrates the negative event into the life of the sufferer and attempts to create some positive outcomes as a result' (2020:189) This is something which I believed fundamental to the process understanding that it is impossible to connect with individuals on a personal level through intimately sharing episodes of past lives and not be changed or challenged in some way as a result.

Etherington states, 'narrative knowledge or narrative embedded in Life Story is interesting , memorable, and [...] transforming' (2009: 225). Bruner (1990) describes narrative knowledge as created and co-constructed through stories people tell about their lived experience and the meaning they give to those experiences over time that might change and develop as the stories unfold. Not only does the narrative add to the 'repertoire' of embodied experience but can also have what Rosenthal (2003) describes a 'recuperative role' for the teller and the listener and Etherington supports the view of a recuperative role for 'individuals, relationships and society' (2009: 226). The teller is invited to remember, reconstruct, edit and present. The listener will then construct, filter, connect, empathise or reject.

Life Story invites the participant to unpack their life experience through story and has been primarily used in disciplines such as therapy, education and anthropology. Richard Rose, a leading practitioner uses the method to deal with children and trauma. He describes how children construct life through memory and different artistic practices as an indirect approach which avoids collecting information through traditional means such as interview, which can negatively impact on the information a child offers or withholds. Rose suggests that ‘if people cannot tell their traumatic experiences, they cannot share what they have experienced with others; and they experience themselves at a distance as well as a relationship of being excluded in relation to those who did not experience something similar’ (2003: 924). Rose also states that the ‘feeling of alienation and not belonging as a result of traumatic experiences is further maintained or strengthened by this inability to speak’ (2003: 925) and states ‘an important advantage in guiding biographical-narrative-conversation, is precisely that through the narrative process, self understanding becomes possible, which takes place as much as possible, without interviewer or counsellors interpretation’ (2003: 927).

Ethical Considerations

The 2009 report on ‘Ethical Principles in story and narrative work’ by *Healing Through Remembering* and supported by the Connolly report *Ethical Principles for Researching Vulnerable Groups* (2003) commissioned by the office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), provide the principles for understanding the process of working with individuals and groups in a ‘post-conflict’ context. The (HTR) 2009 report deals with ethics in storytelling based on local experience, functioning as a guide to practitioners and groups and also as something which can be developed and added to through experience rather than being held up as a definitive document which addresses all the issues. *Healing Through Remembering* 2009, highlights ethics in relation to broad ‘societal issues’, individual issues and outcomes for the participants and state that the findings are intended as “both a key tool for those involved in storytelling and narrative based initiatives and as an aid to discussion”, while making it clear that “translation of these ethical

principles into practice is a key challenge for everyone involved in storytelling and narrative work” (2009: 8). The Connolly Report is a comprehensive document which deals with ethics and vulnerable groups and can be applied to broader research work beyond narrative inquiry. This helped to shape my own approach as a project coordinator and facilitator.

However McLaughlin highlights that ‘it contained no recommendations for ex-prisoners, itself an interesting contribution , if negatively, to debate on definitions of ‘survivor’ and ‘vulnerable’ (2006: 125). If these terms are up for debate then victim must also be included for clarification. While many ex-combatants joined republican paramilitary groups ‘because their friends were in the RA’, many joined because they felt they were being generationally downtrodden by a consistent Unionist majority in Northern Ireland propped up by a ‘foreign government in the British’.

(Anonymised participant interview 08/2017) The result was a lack of proper housing, human rights, jobs and this came to a head in Derry in January of 1972 with Bloody Sunday, which was used by the Republican movement as a recruitment drive to further the agenda of the movement through violence. ‘Many young men at the time had no prospects; if you went for a job, they didn’t ask your religion, they asked what school you went to and once they knew you were a Catholic you could not get work. I suppose you could say men were seduced by the street credibility and security that comes with membership’ [of paramilitary organisations]. (Anonymised participant Interview 08/2017)

Other key values in the process highlighted by HTR 2009, include empowerment, inclusivity, equality and honesty. In producing DS, participants were not asked to produce a document of experience which was authentic. They were asked to be mindful in their exploration of memory and truthful in the reconstruction of the story which will best capture and present their experience. The group dynamic reinforces a sense of authentic retelling as they are a form of private stories made public even among in-groups. The stories have a structure and fluidity which was expressed through multiple perspectives of the same or similar experience and as Burgess states it is the voice of the teller in this format which contain “strong affective resonances” (2006: 210). Poletti

determines the inclusion of voice ‘enables a story to inspire reverie in its audience by producing a flow of associative memories’ (2011: 78) that Lambert suggests ‘wash over us’ (2006) as we listen. Polletti concludes that it is the voice over that does “much of the work of engendering the identification between viewer and author” (2011: 78).

Ethics and principles of DS.

In DS work the participant controls their contribution, in what they share in the story circle and what they produce in terms of a complete story. They make all editorial decisions in terms of choice of story, content, images, soundtrack, pacing. As a community they are presented with all the information from the researcher in regard to processes, stages of progression and expectations and they have the final say about developments. This may not always be suitable for a researcher as it involves much discussion and debate, but the process is founded on the amplification of marginalised voices and participants must be empowered in all aspects of engagement and supported in their decisions.

Through many of the stories encountered across a broad collection of projects and the range of performance modes possible, anonymity is one presentation style which I have discovered gives individuals a freedom of expression to describe their experience in the most uninhibited form. In *BRMR* (2013) there are several stories which have been anonymised from victims and perpetrators of violence, and in doing so they can protect their identity from exposure to further stigma or trauma. DS is well positioned to accommodate this style of presentation and this can ensure broader levels of participation, especially among marginalised communities, who may have a story to tell but fear repercussions of engagement.

Throughout the workshop period all participants control their own assets, including vocal recordings, images, notes and final script. The researcher does not have access to individual story

assets nor should they be stored anywhere except on the device of the participant. Once complete the group shares their stories in a private screening with the rest of the contributors. After the screening they consider sharing in a more public form. Once the group has discussed the pros and cons of sharing they are given a cooling off period, or what Lundy and McGovern (2002) refer to as the 'handing back phase'. They adopted this approach when working with the Ardoyne community on development of narratives immediately after the cessation of violence in 1998. This ensures that nobody is coerced into making their participation or contribution public. The researcher allows time for consideration of the outputs and then the group make any decision based on their best interests. This can be a frustrating period for the researcher as many individuals have many reasons why they might not want to make their contributions public, while having produced intriguing stories. However one must also understand that participation is based on much more than completing a story for publication. Much of the process is about engaging marginalised people and presenting a range of possibilities for some positive change in relation to their engagement.

An ethical review was required to carry out this work through the faculty at Ulster University for several reasons, principally concerned with recording and storing of audio and video / photographs and other sensitive, personal assets belonging to participants. As we were working with person identifiable data on socially sensitive topics, it was imperative to ensure that no participant was stigmatised, distressed or had any further harm inflicted upon them as a result of participation. The Boston College tapes became the centre of media attention at the time of my study in an attempt to help convict a veteran republican for murder of one of the 'disappeared' Jean McConville in the early 1970's in Belfast. The judge ruled that the tapes constituted inadmissible evidence in court due to their unreliability and bias of the interviewer for his stance on the Peace Process and bias against the Sinn Fein leadership. As I will describe later this ruled out many former combatants from becoming open to the possibility of sharing their stories outside of their private sub-groups due to trust issues and potential for further stigma. The groups were given full disclosure to the process and all areas that were highlighted within the ethical review were discussed between

researcher and internal project co-ordinators before any engagement. The 'handing back phase' (2002) demonstrated in the work of the Ardoyne Commemoration project (1998-2002) was an approach adopted for this practice and gave not only reassurance to participants, but underscored their control over the process from the outset.

Lambert (2006) states that 'life narrative is coaxed or coerced in specific environments or contexts allows us to consider the relational function of life story, a feature of autobiography central to the DS movement and the importance it places on telling and listening to life stories as a new form of general civic engagement' (2006). How the site of narration is constructed will correlate with the stories being told. Working with an all-male group of republican ex-prisoners and surrounded by the paraphernalia or cultural iconography of life in prison we decided to use the experience of incarceration in Long Kesh and other 'British prisons' as an entry point into the lives of the men. The common experience of the participants gave the group a starting point from which to negotiate the project and avoid going feet first into difficult topics around the actions taken by individuals that resulted in their incarceration. The cultural symbols ranged from images to music, letters and documents as well as personal hand crafted items made in prison. The presence of these items made it much easier for the men to remember and relay their experiences to the group. It gave them a fixed point of focus for the narratives and enabled me to ask questions about the meaning and context of artefacts and images. In this way I was able to enter into a dialogue about their prison experiences through the stories without expressing explicit or implicit judgement. They used the artefacts as a gateway to memory and because the objects represented personal meaning they evoked subconscious action in the teller.

As facilitator it is important to recognise personal bias. Mari Fitzduff (1999) in *Community Conflict Skills* offers facilitators some useful advice which I found effective when engaging in different communities of interest. Fitzduff highlights the importance of "commitment to the process of the group itself, and the equal participation of all in it; a commitment to respect for feelings, fears and claims about rights of all within the group and all they represent; and a commitment to the

empowerment of all groups present in helping them articulate claims, and analyse the fears and values behind them” (1999: 39) Fitzduff further highlights that ignorance can in itself incubate conflict suggesting that “often our desire to protect ourselves as groups means that we do not take any care or trouble to find out what our supposed enemies are thinking, believing and wanting [...] straight talking between groups about their fears, beliefs and differences is very difficult” (1999, 43) It is difficult to bring culturally opposed groups together in Northern Ireland but it is doable and stakeholders on the ground are always looking for ways, usually limited in their own resources, for their members to integrate, participate and learn new skills. Like Theatre of Witness and other embedded practice which has developed in communities around Northern Ireland it takes time to develop relationships.

The ex-prisoners are approached regularly for interviews by different documentary makers and production companies and they informed me on several occasions that they *always* decline such offers. The ex-prisoners feel they are represented in a negative frame and some people would argue they deserve this treatment but they have paid a heavy price for their beliefs and actions. They have lost family and friends and while some acknowledge they completely wasted the opportunity that life presented, they feel disconnected and restricted in their ability to evolve and work along with the peace project. The participants live in a state of relative freedom but have so many restrictions placed on them as part of their parole arrangements, that many find it difficult to live a normal life. This impacts other areas of life such as mental health and well being and these groups remain on the fringes of society. They still have their views and beliefs and these will not soften or change without proper communication and dialogue. Sometimes collaboration was sought between opposing groups in prison so they have the capacity to work together borne out of necessity. As one participant in *Stories from Long Kesh* puts it, ‘if you struggle in prison you struggle for everyone, including the Loyalists. The only way to get things done in prison was usually to work together.’ It didn’t stop the violent episodes or extreme incidents between groups at different intervals but the hunger strikers of 1981 made the ultimate sacrifice with their lives and in doing so died for the rights of the loyalist prisoners to also be treated as

political prisoners. This is one example of the many contradictions in the meta-narrative of the story of Northern Ireland. Dialogue and negotiation between prisoners resolved many long standing issues going back to the time of the 'Cages' in Long Kesh. There is no reason not to embrace this knowledge and use it to the advantage of everyone in society. Relationships can be developed, healed or built upon with the correct channels and opportunities for communication. Equality of outcome will never be a possibility due to the deep loss suffered on both sides of the community, but society can begin in the present with a promise of equality of opportunity, where everyone's experience is valid and should be expressed in non violent means. It is the arts, in all its guises, which can facilitate expression which is liberating and empowering.

Training and Preparation for community engagement

As an experienced teacher and facilitator with extensive media and production experience I had a combined skill set which would allow me to undertake this practice. However I identified and participated in additional training before engaging communities in practice. I engaged in Digital storytelling workshops as participant to understand the experience from the perspective of participant. I attended multiple workshops through the 'Rural Community Network' exploring project building, conflict transformation, DS and community networking. Rosenthal highlights, 'to guide a biographical narrative conversation which is also always an intervention, sound training is necessary.' (2003, 930) I was able to explore the potential for DS in community settings while enabling the groups to contribute to the development of the process in the context of contested space, while not being overly concerned with the output.

Description of the projects developed on the land border

In 2017 I engaged in a period of community practice. I wanted to set up multiple projects through workshops in different locations along the land border, which might highlight experience among participants in a range of age groups and backgrounds and also develop the process of

engagement to ensure participants are ready to share stories. Bush claims “workshops are a modest effort to move beyond the anecdotal, toward a more systematic approach to analysing and employing storytelling and story creation” (2009:73). The workshops serve as a lens for evaluation and understanding connection between self and story. Much of the research up to this point was based on literature studies and several hundred hours of audio and video recordings.

I set up three collaborative DS projects which would serve to produce research data in each instance, through the process and the outputs produced. The first project involved a retired women’s group in rural Donegal. They told stories of childhood memories, of family and friends and the process was framed as a social activity with some digital learning involved. The project gave me an initial experience of guiding participants through the process from story circle to finished output. This project highlighted many basic issues around logistics, resources and participation in rural communities. I was able to reflect and respond to the issues and consider solutions with participants, research supervisors and other community representatives.

Next I worked with a group of 18-25 year olds in rural Donegal who wanted to use DS as an advocacy tool to highlight issues around the lack of mental health services within their region. This group unsurprisingly proved to have no issue with technology, however it became evident early on that they required much more time in the story circle phase in order to make those discoveries of self in the sharing of stories and experience with others. This project raised issues of publication and stigmatised identities, where there is a risk of exposing already potentially vulnerable people to publicity through the DS process. The group decided to make a DS as a petition to their own councillors and members of parliament in an attempt to highlight the issues that they personally experience. They did not use their names or images as they would no longer be in control of the output, if they made the choice to share with elected representatives in the region. They also took responsibility for their own assets. I was given access to the work temporarily to view and consider it with my research supervisors. This project underscored the need for developing strategies for working with people who may have more difficult stories to tell. DS traditionally works in a

nostalgic, non confrontational environment. My main objective is to discover its potential as an alternative narrative approach in communities emerging from conflict.

The third and final project in this practical period of 2017, was an opportunity to take the learning from previous projects combined with the case study data, and create a process of engagement which places the emphasis in the room with collaborators and less on the final digital output. I adopted additional methods such as 'Life Story Method' and 'Every Object tells as Story' as particular techniques in response to research which might support the telling of difficult stories, and I extended the time period from 5 days to approximately 25 days with only the last 20% of the time dedicated to producing the digital stories. This work was produced through new community connections developed as I discussed my ideas and plans with different organisations. The Irish Republican Prisoner and Welfare Association invited me to meet with their representatives and discuss the process. They are continuously looking for opportunities for engagement for their members, however they are selective and thorough in their approach, as they have had negative experiences of engagement in the past, where they have been 'objectified' and regarded 'a curiosity' in public participation projects. Each individual project and contributor has been critical in shaping the process of engagement, highlighting areas which need careful consideration and development, in order for DS to find its place as a useful alternative tool for narrative practice in the age of digital media.

The PAR Project

Pain (et al,) argue "Research in PAR typically goes through a cycle; Planning, Action, Reflection and Evaluation. There is no blue print for must have methods or steps" (2017:3-4.) Like digital storytelling there are seven principles of PAR consisting, collaboration, knowledge, power, ethics, building theory, actions, emotions and wellbeing. (2017) As an approach it must remain responsive and flexible to the needs of participants where they can bring their own knowledge and experience to bear on any aspect of engagement.

The project was designed using the existing framework for Digital Storytelling, combined with knowledge and experience of existing practice to begin a process of discovery along the land border with communities of interest. This was a multi modal approach which involved community practice as research in an evolving and iterative process employing a range of methods from interview, focus groups, observations to adopting alternative strategies of narrative practice from other fields of research to help unlock difficult narratives among participants. One such success was the introduction of Life Story Method, as a direct result of engagement with a group of young people (18-25) on the issue of mental health service provision within their community.

Action research and reflection were methods I used for working through the findings of the process in a linear, iterative manner. McIntosh argues

reflection is assumed to create depth of knowledge and meaning both for self and those practiced upon. Running alongside the use of reflection is the prevalent use of action research which some see as a way of approaching the study of humans from a philosophical perspective in which sharing takes place in mutually supported environments (2010:72).

Much of the reflection and subsequent action was generated by each participating group as their responses to ideas and processes of community engagement through the narrative device of Digital storytelling. In addition the work and developments were under continuous review from research supervisors to ensure the principles of PAR and ethical concerns were constantly in the foreground among other issues revolving around process and engagement.

Outcome and impact are difficult to measure. In this study outcome and impact is derived from participants in what they say about the process and their contribution. This information generally comes in discussion, focus groups, interviews and observations. Each participating group were able to consider methods and approaches to practice which they would inform on their relative success or impediment to developing the next stage of their engagement. The over arching view

from participants is that the work is supportive of those with difficult stories and has potential to engage marginalised groups which are inherently insular in positive initiatives of self discovery through communication and learning. As Bush argues “Evaluation must appreciate the complexity, ambiguity, variability and time-dependency of storytelling. It must also appreciate ‘backsliding’ - the possibility that events external to an initiative, might account for failures or setbacks in apparent progress” (2009:73).

The obvious limitation to this set of practice is the lack of a reception study largely due to the nature of the content being shared and the perceived character of some of the participants among collaborating communities. The republican group of ex-prisoners had many reasons against publishing their outputs in this instance. Hartley (2009) and Couldry (2008) highlight the need for more work to be done to bring the voices of the marginalised into the public sphere. What if the participants don’t furnish this aspect of engagement with as much significance as the process of participation for the benefit of each individual. As a result of the feedback I no longer view publication as a primary part of the process. While desirable, the emphasis is on participation, sharing, understanding and empathy in real time, recognising the self in the ‘other’ and putting experience in perspective.

Changes in approach were required as a result of information extracted through the developing practice. It was evident that group interaction required development, especially among people who are from the same community, but do not necessarily know each member personally in the group. I added ‘Life Story Method’ and ‘Every Object tells a Story’, to provide alternative means for expression without coercing or aiming for a particular narrative based on the make up of the group, and to take the emphasis off the self in the process of telling stories. There were issues of collaboration; in attempting to bridge communities of difference and bridging intra-community groups which I will describe in detail in chapter 6. Among the many problems were territorial, geographical, gender and political which served as barriers to participation. With development of the single identity network approach, this ultimately served to benefit the process

and underscore the necessity for communities to understand their own positions by working together before reaching out to their apparent 'discordant other'.

There are of course limitations to this research. One might argue for the lack of opposing voices, yet it is through the process from inception to completion, where participants shape the practice, answer the questions and determine the outcomes based on their best interests, from a perspective of knowing and consideration of what they want to change and how those changes might take place. There is no reception study of the practice but throughout the thesis I inform the reader at different points why publication was not possible and argue why it may not always be necessary.

Focus Groups

Within the focus group sessions I was permitted to take notes as the group had made an obvious transition to considering rather than actively participating in storytelling practice. The interplay between the group meant the baton of expertise was passed at different intervals in the process. As Mies (1993) states "participation in social actions and struggles, and the integration of research in to the processes, further implies that the change of the status quo becomes the starting point for a scientific quest. The motto for this approach could be 'if you want to know a thing you must change it' (1993: 70). Focus groups were an important method in this research as they were performed in the collective and were distinct and separate to story circle sessions. Focus groups presented 'equality of opportunity' for participants to shape the developing methodology and allowed for different perspectives on a range of issues which affect output, participation, publication, self presentation and expression from mechanical processes and logistical problems, literacy issues, and much more complex personal problems which affect participants in their daily lives. I adopted focus groups as a method to attempt to understand what participants think and feel about different aspects of engagement in narrative studies and participation in practice. Opinions, attitudes and beliefs were more accessible in this format rather than trying to acquire this rich data

from questionnaires. I did not want to conduct one to one interviews during the process of engagement as any attempt to remove individuals from the group might be viewed with suspicion and would not help the initial inherent levels of mistrust in the process or in me as researcher. In the case of the ex-combatants, while having the circumstances of the Boston College Tapes play out in the mainstream media, one to one interviews were not plausible. While the answers gleaned from focus groups are difficult to represent on a scale, I was able to quickly identify major issues such as anonymity, further stigma of the self and family and potential impacts on current employment among others.

My challenge is to make difficult stories attainable and through participation and balance of power relationships between researcher and researched, the knowledge produced by participants is not solely produced in the final outputs. They are a result of invested engagement, with shared ownership of the process, based on relationships of trust, acknowledgement, sharing and empathy.

Conclusion

The constructivist / interpretive approach to research among communities of interest emerging from conflict, places value on existing knowledge and new experiences of the individual and the collective in a process of self recovery, discovery and understanding through supported sharing environments. The principles of design and the use of PAR as an approach ensure that collaboration, knowledge, power, ethics, building theory, actions, emotions and wellbeing (2017) are central to engagement within perceived, marginalised and silenced communities. Through a genuine offer of knowledge exchange it is possible for the researcher to build relationships with communities where there is a reciprocal approach to learning and communication between people from a range of backgrounds within contentious communities. Knowledge is difficult to measure, as are outcomes in narrative practice, but as I describe in later chapters there are visible encouraging developments which take place between individuals and the group and between researcher and individuals. Each small success within the group paves the way for bigger group challenges and

lead to the completion of competent and well structured digital stories. If the stories have no impact on the community, through lack of publication, the entire process benefits the participants through skill sharing, knowledge construction and problem solving and in many ways changes the individual and gives them an alternative perspective to a problem they have known and lived.

In the following chapters, four and five, I outline two contemporaneous storytelling projects which give insight into philosophical arguments of engagement and process. The first case study (Chapter 4) explores *Border Roads to Memories and Reconciliation* (2013) and the second case study (Chapter 5) explores the work of WAVE Traumas' *Stories from Silence* (2015). To understand the range of participants and community backgrounds in story work with communities emerging from conflict, it is necessary to learn from the previous practice by probing and examining the work largely through its output but also by developing relationships with participants and responding to their shared experience. These projects highlight the complexity of problems that exist and sometimes fester in a society in transition.

A Case Study

According to Yin, case studies are pertinent when research addresses a descriptive question -“What is happening or has happened?” or an explanatory question- “How or why did something happen?” (2012: 5). The process of storytelling favours the collection of data in natural settings which is diverse and layered as opposed to formal data collection processes such as census poll. As outlined earlier case studies have been adopted in this research as one method among several to identify process and outcomes of different community engagement activities with an emphasis on storytelling around the context life of the border in a post conflict society.

Identity and Community

Kathryn Woodward points out the “assertion of difference denies any similarities between groups”, (1997: 9) and forces individuals to be one thing or another without any room for manoeuvre. I am exploring the ‘markers of Identity’ in the interviews of the participants, researching how they situate themselves in relation to the physical and psychological space which they occupy on the land border in Ireland. In this project the interviews were carried out at work places or homes of participants and I am interested to see if this has any effect on the stories that the participants share and the way they narrate them. I use this project as a case study to better understand how stories differ when left untreated or underdeveloped, when the performance of the story is affected through the focus of the lens, and I also look at outcomes of this process which directly impact on the life of the participant once the stories have been archived and published.

Woodward defines ‘the other’ as someone different to ourselves in terms of social and conceptual identities (1997: 18). In this study the ‘other’ is predominantly of Catholic or Protestant denomination. In Northern Ireland ‘Catholic’ can also be misunderstood to be Republican and

Nationalist (CRN) and equally 'Protestant' can be misinterpreted as Unionist and Loyalist (PUL) as if all these terms are interchangeable within single identity groups, however this is not the case. They are separate groups or sub groups within communities which have more in common than that which divides them. This exposes the problem with labelling communities or individuals based on generic terms which are loaded with stereotype, misunderstanding and distrust. Decety and Somerville state that "our view of the self relies heavily on concepts of shared representations between the self and others; Individuals internalise other peoples perspectives through interactions with others promoting self monitoring, self regulation and reflection on their own cognition" (2003: 527).

Where identities are in a state of conflict, as is the case in Northern Ireland during the period known as the 'Troubles' and still now in a less violent manner, a perception of the 'other' can arise which is often highlighted, reinforced and manifested through propaganda and cultural memory. Rather than simply connecting sectarian identity to politics, more attention should be paid to sub groups with alternative agendas where factions adopt ideologies politically, culturally and socially which naturally skew the perception one side has of the 'other' - Nationalist, Unionist, Protestant or Catholic. As Sietel points out "it depends who is talking to whom in what context and to what ends?.. It depends on the type of story being told for different genres implicate different subjectivities and ideological connotations toward the world" (1999).

Segregation still exists within Northern Ireland in many areas where 'Peace lines' and 'Peace walls' continue to act as internal borders on the streets to maintain the status quo and force opposing communities apart. The 'international' land border also acts as a clear demarcation of difference and it was along this land border that the Border Roads to Memory and Reconciliation project was delivered.

The Border Roads to Memories and Reconciliation project was initiated by *Latton Social Services and Development Ltd*, Monaghan, as an opportunity for people on adjacent sides of the border to

express their feelings and share their experience in a storytelling project about the closure of the border roads and the impact it had on daily routine. The project was funded by the *European Peace III programme* and came about as part of the drive for *European Territorial Co-operation, Active Citizenship* promoting equality and rural development providing assistance to ethnic minorities in Ireland. *The Operational Programme for the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 2007-2013 (2006)* made specific reference to the lack of cross community contact within the Peace II programme 2000-2006 and that this must become a key part of the Peace III agenda. In regard to cross community relations in border regions research indicates a lack of participation and integration of the minority Protestant Community.

The main output of BRMR is a website which contains video and audio recorded interviews of participants. The organisers state the aim was to "build trust and stability through recognition and acknowledgement of these individuals as victims (RCN 2015: online) The RCN acted as an affiliate to the program and appealed on behalf of Latton Social Services to interested parties to identify themselves as groups and individuals who may wish to participate in the study.

The Operational Programme of 2006, highlights one quarter of respondents reported negative community relations as a result of their Protestant identity and more than half of survey respondents believe the Protestant community is not fairly and adequately represented by the political system in the Republic of Ireland. Further study highlights that some Protestants in the border regions find it difficult to fully express their cultural identity and interests; and state the conflict in NI has increased their feeling of isolationism and marginalisation' (2006: 16) This highlights the point that just because individuals identify in a particular way, such as Protestant, does not automatically suggest that their experience of that identity is the same as other Protestants and that many demographic factors are in play in relation to the lived experience.

I have studied the Border Roads to Memories online video / story archive initially with a focus on the interviews in the Derry / Donegal border area to explore the form based on the output. This

difference in demographics does bear testimony to a particular participant in the 'Border Roads to Memories' project who gave an anonymous interview and discusses this issue in some detail claiming to "be a second class citizen in the predominantly 'Catholic south of Ireland' and having lost respect of their northern Protestant counterparts as they have chosen to reside south of the border".[BRMR, 2013 online] This story speaks of a sense of conflicted self which can be destabilising and unsettling for the individual. This type of rebuff from the wider community would force one to question their notion of self, identity, belonging and the lack of community.

During the Troubles, rural communities were segregated and marginalised due to the installation of militarised forts which in many instances cut parts of the community off from the main arterial routes in and around that community. Many communities were cut in two and as a result marginalised and in danger of Republican attacks and British retaliation. *BRMR* sought to explore the sentiment of the time as it lingers in the present, to understand how life has evolved in rural communities along the contested Irish Border since the *GFA / Belfast Agreement* (1998).

The project coordinators archived almost 2000 documents including newspaper articles, photos, multi media recordings and other artefacts in relation to the Irish Border Story. Initially it seemed this would make an excellent archive for my own research, however the materials were not made publicly available and do not appear to have been used in any direct relation to the stories being told within the final presentations. Interviews and memoirs were recorded by the researchers of participants who were directly impacted by the road closures and the militarisation and fortification of the Border counties. My focus, therefore is on the the finished project, the material documented by participants and the process of participation.

The Process of Collecting Border Stories

The process of BRMR involved the organisation and delivery of 37 cross border workshops held over two years bringing together over 500 individuals from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds so they could share their experience of the road closures. This suggests that each workshop had a

number of participants present and that participants took part in one workshop and then recorded their account or version of events at a different time and place, in the home or in their work place, interviewed by one of the facilitators on the project without the rest of the workshop group present. In a later interview with a local project participant Kevin McFadden in 2016, (Killea, Co.Donegal) he confirmed this to be the case.

The concept of the meta-narrative is a story about many stories incorporating historical meaning, experience and knowledge and acts to bind single identity communities. Stephens and McCallum explain that meta-narrative is a totalising cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience (1998: 9). Jean Francois-Lyotard (1984) states that meta-narratives should be replaced by focusing on specific local contexts as well as the diversity of human experience arguing for a multiplicity of standpoints rather than grand, all encompassing theories. Memory is fragmented and therefore individuals summarise their presentation of thought which means emphasis on some details and not others. Jay O'Callaghan points out that people legitimise stories by telling them normally with those in our immediate interactions and communities and Cashman states that the primary situational context for telling stories on the Northern Irish border is at ceillis, wakes and other social gatherings (2008: 1). It is personal, social contact with others regardless of background or past experience where individuals can recognise and seek similarities in humanity through harbouring similar fears living parallel lives although segregated through historical, institutionalised communities. Identities are constructs which can and should be negotiated to challenge the unwritten rules of belonging. It is the local context of stories that project facilitators wanted to capture and to this end the project was successful in generating and publishing over one hundred and sixty interviews about localised experience along the land border.

Through the use of technology BRMR provided an opportunity for people to hear the views and beliefs of their 'neighbours' through the form of story with whom they wouldn't have known personally through division, difference and fear. Stories, as Cashman states "relay beliefs, values and norms, especially those that appeal to authority of tradition which provide powerful rhetorical

tools in the construction, maintenance and revision of individual and group identities” (2008: 3). Cashman’s reference relates to the practice of live storytelling in the presence of others. The process of mediatised storytelling raises many issues for the amateur storyteller in that they can not see the audience nor do they know who that audience will be in the future. Therefore the storyteller, depending on context, such as story to be told, environment, surroundings and familiarity of the other participants and the material, will shape and present the story in a very different manner than they would in the presence of friends and family with the general sense of familiarity. Darcy Alexandra states “It depends on who is talking to whom, in what context and to what end? It depends on type of story being told for different genres implicate different subjectivities and ideological connotations toward the world” (2008: 1).

The fact that participants would not be aware of future audiences, the fear of ‘stigma’ and little understanding of the technology and how it can be used might suggest why several participants gave anonymous interviews which indirectly made the stories they told more interesting and engaging for the audience because identities were protected. Anonymity enabled participants to tell the stories they wanted in an uninhibited way. Its apparent through the stories they share that they have much more at stake than other participants. One woman’s account details harassment by Gardai due to her families perceived involvement in Republican paramilitary activities. Similarly one individual from the Loyalist community talks anonymously about involvement with paramilitaries and provides a generally unfiltered account to the interviewer. Its clear these participants would not have taken part, or would be much less open about their experience had their identities been made public.

There is an ambition here that seeks to use the technology beyond its capacity. This is apparent in differences in the outputs and the hidden relationships between these and the processes that generated them. It can disseminate the voices but not all stories are equal, some five minutes, some twenty five minutes almost always dependant on the skill of the teller and their self confidence in retelling their story and performing for the camera and the unknown audience. The level at which the participants engaged in a workshop process is not apparent in their performance

of the telling. Many of the interviews take place in what appears to be homes of the interviewees, so it is unclear as to what sub group this gathering of border dwellers belong as the presentation of their work is in isolation of others which is of less significance than what group practice, cross community or even single identity shared practice may have had on the output of the participants. This may have been a methodological choice by the research team in order to make participants feel more at ease in their own surroundings. This approach makes accessibility and participation easier for older participants to get involved who live rurally and ticks a box for 'inclusivity' in the project, but potentially at the expense of developing relationships, creating community and experiencing new ideas in the company of others. I often hear this work referred to as DS yet it conforms in no way to my understanding of what constitutes a DS and how it functions as process or output. As Ousler suggests "Digital Storytelling engages with performance and presence in ways that articulate and test relations between individual experience, identity and media forms" (1997: 150).

The interviewees indicate through their participation, in the manner that they answer questions, that this is a project in which they have little or no control of the output only in what they say in the moment. There are cautious offerings of experience with an air of guarded response rather than free participation which could be partially due to the closed nature of the questioning from the researcher but also that these stories might be shared for the first time outside of the family environment. The project appears to be seeking emotionally charged soundbites, resulting in many of the interviews sounding similar with little reference to shared experience. The participant is placed in front of the camera and this becomes as much the focus of the contribution as the story itself. The participants responses tend to suggest a heightened state of self awareness. They have not had time to process and reconstruct a response but rather under the impression that they only have one shot to get the answer 'right' for the recording and some appear to struggle with this approach.

The researchers have a particular focus on one particular narrative of the closed roads. Smuggling was an activity so common and wide spread along the border from the beginning of partition in the

1920's, that it offers a way to unlock the stories of the past. It is a safe choice of narrative set against a safe context of closed roads. This choice is based on an identifiable common ground in the meta-narrative of the border regardless of the identity of those involved in smuggling. Evidence suggests that border dwellers in particular had to engage in smuggling in some form or other for basic survival especially during the period of World War II. It was believed that border dwellers could get the things they needed such as bread, butter and sugar regardless of the state boundary and the relatively small risk involved, so it was a chance worth taking. Commodities were available in different proportions on both sides of the border so seemingly 'innocent' illegal cross border activity blossomed, allegedly carried out by all from mothers with babies in prams to high ranking officials and politicians. Testimonies can be found to support this in BRMR and in numerous other documents relating to the period. World War II put a great strain on resources destined for Ireland, and this is what directly led to the rationing and in turn the cross border smuggling. This is an activity which can now be remembered in a nostalgic way including the struggle, survival and hardship which is recounted fondly by the few remaining people who engaged in the smuggling. Many of the stories or accounts offered on the issue of smuggling in *Border Roads to Memories* lack any real colour, individual content or personality of the teller through lack of cultural memory. The narrative of smuggling lacks any real sense of investment by the participants as memories were vague and anecdotes reduced to nothing more than instances largely through lack of personal ownership of the smuggling experience.

The *Border Roads to Memories and Reconciliation* project attempts to frame the experience of interested communities and individuals around the issue of border road closure almost fifteen years after their permanent reopening, treating participation as an end in itself.

The militarised border represented difficulty and long delays for everyone who crossed it, and for some represented hardship and oppression. The northwest border region is remote from Dublin, the centre of political and social life in Ireland and this still causes issues for many of the participants in which I engaged especially for the two groups based in rural Donegal with the lack

of provisions and services for the local community. In a sense these communities feel underrepresented by the political system precisely due to their location.

The Border closure impacted everyone who resided by it, and on those crossing for work and social activities. This does not in itself make an interesting story. If this not so distant past is going to be the main focus of narrative then one would expect the workshop process to contribute to the excavation and development of the stories enabling more investment in the telling or performance of the story and much more authorship and craft on the part of the participants in partnership with the facilitators.

In analysing this work in part for the development of my own practice, I suggest the work should develop our understanding, or at least provide an overview of how a community sees its current state in relation to its past in the border regions of Ireland while considering the uncertainty of the future. Noyes argues how a community is continuously 'imagined, constructed, maintained, negotiated and revised' (2003) and with such changes to the landscape, culturally and politically after the peace agreement, I would have anticipated and expected more depth to stories about these rural communities which is only possible through community engagement. Without the opportunity for each participant to consider many personal experiences, to reimagine and reconstruct the past in the presence of others, and answering blunt questions by the interviewer, there is an apparent lack of any real community engagement and therefore the possibility of further development and integration of communities through the process of participation, if that is indeed the remit of the project.

Demilitarised Border and Transnationalism

When the Border was demilitarised in Ireland and reverted to a 'common travel zone' between N.Ireland and the Republic of Ireland at the beginning of the 21st century, the communities directly affected would have naturally initiated a process of negotiation and revision of the space and how it functions for the community. On a more personal level for communities and individuals this would

give rise to internal questions of identity as well as offering for some, identity resolution. The deconstruction of the militarised border removed the physical presence of the army, but it may have also manifested more broadly in Unionist circles as what Ernest Laclau describes as 'dislocation'. Laclau argues that modern societies have no clear core or centre producing identities so what happens when this is magnified by the removal of boundaries when communities are required to respond and readjust. (1994). In the stories of the BRMR project we hear of the destabilisation of identity in terms of what it means to be a CRN or PUL. As I highlighted previously the findings of the *Operational Programme for Peace III* 2006, suggests some groups felt marginalised, excluded or 'othered' and negative community relations were allowed to manifest as issues were not adequately addressed.

The Operational Programme for Peace III suggests many nationalists recount feelings of liberation when the militarised zones were decommissioned on the Border and they were able to travel freely around 'Ireland' without routine questioning and searches as they made the journey across the border. In stark contrast the Protestant community felt they had a safety net removed and this caused fear and anxiety as to what might follow. (2006: 16)

The militarised zone was a terrible inconvenience to daily routine and represented a place of danger in relation to the 'crossers' proximity to the British Armed Forces where an attack by paramilitaries was always a high possibility. The militarised zone was also a danger to military personnel while it represented a clear demarcation of the separate territories of United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland but they did not extend beyond several fields, and therefore were as symbolic of difference as they were tangible on the landscape. There was nothing secure about these installations as their status might suggest. They were vulnerable, exposed targets for attack and this presented a threat to the immediate community.

This sense of space and place is highlighted in *BRMR 2013*, where an interviewee gives an anonymous account suggesting that he thought "everyone across the border were aliens speaking a different language". In using this language he is explicitly representing how different he perceives our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland to be from Northerners. What remains in the present day

is unimpeded roads, an indistinct boundary line between two politically distinct ideologies as society enters a phase of self consciousness once more which encourages new choices and opportunities to reimagine the shared spaces and redefine the sense of 'other' as a result of the development of Peace and the current intransigence revolving around the UK exit from Europe. This same space is once again in the spotlight because of the destabilising nature of the recent UK referendum vote to leave Europe and the resulting and unanticipated implications it has had on the UK land border in Ireland.

Cashman argues that global transformation in the way we interact, participate and function has led to a 'crisis of identity' (2008: 17) in what Robins refers to as 'trans-nationalisation' of economic and cultural life. The ideologies in which people feel so secure, have been destabilised to the point where with each new development, socially, culturally and economically they must assess their ideal outcome of where they want to go, based on their 'starting position' of the past and the potential for a shared future. The problem is that society, instead of coming closer together, demonstrate signs of difference on a broad range of political issues which revolve around the cyclical nature of culture and identity presented as symbols and single identity narratives.

Demographic Analysis of BRMR Participants

Due to the relatively large number of participants in the study and the availability of the documentation I thought it would be interesting to explore the contributions in-depth in an attempt to understand the demographics which constitute participants, to explore noteworthy patterns in storytelling projects in border regions of Ireland. Geographical location, work, career, and age range of participants are some of the indicators which highlight markers of identity working in cross community projects. I felt that this could help inform targeting of participants for research in my own study.

The project engaged with people of various age groups from both sides of the border however the best represented age group on the Derry / Donegal border interviews is of those in the age band of

60-70 years old. This may suggest that this is an age group who are mobile and have the time to participate in this type of work for recreational and social activities. They are mainly retirees who have a willingness to participate in societal reconstruction and active citizenship adding value to the project, one encounter at a time. The second largest participating age group is those in the 70-80 year old band. These people are well into retirement but based on their lived experience and the perceived wisdom that comes with longevity, they have a vital contribution to make in sharing their experience of the past, in the hope that future generations will learn something from them but that they also preserve a little of themselves as a virtual self connected to this time and place. Forty - Fifty year olds make up the smallest denomination of contributors to the project in the Derry / Donegal interviews with nine percent participation overall. This figure represents the working population suggesting responsibilities get in the way of participating in recreational and social projects of this nature. Participants may also feel they have nothing to say on the issue of closed roads or smuggling except to share secondary stories of others that they have heard recounted at family gatherings, but have no personal agency with the narrative or experience. Younger participants would not have experienced the period of 'smuggling' during the war and if the project is set up to frame these stories then the older generations are going to be most sought after participants. The broad range of ages suggest that the facilitators wanted to talk about more contemporary matters, as indeed they did in some cases, but that the smuggling and closed roads anecdotes were a gentle way to settle and engage interviewees. This may have impacted on the participation in terms of individuals ruling themselves out. I was raised on the Derry / Donegal border and have much agency in the narrative however I have always thought that others, such as older generations have more important narratives of the closed roads for purposes of storytelling which become 'official accounts' and therefore I would not personally come forward and participate due to my own perceived limitations. The misconception is not believing a story is worth telling considering that others have likely suffered much more extensively. This is a pattern that has become much clearer over the course of researching post-conflict storytelling projects in general regardless of the demographic of participants. Many participants feel guilty for expressing their

realities when others have arguably suffered more and have not had the same opportunity for participation and acknowledgement.

These cross community projects provide an opportunity to approach the future by learning from the past, reaching out to unknown neighbours on a basic human level of social exchange. They aim to begin a process of reconciliation, restructuring and re-evaluating the society that must be shared in future. However there is limited scope for change if participants do not meet and actively engage with each other.

The most apparent statistic that I discovered in BRMR project is the gender imbalance in the Derry / Donegal interviews of the participants. Male participation in this region was 78% while female participation was much lower at 22%. This may be due to the open recruitment policy instead of targeted sub groups of border communities which would provide much more balance to the project.

At the publishing launch of the BRMR project I met several female storytellers who were charming and accomplished communicators yet had no desire to go on camera and share their experience for the project. Their stories were represented in the project, but told in a much more factual manner by close relatives who were unintimidated by the camera, but had less agency in the narrative. For these participants there was much more of a social aspect to the project apparent at the launch which might indicate an interest in listening and less for participation around this particular narrative. A look at the overall female participation of the project shows much better figures of representation with participation of gender at a ratio of 2:1 in favour of males.

Topics discussed by Participants

Throughout the interviews contributors may have spoken about one specific topic on the issue of road closure for the duration of their interview or give a much more general account of lived border experience reflecting and sharing stories. In the Derry / Donegal interviews I have identified 18 individual topics that are raised among the participants. The top 5 topics are in ascending order were smuggling; of which the participants were specifically asked when they did not choose to elaborate on other areas. Religion and RUC / Army Checkpoints; both topics share the second highest area of focus as participants would situate their experience of the border in relation to these issues. Road closure is not the most talked about topic among participants even though the project is framed on road closure. Murder and fearing for life was high on the agenda of participants as many of the participants of this area of the study worked for the state, in either the UK or Irish public sector. Republicanism and emigration share the fifth most popular topic of interest among participants.

These stories are the offerings of the participant storytellers / interviewees drawn by the project interviewer in the final process of documentation of the project. The interviewer would generally steer participants to think about the effects of the closed / unapproved roads and then allow the teller to take the story in any direction they wanted. This meant that while some would describe smuggling at the Border, they took the opportunity to discuss and go into the wider ramifications of the closures and how their lives were affected personally as a result of the conflict.

Unfortunately limited editing and review of the work seems to have taken place in the post production stage as there was content produced initially on the website which may have left some of the participants in a vulnerable and exposed state. One participant who withheld their identity was named in the recording by the interviewer and not removed in post production. Unlike the Ardoyne Commemoration project which gave participants full control of their submissions before during and at the conclusion of the project which resulted in the publication of a book. They could

take part in the project but did not have to be published. They could change their stories up until the end of the project. This work, in order to be meaningful needs to be in the control of the participants and requires time to establish and develop. Contributors must have ownership of the material and the process.

Occupations of Participants

Forty six percent of the participants in the Derry / Donegal area chose not to disclose their line of work in the study. Forty one percent of the participants who disclosed their employment details to facilitate the telling of their story worked for the state which is going to have an impact on the stories told and how they are constructed by the participant and shared. The narrative of each depends essentially on the roles they played in society in direct relation to the border.

The top 5 positions are in order from 1-5, 1- Undisclosed, 2- Garda, 3- Teacher, 4- Civil Servant, 5- Customs Officer. Twenty eight percent of participants in the study worked in jobs where the border was prevalent in their everyday encounters so this sets a particular context and frame for their individual stories. Some of the contributors were 'insiders'. They had access to the 'backstage' areas of the border and yet their experiences recounted in this project don't reflect the access they had. The lack of willingness to depict stories which might give some real insight to the past maybe due to underdeveloped community engagement. I have listed paramilitary as an occupation as this is the marker of identity offered by one participant as a lead in to his story, a man who gave 20 years of his life to the organisation and whom was jailed at the height of the troubles for his participation in Loyalist paramilitary activity.

As a member of the general public and border dweller, my experience of the border represented a point of regulation as it performed its function in response to the political climate operating in a front stage space. This group of participants had access to the back stage space of the border, the inside track, yet did not give any real insight to how the space functioned as a backstage

performance space, or how or whom they considered 'other', and referred to it only in general terms. They set out to highlight stories about lived experience on the border and they have successfully fulfilled that objective. There may be an issue on the part of the organisers as to a lack of understanding for whom the work is being produced, and the unknown future audience in the form of visitors to the web archive produced specifically for the project. In work of this nature it must be argued that the work is being produced solely for each participant and when the work is put together it can take on extra significance when each member of an audience applies their own layers and levels of meaning to the output.

Farming is underrepresented on the Derry / Donegal Border interviews as there is only one detailed, eloquent account of a man in his late eighties who speaks with clarity and directness, sharing accounts of exporting and importing from one field to the next, taking in a four mile journey, a two hour delay at Customs & Excise, and working in two different countries separated by a fence in his fields. He elaborated on many processes undertaken by farmers once the land separation had taken place yet this is one detailed account which could not represent the meta-narrative for farmers who traded on the border and between states as it is only one perspective of the story. However the man's presentation had many recognisable elements of story possibly due to his experience of communicating as an octogenarian and possibly too old to care what people think of him or his story. He presented as a man with great experience who had a story to tell and for the audience, one worth listening to. It contained struggle and hardship but above all was a love story of how he met and shared a life with his late wife. When I claim it was authentic, I am acknowledging the air of sincerity at which this man told his story. Alex Neil suggests that "Authenticity is not about actual recovery, what one says or how one feels, but the ability to be in the moment and tell the story in a manner that is sincere and true to his or her self" (2015:online).

The participants who presented anonymous accounts, only referring to their location on the border region offered some of the most compelling stories. From the vantage point of protected identity, the teller has a freedom to express their truth. One woman expresses herself freely in her telling

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and as a result is unconscious of her performance. The listener can sense her terror as she remembers the difficult times. The woman in her mind goes right back to events of the past and takes the listener with her. The ex-UVF man who found freedom and voice through protected identity told a very colourful, detailed story about his experience of the border and the wider conflict. There are difficult truths contained in these anonymous accounts, with the emphasis on the story, the experience and not the teller.

The project set out as a storytelling project which would give people their voice and begin a process of reconciliation. I have discovered that it is through the form of anonymous story presentation that the truth and realities of the experiences of border dwellers can begin to be uncovered. By removing the self from the finished story in terms of appearance, frees up the ideological identity and the stories become central, some painful, harrowing, funny but experience foregrounded and reimagined, remembered and understood on human terms. Anonymity in this project was the one factor which enabled participants to find their voice.

The act of revealing identity in these studies could potentially be the fundamental barrier to knowledge and understanding sought by the peace and reconciliation groups. After decades of conflict the public, the survivors, and the victims seek truth. If identity is no longer a factor in participation of a truth process then people may feel less anxious about providing their truthful and authentic testimony on their role during conflict and participate in research which could sow the seeds of tolerance, understanding, societal reconstruction and potential reconciliation. Through speech and other signs and cultural markers, the identity of an individual is not difficult to assign but it seems ingrained within us to seek out those signs and look for the difference.

It is clear that there is a form of micro reconciliation by participating in cross community projects. Participants were largely self selecting in this process which may influence the outcome. Possibly there is not enough participation from within the individual community groups to get a broad

enough understanding of the issues that affected community life in the past and going into the future.

McCone 1998, Becheffer 1999, Kiely 2001, state that “identity has to do with claims rather than fixed descriptions to be read off demographic characteristics” However through demographic analysis it is possible to get an understanding of multiple streams of data specific to projects and the findings can provide indicators of what works in communities in conflict when they are called to ‘imagine, construct, negotiate and revise’ (2003) as well as highlight the areas that need to be addressed in order to learn from studies and practice of the past.

Lessons from BRMR

There is no doubt there is much to be learned in terms of factual representation of the artefacts and memories that BRMR contains. Its value lies in understanding how Ireland malfunctioned during the decades of unrest for academics and school children in the future. The project has been recently added to Ulster University’s *Accounts of the Conflict* archive for the purpose of preservation. The content of *Border Roads to Memories* could be referred to as authentic and sincere, untreated accounts of the conflict and regardless of preparation of the stories and the presentation of the work, the project will only ever be a partial contribution to the story anyway. All that exists is fragments of multiple truths that could help to shape and make sense of the past in order to begin to negotiate the restructuring of a shared society with understanding the ‘other’ at the foundation of such new beginnings. This raises an issue over the importance of documentation and process. For my work as Researcher / Facilitator the process is the fundamental consideration as I wish to pursue change and positive development for participants in my projects both in terms of how they relate to one another and in the skills they learn.

The research team in pursuit of inclusivity opened the doors to the project and anyone willing to participate features as a contributor in the final output. This is one area that will help me focus my own study in terms of what groups I approach to engage in a much more involved process of Digital Storytelling. The stories in the end should be the focal point of the project for the audience and not be so aware of the tellers heightened levels of self-consciousness when narrating an account or experience of the border, or answering questions, a more accurate description of the process. Questions could have been the reserve of a story circle process available to participants only so there is a chance to rehearse and edit the story and then begin to present in a way that one feels comfortable in what they are saying and confident in the manner they say it. The participants as part of the workshop process should have become habituated to the documenting technology and process of presenting stories in front of a camera but this takes time and patience on part of both the participants and organisers. It is only with time that this type of work can be allowed to develop and reach its natural conclusions

Much of the analysis undertaken of the BRMR project helped me develop and focus my own Participatory Action Research. I identified the age bands of potential participants, a multi generational approach, using targeted sub groups within the communities. The analysis also showed me that 'Closed Roads' mean many different things to the individual participants. Some literally speak of the closed roads no clearer than the Coshquin farmer, Mr Crockett. Others think of the closed roads as a consequence or a metaphor of a much broader issue and I was able to identify through this small test case the real topics of interest to border dwellers, of what they might speak freely when they are asked about 'closed roads'. This allowed me to frame my DS study in a particular way that allows people to fully understand the process they are engaging with, the questions being asked and the time required of them in order to develop individual stories which represent the individual, the community and the space, leaving no room for misrepresentation or 'ventriloquism'. (Maguire 2015)

In the process of withholding the identity of participants, the focus shifts back to the story and the natural ability of each participant comes to the fore making experience as empathetic as it is exciting or devastating. The recent government consultation on the past (2018) suggests an Oral History Archive to which everyone can contribute and which will be managed by PRONI in order to begin to address the issues of the past in a time frame which allows society to reflect and move forward.

In a further bid to analyse participation of *Border Roads to Memories project*, it was necessary to explore the other geographical border areas in which the researchers engaged. Across the project there is more of a gender balance. For every two men involved in the project one woman is represented. However forty seven percent of female participants chose to withhold their identity as opposed to men who were more strongly represented on the project and much more visible. Only sixteen percent of the overall total male participants chose to withhold their identity. When they did it was due to the explicit content of their narratives. They had the desire to share their experience unfiltered, but did not want to be recognised for the role they played during the conflict. In my experience many ex-paramilitaries have the desire to share their story and document their experience, but do not necessarily want to offend or traumatise victims by dredging up the past.

This gives rise to questions about broader ownership of the story of the Border in Ireland. What was the role of women during the conflict? Many academics have addressed this question such as Ward (2004) in her essay 'Its not just tea and buns: Women and Pro Union Politics in Northern Ireland; McDowell (2008) in *Commemorating dead men: gendering the past and present in post-conflict Northern Ireland*; And in Dowler (1998) 'They think I'm just a nice old lady : Women and War in Northern Ireland. In all the storytelling projects I have researched women appear to demonstrate more restraint when addressing issues of the past and it is in this instance that as viewer there is a privilege being invited to share in such a public way, what is very personal and private. When a women speaks in the project there is a overwhelming sense of 'breaking the silence' in what is a publicly male dominated narrative.

Four men concealed their identity due to that nature of what they were discussing which normally involves someone close being killed in the trouble or family involvement in the 'struggle' and the problems that were endured as a result. As this is not an official truth process with amnesty for participants, I can only conclude that these men still feel there could be retaliation for their sharing with the project either from their own community circle or from the 'other side'.

The issue that kept recurring in this project is the limited input of the participants in terms of developing and workshopping stories and variations of their presentation as there is clearly a production team who collect the stories. The biggest stumbling block was the ability of the participants to communicate their story in a way that is natural and engaging. As Chilsen 2014 argues the "creation process enables deeper, more authentic learning, allows us to communicate more effectively, to self assess more reflectively and to thrive in a screen based world" (2014: 1). Chilsen further notes that "It is through the process of mediation that learners develop cooperative skills, to enhance problem solving and to participate in cultural and social processes as capable engaged interpreters" (2014: 3).

Border Road to Memories is a memory project rather than a storytelling project. The participants were present on the border during their retelling so there is an inherent immediacy in what they recall and in the case of the accounts of withheld identity there is an intimacy apparent in the telling. The issue of border roads no longer endures in the wider public psyche so there is an element of filling in the blanks on part of the participant for the audience.

Chilsen points out that the "more personal someone is on screen, the more drawn in the viewer seems to be" (2014: 4). This is also true of the accounts of withheld identity. When the participant is visually absent on screen and we can only hear their voice there is a vibrant authenticity, a freedom which the listener can perceive in the telling. The participant is not visible yet their voice resonates above the rest because of the explicit nature of their experience and the way in which

they frame it, without fear. They are protected in their own mind from any repercussions of the telling and are enabled to speak with more freedom about sensitive issues.

Many of the participants who are visible on screen lack any sense of ownership of their story and find it difficult to tell their story within the frame proposed by the Border Roads to Memories project. There is an apparent inaccuracy of representation. Some interviewees do not look comfortable in the situation in which they find themselves regardless of being in a familiar place such as their own front room. They had no time to acclimatise to this version of the telling. Ousler suggests presence arises between the constituent elements and the viewers investment in action (1997:151).

When one is consumed with the teller and not the telling, a fundamental oversight has occurred in the process.

Contemporary Community based Narrative Practice

The act of sharing through telling and listening to stories of a different perspective from single identity groups as well as cross cultural groups creates a platform where human qualities of empathy, humility and understanding prevail. Cashman suggests that the act of storytelling enables participants to share stories which “relay beliefs, values and norms, especially those that appeal to the authority of tradition which provide powerful rhetorical tools in construction, maintenance and revision of individual and group identities” (2008: 3) This project has more emphasis on spontaneous memory than structured story, scratching the surface of communicative memory where participants respond to the questions of the interviewer. Ousler suggests that “DS engages with performance and presence in ways that articulate and test relations between experience, identity and media forms” (1997: 150). There was no apparent knowledge exchange as such between interviewer and subject and the project has the feel of something which is done on participants rather than by them. Lundy and McGovern (2006) assert that “people always screen what they say and whatever advantages arise from inside access need also to be seen in this light”. It is imperative that the facilitator stimulates and supports the participant in what

Edwards refers to as 'co-generative dialogue' (1995) The interviewer on BRMR, while not basing their practice on the work of Pilar Riano Alcala (2012) 'uses simple words and phrases while conveying interest and respect but refers to objective facts and repeatedly fails to draw participants on speaking about themselves and their feelings'. The result is much more akin to 'Labovian narratives'; in answer to a single interview question which in pursuit of understanding and dealing with amateur storytellers does not provide scope for opening and delving into the memory bank of the participant only succeeding to extract vague and restrained answers (2005: 1). One would expect the workshop process to contribute to the excavation and development of stories enabling more investment in the telling or performance of the story and to develop ownership of the material and craft on the part of the teller before recording the contribution. Lee and Renzetti (1993) refer to 'the sensitive nature of delving into deep personal experience relating to issues of deviance and social control' and this may have been a contributing factor for the answers participants offered on the BRMR project. It has the traits of a thematic analyses in its identification of a general cultural story, (smuggling) and seeking to explore how that shaped experience, while hoping to unearth deeper insights where they might have just asked more difficult questions. However this takes time. All projects have their limiting factors and arguably the *Latton Social Services and Development Ltd* attempted to cover much ground in a short space of time producing 170 interviews from 37 workshops in 18 months with a small team. The output looks like the main purpose for the project as opposed to the process of reconnecting people within these geographical locations and beginning to re-establish some sense of shared community.

Digital Storytelling is a visual medium which allows for relative anonymity on the part of the teller which should mean they have much more freedom of expression through voice and imagery. In the process of DS the emphasis is on the telling which constitutes a mixture of structural analysis adhering to the basic ingredients of narrative structure outlined by Labov addressing abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and performance analysis. (1982) This is explained by Reissman (2003) as a performance 'by a self with a past with vested presentations of self'. Radley and Taylor suggest the "integration of the visual through film and photography with the

spoken narrative represents an innovative contemporary turn” (2005: 6) The style of presentation heightens what Darcy Alexandra refers to as the ‘evocative centrality of the spoken voice’ (2008,104) making ground for potential submissions to be informative, intriguing, full of danger and tension to some listeners as they are comforting and consoling to others.

Conclusion

The markers of identity in this project are limited to generalisations about one side or another from narrators. Participants define themselves by the societal roles they played during the road closures. Their perception of self relates largely to professional roles fulfilled in their careers and the ideas they held, indicated at times through the individual accounts.

The Border Roads to Memories Project team refers to the participants of this study as victims and bids to help them see themselves in this light. From the perspective of an engaged audience member I see the participants as survivors with a story worth telling if presented with a more detailed process of engagement. There is no doubt that the levels of suffering were different for every individual. They are victims; a great majority are victims of circumstance. They were implicated directly or indirectly and they survived, so what is it that we can we learn about them and from them to protect future generations from ever deteriorating into the same disorder and chaos. The border story requires much deeper penetration framed as the border story and not the border story in relation to closed roads and anecdotes; it requires free thinking participants with equal gender representation and no bias toward old over young. When you share experience with others, through the telling you generally learn something about yourself. It is my view that participants in this case study were too self aware and unprepared for the process of answering the unseen audience. Yet we learn a great deal from the experience as viewer regardless of the fact that participation did not develop the individual through knowledge exchange or create new communities among the participants.

WAVE Trauma Centre- *Stories from Silence* - 2013 - 2016

A Case Study

WAVE Trauma Centre Background

WAVE Trauma Centre was formed in 1991 to support the families and spouse of those bereaved by the conflict in Northern Ireland and later expanded to include children and young people as well as those injured as a result of the 'Troubles'. WAVE currently operates five regional centres across the province enabling them to provide support in areas where it is most required. Due to the location of my practice I understood that no matter the age demographic, I would encounter individuals who have suffered in the most extreme ways as a result of the violence. Through the in-depth study of their stories we can better understand the experience of victims and how they articulate their experience comparatively with other community sub groups while at the same time acknowledging their suffering and loss by making time to listen to their stories.

Stories from Silence was a project developed and delivered in three phases by *Wave Trauma Centre* collecting stories from individuals whom have experienced the trauma of the 'Troubles' first hand through the loss of loved ones. The participants describe in great detail their pain, loss and in some cases their individual coping strategies for survival. Many stories refer to the horror of the past and how that cycle of suffering continues in families through trans-generational suffering. Many contributors highlight the effects of a lack of truth or justice where they still have no answers to outstanding questions relating to their injury and loss. The project co-ordinator, Alan McBride suggests that, "Victims and survivors are told by politicians almost daily that their needs must be at the centre of any attempt to take us forward. The reality is that they have seen precious little acknowledgement or recognition of what happened to them and the effect it had. These powerful testimonies literally give victims and survivors a voice to reaffirm their humanity" (2015: online)

With an emphasis on speaking out, sharing and arguably most importantly listening, *Wave Trauma Centre* and other voluntary organisations are giving individuals a platform to present their own subjective truths about traumatic experiences, working in communities which have felt the full force of the conflict and still attempting to negotiate a way beyond the intransigent ideological positions demonstrated by both sides of the community. The community need a real sense of agency in the work in order to invest in it fully.

Isabel Cordero suggests that;

peace building has to do with constructing alternative local development models that not only focus on deactivating political and social violence and its consequences but also and more importantly on preventing violence by addressing the structural, economic, social, political and cultural inequities that favour its development. A viable model is one likely proposed by the vulnerable who understand violence from the ground up (2001: 162).

The work needs to impact on the lives of participants in a meaningful way if it is to have some lasting legacy. Engagement should enable participants to find their place once more in society stemming from a process which is deeply considered, reflective and difficult, but which is supported through networks of community which relies on physical real life encounters.

Legacy of 'The Troubles' - Trans-generational trauma

The need for organisations within the community such as WAVE Trauma Centre is great to help people adjust and cope with trauma sustained through conflict. I will briefly highlight their significance by providing some background to the broader issues which keep many individuals trapped in a cycle of trauma.

As the population ages, the critical memory of the 'Troubles' is rapidly declining and all communities need an equal platform to tell their story. Everyone from victims, survivors, urban and rural communities, perpetrators and security forces have a story to tell. Sometimes due to self imposed restrictions, or having never been asked about their experience, individuals have been inadvertently silenced. They have been presented with no formal opportunity to publicly or at least collectively address their enduring hardships suffered as a result of the protracted conflict. An agreed position for dealing with legacy issues in Northern Ireland at government level has at the time of writing, yet to be reached and as a result there is a sense of societal intransigence. While the sectarian violence has largely ceased between communities in Northern Ireland there is still a lack of understanding among her people around the suffering endured considering its long term impact on individuals, families and communities.

There can be a lack of engagement within communities for multiple reasons such as a fear of speaking out of turn, or thinking that one persons suffering is not as valid as another. Participating in storytelling practice not only highlights the dangers of returning to the past but also gives each individual a sense of public acknowledgement of their personal struggle.

While aiming to avoid exaggeration in the potential for the use of story Papadopolous determines; "the healing of painful experiences due to atrocities may not lie in devising sophisticated therapeutic techniques but to return to more traditional forms of healing based on assisting people to develop appropriate narratives.[...] the healing effect of storytelling, in its multiple variations has always been a well known phenomenon" (1998:472). Levels of healing for participants are not apparent and therefore unmeasurable, however the healing effect can begin by talking and sharing with people who have similar experience, by opening up and have another person acknowledge the pain and suffering. As one participant in the Ardoyne community project (1998-2002) described, "if you are going to have any healing you have to get some expression of truth even if it is only my truth. It doesn't have to be your truth or shared truth. Before any healing takes place I

have to believe that someone has heard my story and if they have not then I am not going to let go” (2006: 83).

The vulnerability of participants becomes more concentrated in the context of stories of conflict. Individuals share their darkest, most painful experiences as victims, witnesses and perpetrators of violence unveiled and retold for a public audience. Their stories, evidenced in the broad range of projects highlighted in this thesis, shine a light on the humiliation, anger, fear and frustration of the most horrific episodes of their lived experience, however fractured and fragmented. One example to highlight this point is offered by Kay Green who participated on the *Smashing Times series* produced by *The Memory Project*. Green refers in her account to the experience of finding out her brother was killed on Bloody Sunday suggesting ‘when people tell their stories they are reliving the experience, ducking and diving during recounts of the flying bullets’. Green goes further to discuss the importance of sharing a story regardless of the difficulty suggesting that “nobody has the monopoly on the story or the suffering, that it is a privilege to hear and share in the stories and that she finds listening the most important aspect of storytelling’. (2017:online) Charlie McMenamin also participated in *Smashing Times* states that “And today to me, seeing some of what Kay said as well.....is..... I relive it, I relive it every time I hear it, and I relive their.....the pain that I've heard them talk about in the past, every time I hear it”, in his direct response to listening to individuals recount stories of Bloody Sunday in the public fora (date: online). It is apparent that through storytelling, survivors feel they have been listened to, they have been able to express their pain and understand that their experience and loss is not part of a hierarchy of suffering but that their experience of loss is personal and unique.

Closure for individuals, families and communities is a much bigger challenge and individuals will to a greater or lesser extent manage their pain and suffering by developing a sense of acceptance and building resilience to the pain of suffering through the way they go about their daily lives. However many victims are suppressing the pain in various ways which facilitates its endurance.

For both communities to make the required transition from intransigence to reciprocal relations they require a suitable vehicle for disclosure on all sides which is acceptable to all sides and can address as much of the hurt as possible, personal and collective, otherwise there is a perpetual cycle of contumacy. This is a crucial aspect in preventing or limiting further trans-generational suffering. Trans-generational suffering is passing on the hurt and burden of pain to younger members of the family and subsequent generations of the community where conflict manifests once more and becomes a permanent feature of society, one which is complex to negotiate, yet realised in different guises through time with the same devastating and debilitating consequences.

A report by Hanna et al (2012) for the *Commission of Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland*, refers to the difficulty in defining what is meant by trans-generational trauma but aims to highlight how trauma and the impact of trauma can be transmitted to subsequent generations. The report suggests “the children of those who experienced traumatic events sometimes experienced high levels of poor psychological functioning however [...] this link is neither direct or automatic but may depend more on parental reactions to the experience of the trauma” (2012: 6) This is evidenced in the work of Kellermen (2001) with an emphasis on the Holocaust during the Second World War.

Kellermen developed a model of trauma transmission which included four elements;

The Psychodynamic (transmission via unconscious displaced parental emotions;

The Sociocultural (parenting and role models inadequate behaviour;

Family Systems - family enmeshment - survivor as tight units with limited contact beyond survivor community; Biological (hereditary vulnerability to PTSD with specific mitigating and aggregating circumstances.

The ‘Psychodynamic’ suggests that unconscious parental emotions affect children and families due to the inability to deal with the past, through suppression of feelings or anger. The ‘Sociocultural’ indicates that parents and role models adopt inadequate behaviour and this can range from alcohol and drug misuse, to the extreme where individuals struggle to cope with the past and suicide becomes an issue within the family. Kellermen recommends social support outside of the

immediate family in order to facilitate the process of reconnecting with the past and each other.

One set back of these findings are that they “focus on the family environment and less on the community” (2014: 21). Storytelling projects present an opportunity for families to re-engage with each other, while reaching out to those with similar experience, all through the support of an intermediary body or group such as *Healing Through Remembering* or *WAVE Trauma Centre*.

There have been many groups which have on a relatively small scale produced excellent results in the context of storytelling and conflict such as *WAVE Trauma Centre / Healing Through Remembering (HTR)* / *Prison Memory Archives (PMA)* and the *Warrington Peace Centre*. All these agencies have worked with victims, survivors and perpetrators highlighting the importance of community building and outreach opportunities for future generations. The stories become a form of public acknowledgement of individual and community suffering.

Post-conflict Ireland has struggled to deal with the legacy of the ‘Troubles’ and in a recent Northern Ireland Office (NIO) public consultation and subsequent findings, (2018-19) it has once again been recommended that storytelling and an oral archive be created for the purpose of acknowledgement of those who have suffered as a result of the conflict. It is vital to include everyone in this process including perpetrators of violence. Atkinson and Silverman highlight the therapeutic nature of the confessional voice as a biographical device. They state that;

The narrative is therapeutic not only for the teller but also for the audience. Viewing, hearing or reading a confessional interview invites complicity with the penetration of the private self [...] it displays the emergence of a true self that escapes the bonds of private reticence. Reminiscence incorporates past experience into present performance [and] integrates the selves of memory into an essential and timeless self (1997: 313).

How far perpetrators of violence want to go down the road of reconciliation and conflict transformation remains to be seen, but by engaging as families and individuals among single identity groups, society can get a better understanding of the complex issues which have not been resolved with the signing of the *Good Friday / Belfast Agreement*, (1998) and this can become an

entry point for widening participation and addressing concerns and needs of individuals and communities.

Issues of recording and documenting stories and testimony among certain sub groups in Northern Ireland are based on complete mistrust of the media as highlighted in the *Ardoyne Commemoration Project* (2002) but also of the British government, viewed by Republicanism in particular as a protagonist in the conflict. The failure to address issues of legacy such as acknowledgement, justice and compensation continues to fracture families and the prolonged suffering can have a negative impact on the mental health and general wellbeing of victims and survivors. A report by Queens University in 2012 commissioned by the *Commission for Victims and Survivors* stated “Regardless of any strict classification that maybe placed on trans-generational trauma, there does seem to be a growing body of evidence that trauma experienced by individuals can affect their children and grandchildren even when these generations have not experienced any of the initial traumatic experience themselves” (Hanna et al, 2012: 12). The 2012 report also highlighted that the co-occurrence of psychological disorders between traumatised parent and child is not due to their genetic link but to maladaptive parental behaviour as a consequence of the trauma” Professor Siobhan O’Neill was commissioned by the Commission for Victims and Survivors, to lead a study exploring 4 key areas;

- The trans-generational impact of the Conflict / Troubles in terms of mental health;
- The relationship between the conflict-legacy and suicide;
- The effects on early years’ development;
- A review of service provision addressing the trans-generational impact on mental health and wellbeing, with a view to making recommendations for future service provision.

O’Neill states: “There has been a significant rise in the number of suicides in post-Agreement (1998) Northern Ireland. For example, in 2013, 303 suicides (and undetermined deaths) were registered in Northern Ireland compared to 144 a decade earlier” (2015: 70) The report concluded that “the mental health difficulties of at least half of the remaining 28.5% appear to be directly

related to the Troubles. Based on an adult population figure of 1.5 million, this equates to around 213,000 adults” (2015). *The Victims and Survivor Service* response to the *NIO Legacy consultation* 2018 highlights a summary of recommendations and the focus on the individual is at the heart of the process. They also recommend engagement and partnership between stakeholders, victims/ survivors and perpetrators and integration between practice across disciplines and most importantly integration in the community. DS is one of many available options of applied practice which could potentially facilitate considerable levels of engagement and collaboration for participants enabling understanding through effective communication practices.

Deane underscores the issue stating that

Whether intentionally or not, the effects of violent experiences of adults can be passed on to subsequent generations. [...] individuals within families may live in close proximity to one another but are frequently unable to discuss openly what has happened to them using denial and silence as a defence against the horror of their loss (1997: 165).

Becker states that ‘Support for those experiencing trauma (PTSD) as a result of the conflict should not be limited to one approach, that is, treated as a mental health problem detached from its political and social reality’. He suggests that; ‘of equal or greater importance is societies’ acknowledgement of what has happened. In this way extreme suffering of individuals can be shared and collectively contained’ (2013: 4). Becker continues that ‘for many who have suffered bereavement or injury as a result of the Troubles, acknowledgement is as important as truth or justice, in the process of recovering some sense of health and well being’ (2013: 3).

Brison argues that by

[...] narrating memories to others enables survivors to gain more control over the traces left by trauma. Narrative memory is not passively endured; rather it is an act on the narrator, a speech act that diffuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to

events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling and helping the survivor to remake a self” (2003: 71).

Many participants describe the notion of ‘learning to live with it, but never getting over it’ in their own unique ways. It is human nature to seek closure to catastrophic events which occur in our lives no more so than when suffering a bereavement. Society has avoided thus far looking back and properly addressing the hurt because of the difficulty involved and victims and survivors argue quite bluntly that they have been neglected. They yearn for closure but this is not possible so it is important to seek something alternative that allows them to live again.

As Grosz points out, “In the 1960’s Kubler-Ross identified five psychological stages in the experience of terminally ill patients with the last stage being acceptance” (2013: 208) and practitioners and counsellors have attempted to apply this model to individuals suffering from grief as a result of violence and subsequent trauma. The problem with the five psychological stages for the terminally ill (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) is that when a terminally ill patient dies, their closure comes as they can no longer experience anguish or pain. However this is not the case for those who suffer from the loss of a child, a parent or friend. Grief has a tendency to ebb and flow and when anniversaries occur, or when people visit places which have personal resonance through the memories and stories created there, grief can suddenly return and overwhelm the senses. Bereavement Counsellors tend to promise that closure comes, at different times for different people but Grosz concludes that it [closure] is an; “extraordinarily compelling fantasy of mourning. It is the fiction that we can love, lose, suffer and then do something to permanently end our sorrow. We want to believe we can reach closure because grief can surprise and disorder us - even years after our loss [...] it is the false hope that closure can deaden our living grief” (2013: 209)

Stories from Silence

The *Stories from Silence* project consists of multiple episodes within three separate series at the time of writing including, *Loss of a Parent*, *Loss of a Child* and *Senior Stories*.

Wave have categorised this work as online storytelling with a dedicated website hosting the sound files which are also alternatively available on 'SoundCloud'. The participants in *Stories from Silence* have lived with their suffering so their investment in the telling needs much less conscious effort as they have embodied knowledge and they are being asked about a very specific experience. It is not possible for the public to add to the archive in its current form and the work has been created, compiled and completed by a group of professionals with a background in Journalism and broadcast media. The project features a range of victims and survivors across its three series, made up of people whom have suffered devastating violence resulting in a deeply traumatic experience. Some have suffered at the hands of paramilitaries and others by state forces. *The Victim and Survivor Service* (VSS) points out that; "As N.Ireland continues to make the transition from violent conflict to peaceful democracy, we believe it is important that these stories are not lost. They highlight the human cost of the conflict and insist that the atrocities like this should never be carried out again" (storiesfromsilence.com)

Wave Trauma Centre conceived and delivered this project by recruiting participants through regional partners including *Relatives for Justice* (RFJ), *Families Acting for Innocent Relatives* (FAIR) and *The Pat Finucane Centre*. The interviews were carried out by two experienced broadcast journalists and writers; Laura Haydon, a BBC reporter and Independent Producer and Susan McKay, former editor of the 'Sunday Tribune'. The editing work was carried out by John Hyland and George Row and the website was produced by Peter Kingston.

Like the most accessible of media based storytelling projects, the work has a recognisable form in that stories are packaged and structured consistently. Each piece is 4 minutes in duration, getting

to the crux of the issue, regardless of the time spent between interviewer and participant, giving the listener a sense of a tightly edited collection, produced by professionals. It suggests that the producers have a keen sense of time in what they expect from their listeners, competing in a saturated virtual space for audience where people have a limited attention span. Duration of output is a prominent consideration of any media producer.

The audience are invited to listen to stories which are intimate and deeply personal which have rarely been shared publicly and which are now being explored at a much deeper level than that of a fleeting news feature in what was a 'Troubles' saturated news schedule.

The act of remembering and structuring a story which is often difficult to express, is part of the challenge to producers and they invite the general public to complete the cycle and engage with the material. As a result the process becomes an inclusive and participatory experience requiring action on all sides. J.L Austin defines 'performative utterances' as "the uttering of a sentence is, or is part of, the doing of an action, which would not normally be described as or as 'just' saying something" (1962: 5). In the case of traumatic testimony the action could be described as Brison suggests in "transforming traumatic memory into narrative memory or as recovery or remaking the self" (2003: 72). This requires acceptance of past events which then become layered with new experience and should present opportunities for personal growth.

Through articulation and freedom of self expression the participants in *Stories from Silence* confront the listener with the blunt and harsh reality of extreme violence. The stories rely on the power of the voice of the teller to draw the listener in, however they also draw on the skills of a very talented Post Production Editor who becomes the translator and pace maker, deciding what makes the 4 minute cut and what falls on the cutting room floor. Third parties make editorial choices on behalf of participants.

Stories from Silence differs in many ways to the *PMA* project where no limits are imposed on the storyteller in terms of time, and the camera operator becomes complicit in the telling through the use of the camera, in how the frame is composed, and how the narrator is positioned in relation to the environment and the story being told. Due to the form and presentation style of *PMA* the viewer is confronted with former infamous sites of conflict and protest, sites which are deteriorated and abandoned yet act as a memory repository for participant storytellers. Participants move through the place at their own pace creating and reimagining, curating their memories in the moment in response to the multiple stimuli, in terms of sight, sound, smell, atmosphere. This is an interesting process as they are confronted with the present in relation to the past and part of their impromptu performance considers the ways in which they make their narrative memories relevant for the viewer. The storyteller and the camera person work together in *PMA* in an unrehearsed yet responsive fashion. The camera operator does not impose on the story being told with contrived videography in an attempt to upstage the storyteller or enhance the story, but works with them to allow to the story to develop as it happens in a noninvasive manner.

In contrast to this approach in the work of *Border Roads to Memories and Reconciliation* (2013) the storytellers are placed in front of a camera yet they have not acclimatised to this process over a period of time and as a result they appear to be very self aware. In many cases they present as if they are working hard on the process of telling to an unknown audience, curating on the spot without stimuli for the senses. The consequences and impact of the road closures had no greater impact on these border residents than anyone else in the affected communities. This critique is not to invalidate the experience of the participants in this particular project but it highlighted to me the importance of something of value at stake for the teller in order for the story to appeal to the listener. *BRMR* participants were portrayed as victims by the organisers and yet it is clear many do not see themselves in this light. As previously highlighted *BRMR* producers placed no restriction on time and stories can be as long as 30 minutes or as short as 5 minutes. Without the stimulation of environment or objects and documents which activate the memory alongside a community of participants, the work becomes more 'vox' pop than participatory.

Storyteller and Stories

I have discovered that some producers place the emphasis on the storyteller and story being told while others have an intentional focus on the experience of the future audience through management of the material produced. My DS practice aims to strike a measured and balanced approach between both storyteller and listener as all participants engage in active listening as well as active telling. My work highlights the voice of the teller and their personal experience. It highlights the importance of the actual community in a physical space working together for a common goal. It takes time and there are many unforeseen challenges however It is essential to build trust and rapport with participants in order to facilitate knowledge exchange which is the trade off and central to the process.

It is important to explore some of the narratives on offer in the work of the *Stories from Silence* project which have been chosen as a sample representative of the project. *Loss of a Parent* series features two brothers who discuss the same traumatic experience placing emphasis on different aspects and outcomes of the subsequent trauma suffered as individuals and a family. This particular instance gives a very interesting insight into trauma and personal perspective as I will describe later in the chapter.

The *Loss of a Parent* series had ten female participants and eight male. The senior stories series consist of ten female participants and six male participants and the *Loss of a Child* series has seventeen female and ten male participants. This participatory demographic could be aiming to address the imbalance of conflict based narrative where it is largely a male driven one, but it could have incidentally underscored the notion that males are generally the perpetrators of conflict and the women are predominantly the victims of the conflict. Morrissey and Smyth argue “the victims issue in Northern Ireland is gendered. Over 90% of those killed were men. [...] Yet the feminisation of victimhood has been achieved partly by the role widows have played in the voluntary sector and

by media attention on female relatives. The 'Troubles' narrative is still predominantly male driven where stereotypically men *do* (noisily) and women *suffer (in silence)* (2002: 144).

The view that the general public and civic leadership has of victims can inflict harm, specifically the perception that all victims have the same desires and needs. The inability to manage such difficult circumstances and narratives creates a vacuum of abandonment and prolonged suffering. Through participation in Oral History projects all participants are acknowledging their personal struggle and in doing so having the acknowledgement reciprocated through the listener which breaks down the perceptions of victimhood and stereotype. Smith and Morrissey state,

Certain myths and stereotypes of those bereaved or injured in the troubles have developed during the period of the troubles [...] by the kind of media coverage given to tragic events. Stereotypes represent victims as grief stricken rather than angry, forgiving rather than blaming, innocent rather than guilty. [...] Their suffering was perceived as short term, reflecting the sound bite of media coverage that their situation attracted in the immediate aftermath of a Troubles related event. The proliferation of such events [...] meant that attention and space had to be made for the next tragedy that came along so the attention span was short (2002: 139-140).

Victimhood is something which can be assumed and can also be projected. Many 'victims' of the conflict have shunned the label and view themselves as survivors. The term victim suggests one has suffered and has not recovered. It has a very negative association. The term survivor suggests acknowledgement of the past traumatic experience and while closure may not be a realistic outcome, survivors come to accept and live with their circumstances.

Stories from Silence - Loss of a Parent

In the *Loss of a Parent* series, one contributor, Stella Robinson, describes the morning of her parents murder, both victims of the Enniskillen bomb along with nine other innocent people. The bomb was planted by the IRA to cause death and destruction to the security forces celebrating Remembrance Sunday on 11 November 1987 in the centre of the town. Ms Robinson recalls a vivid memory of the scene at the hospital when she was looking for her parents among the chaos in the aftermath of the attack. In the process of telling, it is clear that she is reliving the trauma as she remembers it. Her emotional account and delivery of her unique experience and response to the event captivate the listener from the offset. The grainy amateur footage which was broadcast around the world in the aftermath of the Enniskillen attack is the experience many viewers had of this particular atrocity. Ms Robinson puts the humanity into the story for listener as she provides perspective and context. Through her story the audience gets access to the inner sanctuary of her memory. In the process of telling she deconstructs the familiar meta-narrative and re-humanises the experience. She reimagines the lives of her parents, the places they would love to visit and things they liked to do together. She portrays the normality of her family and highlights that this could have been anyones parents, such was the risk of being innocently caught up in an attack at the time. She is reflective and deliberate in her delivery. What resonates is her claim that “grief is the price of love” and suggests because of how deeply she loved her parents and relied on them, even after 30 years, they are still very visible to her in the present. She encounters daily reminders and memories triggered by smells, sights and sounds which help her to remember and imagine her parents in the most positive way. It is also these same triggers which cause her to invariably relive the trauma by re-engaging with the harsh brutal memory of the manner in which they lost their lives. In participating in *Stories from Silence*, Ms Robinson has had her suffering acknowledged by sharing in a public manner, but she has not had either truth or justice as no one has ever been charged and held to account for the atrocity.

The *Belfast Telegraph* published a tribute on the 30th anniversary which documented some of the experience of survivors. Joan Anderson also lost both her parents in the Enniskillen bomb yet describes a very different approach to coping than Ms Robinson noting that 'you have to learn to live with it or else you become another victim and I refuse to be a victim [...] you heal to a point but its inside you and never leaves. Every day of my life I miss my parents'. (Belfast Telegraph: 2017) Aileen Quinton who also lost her mother suggests 'At the time it just felt too awful to be true and in many ways it still is. Im no more used to it. Its still awful and it still matters' (Belfast Telegraph: 2017).

As previously mentioned the brothers Thomas and Edward Brady participated in *Stories from Silence - Loss of a Parent* series and it was interesting to see how and what memories they focused on when sharing their personal view of the experience of losing their father during the conflict in Northern Ireland. Their father was shot by the British army in 1972 who claimed at the time, he was caught up in a gun battle. The Official IRA claimed Mr Brady as a member of their ranks to facilitate their media propaganda war and to underscore the notion that as a member of the community at the time you were either for or against the IRA. The family have always refuted the claim of any IRA involvement to their detriment as they were subsequently evicted from their home by the Republican movement in Belfast and found themselves homeless in England. When depicting what happened Thomas describes being treated like Protestants in their own estate which in effect meant that through their denials of the desired narrative of the IRA, the family were looked upon explicitly as 'other'.

As Irish citizens in England, Thomas and his family were repeatedly physically and verbally abused. They slept rough until their mother had a 'mental breakdown' and the children were taken into a convent in Wales before being 'adopted out to sick and dirty people'. Thomas suggests he complied with sexual abuse to protect his younger siblings. He reminds us that English people could not forgive or forget because of his Irish heritage. English people blamed all Irish people for the atrocities which were carried out by the Irish paramilitaries in the 1970's and 1980's such as

the Guilford, Birmingham and Brighton bombs on the British mainland. Several years later, once his mother had recuperated and after a legal challenge, the family reunited and returned to the estate in Belfast where they had been previously forced out. They were allocated a home yet it did not last long. This time the UVF were in control and his mother was tortured, held at gun point and forced to leave once more. Thomas points out that his family were abandoned by their own country and England didn't want them because they were Irish. They had no help from either side.

Throughout Thomas' story he refers to his mother and the importance she had for him and his siblings as the 'rock for the family'.

Edward is the brother of Thomas and also participated separately in the 'Loss of a Parent' series.

For several reasons I would suggest he is younger than Thomas. He has an English accent where Thomas has a Northern Irish accent suggesting he is the younger of the two. Thomas talks about protecting his younger brother and sister from abuse and Edward almost glances over the circumstances in Belfast where his father was murdered where his emphasis is on the experience in England. He was probably too young to remember the occurrence and knows nothing else but the traumatic and subsequent consequences.

His story begins describing himself as a child in England with 'no country, no parents and no home'. The mantra in England at the time was 'no blacks, no dogs and no Irish'. He was vilified and held to account for all the actions of the Republican movement and was viewed as 'Irish scum'. He was continuously made to feel he was guilty of something. When Thomas was older and got into trouble for petty crime and drugs he was punished twice; for the petty crime and also 'punished for what was written about his dad'. He describes the trauma of not knowing 'how to be a man or a father' and anything he had learned was from watching television. Edward 'hated white people seeing them all as English and army people'. He doesn't view England as home yet he wouldn't come back to Ireland as that is not considered home either. He describes his whole life as a secret and that he doesn't really know who he is with no records available on his father or himself as a child. Edward refers to the very 'heavy price he had to pay' for what happened to his dad and

harbours feelings of a chronic sense of injustice. Due to the unimaginable suffering in his life, Edward has lost his sense of self as a result of societal abandonment and dislocation. He has not successfully established roots of his own expressing no connection to the place he lives which supports the notion that identity and self are deeply connected to community, people and place.

The importance of a family and positive role models blended with a connection to place are central when considering identity and belonging. Unfortunately for Thomas his circumstances are exasperated in the cruel way his father was shot dead and the treatment that followed in a place he wasn't familiar with people set on doing him harm. The importance of these stories highlight the relationship of the siblings, their relationship as a family unit, yet their completely different perspectives on the incident and subsequent trauma experienced as a result of the death of their father. As listeners we get an understanding of the complexity of the situation. This alludes to the difficulties of working with individuals in communities who have experienced at different levels, multiple traumatic events and their personal, individual response to these incidents. For practitioners the issue becomes about how to bring their experiences together while giving the opportunity for communication and expression. Diana Taylor states "looking at performance as a retainer of social memory engages history without being a symptom of history [...] the performances enter into a dialogue with a history of trauma without themselves being traumatic" (2003: 210)

The 'Banality of Evil'

People in the midst of war are capable of doing things which are unreasonable and unthinkable in times of peace. When communities feel targeted or oppressed they can react in an inhumane manner toward 'others'. The philosopher Hannah Arendt was commissioned in the 1960's by *New Yorker* to cover the war crimes trial of Adolf Eichmann. Arendt concluded that this man and his comrades were neither perverted nor sadistic but rather 'terribly and terrifyingly normal'

(2011: 150). She refers to this phenomena as the 'banality of evil' and proof that the self had capitulated to the cruelty that war and conflicts engender (2011: 150). While English people were distant from the conflict in Northern Ireland in terms of their understanding of the complex relationship of both communities, the IRA and INLA took their brand of violence to the mainland on occasion with devastating consequences. This meant all Irish people at the time were held responsible for what was in reality the actions of a radical minority group and English people would find themselves abusing and berating any Irish citizens whom they encountered at different levels - a form of racism and xenophobia. Lesley Lelourec highlights an example of this in, *The Troubles in Britain*, stating that "Irish people living in Britain were often victimised during the troubles, convenient scapegoats in the wake of atrocities" [carried out by Republican paramilitaries] (2017: 268) The media played its role in antagonising and propagating the vitriol against the Irish adding further stigma to the collective Identity of Irish amongst the British public. Nadine Finch highlights an example from a mainstream newspaper which stated "On 29th October 1982, the *Evening Standard* carried a JAK cartoon depicting an imaginary poster for a film which said 'Showing Now - The Ultimate in Psychopathic Horror - THE IRISH.'

Similar cartoons reflected a one dimensional view of the Irish and Michael Cummings who worked for *The Express* claimed, " 'Cartoonists Licence' for giving expression to the British view that the Irish were extremely violent, bloody minded, always fighting, drinking enormous amounts [of alcohol] and getting roaring drunk" (2017: 142).

This is the stigma which was projected on to the Brady family and many other Irish people living in Britain at the time. Andrew Sutherland points out in *Troubles Related: Psychological Trauma Explored*, that the "Social fabric of a divided society can inhibit recovery from trauma if an individual is unable to re-integrate and rebuild trust with others and their identity due to intimidation, fear and lack of social support in their community". (2013: 6)

The brothers in this example present some very difficult but interesting findings in how they

position themselves in the way they recall their narrative. They use different language to articulate their experience which while in many ways is shared, they have a unique, personal, individual and ephemeral quality to their experience of it. The brothers have noticeable different accents, one English and one Irish - Thomas suggests that while never forgiving him for being Irish or letting him forget, England 'afforded him some freedoms'. There is a sense that the place he lives is not perfect but better than what he experienced 'at home' and there is a sense of moving on and not allowing the past to dictate his present. Thomas centres his story on his mother and the nature of her strength of character despite everything that she had endured. He claims that the family survived because of the love she had for them and her willingness to do whatever she had to protect them. This suggests that Thomas understands that an important attribute of identity is the family unit and togetherness and can be less about geographical place.

Abuse, betrayal and abandonment are central to both narratives but Edward presents a more disjointed, fractured experience which goes to the heart of selfhood and identity regarding place as central to identity and belonging. He presents a story which is complex suggesting that everything that has happened subsequently in his life stems from this one traumatic incident which there is no evidence to suggest that he even remembers it. To listen to the experience of both men described in their own words portray an inhumane experience, puts a human focus on their ordeal in how a violent and traumatic incident may only be the beginning which can rapidly spiral causing the destruction of many lives affecting the family in a trans-generational way, long after they are no longer the focus of the news reels.

The brothers present no sense of entitlement but portray dramatic loss of self and heritage. These two stories bring home the fragility of life and identity and highlight the harsh reality for many families who suffered as a result of the conflict. According to recent reports there are approximately 3,000 unresolved murder cases which equates to numerous individuals and families living in the present with a conflict of the past and while there have been many false starts in dealing with the

past, a current public consultation is under way by the NIO to examine ways to address legacy issues of the Troubles.

In curating a story it is possible for an individual to construct a narrative which addresses the missing information which lets them create a sound identity developing a sense of self worth and belonging. Through group practice, participants like Edward may find connections in the present with people whom have suffered similar levels of disenfranchisement. Society can learn a great deal about conflict from individuals like Edward so a more structured and prolonged period of engagement in a creative process alongside the community would act as another means of positive self expression and remaking the self. Taylor highlights that representation does not further contribute to the desecration of the victims, honing their pain into our viewing pleasure [but] rather without representation viewers would not recognise their role in the ongoing history of oppression which directly or indirectly implicates them (2003: 211).

The victim in the story is a thinking subject who for the viewer / listener becomes the subject of thought and Taylor states that it is the interconnectedness between the two which facilitates broader understanding of 'historical trauma, communal memory and collective subjectivity' (2003).

Stories from Silence - Senior Stories

One story I have chosen to highlight in the 'Senior Stories' series is that of Grainnie Gibson. She lost her husband, a building contractor working for the security forces and therefore considered a legitimate target by Republicans. Ms Gibson recalls her love of writing and how she used that as a method for expressing her grief when her husband died. She wrote numerous letters filled with anger and bitterness to the RUC. She taunted them suggesting the IRA were 'much too clever' for them and always one step ahead. She wrote to Gerry Adams offering her contempt and disgust for him and all he represents. Ms Gibson was keeping her husbands case open with sustained pressure on the police so that he would not be ignored or forgotten like many of the other victims

through lack of evidence or information to press charges that would see the perpetrators of her husband's murder locked up in prison.

A few years had passed and she was contacted to say that the police had charged an individual and he would stand trial for the murder. It could be argued that the sustained pressure she applied ensured that someone would be held accountable for the murder considering that so many unresolved cases remain to the present day. At the trial she and her son agreed to train their attention on the accused in the dock of the court room instead of on the judge. They were accused by the defence of harassment and intimidation. The judge gave both mother and son a warning stressing the court would be cleared if the intimidation continued. The accused or 'Duffy' as Ms Gibson scornfully recalls, was given two life sentences which she viewed as 'just reward' and 'justice done'. However with the GFA/Belfast Agreement 1998, there was a clause which provided the early release of all 'political prisoners'. Ms Gibson unsurprisingly voted against the *Good Friday Agreement*. As a victim and survivor she did not want any more trouble or others to suffer, but she could not reconcile this with the idea that her husband's murderer served only four years while she continuously endures a life sentence of loss, hurt and suffering. This is not a unique experience for the bereaved families in Northern Ireland. She had fought against the system and had a significant victory, only to have it wiped out no sooner than having secured a conviction. Her anger is not only a method for coping but has the added effect of acting as a barrier to sadness. As long as she feels betrayed and let down by the system, she does not herself have to fully acknowledge the hurt and pain which she has endured for so many years.

In her story Ms Gibson focuses on her struggle for justice while intermittently remembering her husband. Unlike other storytellers she does not or possibly cannot remember the good times and has become trapped without the justice that she demanded and fought for. As Brison determines; "The need for control reinforces and is reinforced by a fundamental assumption most of us share ; our belief that we live in a just world, in which nothing that is both terrible and undeserved will happen to us. [...] Social psychologists have observed that not only do others tend to blame and

derogate victims of crime and disasters of various kinds, but victims tend to blame and disparage themselves even when it should be obvious that they could not have brought on their misfortune” (2003: 74).

Helen Kerr is the second contributor to the ‘Senior Stories’ series that I have chosen to highlight. Ms Kerr was caught up in the Omagh Bomb in 1998, post GFA. The Omagh bomb is regarded as the single worst atrocity of the troubles in terms of victims, both dead and injured.

Five weeks before the bomb Ms Kerr had buried her son who died in England. In her own way she describes the panic that took hold in the town when the people were advised there was a bomb in the street. People were scrambling in one direction and she continued toward the bomb with her daughter taking no notice of the warnings as there were many frequent hoaxes in the past. This suggests another common feature of the attitude of the people living in conflict, toward instances which could potentially cause severe harm or death. There were several ‘security alerts’ everyday and people become apathetic and weary of them and where possible, would not allow these events to impact on their day sometimes to their detriment. In this way, the violence had become normalised and legitimised.

The Psychoanalyst Stephen Grosz points out that

We resist change. Committing ourselves to a small change, even one that is unmistakably in our best interest, is often more frightening than ignoring a dangerous situation [...] We are vehemently faithful to our own view of the world, our story. We want to know what new story we are stepping into before exiting the old one. We don’t want an exit if we don’t know where it will take us, even - or perhaps especially - in an emergency (2013: 123).

Having taken a window seat in a coffee shop with her daughter there was a sudden blast and the window came in around them. They were covered in dust and glass but were lucky to be alive and they did not sustain any life threatening injuries. However Ms. Kerr is haunted by the memories of “the screaming, dead people, confusion, the smell, rumours of the numbers of dead people”, when

at the point of the bomb there was no real way to tell how severe the impact would be and people were too traumatised to make any rational assessment of the scene. She describes how she has tried to suppress the memories of the events as they unfolded where the town had been crippled and the community ripped apart. Ms Kerr claims that the acute injuries have long since healed but the psychological injuries endure to this day. All of this experience and trauma is embodied and codified into her psyche.

Stories From Silence - Loss of a Child

The *Loss of a Child* series features a story by former Police Ombudsman, Baroness Nuala O'Loan. In 1977 while working at the 'Ulster Polytechnic' she was blown up in a bomb and lost her unborn baby as a result of the attack. Baroness O'Loan, in sharing her story raises important questions about the unknown, unrecognised and unacknowledged victims of the 'troubles' in unborn babies. She depicts her experience as of "less significance to others who had children who could walk, talk and run, and lost them in the conflict". She acknowledges that when appointed as *Police Ombudsman* victims were happy that she would understand their circumstances as she had similar experience, however she claims that she 'couldn't begin to understand their suffering'. She does state however that she is familiar with the feelings of overwhelming 'sadness of loss'. Ms O'Loane has had a public role in restorative justice and this may have helped her come to terms with her loss. It could also be suggested that she has no memories of a child outside of the personal experience of pregnancy in which she could relate and subsequently narrate.

Another story in the 'Loss of a Child' series is told by Phil Catney. Her 27 year old son was shot in a sectarian attack by the UVF in 1989. The UVF claimed Ian Catney was a member of the INLA but the family have denied this and the RUC found no evidence to support the claim.

Phil describes Ian's birth where he was born two months premature. He was due in January and arrived on November 11th born in the family home. As he was premature he had a private baptism

and was christened Poppy Catney by one of Ms. Catneys friends, as they had expected a little girl and did not expect the child to survive. Phil then condenses time and talks candidly about the murder. Ian died while working in the family run shop at Smithfield Market. Three gunmen entered the shop on a January morning while Ian was reading the paper and opened fire. He was hit with seven bullets but Phil recalls he didn't die immediately. She doesn't dwell on this painful memory but goes on to talk of the different ways the family suffered as a result, through alcohol, depression and illness. As Ms Catney struggles to hold herself together in the moment of the telling, she admits that when Ian died she thought nobody was suffering only her, but soon realised that her method of coping was by 'being brave for the rest of them'. She claims that 'time is a great healer' in the sense that while you never get over the loss, 'you learn to live with it'. This is in contrast to Stella Robinson's account where she remarks that 'people claim time is a great healer but not in her case'. While there are recognisable traits to suffering, every experience is unique. Ms Catney uses a strategy of avoidance and protection of the rest of her family which means she has less time to address her own feelings by placing her attention and focus on others.

Susan McKay suggests 'these brief recordings give a moving sense of loss that haunts the lives of those bereaved in the Northern Irish conflict. [storiesfromsilence.com] Grosz describes haunting as a different feeling to being frightened. With haunting he suggests "it makes us feel - makes us alive to - some fact about the world, some piece of information the we're trying to avoid". (2013: 113) These recordings present a fresh collection of experience which resonates. The material has the capacity to move and challenge the senses of the listener through acknowledgement of the impact of division and difference while contemplating the fragility of the present and each individual's role within it. Society has so far failed to engage fully with the pain and hurt caused as a result of the protracted conflict in Northern Ireland due to the complexity of problems that exist, some of which I have highlighted here.

All participants convey different coping methods woven through their stories from avoidance to anger and suppression. They are continuously working through their emotions and feelings as they

progress through the various stages of grief or ignoring it and becoming trapped in a moment, overpowered by the sense of loss, the impact of which can have all sorts of negative consequences on physical and mental health for individuals and families.

Storytelling & Facts in a Post Conflict Society

A 2006 report by Healing Through Remembering suggests the “overall purpose of acknowledgement is to help prevent the reemergence of violent political conflict [...] we emphasise that it is the violence rather than healthy non violent political conflict in general that we wish to banish from our society” (2006: 4).

They also point out that the process of ‘Acknowledgement’ does not have to be part of a truth and justice process - though some may view it as a step in that direction’. (2006: 4). Mark Lindsay (Chairman of the Police Federation) at the recent PSNI (45th) annual conference has a different take on this subject where he suggests “If justice is to be done fairly, then society must move a way from rumour, storytelling and political agenda and deal only with facts in law” (May 2018: online) Lindsay claims that ‘amnesty for any troubles related incident is an insult and that society must decide if the solution is going to be a political one or a criminal justice one’. This goes beyond paramilitaries and must encompass what is understood as widespread collusion between the *RUC* and *UDR*, *FRU*, (Military based Force Research Unit) and groups such as *UVF* and *UFF*.

Whatever method is adopted to deal with the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland, the main source for individual cases is going to be based largely on the testimony of individuals giving evidence, or telling their story whether as civilian, ex-paramilitary or security force personnel. All accounts will be subjective accounts. Truth and facts will be established from the memory of individuals within society. They become what Laub describes as ‘the witness from inside’ or ‘the witness to oneself’. (1995) Mark Lindsay is in a position where he has access to the available ‘facts’. Unlike participants in *Stories from Silence* featured in this study such as Edward Brady who cannot get files or information on his fathers murder from the security forces or through judiciary

channels, so many victims and their families remain in the dark as to the full details of the demise of their loved ones.

Legacy Issues of the 'Troubles'

Storytelling is only one way in which to address the issues of the past. It is a psychosocial and physical activity which presents the opportunity for people to confront the past together. Since the signing of the 'GFA' (1998) it has been projects and organisations run by volunteers and academics such as *Wave*, *CAIN*, *PMA*, *HTR*, who have filled the vacuum with an absence of justice or truth by giving voice to victims and survivors and helping them address the many problems that have occurred in their lives as a direct result of the violence. It could be argued that without oral history and storytelling projects many would feel the effects of increased societal abandonment. I further suggest that through community practice, victims are forcing the powers that be into a position where they must acknowledge the past. The current Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has published the long anticipated public consultation document through the Northern Ireland Office on *Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past* (April 2018). The findings of this study give weight to Oral History work as part of a broader strategy to begin a process of reconciliation and conflict transformation. The 'NIO' suggest that an 'Oral History Archive would collect recorded memories in one place and gather information from existing oral history projects and be under the management of the Public Records Office Northern Ireland (PRONI). The NIO suggest their *Oral History Archive* could be used more than any of the other proposed new legacy institutions where anyone impacted by the troubles could tell their stories for the archive'. (2018: 9).

Conclusion

This case study reveals the significance of story, regardless of the means of collection and production and all producers have important roles in preserving the experience of communities of interest. The ideas about engagement processes will vary, however while I appreciate the need to

let the individual focus on telling their story I also believe in a much more supported environment of learning and production where the community not only reinforce the power of communication on many levels, but also learn new digital skills which can serve them long after the collaboration ends.

The case study highlights the fluidity of identity and how one might construct an identity when the familiar components of identity are no longer understood in the maintenance of self. Through the brothers accounts the listener understands that the same devastating event can impact families and individuals in very different ways, as they describe their lived experience. While giving the viewer an insight into their backstage lives, it seems that in some way the participants, are now untouchable. What is the worst that can happen? They have been through the most depraved of human experience. As Soyinka suggests “We can and must exorcise the burden of memory, but only by such strategies that do not sanitise the residuum of an un-expiated past, be this of external inflictions or the culpability of internal collaborators” (2000: 37). The participants in ‘*Stories from Silence*’ have been silent for such a long time, that there is a powerful and self emancipatory, cathartic process at play in telling their stories emerging from a position of weakness to one of strength. Knowing that for the first time, many of them are being listened to, helping refocus the minds of a population, complicit in maintaining the silence, sharing a sense of the true price of the conflict. These storytellers have the capacity to stop society looking back at the conflict and reflecting on it in any way other than the harsh reality it represented. The stories compel us to listen and consider the pain, suffering and continued struggle. They are survivors, while their victimhood can never be erased fully, becoming intertwined in their identity, in how they are perceived by the ‘other’ but which should not be used to define the self. These stories perpetuate their victimhood and while they impact the listener, it is difficult to assess how this performance affects the teller.

While Ms Robinson, the Brady brothers, Ms Gibson, Pat Catney and all the participants in ‘*Stories from Silence*’ have endured the suffering of a bitter conflict, they are encouraged to keep the

memories of their loved ones alive through sharing their stories. They have all found methods for coping to get this far and in the simple act of telling someone else, or sharing with many others through the medium of digital recordings, they can feel assured that others care for and empathise with them, in all that they have endured.

While storytelling and oral archiving has an important role to play in the rebuilding of a post conflict society where people come together to share and tell their stories, it is only when the broader communities are given a voice and everyone has an equal opportunity to speak and reflect that this approach can begin to help society take steps forward. Morrissey and Smyth point out that “conducive environments may be available outside communities to those bereaved and injured [...] who are able to avail of the services in the voluntary sector. However many return to communities in which living conditions re-traumatise them by exposure to other forms of violence” (2002: 187).

The next chapter will explore the process of engaging in DS practice with ex-prisoners from the Republican Movement in Ireland. This group of people were known as perpetrators of violence in Northern Ireland, Ireland and Great Britain, yet they have also played an important role in the establishment of peace. However since disarming and pursuing peace through diplomacy as a community, they harbour a sense of being marginalised. I will examine the possibilities and challenges which face facilitators and participants working in the context of a post-conflict society considering the process and the output with perpetrators of the conflict. The emphasis of the work is based on group practice as opposed to many examples of Storytelling projects I have outlined in this chapter and other areas of the thesis which match professional media personnel and individual storytellers, where levels of engagement and outcomes for the participants remain unclear.

Stories from Long Kesh / Maze Prison

Introduction

Throughout the process I have combined existing narrative methods to create a framework for engagement in border communities in the North West. In each case the process was altered to accommodate the group in terms of time but the constituent parts of Story circle, DS and Life Story Method remained fundamental elements. In some cases we worked from memory as with the retired women's group and with the ex-prisoners I also adopted the method of 'Every object tells a story'. In the final project I worked with a group of former prisoners from the Republican community who I met through direct contact with the *Irish Republican Prisoners Welfare Association*. This presented me an opportunity to explore the potential for using DS to engage a marginalised group of people, living in what is still a contested society, with the purpose of engaging them in reflective activities on their own actions and histories. During the earlier stages of this research I identified shortcomings in DS when dealing with difficult or contentious issues. Therefore, when preparing to work with these groups I explored and combined separate narrative practices to create a working method that might fulfil a number of functions, but in particular might facilitate reflection and initiate a process of positive transition, what ever form that may take, for the participants in relation to the self and the community. I also wanted to create a repeatable process which would be beneficial for all participants based on the in-depth study of existing practice extracting elements which seem to support the telling of difficult stories.

A key issue in the research was to find a way of enabling former paramilitary combatants to re-engage with broader society and re-integrate in a manner that does not challenge or question their experience, but accepts it as another tool in understanding the period of conflict through alternative and marginalised voices as digitised expressions of experience, of episodic memory of cause and effect. The aim of the work is to facilitate self-awareness, including awareness of former actions against others, the impact of violence on the self, the family and society and consider the

fragility of life through a process of positive engagement and group support. Working in this community I merged the narrative practices of *Story Circle*, *Life Story Method*, *Every Object Tells a Story* and *DS*, while continuing to utilise workshops, focus groups and interviews to shape and directly inform the practice during the period of engagement. The pace was slow in the beginning as I had to be cautious of moving too fast while the men needed time to build the emotional support from the group to approach the difficult narratives which in time, they did address. Shirlow highlights the importance of emotional support for this demographic but also emphasises a need for employment opportunities and re-skilling where courses are 'discreet and confidential'. He states that "projects which are tailor made in relation to real issues are both necessary and successful [...] Given the skills and the knowledge base within these groups it is patently obvious that both holistic approaches and an eclectic range of services have and could be developed" (2001: online). The intended outcome is that individual participants gradually become more self aware of the connections between their past and their present, and more reflective on their individual choices and the external circumstances acting on their decision-making. Within the group, this work supports individuals coming together in new ways to create bonds stimulated and activated through an alternative collective purpose, as the participants are reconstructed and transformed in the present from ex-combatants to storytellers. Participants characterise themselves in many different ways, while their stories challenge the audience or listener to deconstruct their previously conceived ideas about perpetrators of violence and to some varying extent, re-humanise them. Maguire suggests that performance itself is an "act of affiliation", even if the words are not the actors' own words. This suggests something more powerful when the story is 'autobiographical' and comes straight from the mouth of the person whose life is being told, due to the nuance of memory, physicality, speech. Maguire states that at this point in time, Northern Irish society does not need "another memorial to the dead but a beacon of hope, some ways of telling stories about how we can live together in the society or imagining a different future" (2015: 153). Paramilitary organisations have countless memorials in their communities for the dead but little attention is given to those who 'struggled' and survived, how they have made the transition to peace, and their perspectives today. The act of participation in itself should give hope. If individuals

who are considered extreme can participate in acts of positive social engagement, even when addressing difficult issues of the past there is potential for a shared future. Engagement is only the first small step, but it could be the most significant. Jennings states the facilitator must engage “in often subtle and continuous negotiation [are required] to preserve the democratic principles of community based theatre and conflict transformation in specific practice”,(2009: 121) while simultaneously pushing against a society where there remains a culture of silencing and ‘forgetting’. Some within the ex-prisoner community feel abandoned, marginalised and let down, not by government, local or British, but by their own former comrades in *Sinn Fein*.

Ex-Prisoners Outreach Programme

The only way to really understand a community or a subgroup within that community is to become part of it. Through a process of engagement among different community groups in different locations across the Derry / Donegal border, I discovered it is absolutely vital to develop work with single identity groups before attempting cross community collaborative practice, or introducing ‘outsiders’ into the community, especially when working with vulnerable and opposed people. I initially contacted local history and community groups and in one early conversation I was advised that the Ex-Prisoners Outreach programme might be interested in a project of the nature I was offering. I made some calls to the *IRPWA* (Irish Republican Prisoners Welfare Association) and was provided contact details for a representative of the Ex-Prisoner community in Derry and we had a lengthy discussion about developing an opportunity for a worthwhile process of engagement for ex-prisoner participants. The offer was framed as a partnership/collaboration between the participants and myself in pursuit of discovering a meaningful process of engagement through sharing, critical self reflection, knowledge exchange and acknowledgement for their part in the Northern Ireland conflict.

At the same time we would develop a program with the capacity to be effective in addressing the needs of the ex-prisoner community highlighted by Shirlow (2001) and more recently Joyce and

Lynch. (2017) The dominant themes among the Republican Ex-Prisoner community, identified by Joyce & Lynch (2017) are “(i) preventing trans-generational transmission of political violence, (ii) promote peace through intra and inter community contact, (iii) promoting restorative principles and capacity building”. (2017: 1075) While the initial response was positive, we discussed at length the possibility of working alongside opposing former paramilitary groups and I was introduced to two ex-prisoners from the Loyalist tradition. We had several detailed discussions and both parties were always open to the possibilities of working together. The representatives would take the ideas back to their groups and then bring back legitimate issues highlighted by their members which might impede the practice. The main stumbling block around cross community collaboration was the lack of a neutral space where meaningful work could be undertaken and individual safety assured. There were also concerns about publicity / confidentiality due to the potential nature of the output. While the group could create the rules of engagement and address the publicity issues collectively, after exhausting all possibilities in terms of available locations which might support the practice, the representatives from the Loyalist community decided that in this instance, they could not participate. This was understandably disappointing from a researcher’s perspective but I could understand why there is still a fear of going beyond the borders of ones community. Shirlow (2001) highlights the experience of one participant in an evaluation of Ex-Prisoners carried out in Autumn 2000, involving 100 Ex-Prisoners and 40 Relatives, whom directly addresses the issue of mobility, even on a localised level. He states “Sure of course most of them (Ex-Prisoners) is full of worry. Sure they cant go anywhere outside of the district for fear of getting a hiding (beating) or something. They are stuck in this district for fear of getting a hiding. [...] Its like you're in a bigger prison”. (2001: online)

There were also simultaneous discussions with former female combatants from the Republican community who considered joining their male counterparts in a DS project based on their experiences of membership of paramilitaries during the period of conflict. The female representatives were open to inclusion in the practice but firm in the conviction that they should do a separate project from their male counterparts as they felt they have not had equal

acknowledgement for their role in the conflict and that their contribution to the cause has been overshadowed by male counterparts. The issue with this on the ground is that traditionally the female representatives come under the umbrella of the male dominated organisations and therefore hold little power in setting the agenda. As a sub-group they are also much smaller in numbers, where the prison population during the conflict for 'Troubles' related offences amounted to 85% male and 15% female. The women are a sub-group within a sub-group and the evidence suggests that they do not lean on the 'ex-prisoner community' upon release, in the same manner that the men appear to rely on the network. They are less organised, established and visible within the community sub group than their male counterparts. One thing that became apparent was that the women who I had direct interaction with appeared to have adjusted to life post peace agreement in a much better manner than their male counterparts. While the women form part of the 'imagined community' which is an intrinsic part of the survival process in prison, they had a distinct and separate experience in alternative prison facilities. They did endure the same 'struggle' as the men through efforts of solidarity, but it has not been documented in the same manner as the experience of their male counterparts.

Groups such as PMA are slowly addressing the narrative imbalance. However while a small group of women were willing to participate in this project they wanted to engage as a single identity group and the numbers were too small to have any impact in designing a process separate to the men which might be scaleable across communities. I advised all parties on my limited availability and resources to run several projects at the same time. We agreed that because the women did not have access to a suitable venue or participant numbers to make the study feasible, and I had no financial resource to address these issues, that they would decline participation, however they did leave the door open to further discussions once a process has been established and explored. There are women who are willing to engage and share their stories of the past but in the post conflict environment their network has largely dissolved and therefore there are additional resources required in order to engage this particular demographic.

Once I had been introduced to the group of male participants, made up of 6 individuals from different communities around Northern Ireland they asked a lot of questions of me, to establish my credentials, background and to understand my reasons for seeking engagement with groups such as theirs. They collectively highlighted the *Belfast Project* (Boston College Tapes) as a real area of concern and it was vital for reassurance that this was in no way a process of truth recovery. I was not seeking disclosure of activities carried out in the past. Many of their crimes are well documented. I am interested in the possibility of communicating the past for the benefit of the present where people can reach beyond 'struggle nostalgia' and critically reflect on all aspects of their participation, recognising that if there is to be a fresh start, then it requires the participation and engagement of all communities, even opposing communities and those most inclined to disagree. There must also be some tangible outcomes of participation and through an offer of knowledge exchange, self determination and identity transformation based on communication and creative self expression, there is the potential to at least understand where communities are now in relation to the past, twenty years into a phase of existing in a state of peaceful separation. My job was not simply to go and collect stories. The offer was clearly in partnership with the group. My role was to guide the process through the different phases of the work and listen. Through administrative measures and day to day operational support such as answering the phone, helping make memorabilia such as button badges and artwork and demonstrating software which would make the groups records more up to date, I worked alongside different individuals outside the group sessions which facilitated regular working relationships. I was indirectly demonstrating that I was not there to simply take what I wanted, but had a genuine interest in the development and well being for individuals within the group. Rather than allowing the universal and stereotypical understanding I had of the organisation and its members to prevail, I had to engage each person on an individual basis. This was a useful process as it was crucially building trust with the community. I wasn't simply showing up for story time, but demonstrated through engagement the possibilities of being more open to community development with some measured 'outsider' involvement.

Once gathered in the Story Circle we explored 'Life Story'. The participants were invited to consider life before involvement with paramilitary organisations. This appeared a refreshing opportunity for individuals within the group to get to know each other based on who they were, what they liked to do as young people, their hopes and dreams, rather than life after their involvement. This also provided an opportunity to reconnect with the self in a supportive environment. This not only re-humanised the individuals in my eyes as 'outsider' but in many cases heavily contrasted with the perceptions, or established reputations of individuals within the group. This was a memorable exercise because of the potent mix of poignancy and humour, of possibility and failure and the inevitable end of the beginning, which resulted in the devastating loss of life for many and as a result the loss of liberty and freedom for participants. The first two 'Story Circle' sessions were based largely on life before active service to individual member's proscribed organisations and the general conditions in which people were living that led to the initial violence, reasons for people getting involved and what they hoped to achieve. There was positivity among the members, who encouraged others within the wider organisation to consider involvement and the group expanded to twelve participants by the end of the second week. Not all these participants would go on to complete a story for the project, however their participation and input was valuable in supporting and shaping the practice. Members in the group were exclusively made up of former *IRA* and *INLA* members. The group consisted of members from within the *Ex-Prisoner Outreach Programme* from different counties in Northern Ireland and they formed as a working group in July of 2017. I remained with this community group for a protracted period of time in order to develop relationships which would establish trust between the members and I, and lay a solid foundation for the practice within the group. DS workshops are recommended to take place over five days, however this particular group had many concerns in regard to participation and I had to allow space for the group to continually reassess their position in terms of commitment and the work they wanted to produce. It was important for them to have a worthwhile process of engagement, learning through knowledge exchange toward creating a model of DS in a post-conflict context.

The additional time spent with this group allowed participants to gradually speak freely, to assess and understand their perspectives on issues and circumstances of interest as individuals, then as members of a sub identity group within a wider community of interest. This must take place for a period of time among the single identity group before attempting to reach out to the culturally and traditionally opposed 'other'. Even within an apparent tightly-bonded group, members can have substantially diverse opinions based on experience regardless of the identity or traits which connect them to each other. A facilitator must therefore spend as much time as is reasonably possible to begin to know the group and gain a richer understanding of its form and function. It takes quite a long time for individuals to open up when the circumstances are inherently difficult to approach and equally so for the 'outsider', as researcher and facilitator but also as primary witness to the process. It is a relationship which is built on trust and it takes time to establish with any group but particularly with contentious groups who have inherent mistrust of 'outsiders', regardless of their academic, political or professional affiliation.

Republican ideology is based on a rich history of storytelling through literature, murals, monuments, performance art, music and film. Republicanism in Ireland, in the context of the Irish 'struggle', is a brand or identity closely associated with the *IRA*, *INLA* and other Republican political organisations such as *Sinn Fein* and the *Irish Republican Socialist Party*. The participants in this particular pilot study have lived the Republican identity in its most extreme form, through activism, terrorism, and incarceration and now in relative freedom. They function within a contested frame in their local community and in wider society. The group was diverse; some participants got involved in community work on release from prison and recognised some value in engaging with this practice development and research, and supported and promoted it to their peers. However, many of the men remain on the sidelines of society even today, under the stigmatised identity of Republican ex-prisoner who is unemployed, with physical and mental health issues ranging from minor to life threatening, often estranged from their families and their children, and without their former networks of family and friendship.

In order to resolve the broader issue of stagnation in conflict transformation and resolution the recent *Ulster University* report on *Sectarianism* (2018: 39) makes some recommendations. Of note the report highlights the importance of broad community involvement suggesting [the] “community should feel able to identify with, shape and support proposals for change and that means are found to enable this to happen” The report calls for ‘immediate action to address inequalities especially in areas which are economically and socially disadvantaged’ (2018). The report highlights the importance of civic responsibility and participation and states the significance of “stepping up momentum to find satisfactory solutions to issues which greatly contribute to community division such as paramilitary activity, legacy issues, flags, emblems and parades” (2018: 39). As of 2014/15 only 7% of students in Northern Ireland participate in integrated education. In a report conducted in 2007, Hughes et al., state “approximately 35-40% of the Northern Ireland population live in completely segregated neighbourhoods. The study also highlights other forms of segregation such as personal and marital (Gallagher and Dunn, 1991) Educational, (Darby et al., 1977, Gallagher 1989, McClenaghan et al., 1996) and segregation in work, social and leisure, (Niens et al., 2003). The report claims that “residential segregation is particularly significant as it pervades many aspects of social life often reinforcing other types of segregation” (2007:34). The authors highlight that segregation is often essentially a response to out group fear and anxiety, and in turn ensures the longterm prevalence of such negative emotion by reinforcing mutual ignorance” (2007: 35). In January 2020 the Northern Ireland Assembly drafted *New Decade, New Approach 2020*, which would address the priorities in power sharing at executive level in Northern Ireland. The document has all the usual platitudes for change, but fails to provide a clear pathway to a shared society. The document reaffirms its endeavour to “build a shared and integrated society by supporting educating children and young people of different backgrounds together in the classroom and a commitment to tackling paramilitarism, while ending sectarianism through implementing robust supporting strategies and actions (2020: 9). The report highlights broad and well meaning objectives without stating how and when ‘supporting strategies and actions’ will be rolled out, with widespread participation as a collective society addressing the issues of the past. It is vital to be inclusive of the different groups who can drive the change that is required at a

community level. I do not suggest that the process will in itself lead to conflict transformation, resolution, or reconciliation however it is possible to begin a process of conflict management to get an understanding of the communities and individuals especially from a single identity network. The findings are also potentially useful for programmes that engage with and address youth radicalisation in Northern Ireland and beyond.

Each of the participants in this project had very different personal circumstances. Some individuals had been released from prison as part of the GFA-Belfast Agreement, but others had been returned to prison for serious offences post -GFA and had outstanding sentences to complete after a period of being 'on the run'. One participant had only been released from prison in 2013 (four years prior to this study). The participants had experienced the prison regime at different points throughout the conflict, and therefore some suffered more extreme circumstances than others during incarceration. Shirlow supports this view suggesting that engagement with Ex-Prisoners and other political groups should now "go beyond underlining emotional and educational needs and get beyond the perception that the prison experience was uniform" (2004: 648).

In their present state as Republican ex-prisoners, their role is predominantly to commemorate and memorialise the 'struggle' of former militants and their activities, to ensure the ultimate sacrifice made by volunteers is not forgotten in the community from which they came. Multiple hubs have been established by Republicans within communities where 'comrades' can get help and support in everyday activities such as form filling or with more serious issues such as mental health support. Republican hubs are based securely in the confines of Republican communities, situated primarily in residential areas. Similar hubs exist in Loyalist communities around Northern Ireland. They represent and preserve their version of the narrative of the 'Troubles' from their personal and collective perspective through the display of artefacts and objects which give meaning and purpose to their lives in an attempt to rationalise and memorialise their individual contributions to the 'struggle'. The same groups normally control the erection of murals and memorials on the landscape throughout their communities, and these are visible in single community housing

estates, regardless of background throughout the region. It could be argued that their presence in the community and participation in work such as this, serve as a continuation of struggle and resistance albeit in an alternative, more humane form. Through memorialising the past they have a reason to exist, however for the same reason it appears many are stuck in the past and have struggled to take control of their own lives through restrictions imposed by the parole process, and through self-inflicted measures as a result of their difficult former experiences. Instead they seem to exist in the shadows of 'fallen patriots' who are held up as 'divine entities' (2017) from a different time and place and in the shadows of society as the elephant in the room which few dare to acknowledge.

All these individual circumstances meant it was important to meet these participants in their current identity state as 'former' extremists, and base my encounters as far as possible on the self they perform in the present. I therefore did not place any emphasis on individual actions carried out as part of their 'active service'. I did not know any of the individuals personally, before making the initial connections and had no personal experience of participation in any form of Republicanism. At the beginning of the process I was not aware of many of the participants' actions; however as they began to explore their past through narrative it became clear just how extreme some of these individuals had been in pursuit of delivering Republican goals without much consideration for their personal safety or the severe consequences for others, especially innocent victims.

As facilitator I had entered the project with a broad plan, but I found myself responding organically to the process, in continuous negotiation, treading slowly and decided early into the planning that this process would require much more time than the allocated five day period defined by Lambert et al. This immersion of the researcher in the project is identified in the literature as a potential shortcoming of Participatory Action Research, because of the risk that the researcher will lose objectivity, or a sense of the overview of the work. Therefore I consciously distanced myself from the group by maintaining my identity as a relative outsider to the experiences of the past, as one who was not ideologically aligned with the group while maintaining my relationship in the function

of the present structure of the group as insider. I managed and maintained my position as outsider through verbal and non verbal cues. The participants made some jokes comparing my approach and presence to that of MI5, due to the content of information they were disclosing to me and the later presence of recording equipment in a small room which brought back memories for many of interrogation at Castlereagh; not so much that I was presenting as authoritative, but that some of these men were addressing these experiences verbally for the first time and I understood the significance of this crossroads at which they had found themselves. However it was apparent that by the time of recording stories the men did seem to trust me and the process. On occasion, If a participant began to discuss information which the group felt I should not be party to, someone would quickly intercept the story, speak in Gaelic which I did not understand, stopping or redirecting the story, which in turn served to highlight my own cultural shortcomings in relation to my Irish identity and the native Irish language. It also maintained my otherness to the group while coming from a similar background, culturally and politically, their actions and beliefs served as a constant reminder of difference. I kept a reflective diary during the process. Adopting an analogue system of documenting the process and participants' responses. I advised participants that I would make some notes at the end of each session which would allow me to consider and reflect on the workshop and inform the next meeting, but that I would not take notes in session as this would have a negative impact on each individuals ability to freely speak and share experience while negatively impacting on the process of trust building. Ownership of the process had to be fully shared and it was imperative that I did not present as 'all knowing'. I continuously reminded myself of the principles of the process in communication, shared experience and knowledge exchange. All participants were treated as experts, and at the appropriate points I would demonstrate my expertise highlighting equality and the reciprocal nature of the process of collaboration.

As dicussed in Chapter X, the power of Digital Storytelling lies in its relatively simple production methods, its potential reach and capacity through online video sharing, and its accessibility when it can be archived online. However careful consideration must be given to the process of sharing outputs of such sensitive nature where there is a vacuum in the process of legacy in general. In

social media circles the work would certainly be exposed to critics. Social media can function as an echo chamber of viewers with similar ideology, beliefs, cultures and traditions. When DS is undertaken as a long term process of establishing communication among discordant groups it may act to eradicate the 'social validation feedback loop' and represents a challenging and thought provoking mechanism which serves to begin to move communities from positions of intransigence to considering the potential for positive transition. With limited community integration in the physical world, communities will remain in a state of 'otherness' and 'mutual ignorance'.

Comprehensive archives on the period of the 'Troubles' already exist in *CAIN* and *PRONI* consisting of research and projects such as, *PMA*, *Healing Through Remembering*, *Border Roads to Memories* and *WAVE Trauma's - Stories from Silence*. These projects are published on their own specific websites and are not exposed to public criticism or negativity, but rather exist as fragments of the narrative of the past within a specially created repository. I have developed a process consisting of Story Circle, Life Story Method, Every Object and DS which provides a positive model of community practice which can become part of the process of conflict management working over a period of time toward resolution and reconciliation, through the universal language of story with victims, survivors and perpetrators. As Fitzduff observes, community based practice "can help to pose fundamental questions about issues such as identity, social concerns and political possibilities which beset the conflict" (2002: 68).

Engaging groups such as the Republican community to tell their own stories is as Michaél Mac Giolla Ghunna suggests not about "depoliticisation of Republican prisoners from activist to actors" but rather highlights the "cultural aspect of a broader struggle within the prison and outside" (1996: 10). DS in this instance responds to Republican traditions of storytelling, enabling participants to build the skills which unlock stories, encouraging a reflective and considered response among participants. The teller provides a subjective snapshot of their lived experience, with the perspective of distance from the events that shaped their experience of life, layered with more knowledge and hindsight, fused with episodic memory, that is, remembering times, places, people. The ideological subjective position of participants, the current political climate, slow societal re-

integration and levels of PTSD suffered as a result of the trauma experienced, are among many factors which impact on the current quality of life of each individual in this project as members of the Republican Ex-Prisoner community.

Although multiple artistic processes have been explored throughout the region to help those who have suffered through the conflict to adjust and reintegrate, DS is unique in the multiple benefits it offers to participants through a two way exchange. As well as being a means of recovering the past and the self, the different phases of the work develops valuable transferable skills with individuals who had limited access to formal education, have a criminal record, and have few marketable skills. The relative technical simplicity of DS and its accessibility regardless of creative ability, builds the confidence of the individual participant while also, as a reintegrative tool, brings people together in a spirit of sharing, understanding and learning.

Current DS practitioners might view my engagement as a relatively long term approach, in comparison to the normal, short five day working process. However, this adaptation of the DS process seeks to use the technology and the process for a purpose beyond oral history. This work seeks to use DS as a tool for self [re]discovery. Due to the experiences of the participants, it is imperative to build solid foundations for the group through story circles, using Life Story methodology which does not focus on any one event or experience of the participant but allows them to invite the listeners into their lives at any point they choose through an artefact or object. I will give one memorable example which highlights the surprise element of storytelling in the very first session. One participant brought a black and white picture of himself with the mayor turning on the Christmas tree lights in the Guildhall Square in the early 1960's. The participant recounted how he "had been picked from the boys in the home, to switch on the lights" which was a highlight in his year as he had only recently been placed in the home due to social and economic issues within his family. In the same story the participant remembered himself as a little boy who had no father figure to look up to and his hero was Airey Neave, the first British prisoner to escape from Colditz, on 12th May, 1942, who upon return to England in 1945 received the Military Cross. The

participant recounted the bravery of Neave and the cunning with which he executed the escape through a trap door while dressed in German military costume, during a theatrical production. The battle hardened former Quarter Master, former ex-combatant, momentarily transformed into a vulnerable nine year old boy, giving us insight into his childhood fantasies. However he quickly reminded the group that it was his proscribed organisation, the *Irish National Liberation Army* (INLA) who claimed the assassination of Airey Neave in 1979, as he left the palace of Westminster, specifically for his pursuit of the policy of defeat of Irish Republican terrorism rather than its containment.

The paradox is clear and contradictions are stark. Here is a Republican who at one point held an elite member of the British Military and ruling class in the highest esteem. It shows a glimpse of the evolution and fluid nature of self and how a person can be subject to influence within their environment. Immediately the capacity for story to surprise was apparent. It had all the elements needed: tragedy, fantasy, and cruel irony. In week two we had twelve participants in the group. The time allowed for sharing Life Story was imperative in giving participants time to express themselves, in order that potential viewers among wider and opposing communities accessing the content might come to some understanding about those individuals who maintained and perpetuated the conflict. The output is intended to help communities consider the other in non-combative terms, sharing and understanding perspectives, traditions, culture and heritage, in a process that recalls Lederach's 'moral imagination' (2010). I believe most importantly, that it helps the participant understand the self in relation to the past and present and to recognise the experience of another through their own eyes in a creative and often spontaneous process. It is Lederach who highlights the importance of the 'creative act' (2005) rather than the specified practice, when engaging with marginalised groups.

All models of DS pointed to 1 week or 5-day sessions to complete the process of creating collections of community based digital stories. In fact, I found that it required several sessions just to settle the group, to understand its dynamics, for the participants to get used to the presence of

me as outsider researcher, and to establish their confidence as storytellers through attentive and responsive listening. In engaging with this community one might consider that the work becomes what Rothman (1992) refers to as 'pieces of peace', suggesting all creative and artistic contributions are small but significant steps which must be taken at ground level with many stakeholders in the pursuit of lasting peace. Fitzduff highlights how "the evidence in Northern Ireland is that of a combination of approaches addressing both the hard structural changes in equality and legislation, allied with psycho-cultural work of addressing dialogue, communication and co-operation began to accrue some significant shifts in both behavioural and attitudinal terms throughout the community" (2002: 157). It is this work of behavioural and attitudinal change, that DS has some potential to address. The digital content is the output and of much less importance than participation although it contains value for potential future audiences.

In the process of collaboration with the Republican group, I was able to establish solid foundations for further development and research of the practice in order to extend participation within Republican sub groups, such as female former ex-combatants, while simultaneously working on developing connections for engagement with Loyalist communities of ex-prisoners and combatants. A combination of narrative practices can create a fresh sense of cohesion within communities by creating an embedded community of producers and creators who freely express their local and historical culture while acknowledging difference and division. This anti-radicalisation strategy aims to create new realities, shared experiences, and broader social tolerance. It aims to do so with a full awareness of the difficulties of the past and the long struggle to address and acknowledge it; the personal difficulties that individuals experience in speaking out, and the importance of the right support and resources. Shirlow states that "the experience of former prisoners suggest that when there is a substantive and practical agenda, a properly structured engagement and identifiable outcomes which are to benefit of both main communities even the most extreme of former adversaries can engage in real and effective reconciliation work" (2008: 153).

Dealing with single identity groups is often recommended before bringing together opposing community groups. Following the guidelines of Lundy & McGovern (2002) from their long term study, *'Ardoyne Commemoration Project'*, where organisers allow for a framework to be established and goals and targets continuously reassessed and reconfirmed at various stages of longer term community engagement. The group dynamic enables and encourages individuals to clarify their personal positions to the group in terms of current ideology, beliefs and emotions. It should be stressed that single identity groups including Republican ex-prisoners should not be considered homogenous. Participants do not hold the same views on many issues especially on the past in relation to the present, yet they are all branded 'Republican' which suggests they fundamentally think the same. Rather, all individuals are complex and nuanced, even those from apparently similar backgrounds. Within this group there were vast socio-economic differences in experience in upbringing, relating to family attitudes and environment, factors which produce and continually influence many variables among the individual members. The participants in this project do not frequently express their personal views nor talk in-depth on personal issues in more usual, less formal social occurrences within this community. Some individuals disclosed to me privately that they really 'want peace to last' and one displayed a genuine state of regret for his personal actions, emphasising the moment his view cleared. He states his perspective 'changed as a result of the murder of eight Republican comrades and one civilian, Anthony Hughes on 12th May 1987, during what become known as the 'Loughgall Ambush' by the British SAS. Some of the participants understand they cannot change the past but believe the future could be different even if they are not yet at the point where they understand how it can be 'shared'.

Other participants firmly believe the 'Peace Project' has failed and they have been sold out by former comrades in Sinn Fein, who have put 'personal prosperity before the cause'. One participant contributor thought it was right to take the fight to the British people which includes the Ulster Protestants, knowing that while his actions did not achieve anything except misery and hurt, (for his own family and others), he does not see much change in attitudes or circumstances as a result of the 'Peace Project'. While claiming no further desire to participate in violence, the same

individual does argue that young Republicans are entitled to 'continue the struggle by whatever means they see necessary'. [Anonymous Participant Interview - 2017] These are interesting insights and information which could be worked on by the community for the benefit of younger generations who believe there is merit in pursuing a violent struggle.

Collaboration and engagement through embedded practice

Once the prospect of cross community collaboration, briefly explored and discussed, came to an unsuccessful conclusion in this instance for the reasons previously outlined I focused on the single identity group of republican ex-prisoners who accepted and explored the initial offer of participation in DS practice as an educational resource and alternative digital artistic outlet for its members. It was necessary to agree the process of research, in terms of what would be documented and recorded. When I was in early discussions with the Republicans about the project, As mentioned previously the Boston College Tapes (2001) were causing problems for many ex-combatants and this was a factor that ruled out several potential participants completely. Some individuals could not trust the process, highlighting the potential for further 'stigma' or 'hassle' of the individual as a result of participation. The timing was merely coincidental, but it did have an impact on the uptake of the project.

However, as stated previously, there were many reasons why single identity groups and individuals declined the offer to participate. To protect the participants, we decided collectively that the focus of the stories would be around life in prison, and the reason for participants' incarceration only if they wanted to include this, but that we would not venture into territory where unprocessed crimes may have been committed in jail or in the community. Each member gave their consent and the members retained complete ownership of any output generated as a result of engagement. They were provided with a clear information sheet about the project and a consent form, and were advised intermittently of the right to withdraw or withhold their final contribution without question.

Consent was reviewed collectively at every critical point in the creative process. This reinforced the sense of ownership of the process in participants and helped establish a level of equal ownership in the process and make me more readily acceptable to the group.

Once the rules were established the participants cautiously began to weave the connections of the past to the present starting with childhood experiences. I was inviting already 'stigmatised' individuals to open up and express themselves like never before. I had an ethical duty to treat these individuals with utmost care and respect and therefore it was important that I set aside any preconceived ideas about these men of which I had a few. As a researcher who had grown up largely during the conflict, in the same city as several of the participants, I was acutely aware of my own bias and the potential for my own life experiences to influence my response to the participants. To counter this, I kept a reflective diary of the process. I acknowledged the inevitable bias which could not be practically avoided in dealing personally with individuals. Many of the participants were friendly, responsive, interested in the process and courteous with me. None of the things one might expect, when having no relative experience among this demographic and only perceiving former combatants from a distance. However a dominant characteristic of the practice is PAR. The participants in this study identified their own issues from the offset and helped develop the model of practice as a vehicle for expression. Participants chose the topics to be discussed, set the pace at which the work would be produced and retain ownership of all content produced. This removes hierarchical structures and the inherent power imbalance that the researcher may hold over research subjects and rebalances the relationship in favour of recognising all contributions as valid and valuable contributors to knowledge creation. Reason and Bradbury state that "Action research does not start from a desire to change others 'out there', although it may eventually have that result, rather it starts from an orientation of change with others" (2008:1). On beginning my journey with the group, I was clear about my objectives of developing and completing a process of Digital Story Production in a post-conflict environment which would be developed by including different strategies for narrative expression but determined by the participants in terms of how they respond to the work, whether Story Circle, Life Story Method,

Every Object Tells a Story or elements of the production phase of the practice. In the Story phase the Participants adopted the role of expert and at the production phase of the practice I self identified as expert. The relationship requires a fluidity and understanding that each participant in the work brings their own experience and expertise to the practice which manifests in many different forms. My role was largely to listen and support the group in the process of supporting each other while engaging in a continuous cycle of evaluation with the group and individuals, to ensure that each step in the process was considered and delivered at an acceptable pace for the group.

The group started small with six members and myself. It was disclosed to me privately that in the early stages some people did not trust me, assuming an alternative agenda, while for some men (not initially involved in the practice) I was disrupting the flow of their 'safe space', as an obvious outsider who they perceived was 'asking a lot of questions'. However they discussed the practice in my absence early in the process and the consensus was they were generally in favour of the work. As a result several other individuals from within the community were drawn to participate, encouraged by the members of the initial story circle once it became clear that I was not attempting to set the agenda and entice individuals to places they would rather not go.

Early stages of engagement with the Ex-Prisoner working group

The process began with story circles combining 'Life Story Method' and 'Every Object tells a story'; a guide and learning resource produced by MLA Yorkshire and University of Sheffield's School of Education, similar to HTR's 'Everyday Objects 2013' as an example of how people could use an artefact to trigger the memory for a story. This item would represent a time before political or paramilitary involvement. As McNally points out "what we remember sometimes depends on the context of recollection" (2003: 40). Many of the artefacts and images on site belong to current members of the group as well as deceased members. Therefore picking an object and responding to it by telling a story made the process much easier to activate, and no one was coaxed into

particular narratives. The object choices of the participants shaped the content of the story circle on any particular day. Rather than placing the individual as the focus, the object became the focus for the teller, taking his mind off the audience made up of participants and myself as outsider or 'other'. The only caveat was that the story had to relate to their life before they got involved with their respective paramilitary organisations. This was a slow but necessary process to unlock the potential of each member. I suggested that an initial focus away from the strong republican identity would liberate members to speak freely about any experience of which they are in complete control. Some members were not in complete control of their narratives at all times throughout the process when on occasion straying into territory where other members felt uncomfortable with certain topics in my presence. To have these occurrences in the initial phases of engagement would destabilise the flow of the group so a photograph, image or object from their childhood was something that could redirect attention and gave everyone an equal entry point into the work including myself as researcher participant. McNally references the "encoding specificity principle", originally the work of Tulving and Thompson (1973) stating "information is most accessible when encoding conditions are reinstated at retrieval" (2003: 40). For the same reason McLaughlin, while working on the *PMA* project, invited his participants back to the prisons in Long Kesh / Maze or Armagh Gaol. *PMA* had a derelict prison with conflicting notions of presence and absence portrayed by the storyteller and camera operator, whereas my process used the personal possessions that filled those cells in prison, acting as signs and symbols of events and experiences of a past which bonds this community intensely in the present. I also worked with the group of participants as a whole rather than through one-to-one encounters. The participants had a space dedicated to their particular story or prison experience in the form of objects, documents and images which they could bring to the group, so they had a potential range of stories that they could share with the group based on their own editorial choices. This avoided situations where individuals could potentially feel compelled to speak about events which may have caused them difficulty in remembering or difficulty in articulating or expressing. McNally claims that in memory, "information may be available but not accessible because of the absence of potent reminders" (2003: 40). They had the triggers to memory at hand and this became the most

accessible way to unlock some of the memories and providing a gentle entry point into the exercises. The men would not necessarily need artefacts to express stories of the past in their own company, however an outsider changes the dynamic in the room and all participants acknowledge their heightened sense of self awareness. While participants wanted to speak it took several sessions to begin disclosing personal details and information. Not only were they sharing this information with an outsider, they were also sharing with the group in this intimate way for the first time. The struggle for individuals to speak was apparent but similarly the support for the individual to speak among peers was equally present through gentle encouragement consisting of verbal and nonverbal gestures and cues. At other times individuals were discouraged by the group, depending on the narrative being expressed, so they managed the content through self-policing what was suitable and acceptable to them in this process of engagement, based on agreements established at the beginning of the project.

To begin the work in the story circles I invited the most experienced of the group, someone who has engaged with peace and reconciliation efforts since his release from prison, to begin the session. He already agreed to this before the session began, so no interventions were required at the beginning of the process other than to introduce myself, and welcome everyone. I did this to avoid drawing attention to myself, as I was not considered a member of the group. These sessions made for compelling listening but there was also a lot at stake for the relative success or failure of the project. Up to this point many of the events and atrocities that I knew about were only familiar through images and news media reports. Now these stories were being presented to me in a very different manner. Suddenly, I found myself in one of the inner circles, listening to experiences, being in a privileged position to ask some questions in which I heard reasoning and attempted justification over a period of time. I heard about the workings of the IRA and INLA, how people got involved, how jobs were sanctioned and allocated and what it was like to carry out actions that sometimes resulted in devastating acts of violence against others. I discovered the level of trauma that manifests in the aftermath which has both psychological and physical impact on the perpetrator. Some of their stories were long, made up of three or four connected stories and some

were short, but the objects, artefacts and documents allowed the participants to focus on the story being told and not on themselves in the telling.

Based on this experience, I thought we could develop this idea and ensure the participant was still engaged in the telling and not on the self, once the sound equipment was introduced. However, there is a permanence which must be addressed when recording, and which creates unease.

Desensitisation to the recording process is something that needs to be worked on in future projects, perhaps only coming on the basis of prolonged work and trust. It is difficult for vulnerable participants such as this demographic to banish the thought police in the early phase of telling stories for recording. It is a matter of experience but with limited time one must consider how best to work to ensure the completion of the project and to meet the expectations of participants: that they would make films, learn new technical transferable skills and develop communication skills while engaging in a worthwhile process of critical self and community reflection.

While the Story Circles offered deep moments of intensity through various combinations of self expression, there was a lot of laughter. Many participants would listen at first and then respond and interact when someone told a story of an event which they could also recall, reconstruct and relay directly. The purpose of the process was to create connections between people and narrative, to remember and re-imagine with minimal intervention from facilitator / researcher. As researcher there was no note taking or recording permitted during these sessions which I surmised would negatively draw attention to me as researcher and not as an equitable partner in the process. In the early stages I had not gained the trust of the men and they had a mistrust of academics, media, and anyone outside their tightly bound group. It was agreed that I would make some short notes at the end of each session which would allow me to summarise at the next session, reflect on and evaluate the participation of individuals within the group and allow the group to pick up at the previous session's conclusion. Many times the sessions would naturally go a different way as the confidence of the group grew and individuals slowly made the transition from listener to fully engaged participant.

There were some participants who were quiet, who I assumed did not trust me or the process. One in particular chose not to tell any stories in the first few sessions although he did contribute and make some interventions with others which were not in any way obstructive. This individual had a reputation for being extreme in his views and notorious for some of the atrocities to which his name is attached. As part of my engagement with the men outside of the story sessions, I would help them with some administration work and with some of the work they undertake daily, making small products such as key rings, t-shirts, and other memorabilia to raise funds at rallies and commemorations. I was able to work with this individual in particular as he liked to come in often and produce this memorabilia. We would have conversations 'off the record' almost every day while I would engage him by demonstrating software for creating other content, or cut cards for key rings while he would place them in their holders. I believe that it was this time which allowed me to express that not only was I there to do research but I was also there to offer my time to support them in work that is important to them. He asked many questions in these exchanges to satisfy himself that I was not going to do anything which would expose the group to unwanted negative attention. After some time spent in the first two weeks helping him do his work, he could see that the project was having a positive effect on the participants and he slowly started to make welcome contributions to the group. This was a man who was held in high esteem by the group and once he decided to participate it did encourage some others to join in. In an incredible turn around, by the end of the process he embraced the practice and suggested he would like to take it further stating "I would like to do a stage performance of the [story] collection as these are stories which should be told" [Republican Interview 2017]. I would say this was a result of several factors including encouragement from the group, my ability to blend in as far as possible and demonstrate my intentions, to deliver the project successfully with them while producing better results than they could imagine at the beginning. Most of them claimed they wouldn't be able to do the 'film bit'. While in session I did not ask too many questions to interrupt the natural flow of the group, yet I encouraged his contributions when he began to speak. He was a natural entertainer and communicator and I felt that if he could get involved and have some small sense of achievement in

the process then this approach is something that could benefit other people who find it difficult to express themselves because in doing so they become vulnerable . I am not suggesting this individual changed his world view in any way, except that in some way he was moved to listen and express himself in a way that he had not envisaged or acknowledged publicly before. As I got to know him he contemplated the 'other' in a less aggressive manner than he would in more informal, natural surroundings. He acknowledges in his story that he thinks "the Protestant people are pawns for the British, being used and manipulated yet they remain part of the problem here" (Stories from Long Kesh 2017) so he does have strong views and while he may not have changed his world view, he acknowledged the extremity of his position through expressing it. I also shared my own story, the reasons for my interest in this research area and my general life experience. This was to give as much information about me so he and the group in general would have a clear sense of who I am and facilitate my integration with the group. This may have put participants at ease, however at no time in the process was I considered anything but useful outsider or friendly 'other'.

After 4 weeks of storytelling as a collective, holding two Story Circle sessions each week, plus individual interviews, research and story development sessions, the group were ready to participate in the intensive week of production. The first thing to do was to ask the participants to consider all the events and stories they had remembered and pick one which they might like to commit to paper. As a group it was decided we could frame the stories around education and learning in prison, how it worked and affected them in prison life and how it may have changed them as individuals. Education is a significant factor in the lives of Republican prisoners and they were continuing this endeavour as a collective through this contemporary collaboration. I suggest this was a process that participants recognised and embraced and may inform why the project worked with this demographic. The final project 'Stories from Long Kesh' concluded with eight stories from twelve participants with an average time of 5 minutes.

Committing the story to paper

Once the participants had selected a story that they wanted to share for the project, they had to make the editorial decisions, what to include and what to leave out of this representation of the story. Some participants were worried about the length of their stories in comparison to others but I advised they should continue to develop the story using whatever time it takes and then hold a group session to read the stories and use the feedback to help each participant refine and develop their story for a more formal and structured presentation. Meadows and Lambert call for a strictness in structure of two hundred and fifty words while Hartley and McWilliam advocate for between two and five minutes or around four hundred words. I did have a target time of a maximum five minutes which would ensure the participants could manage the creation and editing of digital content while retaining the elements that are important to them within the narratives. According to Robin (2007) the writing phase of the practice is one which is crucial in the process of creating Digital Stories. It allows for deep self-reflection and consideration of the story being told, which is essential to post-conflict transformation. However, it is also key in developing multiple literacies of participants in writing, presenting or communicating and problem solving. It is important to spend time on this phase of the practice for all these reasons. The text strongly effects the final output in terms of content, structure and flow, and the duration of the work also allows the participant to refine these literacies and to develop confidence in their own ability.

Participants did not want to be identifiable through their stories, so they collectively decided to anonymise them. There were many reasons for this stance but it was mainly done to protect the families of some of the participants. Individuals within the group disclosed that their children do not know of the levels of involvement of their fathers in the 'Troubles', nor of their time spent in prison for acts of violence. One participant explains in his story that he has not told his only daughter through fear of her reaction and has concealed the truth from her for eighteen years. Others were sensitive to negative publicity through publication when there is still much to be addressed around victims, survivors and legacy. They did not really understand in the early stages how the work

would turn out or even if they would be able to complete the production phase of the practice. The most important aspect is the story being told and the voice of the storyteller which lends significance, authority, or as Maguire phrases it, 'corporeal continuity' which is the idea that the body presenting the story 'is the same as the body which took part in the story world recounted' (2015: 60).

When facilitators are dealing with communities such as those in Silver Stories or Capture Wales, while giving a platform for the amplification of voice through engaging older generations in new media narrative techniques, the stories are not traumatic, but rather nostalgic and sentimental. They often feature fond memories of by gone days and for the participants within the group it becomes a social event, much easier to navigate for the facilitator in a much shorter space of time. When working with vulnerable groups it is important to take much more time over the process to ensure that individuals within the group are afforded necessary protections allowing them to consider their participation over a longer period of time while also providing time to fully engage with the practice. Producing a digital story for the collection is not the sole purpose of engagement. It is important for participants to get to re-engage with the self and for this purpose I adopted 'Life Story Methodology' as this might shift the emphasis in the early phase of the practice away from the collective rhetoric and ideology of the group and individualise the participants. I did not expect or want individuals to speak about their violent actions and resulting incarceration from the offset, so I encouraged an exploration of the person in their formative years and what life was like before joining their prospective groups. This approach enabled a recovery of the self at a manageable pace.

Once each participant had a draft, the stories were read out and the content discussed. This process instigated further refinement of the narrative accounts. This was somewhat repetitive and constituting an individual exercise seemed somewhat taxing for participants. I could sense the fatigue of participants with the drafting process after two writing sessions and some time between. (One Week) They took the decision that their stories were ready to record. At this point, and after

some discussion several participants withdrew from the process. They informed me that they would prefer someone else to read their stories and create the accompanying digital audio for the story although other participants were encouraging them to make their own story and add to the collection. The most significant reason for withdrawal was that several men did not want their children to know of their past lives in the paramilitary organisations and did not want to expose themselves to the risk through completing the project. They were within their rights to call time on the project as had been agreed and reiterated at intervals throughout the process. It did not negatively impact the submissions from across the group and these men were still in full support of their peers and the process while maintaining a presence for the rest of the group sessions. For everyone this had become an engaging social activity

Basic literacy among participants

Through engaging with the writing exercise it was apparent that individuals had issues with basic literacy, spelling, grammar and handwriting. This had an impact on individual capacity to recite the story from the handwritten text. I did not have a laptop for each participant, but I did offer to type the stories as they were written, and print them for easier recitation. There were individuals who were natural and experienced orators and could tell a very engaging story from memory, but who struggled with writing their ideas down, expressing experience through reading, losing the natural rhythm of the telling in the process. To address this I found ways to negotiate and respond to issues on a case by case basis. One solution was to write some cue cards with the basic narrative or arc of the story, and this would afford the teller an opportunity to respond in the moment while telling or performing the story to me in a closed setting. Others would highlight key words within a paragraph and this allowed them to follow their text more closely.

An objective of Digital Storytelling is to enable the community to engage in the production and recovery of their own stories. As a result they should expand their range of digital abilities and reaffirm their talking, listening, reading and writing skills rendering participants transliterate; that is

as Thomas et al. state where individuals have the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media, from signing and orality through handwriting, print, television, radio and film to digital social networks (2007). Transliteracy is a relatively new idea originating in “Alan Liu’s *Transliterations Project* at the University of California in 2005” (2014) According to Sukovic “transliteracy and DS share a number of similarities [...] - origins in extensive use of technologies, focus on multimedia, multimodal and multiple literacies and an exploration of new ways of learning and creating” (2014 :206). Sukovic also highlights,

Learning in an environment which encourages transliteracy seems to enable not only a transfer of skills but also a transfer of engagement. Bridging spaces can become safe areas for exploration. For many [...] a range of tools, tasks and modes of expression provide alternative entries into areas that they may have preferred to avoid (2014:226).

A further potential development that would impact positively on the lives of these participants and the surrounding community, is a process of disseminating the work at grassroots level. Like any group of learner participants, individuals develop skills at different rates. Some participants engaged with the production phase of the practice with enthusiasm and excitement and it is these individuals who would benefit from ‘Train the Trainer’ sessions and become full partners in the delivery of DS workshops within their respective communities. This would effectively create a handover of the form of DS to communities at ground level and give new purpose and meaning to the lives of the community facilitators. With the aid of ‘train the trainer’ sessions, support from the community sector, government bodies and academic institutions, individuals within communities could be readily equipped to lead the process of change reconnecting with self, community and ‘other’ from the inside out.

The microphone as ‘significant other’

As time passed my presence had less impact on communication and freedom of expression within the group, and I gradually introduced the microphone. The microphone represents a permanence through recording, and a projection of voice with associated enhanced audibility, to an unseen audience. For many unskilled participants this is unsettling. The participants needed time to

become familiar with the process of recording themselves and talking about their past activities, which is completely counterintuitive for them. In their past lived experience everything was about secrecy, discretion and being on 'a need to know basis'. Post-Ceasefire, this emphasis on secrecy and silence has persisted. We had a small room at the back of the facility which provided a suitable quiet space to record away from the group. As the voice was of high importance, recording in the group circle would have too many competing sounds and would not produce quality recordings, so the participants opted to use a room at the rear of the common room and perform the stories there.

Once I established the recording room, only for the purpose of vocal clarity, and showed the basic and informal set up to the participants, they continued addressing me as 'MI5'. After weeks of collaboration, building reciprocal trust and confidence, I was reminded of my sense of 'other' and this also reinforced their perception of me as an outsider. For many participants this moment served as a reminder of their time in interrogation units, in places like Castlereagh detention centre, where many claim they were subject to torture and abuse in order to extract the same information that they had been offering in the story circle for weeks. I hastily reminded participants of the option to use their own phone to record their stories, in order to facilitate the process of desensitisation to the microphone and to emphasise the level of control the participant had on the material. Alternatively they would allow me to record them vocally and create an MP3 file which could be shared with them to add to their sound channel on the timeline within the linear editing software. Ultimately the nickname representing a disparagement toward me and the process, was taken in the good spirit and humour at the point it was suggested yet it reflected a pertinent resonance of the negative memories which come about through association for many of the participants. Four participants withdrew at this point, or 1/3 of the group. The recording space represented a permanence to the moment of telling and for varied reasons these participants withdrew from the final phase of the process - the digital story production phase. They did however participate in the complex Life Story phase, every object tells a story, analysis and feedback

sessions so their participation remains valuable both to the process and more significantly to the individual concerned.

To explain sound recording while keeping it basic, I demonstrated a recording of an unseen reading of an excerpt from a magazine and then recorded again, this time performing the telling of the same short magazine excerpt from memory. On playback the participants could identify immediately the difference between the two, finding the memorised telling more interesting to listen to, due to the rhythm and natural animation of the voice based on what I could remember. The result was that participants decided they should also consider making their story more of a performance than an exercise in reading aloud. This was to shift focus from those who were struggling with basic literacy (reading) and attempt to find a way of working which accommodated and enabled as many participants as possible. Throughout all stages in the process, I was aware that the participants possess a range of abilities, personalities and skills that must be considered at the beginning of each new phase of practice, and which require awareness and attentiveness to the individual needs within group on the part of the facilitator. As the process evolves participants become more active in acknowledging their perceived strengths and weakness' to each other and in disclosure to the researcher and this forms part of their personal evaluation where they make discoveries about aspects of the work but most significantly about the self.

As participants were no longer reading the script verbatim, they were now free to add embellishments. The stories therefore present more naturally and conversationally. The change in approach encouraged what McNally refers to as 'narrative fragmentation' which "consists of repeated phrases, speech fillers and unfinished thoughts that disrupt the smooth flow of the story" (2003: 135). This made the tellers more relaxed and less aware of themselves through the lack of formality in reading text. Participants are once more telling the story for the first time, engaging and reconstructing memories and tapping into that source. As McNally (2003) points out "autobiographical recollection is a reconstructive not a reproductive process. The men were combining their generic, or semantic memories as well as the episodic for the specific event being

reconstructed. Generic memory is where events happened routinely and also consider knowledge and beliefs. The participants enhanced the telling by engaging their bodies in narration, demonstrating sizes and shapes through gestures, using a range of tone, rhythm and pace of speech which is nuanced and highly individual. Many participants are accomplished storytellers from their experience in Long Kesh / Maze and 'doing the book', as remembered in *The Divine*, one of the stories told as part of this collection, *Stories of Long Kesh 2017*. While in prison, during the blanket protest and hunger strikes of the late nineteen seventies to early eighties, each man on the wing would take turns to tell stories to everyone else through the door. One participant fondly remembers his time on the book and being reprimanded by a devout Catholic prisoner, who later died on the hunger strike of 1981, for the use of gratuitous sexual content in the story. He uses story to re-humanise individuals whom he suggests have gained 'divine status' in the narrative of Irish republicanism, through making the ultimate sacrifice with their lives. This easing of the reliance on the use of verbatim text meant that the remaining participants who still harboured some doubt about the work, were able to engage with and complete the tasks while learning new digital skills. They were also able to see the project through to conclusion and experience the sense of positive fulfilment and accomplishment in doing something that many participants thought would not be possible at the beginning of the process.

The sense of performing the story demands the participant work harder to tell the story. In the early workshops this is something individuals do naturally, but it can become difficult when they are placed in front of a microphone without proper preparation. Each of these individual recording sessions took several attempts to settle the participant, take the opportunity to chat and get to know them better as individuals, while encouraging them to be confident so that they could recount the story without being too self-aware in the act of telling. There were inevitable mistakes and some of this was corrected at various points in the editing process where participants could remove swear words, moments where they stumbled or stuttered in the telling, or where they added a name or detail that they did not want on record. Due to limited technical skills, individuals only worked on one track and did not crop from multiple iterations or 'takes' as this would have

fragmented the natural flow of the storytelling for an inexperienced sound editor. The apps used by participants on smartphones only allowed for one channel / track editing, (at the time) so the participant decided which recording to work with and deleted the other recordings.

Hearing the stories performed live in such an intimate manner gave me an awareness of myself not only as participant researcher but also as a privileged listener. I considered the victims, the people who would want the opportunity to sit alone in a room with the person who changed their lives in the worst possible manner, posing some of the questions I was asking. With this sense of privilege also came responsibility; to ensure that the participants were not exploited, were not distressed by their participation, ensuring their identities are protected due to the early stages of research in this area, as an alternative approach to inclusive community practice in a post-conflict environment with vulnerable participants. To maintain this difficult balance of recognising and responding to the full humanity of the participants while still aware of my personal political attitudes and my awareness of the sufferings caused by the conflict, was one of the challenges of the Participatory Action Research approach. I made use of a reflective diary, consultations with my supervisors, and scholarly reading in the area to foster my distance from the emotional impact of some of the stories I was hearing and working with. Working with the tight form of DS provided some support also because I could rely on its established structure to help deliver the final outputs and advance the project to its natural conclusion.

The microphone represents the invisible audience and as I have found in other similar studies the microphone and camera can have a complicating impact on people's ability to express themselves in the most natural manner. There are other internal issues like ownership of the story, hierarchy and the right to speak. When individuals begin to question what they are doing in the process, or question the worth of their contribution, they are not focused on the task and that can make them less willing to share details necessary to the story and fully participate in the process of sharing. Many victims in post conflict societies describe their experience of storytelling practice advocating for others to share in the experience, yet frequently acknowledge that there is a sense that there

are others who have suffered more and have not been given the chance to express their stories in the public fora. It depends on the story being told and the levels of ownership of that story which also impacts on the confidence of the teller in their performance and recollection of the story which makes it relative to the listener.

Adding Images to create Digital Stories

Several available software programs and apps were used to record and create the stories based on the available devices. Once complete they were then transferred to iMovie, an entry level editing software, in order to create the final collection. These are user friendly editing suites for the beginner. Ideally all participants would use the same software if the project was financially resourced. This would simplify the technical teaching and make it a more coordinated exercise instead of the facilitator trying to learn all the available editing resources that participants can access and navigate based on access through android or iOS, preferably free apps available at the point of delivery of the practice. The principles are the same in each program but some features vary. While I had to spend extra time explaining different functions on an individual basis the men were able to use the software they accessed.

Once the stories were audio recorded, the participants looked for images and artefacts which they could photograph that would tell their story visually, unless they already had other relevant documentation which helped illustrate their words. They were permitted to be abstract or literal in relation to how they displayed their images. However for aesthetic reasons I advised all transitions should be fades or cuts only, and not to use the animated transitions found in the software as some of the effects can be nauseating to the viewer. This is particularly so when words about acts of terrible violence might be intercut with star-wipes or other playful animations. Many participants followed the previous examples of DS that I provided from other projects including *Undocumented in Ireland : Our Stories*, first screened in 2007 at the MRCI, (*Migrants Rights Centre Ireland*) in Dublin as part of *Life in the Shadows Series*. This work was a longitudinal study with Immigrants in Ireland while they were waiting for their asylum applications to be processed. Some of the work is

still available to view on www.darcyalexandra.com. I also showed the group other examples of Digital Stories including examples from *BBC Capture Wales* Project and more contemporary projects which evolved as a result of the *Capture Wales* series such as *Breaking Barriers Community Arts - Digital Storytelling and Participatory Practice* who work with a range of community groups employing DS as a “community arts tool for individual development and community regeneration”. These examples provided a suitable snapshot of the form and potential for a range of outputs based on personal experience. While the participants developed the skills and assimilated the tasks at an individual pace, they did support each other as a collective and accomplish the task and produce their final digital outputs.

In conversation with members of the group it was decided as much out of necessity as aesthetics to use moving images if they could source them, as well as images of artefacts relating to their own ‘struggle’ within the Republican movement, their time in prison, and their lives prior to prison. This may have been an ambitious aspiration on the part of the producers but in conversation they did discuss recording different types of footage however that never transpired and they sourced online content and used this under the fair use principle i.e used sparingly in a transformative process in order to provide commentary. As the work will not be available on general release, or as part of public exhibition in its current form, restrictions on copyright do not apply; it is a private collection only available in its current form as a practice-based submission to accompany the submission of this thesis.

Prison Stories

There are eight stories which complete the collection. There were more contributions produced in the process but these remain unheard outside the group and withheld from the project. All of the stories remain the property of the individual tellers, and have not been made available for general public dissemination. Participants were freely able to withdraw their contribution at any point in the process, even after completion. This is not unusual in work of this kind; participants in the *Ardoyne Commemoration Project* (2002) removed stories from the final collection before publishing and

Border Roads to Memories (2015) also removed stories from the digital collection published online after a period of time had elapsed. Ownership rights are vital to uphold so that participants from all backgrounds can come forward and participate in the regeneration of the community through story regardless of themes and form of the final output. The central theme of the work is about engagement and collaboration among communities around difficult narratives. The remaining producers offered me their stories to provide context for readers of this particular study. The eight stories I have curated through co-producing the project are on average 5 minutes in duration, and are described briefly below.

Endgame (Fig 1A) considers the paradox of the terrorist and the convicted 'political prisoner'. It alludes to several examples of bombs which devastated their targets and the lives of those caught up indiscriminately. The story is told by a former Quarter Master and bomber, who acknowledges a sudden change of attitude to the morality of his actions when considering the loss of life as a result of the Loughall Ambush in 1987. An eight man active IRA unit were in the process of unleashing an attack on a police station while the SAS lay in wait, then opened fire on the unsuspecting combatants. This was a significant moment for the participant as the point where he decided violence would not be the answer to the Irish problem. With no real authority for broader influence he focused on physical exercise and positive mental stimulation to facilitate wellbeing, especially during difficult periods in prison although at no point did he make his views known or request a move from his wing. He remained part of the structure of his organisation for the remainder of his sentence.

Self Determination (Fig 1B) explores education and study from the perspective of a political prisoner. This prisoner spent time in Crumlin Road, Hydebank, Magilligan, Long Kesh / Maze and Port Laoise to name a few. He has experienced the difference an education can make to young, highly charged and radical individuals who are willing to fight for ideological ideas about which they knew little before joining their particular organisations.

The Crum (Fig 1C) is a story about one of the youngest people ever convicted of a terrorist offence in the recent conflict in Northern Ireland. He now works on Republican Tours around Northern Ireland that represent key locations highlighting different aspects of the conflict from a Republican perspective. His story recalls the harsh reality of life in prison being so young and the dangers that await those who end up there as part of this regime. While waiting for his transfer to the H-Blocks he remembers the segregation challenge from Loyalist prisoners and the resulting violence during his time in the 'Crum' (Crumlin Road Gaol in Belfast) He remembers many beatings in the years that he spent in Crumlin Road and Long Kesh, choosing to highlight in this story a beating from Loyalist prisoners that he managed to avoid through sheer luck or fortune, to the detriment of one of his Republican comrades.

The five isms (Fig 1D) is about education in prison for and by Republicans and its implied importance to the ultimate cause of the unification of Ireland. It demonstrates the lack of reasoning for men and women who joined the paramilitary groups in the 70's and 80's. This storyteller explores his own personal conflict of teaching the '5 isms of Republicanism' and in particular anti-sectarianism while serving a life sentence for shooting an 'Orange man' or member of the Orange Order. The five 'isms' of Irish Republicanism are: Socialism, Nationalism, Secularism, Separatism, and Anti-Sectarianism. This storyteller views himself as indigenous to the island of Ireland and looks at the Protestant people as 'pawns for the British government' claiming that while they are being manipulated they are still part of the problem. His ideological beliefs have not changed, even twenty years into a faltering peace process and twenty years after his release from a life sentence in prison.

The Breakers Yard (Fig 1E) is focused on the experience of a former Republican prisoner in Crumlin road jail and his personal fight as part of the wider struggle for political status in all prisons in the North. The teller comes to the story from the perspective of prisoners using art and particularly through theatre, taking their message into the community, in the form of a play, 'Bobby Sands - The Crimes of Castlereagh'. The teller was part of the playwriting group who used theatre

to show the reality of life behind bars as a political prisoner, and he weaves his story through the violent episodes of life on remand and awaiting transfer to H-Blocks, recalling the attacks, the beatings and an attempted violent break out with the SAS waiting on the other side of the gate. The teller highlights the collaborative approach to the struggle for all prisoners including their adversarial counterparts on the Loyalist wings, and not just for the benefit of Republican comrades.

The Enemy Within (fig. 1f) explores the time of the ceasefire in prison from 1994 onward and the problems that were created as a result of the advancement of the peace process for the lives of the prisoners inside. Suddenly they were unlocked for 24 hours a day and had access to phones on the wings. This interrupted the life of the prisoners, unsettling their daily routine. The teller speaks of the struggle in prison while his parents were ill and dying, and how disenfranchised from family and society one can become, as a result of a long time spent in prison. The storyteller also reflects on the issue of his daughter finding out about his identity as an ex-IRA man having served time for very serious offences, and how that might impact on his relationship with the only person he has left in the world. He was not yet ready to address this matter with her.

The Divine (fig. 1g) deals with the notion that Republicans who have made the biggest sacrifice with their lives are often held up as divine entities but in doing so it is easy to lose the reality of who they were and what they were about. This storyteller remembers his days on the H-Block sharing stories 'at the cell door' adding in sex scenes where they didn't belong for additional spice and the amusement of his listeners. At the time he was confronted by the 'OC' (IRA Chief of Staff) because the hunger striker Raymond McCreesh was a 'devout Roman Catholic' and did not want to hear sexually explicit content narrated as part of the stories.

Agin the Grain (fig. 1h) is a collection of memories about craft making in Long Kesh and an escape attempt. The teller describes the crafts were a form of currency in exchange for work. Knowledge and power is key in prison and this narrator describes Peter Bateson, a man who knew how to varnish the crafts to a high standard finish, who had a secret recipe and was able to swap his

services for products. The narrator also recalls how an escape attempt was underway which meant his own 'testimonial' football match was cancelled the week before he was released. The storyteller is one example of a participant who used a story prompt sheet instead of reading his story verbatim. This means that the story is not as well delivered in performance as others, and the teller suffers some narrative fragmentation, but he does give a natural presentation and no less insight into the experience of the teller, worthy of its place in the collection.

General findings of the Project

The stories created by participants in this project are on average 5 minutes long. They are expressions of past and present, reconstructions of experience and imagination, told in the first person. They are created through a structured approach to story formation, adopting methods such as Story Circle, Every Object Tells a Story, Life Story Method, toward the final output of digital story production which as Klæbe states "constructs a personal sense of place, identity and history" (2006: 1).

This process was not about truth recovery or reconciliation but rather exploring the potential for engagement and participation in communities of conflict and as a result establish a framework for working on stories of conflict with victims, survivors and significantly in this research, perpetrators of violence. As John Hartley points out DS is "a tool for fostering digital literacy both as an end in itself, (Hartley et al. 2008) and as a means of moving away from dominance of professional media and its attendant expert paradigm brought about by recent technological and cultural shifts. (2009) DS is about using the tools of contemporary society to adapt and reimagine the process of communication, collaboration and artistic practice. Nick Couldry observes the importance of reinvigorating practices of storytelling about experience, as a means of addressing the "disarticulation between individual narratives and social or political narratives is fundamental to DS as a movement arrived at effecting change in social or political spheres through the inclusion of marginalised voices" (2008: 338).

These stories and others derived through local engagement sidestep the existing documentation, considered as archive or historical evidence and raises the profile of the repertoire. These are not official accounts by 'traditional memory agents' such as mainstream media, the British government, British Army and RUC Police reports, or victims' accounts in terms of documenting the 'Troubles'. They are perpetrators and they provide an insider perspective. While the stories are "true" they are not the whole story and never will be. Each participant across all three projects had many stories to share and it was a group decision as to the general topic of their particular DS collection. This archive functions in the space between traditional accounts of the past and personal testimony creating a deeper level of understanding considering not just what happened but why it happened. McNally states "procedural memory concerns knowing how rather than knowing that" (2003: 31). By engaging in the DS process participants can create unambiguous works which can address many concerns in their lives, but most significantly they come together in a room to work with each other and discuss many difficult topics.

Procedural memory is about doing. It concerns repetition and attention and an interest in the subject matter. The stories may have stemmed from episodic memory, a conscious recollection of one's personal experiences (2003: 30); repisodic memory which is constructed by repeated episodes of the same type, (2003: 35) or a blend of both. McNally points out that "autobiographical recollection is a reconstructive and not a reproductive process" (2003: 35). The process of remembering the elements of the story requires recovery or recall of the experience and then the separate construction of a narrative. It is fragmented and needs to be packaged for the unseen audience, which could include innocent victims, survivors, their families and families of the perpetrators. It requires participants to consider their involvement and their victims, and also to acknowledge their discordant other in the opposing, equally violent, organisations. The process of Life Story, method allows the participants to consider their feelings, frustrations, regrets and fears in a time before they had any connection with violence, and encourages reconstruction of the past for the present to begin to explore why and how apparently normal people carry out extreme acts

of violence toward others and potentially stop its development to such detrimental levels in the future.

There is a new generation on the fringes of society which would benefit from hearing the stories of suffering, violence, oppression of the past in order that they do not attempt to repeat the past.

These individuals can be influenced by icons, propaganda and some people from the past which could have the capacity to activate false notions of heroism and patriotism which can lead to much darker objectives. Community support for Republican organisations such as the 'New IRA' is negligible; however they operate on fear rather than support in the current climate. They serve as a reminder that there are still people in the wider community who are willing to act violently through punishment beatings and gun violence while actively if intermittently, targeting security forces and prison staff, remaining a clear and present danger to wider society. One project cannot drastically change the outlook or perspective of its participants, however having engaged they have made many personal discoveries about their own lives and those of their peers. The process created a deeper sense of community and highlighted suffering and experience which in the early stages was shielded with laughter and humour.

As time passed however, there was more refrain within the group when discussing their roles in the conflict as they had already considered their childhoods, family and friends. The process gave them time to reflect, acknowledge and share their fondest memories, of childhood ambitions and heroes, their own hopes and dreams for the future. They were not being treated like ex-prisoners but as equal participants in a reciprocal process of knowledge exchange. They demonstrated their humanity, vulnerability and weakness and in doing so were able to begin to address why their lives went in the direction of Republican activism and the subsequent consequences of personal actions.

They also learned transferable digital skills in the process which is of benefit in terms of personal communication and self-expression in the digital age, having more awareness of necessary

considerations when creating public profiles, sharing information and building communities where tolerance and acceptance of differing opinion is key in any process of conflict management.

Reintegration: Ex-Prisoners and Society

Evidence from their stories suggests that the majority of the participants have not given up on their ideology, yet they seem battle-weary from their efforts. The former prisoners are a community or sub-group who have been largely ignored and feel abandoned since their release from prison following the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement (1998). They have not and potentially will not fully re-integrate into society, and there are few resourced and targeting programmes that systematically address this issue. Participants from within this demographic struggle to find regular work and suffer from various physical and mental health conditions. Several individuals among the small group I worked with struggle with addiction issues. As a group they have many attributes which affect their ability to integrate as Shirlow and McEvoy point out: they face “other difficulties in coping with new technologies, impact of urban redevelopment and a subsequent failure to recognise places once familiar to (them) prisoners” (2008: 81).

The community hub has become a contemporary replacement for the prison and the men use the space routinely for discussions, readings and other social engagements, surrounded by the familiarity of artefacts from their prison cells and most importantly in the presence of ‘comrades’ whom they may not know well, but trust them based on their previous ‘shared’ experiences, or objectives.

The Irish Republican prisoners have a rich culture of heritage and tradition in regard to artistic performance of protest, struggle and resistance in the form of literary, artistic, musical and educational activities. They understand the ‘propaganda war’ which was waged against them throughout the conflict by the media and therefore understand the power of media. “Stories from Long Kesh” therefore, was an opportunity for many to tell their stories for the first time and positively interrupt their routine by creating a variation in activities, and opportunities for positive

interpersonal engagement, self-reflection, experiences of shared vulnerability, and other activities that are useful in the promotion of positive mental health and well being. They had previously made their own attempts at community integration but many were uncomfortable with the number of people showing up and asking questions, objectifying the members and therefore they took the decision that any future work or practice would be internal only for the benefit of its members.

These men have a foreboding presence in their communities, and while the wider community is aware of them from media reports, documentaries, oral history projects, and so on, many participants feel that they are treated with indifference or are completely ignored. While the Republican paramilitaries generally had more community support than their Loyalist counterparts during the conflict, that support has long since diminished. As a sub-group within the broader Nationalist/Republican community, they believe the group exists to 'protect the memory of fallen comrades and to keep surviving members sociable, accessible, out of trouble, somewhere to let off steam, help with form filling and them sort of things' [Republican ex-combatant interview 2017].

One of the participants described the process of DS, suggesting the activity presents a "fresh perspective of storytelling and participation and not the usual request for interviews and project proposals, where we normally do a blanket rejection whether its TV crews, academics or journalists. For many of these men, their first instinct is not to talk and that's what you're trying to change, well look at me, I didn't speak to you for two weeks and now I can't shut up... but its good craic and there's a good vibe about the centre with all the stories and the laughs"

[Republican ex-combatant Interview 2017]

The experience of ex-combatants can be used in a positive manner through engagement, education and community building to draw a line under the past and begin to establish foundations for change, for a future cross community narrative, constructed in a shared and equal society. As highlighted in Chapter 2, Jackson concludes that "Stories are redemptive not because they preserve or represent the truth but because they offer the perennial possibility that one see's

oneself and discovers oneself through another, despite the barriers of space, time and difference". (2006:250). Even when individual participants are not compelled to change their world view through engagement, their participation is still beneficial to the group, the individual, the researcher and society. As long as they recognise the value in sharing and acknowledgement, they can at their own pace, consider the challenges they face through a process of critical self reflection. In my experience few participants openly acknowledged their private thoughts of regret over past actions as part of the group. Some did acknowledge to me in private discussions, that they find it 'difficult to say things out there' [in front of the group]. (2017) They may express some form of remorse for their actions however it is usually qualified by 'whats done is done' or 'I cant change the past'. They are masking or maintaining their performance in order to retain some equilibrium within the group, for fear of stigma from the same. They may also be acting to protect an assumed identity of a hardline, no nonsense activist based on former notoriety for actions carried out in the past. Each participant is in a perpetual struggle with the unavoidable self while maintaining a performance based in the past for the present and this work provided a welcome disruption to that cycle of behaviour and demonstrated a more personal and beneficial way of communicating to relieve some of the pressure and burden of carrying the weight of such memories individually.

Psychological Health and Mental Well being among participants

Shirlow & McEvoy point out that "Imprisonment had a series of effects on both the prisoners and their families which did not disappear with the end of incarceration" [...] such as "physical and psychological health, relationship problems, complications in obtaining and maintaining long term employment and concerns around coping with life on the outside" (2008: 80). One serious legacy of the period of conflict is the trans-generational suffering, evidenced by the high suicide rate in Northern Ireland (highlighted by Michael Mansfield QC at a recent conference in Belfast for *SoS - Silence of Suicide* -Nov 18. Siobhan O'Neill et al state that "witnessing death, violence or pain, increases the person's risk of transitioning from suicidal thoughts and plans to actions: suicidal gestures and attempts. This acquired capability may be achieved through exposure to pain and violence either directly or indirectly" (2015) They continue that "one in ten (10.7 percent) of those

who died by suicide have recorded events relating to experiences of death and grief, a proportion of which will have been directly or indirectly attributable to the Troubles (2015: online).

Participants who were hiding their past from their families are one illustration of this: the secrecy must be detrimental to their mental health and to the quality of their relationships with those they love. Other examples are of course families whose loved ones were killed or maimed in actions of violence. Whole families have been destroyed, as evidenced in storytelling projects by victims in *'Stories from Silence'* *'Healing Through Remembering'* and documented through this practice in *'Stories from Long Kesh'*. It is not possible for the bereaved families to receive closure from participating in or hearing what any individual has to say about a traumatic event through a digital story, oral or written collection. Too many unanswered questions remain. This practice presents wider society an alternative pathway for engagement, communication, acknowledgement and understanding with all parties. It allows for critical self-reflection, the capacity to see oneself in another while it can also dissolve stereotypes and preconceived ideas. The process created here combines narrative techniques used in education, training and heritage, and places it within the community sector, creating a new relationship where knowledge exchange is key between the community, across communities and project facilitators.

The numbers of unresolved cases and the problems in resolving legacy issues in Northern Ireland, have left victims with an overwhelming sense of abandonment by central government and local politics according to the VSS. Projects should aim to align the services of community and professional practitioners who enable acknowledgement of experience and provide professional support and should be more widespread and accessible. Complex communities have complex problems which can only be resolved in a process of dialogue and intracommunity contact with a focus on their particular issues.

Conclusion

Stories provide an opportunity for communication and understanding, and media accessibility provides opportunities for sharing cultural and traditional norms from within and between opposing groups at a safe distance. DS is knowledge exchange; it is a process of discovery or rediscovery of the self through storytelling, performance and digital expression. The outputs have the capacity to speak directly to society about the past, about the present in relation to the past, about suffering and humanity. Combining the methodologies of Story Circle, Every Object tells a Story, and Life Story Method to create digital stories among communities emerging from conflict, provides a balanced approach to practice where professional and community collaborators can both get measured results through participation. Life Story Method allows the necessary time for collaborators to express the more difficult experiences of their lives by redeveloping their capacity to share stories in a structured setting, with [in this case] an emphasis on the life of the individual before joining paramilitary organisations. Unlike victim-based story projects where the emphasis is placed on the event which has caused the trauma, Life Story Method gives a deeper insight to past lives of participants such as former perpetrators of violence and is usefully combined with 'Every Object' within the Story Circle. It allows the process to build progressively toward sharing more difficult narratives, which in turn becomes what Simon refers to as 'difficult knowledge' (2011:433). Simon states it is 'difficult knowledge' because 'conclusions remain complicated and uncertain' as contributions such as the stories contained in this project, may in its audience evoke "negative emotion, those vexing and troublesome feelings of revulsion, grief, anger and shame that histories can produce" (2011: 434). It is important that perpetrators discuss their actions in participation of the group, but this is not something which can be achieved too early as it is important to engage the individual first, as part of the group before addressing the collective ideology. The baton of expertise shifts around the room as each participant makes contributions. Every participant is an equal partner and has full control over their output where they continually reassess their position within the group and independently raise issues of concern, which ensures that there is no unforeseen situation where they will lose control of their process, or the finished output.

Knowledge is a difficult concept to measure. There is knowing and there is understanding. As McNally points out “Procedural memory concerns knowing how rather than knowing that. Although we can describe how to do a skill, the ability to do so plays no role in its performance’ (2003:31). Life Story Method can uncover the ‘knowing how’ rather than relying on the unhelpful position of ‘knowing that’. Noor Rahamah et al. state “Large samples are unnecessary and maybe even inappropriate. Adequacy is dependent not on quantity, but upon the richness of the data and the nature of the aspect of life being investigated [...] In this way life stories of individuals are incorporated into a broader social history”.(2008 : 4) Engaging with DS practice in this form of Participatory Action Research, enables participant collaborators to make worthy and significant contributions to knowledge through their own experience. Orlando Fals-Borda (1991) suggests “PAR has four defining characteristics. It involves collective research and attempts a critical recovery of history. It will also seek to enhance the valuing and application of ‘folk culture’ and aims at the production and diffusion of [such] knowledge” (2006:73). Accessibility and inclusivity is key to opening up channels of communication within communities through structured, reciprocal interventions, such as the framework for practice outlined in this study. Through engaging with narrative practice there is a constructivist approach to the past, present, self and community and with this comes the potential for one to see difference, not as a threat, but as an opportunity to find workable solutions to problems that have become deeply woven in the fabric of Northern Ireland. It could be argued that engaging with Life Story allows ex-prisoner participants a platform to develop a collective victim status, without explicitly mentioning it. Joyce and Lynch (2017) state that instead of disregarding the collective victim narrative, that the information has empirical value “used, not solely to justify violence, but to legitimise their ‘transition’ to peace” (2018: 520). According to Cahal McLaughlin, “there is no one way to address the legacy of the past [...] but through hearing the voice of the “other”, it is hoped, we may enrich our understanding and navigate our way to a shared future” (2018: online).

Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter concludes the study of Digital Storytelling on the land border of Ireland. It summarises the key findings of the study in relation to the research question and aims, and highlights the value of the work and its contribution to knowledge. I will also reflect upon the limitations of the work while presenting opportunities for further research within the field.

Key Findings of the Study

This study set out to explore how engagement in narrative practice might be mutually beneficial for researcher / facilitator and participants along the land border of Ireland, while considering how individuals who have been marginalised or silenced within fragmented communities might amplify their voices through engaging with technology through the creation of Digital Stories. In a number of pre-existing projects, storytelling has been adopted as a strategy for considering the experiences of the past. In this project, which took Digital Storytelling as its form of practice, it also became a process for rebuilding the self and reimagining the community in the present. I also wanted to explore the process of archiving and disseminating practice considering that stories collected along any contested land border may be culturally sensitive.

Initially I considered Digital Storytelling as an incidental pursuit on the part of participants, planning that it would be adopted as the method to connect narratives, people, and communities who are generally more isolated than their suburban counterparts. With time and development however I discovered that Digital Storytelling requires individuals to come together and solve problems through listening and sharing experience as a collective. The process is about creating new connections by reimagining communities in the present and building personal relationships through understanding in the presence of others. Digital Storytelling provides a structure and framework for

engagement and a focused endpoint for participants around creating digital outputs, but with additional elements of narrative practice we have created a process that enables individuals with more complex and difficult stories to be shared and experienced in alternative ways.

I have developed methods and strategies for adopting Digital Storytelling as an alternative means of expression among communities of interest through traditional research methods and by working in partnership with different subgroups around the land border of Ireland. This project set out to use the existing frameworks of DS and PAR, based on principles of knowledge creation, sharing experience through story, and equitable partnerships between researchers and participants. This would provide a starting point for community engagement among different social groups, emphasising collaborative approaches rather than hierarchical, power-based relationships and top down approaches to community engagement. One important factor in accessing different community groups and building relationships within communities of interest, is situating prospects as experts from the initial introductions. This simple act empowers the participants, invites them to view their experience in a different light and removes the perceived or actual, hierarchical power imbalance between researcher and community. While as researcher it was important to highlight my skill set, experience and expertise, it is of little value to these individuals if there is no benefit to them for engaging as individuals or as a collective. The offer was to share knowledge and experience and in doing so both parties could gain insight and understanding about the self and others while developing useful transferable skills. The work needed individuals who could shine a spotlight on aspects of life, past and present which are not easy to discuss as part of everyday encounters. All collaborators have the capacity to open the channels of communication in and between communities where an 'outsider' would have great difficulty in understanding and learning the networked connections of any community and subsequently trying to act upon them in a relatively short period of time. The importance of creating a level playing field between participants and researcher cannot be emphasised enough. Every group has different needs and one must be adaptable, responsive, and resourceful in addressing the collective and individual requirements or the door will close quickly on any potential opportunity for engagement.

Through an iterative and protracted engagement process among different community groups, I have developed a model for practice which incorporates 'Life Story Method' and 'Every Object tells a story' alongside 'Story Circle', and the standard practice of 'Digital Storytelling' workshops which I have expanded extensively in time, beyond the five day engagement. These four individual processes combined, unlocked several complex communities in a way that enabled them to open up to an outsider, and more importantly, to each other, creating a revitalised sense of self through understanding and acknowledgement of past experience, while developing analytical perspectives of experience over assumption. Participants could see the level of control they would retain in participation and also recognised the potential for individual and collective growth in response to their life experience. The story circle would not work on its own for several groups and individuals needed additional support to enable them to speak about difficult episodes in their lives, so this is where I introduced life story method. 'Life Story Method' makes difficult personal narrative accounts accessible in the presence of others. Participants are not forced or 'coerced' to speak about events or experiences, but rather contribute initially to the group on any life experience they choose and thematic concerns developed as each individual articulated their personal accounts of the past. It is imperative that time is afforded to allow for genuine moments of reflection and self-recovery with an undetermined starting point. This phenomenon was more apparent with the Republican ex-prisoners than any other community group encountered on this research through the introduction of alternative methods for narrative recovery.

I linked Life Story Method directly with the method of 'Every object tells a story', where the storyteller can use an object or image for reference and in doing so, shift the focus from the self to the object and therefore the story. As a distancing technique, this facilitates a lower level of self-consciousness in the moment of performance and can silence the inner policeman. When participants are focused on the telling and not the self in the telling, the story becomes much more accessible, and difficult topics can be unlocked and explored. The object acts as a trigger to memory and an entry point to the story. Each individual is allowed the space to grow in their participation and there is no coercion on the part of the researcher to determine what stories

should or should not be included. It is imperative that communities are supported to find ways to represent themselves and collaborate with one another to build relationships based on common goals and objectives. The knowledge that is created and exchanged in such environments presents more opportunity for reflective learning as there is a collective understanding and processing of the past in the present. Even single identity groups can learn a great deal about the self and their immediate community by creating alternative opportunities for engagement. The fundamental constructivist approach to practice and research is deepened through the range of methods adopted such as case study to inform and develop not only the learning from each community engagement, but to shape the processes of this particular body of work.

Through researching previous projects which adopted alternative forms of narrative practice, I discovered that placing amateur storytellers in front of a microphone or camera without the correct preparation is not productive. These digital tools represent the unseen audience. If they are introduced without fully developing stories and the individual's capacity to articulate that story, they can have a negative impact on the story being told and on how it is received by the viewer / listener. As a professional I would not record an audio or film segment without the correct amount of rehearsal appropriate to the piece, so amateurs should also be afforded the time to ensure their performance is fully developed to a point where they have the confidence to present their story as they wish. The work I examined involved well-meaning community representatives and amateur storytellers as well as multiple projects undertaken by professional producers with amateur storytellers. My goal was to find a balance between the two approaches to empower the participants and develop their range of skills in traditional and digital literacies while still achieving research goals, and making discoveries in my research through practice. This required much more time dedicated to working with the group than many of earlier projects. I had to teach the digital skills to participants, after engaging in a protracted and often emotionally challenging period of narrative discovery. However, to be mutually beneficial to both parties, it was necessary to dedicate the time.

McWilliam (2009) states the 'pluralist approach is open to alternative strategies which improve representativeness of research', and it was necessary to be adaptable and responsive to different community groups as each group wanted different outcomes from participation. Some groups shared nostalgic and romantic memories of the past, while other groups shared stories of experiences that were detrimental for the teller, their families and the wider communities, not to mention the potential stigma which could add to the problems of each individual if the stories were released to the general public in the present. Different groups needed different strategies to facilitate engagement and story development. Digital Storytelling and the additional narrative practices that I have incorporated into that process is predominantly about empowering the individual to tell their own story using digital skills which were previously only accessible in professional media circles.

Synthesis of this study

While communities remain fragmented and somewhat disconnected around the land border of Ireland there is an appetite to explore the past by working together in the present among and between communities of interest, as demonstrated throughout this study with established community organisations and celebrated narrative centred initiatives.

I have presented an alternative approach to collecting stories which ends with a self-produced digital story and employs a range of narrative practice to recover experience supported by the presence of an understanding and empathetic community of peers. I have worked with single identity groups in all iterations of practice and they have provided the necessary group support through intimately understanding a particular lived experience, while not necessarily knowing each other personally, before the beginning of each engagement. This approach to practice affords participants time to address the past in non-confrontational terms. Participants are not coerced to speak on particular experiences but instead are invited to use objects and images as a gateway to explore past experience beginning with memories which are nostalgic and sentimental, before

attempting to articulate events which have had a significant negative impact on the individual, family and community.

The purpose of this work was to find ways to empower participants of storytelling projects through equality of opportunity and by removing structural hierarchies and power imbalance between participants and researcher / facilitator. I also set out to discover ways to support the presentation of self in community practice and explore the known issues around the publication of stories.

Empowerment should enable individuals to take ownership of their experience, to represent the self and dissolve the need for third party interpretation or ventriloquism, long after the facilitators have left. Through participation, learning new skills and building their capacity for communication, participants throughout the process rebuild and reimagine their communities by recognising and reconnecting with experience. The most significant aspect of the work is the recovery of self, through the range of methods adopted by this study as a means to promote understanding and acknowledgement of all experience between participants and eventually recognise the self in the 'other'. Individuals, even within contested communities, quickly realise there is much more that connects than divides. It is through protracted engagements among communities where individuals undergo a process of self-discovery and recovery, and critical self-analysis, where they can begin to consider alternative solutions to long term problems. Digital Storytelling is the output in this process but it does become a byproduct of an emotive process of engagement.

Through research I have discovered issues with placing unprepared amateur storytellers in front of a camera or microphone and how this affects the story being told and the subsequent reception of the experience being shared. Through adopting additional narrative approaches I have found ways that enable the participants to rediscover their voice and have confidence in projecting that voice.

As they have progressed through the workshops with a group of peers they have also experienced acknowledgement and have a sense of being listened to, many for the first time. This suggests that while published stories would be useful for wider society, researchers and historians it does not serve any additional benefit to the participant. They have produced the story, and are responsible

for everything contained within it. They retain the skills of engagement and therefore publishing, while desirable from the perspective of a professional producer, it is not a prerequisite and all individuals retain full ownership of their content.

The work is valuable as it recognises the experience of the individual and connects them to other individuals within their community who understand their lived experience or many aspects of it. Participants develop their capacity for communication throughout the process, reconnecting with basic literacies of reading, writing, talking and listening skills while developing skills in digital communication and developing confidence knowing that their story is worth sharing and is worth listening to. There is an evident exchange between researcher and participants so that both parties achieve outcomes through engagement, rather than not treating the participants as passive subjects of research.

This work provides narrative practitioners with an alternative approach to engagement with communities of interest around recovery of self and experience. It makes difficult experience accessible in the form of story in the presence of community through Life Story Method and Every Object Tells A Story. The process shifts the focus from the self to the story and enables participants to articulate experience which has been suppressed over time resulting in individuals feeling marginalised and victimised, often with no support. The work makes no claims of healing but can connect people in a way that allows them to recognise their difficulties and begin to address those issues in a collective and shared way.

It is in the room surrounded by participants where the most significant steps are taken and the impact of engagement is felt most, by breaking barriers of silence built up over time and peeling back layers of fear, frustration and anxiety. It is through face-to-face encounters that participants make connections based on experience, empathy, understanding and acknowledgement by having others listen to their experience. Through engagement they encounter a process of self-discovery which has the capacity to challenge and change them in small but significant ways. The inclusion

of digital learning as part of the exchange makes a relevant, contemporary and exciting offer of arts-based practice to communities who face all sorts of challenges of survival and struggle. They can express those concerns by working together and create new achievable goals and targets which consider everyone in their community. The significance of this practice is encountering participants in the present in physical and personal terms, equally facilitating and participating in their own reconstruction of self through multiple representational and communicational modes for making meaning. It is a process which hands back control of the narrative to participants inviting each individual to begin a positive process of renewal and self-determination by increasing their natural capacity and evidential willingness to communicate.

Contribution to knowledge

The main contribution this study makes in the field of Digital Storytelling and community practice highlights an alternative process of engagement in applied drama, and the combination of an additional suite of narrative practices, built into the Digital Storytelling process. The narrative practice in particular, has the capacity to unlock contributions from participants with significant and often traumatic stories to share along the land border of Ireland.

Through extensive community facilitation and traditional research methodology, I have combined the practices of Life Story Method and Every Object Tells a Story combined with Story Circle and Digital Storytelling. These methods together facilitate the recovery of difficult and traumatic narratives and life experiences among single identity groups, enabling individuals to rediscover their voice, often for the first time, around complex and volatile experiences. Through engagement individuals have the opportunity to amplify their voices in relation to concerns and circumstances which affect their day to day lives.

My work also highlights story performance issues on the part of the amateur storyteller when articulating significant experience which has the potential to cause further trauma or stigma. By combining Life Story and Every Object, individuals are enabled to focus on the process of

engagement rather than the self in the process of engagement. They never lose self-awareness, but the right mix of methods enables them to open up to a community of interest in ways they could not consider before, because of the perceived consequences for the self and others, such as family members, friends and (in the case of work that deals with the conflict and its legacy) victims and survivors.

Situating the participant as 'expert' from the initial encounters allows for a mutually beneficial relationship to develop between researcher / facilitator and participant. This approach attempts, (I argue successfully), to dissolve the often unbalanced and hierarchical approach to community practice. To situate the professionals' expertise on par with the lived experience and therefore expertise of the participant, places inherent value on that experience. This allows the participant to see the potential of participation in knowledge sharing, self discovery, and community building, all which have value in the present and well into the future, long after the researcher has gone.

I have discovered that Digital Stories do not need to be shared to be beneficial to the participants, though some scholars and practitioners argue otherwise. The most significant moments throughout the process happen in the room between participants, where the story is central and the desire and ability to articulate that experience is paramount. The digital story becomes a by-product of the process, albeit a valuable piece of documentation for the future which has been produced after a protracted period of emotional engagement among the community of interest in pursuit of sharing, understanding and acknowledgement. Of course stories do need to be published to be beneficial to a wider viewing public; however when participating, communities have such complex and difficult experience they must be afforded the space to develop their capacity for communication and consider all the potential benefits and negativity, which could be attached to publishing sensitive stories. As researchers and community facilitators the process of engagement and an emphasis on the development of participants must be clear from the offset, especially when the offer is for knowledge exchange, in this case stories for digital skills, literacy development and

rediscovery of the self. Otherwise it would be apparent that the goal would be to show up, take what is needed or required to fulfil the brief of the research, and leave.

My interest has always been in developing the role of participants who engage in narrative practice so they get equitable outcomes on par with the researcher. If the offer is sincere and the process achievable, the researcher will no doubt develop their work in ways the participant did not consider, in a meaningful exchange and partnership. Under the umbrella of agreed legacy in the context of Northern Ireland, the stories generated through this process may become more shareable in future in dedicated archives or collections where there are still protections afforded to participants.

However, the value of participation lies in the group among peers, where real connections are made between the past and the present, often viewed in a different light with the support of others and this makes change possible. In chapter 7, I highlight that after several interviews with the participants in my study, participants suggest how they experienced levels of catharsis after opening up about the dark corners of their lives for the first time. Much of these experiences did not make it to the final stories however the participants collectively became a support network to discuss issues that are central to their life experience rather than mundane topics which enable any individual to pass themselves in the company of others. This particular group of participants present as freedom fighters and in that frame of discourse there is usually little room for feelings. The process enables people to view their experience in a way that does not dissolve their responsibility or accountability in actions past, but rather lets them see the potential in the lives they have yet to live.

Summary of key findings

This work highlights how technology and traditional narrative practice combined, can support communities in articulating experience of the past which is beneficial to them in the present and enhances the individual's capacity for communication in the future. This removes the need for academic or professional ventriloquism. By providing individuals and communities with the tools and skills to represent themselves, the issues which continue to hold Northern Ireland back from

personal, ideological and societal become much more prominent and it's apparent that the affected communities exist in a perpetual state of paralysis. To ignore these problems is to facilitate the continuous festering of unhealed wounds. The work underscores the significance of lifelong learning where revisiting traditional modes of narrative practice can develop an individual's capacity for self-reflection, rediscovery and expression, while developing digital skills which can enhance their literacies and capacity for communication.

With a tailored offer of engagement, communities are willing to participate in the recovery of difficult and often traumatic experiences. Participants serve as a network of support in delicate moments and enhance the potential for collective discovery about the self and others. By bringing communities together they can collectively underscore the past and look to a potentially more positive future through meaningful understanding rather than assumptions about what "others" think. They share ideas and experience and learn from each other in a way that holds great potential for positive change which they can initiate and build upon with proper considered support and planning with community practitioners, NGO's and researchers.

The importance of working among single identity groups before attempting cross community practice is paramount in order that the community of interest fully understands what it wants and needs through active engagement, listening, probing and sharing. Not every individual wants the same thing and their voice will be suppressed in a wider circle of participation which may include their discordant other, and has the potential to lead to continued intransigence or fresh antagonism. Individuals need to find their voice and using the suite of methods I have adopted in this research serves as one way of understanding communities and more importantly prepares them to communicate on a much wider capacity through the medium of Digital Storytelling and potential future face to face encounters with alternative communities.

This process worked with the community of ex-prisoners because the combination of narrative practice enabled many to address and communicate their experience of the past in an environment

where they were not being judged. Within the story circle among peers, it was not apparent that participants were undertaking any form of evaluation in how they structure their story in the telling. However once the parameters change it becomes more critical that they do evaluate structure of the telling as the story is being created for potential public consumption to an unknown, unseen audience. They were considering past selves while simultaneously considering the self in the present, realising how one has changed over time, how extreme circumstances can determine extreme behaviour, and how one might positively contribute and impact their community and wider society going forward. The emphasis was on unlocking the trauma of the past and letting it go in the present, in a safe place where everyone had a shared understanding of the life of an ex-prisoner and combatant, except the researcher. This furthered my belief that communities can help themselves with the correct outside support, as they were able to successfully complete the process of sharing and digitising their experience. The ex-combatants deconstructed their own perceived status as freedom fighters and became quite vulnerable when they expressed how they felt among a group of peers who could fundamentally understand and relate to the experiences being shared. To say participants let go of their trauma entirely would not be accurate, however the very act of telling for the first time and becoming accustomed to talking about their experience throughout the process, suggests there is evidence to that effect. With additional training some individuals could work in their communities from the ground up and excavate the past with no outside bias, while further engaging individuals with a determination to turn their lives around. If identity is the outcome of narrative, then exploring our personal stories in the company of others highlights many contradictions, similarities, and not a great deal of measurable difference. It is apparent that communities have much more in common than divides them, and through the medium of story they might more easily see themselves in each other.

Limitations of the study

As with any project there are strengths and limitations. Contemplating the latter I have several observations. One area which might have been improved would be to widen participation and have a larger pool of participants included in the study, possibly from the Loyalist community to get

different perspectives of experience and potentially discover more similarities in experience rather than naturally and consistently seeking and discussing difference. I have highlighted the reasons for lack of wider participation in Chapter 7, when specifically addressing the ex-prisoner community but much of it revolves around safety and non-contentious spaces for inclusive practice. Without a proper support structure of funding and resource I was limited in my capacity for widening participation.

One researcher / facilitator can only create and develop, engage and deliver, so much practice in an 18-24 month period, with no financial support and limited resources. My process was ultimately reliant on the resources of the individual, such as phones, laptops, images, and community resources such as centres / spaces to deliver workshops. This is not unusual in developing work of this nature and the work has been developed to a point where it could be funded at regional or national level as the groundwork has largely been done by me as researcher and the community partners who gave so much of their emotional engagement, their time and collective resources. The participating groups have largely shaped the practice, advising me at different points in their engagement about what they believe worked and other elements that were not so successful for different and sometimes personal reasons.

Many academic researchers in the field such as Couldry (2008) and Hartley and McWilliam (2009) believe stories need to be published to raise the collective voice of the participating groups. While I do not believe this to be the case, I would always encourage and endeavour to publish the work. Due to the nature of the participating groups in my study, it was not feasible to publish in any manner. However to engage in some form of reception study might add value to this body of research. It would be fascinating to listen to, and discuss with viewers, their response to stories told, in a measured way through questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. This would provide a level of personal separation from the process and may provide critical and analytical responses which has not materialised through my own research or through the participating members. While always checking our bias as researchers, I have built a rapport through a working relationship with

all the participants and I am proud of their achievements in the process regardless of the complexities of their own individual experience. The unattached viewer would have no sense of the process of engagement and I would welcome their inclusion once the participating groups feel reasonably assured of the safety of sharing the work on a wider scale. In all future renditions participants will still retain full ownership of their contribution and will retain the final say on dissemination of the content. The handing back phase underscored the reluctance for my participating groups to share their stories beyond the group at the present time. This can ultimately be frustrating for a researcher but was one of the identified markers of participation. There is much to be learned from participants directly in the process so one must accept that participants are equal partners and have significant influence on the process and its outcomes.

The research did not directly address any of the debates around the status or rights of victims. While working predominantly with Republican ex-prisoners and perpetrators of violence during the period of conflict in Northern Ireland, these participants highlighted the evolving nature of self-identity through sharing their experiences. They often refer to themselves as victims in how their families and communities were treated in terms of lack of equal civil rights, before they had any engagement with paramilitary organisations. Once joining their specific organisation, they highlight the treatment they received at the hands of the police and military, the courts (Diplock - with no jury) and behaviour of prison wardens at the behest of the British Conservative government, throughout arguably the most contentious period of the Troubles during the 'dirty protest' and the 'hunger strikes' in the early nineteen eighties. They classify themselves as victims while not claiming innocence, at multiple points throughout their lived experience. They have an often conflicting and contradictory experience not dissimilar to that of their loyalist counterparts as they admit their differences in the community while highlighting their solidarity in prison, on issues of equal rights and their treatment as criminals rather than their desired political prisoner status. Innocent victims often take a different view of this claim of victimhood from perpetrators of violence, and while this study in no way set out to resolve the issue, it underscores the ongoing and difficult nature of the broader debate in approaches to the legacy of the conflict in Northern

Ireland. Regardless of affiliation and shared ideologies these people must still be considered as individual; it is not reasonable to consider them as homogenous. They have different desires and needs in the present and often contrasting experience in youth. Many factors affect how one behaves and responds to circumstances in situations past and present and the people who make up these groups are no different. It is at least irresponsible and at worst dangerous to assume they are the same and that they think the same. This is why I believe the pursuit of engagement, acknowledgement and understanding are fundamental to responding to legacy issues in Northern Ireland and the inclusion of everyone is paramount regardless of status, identity or responsibility. Dividing people into groups and contrasting their oppression only serves to further exacerbate the problem faced by society on the apparent down-curve of political conflict.

Recommendations for future research

Further research and development of the process should seek to widen participation around border communities and within suburban communities with internal borders or sectarian divides. The digital outputs should facilitate a process of safe dissemination within focused archives and between groups and this should have an impact on the capacity to engage in audience studies from unconnected viewers and demonstrate the level at which the methods outlined impact on the stories being told. Sharing stories between communities and establishing new networks across community lines should also become possible and enable a broader discussion around notions of shared living within contested communities.

Train the trainer sessions might be included in any development of the practice as this would truly install the participants as responsible for their own development while highlighting complex issues through story establishing dynamic and positive communities who can negotiate the present for the benefit of everyone in their community. Installing former participants as facilitators would ensure there is no hierarchical imbalance, perceived or actual, between the facilitator and participants and could be supported by a combination of institutional, government bodies and NGO's from a supportive distance.

APPENDIX

Stories from Long Kesh

Transcripts

Participant story 1 - Endgame

I remember my first night in jail and it wasn't Long Kesh. It was in the Crum and they put you down in the basement and I was stuck with two wee boys who were nervous and that allowed me to look after them.

The next day you were taken to to the H Blocks and the fired into an ODC wing, where you had to break a rule, like throwing water and not cleaning it up and then they'd put you on the boards. You spent 4 days here then they'd ask what you want and you would request to go to the republican wings.

You would have known a few people already there but you were still apprehensive about the different regime down there.

When you consider what was the catalyst for change in me, thats about what happened on the outside after I had already been in for almost ten years.

Gerry Laird who was from Creggan and in the orphanage with me was kidnapped by the IRA and taken away for a few days. A couple of pensioners went to see if he was ok but there was a bomb in the house which killed the pensioners and a third person who went with them and who died a few days later. I didnt like that at all. As much as I planted bombs, i didnt like them. They are indiscriminate.

Then Loughall happened and as usual you heard the news in jail, 6 men shot dead outside a police barracks and you assume it is police men and army personnel so you go to the cell door and celebrate by banging and cheering the fact that it was a good job. Then the next day we discover its all IRA men shot dead and a civilian shot and it made me think. What are we doing.. what am I

doing. At this stage I'm studying yoga and looking for life to be different and this did not reconcile with me standing at the door.

Every job was a good job until now.

The job that really changed my mind was the Three Flowers at the Derry / Donegal border where there was an army checkpoint. There was a guy called Patsy Gillespie who worked in the barracks, a civilian and he was asked not to do it anymore.

He was put in a van and the idea was that handcuffed he would drive in and call bomb and the army would free him before it exploded, but the bomb went off prematurely and Patsy died along with four soldiers. I don't like what happened to that man and what was done with him. This was a step too far. We made a civilian into a human bomb. Trying to share that view at the time was difficult, but within a few weeks others were discussing the wrongs of the circumstances openly.

I was at the stage where I had made my mind up - I wasn't returning to conflict, no going back to war and politics. If anything I'm going to take my yoga and live my life that way.

Participant Story 2 - Self Determination

The first time I went to prison was in the North. The Crumlin Road.

You had a swinging system in there. One day you had 4 hours of recreation and the next you'd have 2 and the rest of the time you spent locked up.

The loyalists were out the day you weren't. I was young - only 18 and it was during the Hunger Strike. You just got into the routine. I was in Hydebank and got in trouble which meant I ended up in solitary. Once I got out I was on the run in the freestate and wanted, I ended up in jail down there.

Portlaoise jail is different because it has all single cells. There was no doubling up like in other prisons with two men to a cell. They had just started an education program in Portlaoise jail through the OU in Social Sciences which was along the lines of what I was already reading through the Political Education classes I studied at the Crumlin Road. So we were getting introduced to Marxist theory as we were part of the republican socialist movement which would have covered IRA, INLA and IRSP. We had access to computers in the classroom so you could book time on the computer which meant you could type, cut and paste, far better than writing by hand.

We could have got a typewriter if we wanted but the computers were much better.

These people had taken a big chunk of my life and I had an opportunity to do this here, ideally placed as I couldn't go anywhere.

Its alright saying I had the time everyday to study, but in jail no two days are the same. You could have fifty days where everything is fine but when it goes wrong in jail it goes badly wrong.

There were days when people were throwing piss and shit on the landings, we were unfortunately on the bottom so we were swimming in the stuff, over protests of compassionate parole. We had no other options.

When people wont move on an issue you have to say, what options do we have to challenge this decision?

So we make conditions very difficult for ourselves and in doing so make difficult for the screws or others. We have to say for a week or ten days there will be no co-operation on the wing and then we will reassess our

position. We were effectively powerless. Up here if you had an issue with a screw you could send word out and take the fight to the screws outside, however it was different in the south. Only one screw shot dead in the south. That fella was an animal and should have been charged with war crimes.

I used to read about other national liberation struggles in India where change came about through mass movement. In our position in our organisations, we were a block to that. If you have a small group of people organising things in secret then ordinary people have no control or sanction over it. Everyone is going to suffer the consequences in the community. So we needed to reconsider how to get where we wanted to go without continuing down the road of violence.

Too many young men and women spent lives in jail to get an agreement which was less effective than the sunning dale agreement would have been because now we were playing 25 year catch up. Accepting that agreement in 1973 would have avoided 25 years of madness.

The nationalist community is becoming more educated, holding more positions of power, forming an administration, while I don't agree with administration but I can see the strategy. We discussed this in jail. We got primary school figures and extrapolated them up into present day where we were expecting to have a nationalist majority with an absence of conflict in order for this transition to take place and naturally move toward a united Ireland.

We went to residential's with IRSP with people from all over and they were talking about reconciliation and moving beyond violence to peace. I don't see how the Brits are going to stay here now long term. When nationalists become the majority and the free state takes off, proving itself within Europe, people will naturally want to join a stronger more stable, vibrant economy and hopefully they will leave peacefully.

Without education you wouldn't be able to come to these conclusions. You would be stuck with someone else explaining it for you. Education allows you to become self aware and you can work out for yourself what's going on.

Participant Story 3 - The 5 'isms'

Whenever we went into the jail there was very little politics in it. I remember being in discussion on the wing in the H Blocks and the subject we were discussing was 'what made you join the RA'?

Out of about 20 people possibly three said they joined because of politics. Most of the reasons were given 'because their friends were in the RA or they wanted to attack the Brits. The politics always came after for republicans and the only place you had time to sit and discuss and learn was in jail. That's why when people got released from jails they were more powerful because they had education backed with a strong resolve. This makes you potentially more dangerous in terms of your enemy. The Administration were operating the agenda of the British Government in terms of criminalisation, sending us to Magilligan to break our resolve and when I got to Magilligan I was part of the Education. There was a group of people there and I had to talk to them.

I remember the subject was the so called 5 isms of the republican movement, Republicanism, Socialism, nationalism, secularism and anti-sectarianism. It was the anti-sectarianism that I found funny because they are all sitting listening to me telling them about why we shouldn't be involved in sectarianism and the lesson went well.

A week later one of the men found out that I was in for shooting an orange man. Apparently I had a name as someone who was sectarian and even to this day he says to me 'remember you tried to teach me about non sectarianism, but I understood the argument for non sectarianism.

The fact is the Brits tried to make the narrative about a Catholic / Prods divide and that is not what it was about. The reality was the Brits were using the Prods as their killing machines and every bit from the protestant side was geared as another weapon. It was another piece of armoury that the British used on the Nationalists and republicans. So while I don't advocate Sectarianism I'm very much aware that the British have used it, will continue to use it and even to this day still use it.

When they want to put the brakes on something the orange card comes out and the province is swamped with protest and whatever they were trying to stop usually stops and they get their way. That's the way

society is over here. So while agree with non sectarianism I still think that these people aren't natives of the island - they're part and parcel of the problem

Participant Story 4 - The Breakers Yard

What they were doing was using crumbling road as a breakers yard taking young people off this conveyor belt like we depicted in the play. They would try and break these people physically and mentally.

Most of these people were innocent which meant that being released back on to the streets after two years internment, they would be too terrified of getting involved in anything which reflected republicanism. While we were still inside we decided we should make changes, so we struggled for political status from Crumlin Road.

On your first day in jail you have two choices. My first was to speak to the escape committee and we had a meeting which took the view that the conditions were not right for an escape so we therefore had to change the conditions. We established the segregation protest. They were only allowing us out of our cells for one hour a day. Four loyalists would be let out for one republican. There were people who had ears bitten off, two people killed inside the jail. I have scars myself from when screws let 4 UVF men into my cell the day before I moved to Long Kesh.

The screws were LVF, UVF supposedly impartial and doing the job of prison officers but it was political and once you understood it was political you prepare to go all the way. So we decided in the crumbling road to remove the problem of integration which would result in segregation to create republican wings. This fight went on for years. You had piss and faeces running down walls, short no wash protests, short hunger strikes, constant beatings and attacks from screws. Strategically they tried to take all the youth, those under 21 and put in a youth block which meant they were trying to break the youth. One screw 'Walker' beat Marley with a baton and as we were on the staff of the A wing we couldn't let that happen so we took him out. It wasn't personal, just part and parcel of the struggle. As a result we were beaten, strip searched, and put on punishment wings for months. For the screw to claim money he had to take prisoners to court individually or to get paid by NIO he had to accept internal discipline which meant the republicans couldn't be charged. He took the money and run

As the Brits did in Colditz, we were POW's and we were going to escape so conditions had to be right. We also tried to depict this in the play so we could educate republicans coming in on Gaelic language, culture, reading books, third level OU education. The establishment didn't want this as it didn't suit their agenda. The segregation battle took years and one day I walked past the UDA OC, and he asked to talk - pointing out that we would never achieve segregation. I told him to go to the governor and open the cell so we could hold a meeting.

At the meeting the UDA leader said give us three weeks. They achieved it in 3 weeks and we couldn't achieve it in years and segregation changed over night.

In the mean time we tried our escape and were caught with 2 revolvers, semtex, detonators. The charge was against a steel gate. The detonator didn't work and it's a good job because the SAS were on the other side waiting for us. 12 men were charged with that attempted escape and held in solitary confinement and isolation for two years. Another battle and another struggle. All part of the politics.

As shown in the play, any young person would have gone through a similar situation and from Crumlin Road, if they hadn't broke you at that stage, then you went to H-Blocks. The play was educational. It got a bad reaction from unionism initially until they began to understand it. We put it on in the Shank Hill Road backed by loyalist prisoners as a true depiction of what goes on.

Irrespective to what goes on, if you speak to loyalist ex-prisoners, they'll say republicans achieved political status and only for republicans, jail would have been a complete hell for them as well. When you struggle in jail, you struggle for everyone, regardless of what or who they represent.

Participant Story 5 - The Crum

First impressions of going into prison was the Crum and i hated it because it was just the shock of seeing the inside, going into the reception area for the first time.

One of the memories I have on A wing is from November 1976. At that time our wing OC was Bobby Sands. Bobby Storey was also there among others and the wing was tightly organised.

At that time the loyalists never came out of their cells, never came into the exercise yard. There was segregation and loyalists were locked up 24 hours a day. As more loyalists came in on remand, they had strength in numbers so they could begin to challenge republicans and come out. They would go to the canteen, lift meals on a dinner tray and return to their cells and eat and once they were locked up republicans were let out and they would stay in the canteen for association until around 8 - 8:30pm. The loyalists then decided they were coming out and weren't returning to their cells and warned wing staff that any republican that tried to come in to the canteen would be in bother.

At this time I was in cell 5 on the yard side of A wing with Micky McNutt from Derry, who had been in the JRU, the remand centre at the prison hospital because he was still 16, but when he turned 17 in Nov 1976 he was moved to the wings. We knew that we were the first cell to be let out which meant the two of us would be first to face the loyalists. We were going to get hammered so we decided to give what we can then curl up in a ball and hope for the best.

Looking out the side of the door we could see the loyalists walking down to the canteen and a bunch of screws were in the corridor and didn't know what was going on. We knew the door would open any second and have to walk into the mob and then I heard, click click click, click click click, coming down the wing. Out of the side of the door I see Colm Scullion on crutches and another guy injured in a shooting or explosions. Colm had been transporting a bomb with McIlwee and McPeake and the bomb went off in the car. Tom lost an eye, Mc Peake had leg injuries and Colm had leg injuries. Colm and Hector were let out first and the clicking I heard was the aluminium crutches and they got a hammering from the loyalists before they were able to get out.

Participant Story 6 - The Divine

Sometimes when we talk about republicans we turn them into idols and they almost become divine entities. In doing so we can lose their human side.

One of my favourite stories is about Shaun Bateson on H5. Because we were new on the wing, I had fresh stories to tell. The prisoners were fed up listening to everyone else and everyone had to take their turn at telling stories at the cell door.

Talking to Bateson at mass he knew I was doing the story this week and he told me to spice it up with some sex. That's the character he was, always talking about women, an ordinary lad, full of life.

So when I went back to the cell that night it was my turn to do the book and I got up to the door and started to speak through the crack. I forget the book now, but it came to the bit where I could throw the sex into the story so I said "He arranged to meet her at the hotel and so he knocked on the hotel door. When the door opened she stood there naked, wearing nothing but a see through negligee, and nipples like a 303 round" I hear Bateson down the wing cheering and this went on all week, as I told another bit of the story I would add the hotel room every night.

Come the following Sunday at Mass, the OC came along. He said, "See the stories you're telling, Raymond McCreesh, a devout catholic, doesn't like the sexual content in your story and so I was told to cut out the sex stuff. I said no problem, I'll cut it out.

Bateson come over asking what he wanted and I told him about McCreesh. He told me I should just keep it in but as Mc Creesh was a Hungerstriker I had to do what I was told.

So I got up to the door that night after everyone settled down and it came to the hotel bit and so I continued "And he knocked on the door and she opened the door... but anyway the next morning.. and I heard Bateson down the wing "ash for fuck sake" and hes going mental down the wing. And I just carried on telling the story. So the sex scene was cut out. Bateson was going ballistic and I had to listen to it at mass the next

Sunday. That was him, the character he was, always at the centre of the jokes and slugging. Batesons best friend was Joe McDonald. Him and Joe used to love getting together on a Sunday and you would see them huddled to each other talking in whispers. What they were doing was passing each other scandal. They both loved it.

Bateson was great at finding out all the scandal. When I think of Joe McDonald, of course he was the elite of republicanism, for any republican to starve themselves to death on Hunger strike, there is nothing else you can do for your comrades and the politics of your struggle but when I read all the stuff wrote about hunger strikers or any ex prisoner, we're in danger of making them divine entities and losing a bit of what they were, the human characters they were. You dont say, he was a slagger, or he loved the gossip, but they did. So I always think if them in that regard.

Of course they were brave exceptional people, and they deserve to be at the heights to be looked at, admired and remembered but I like to remember the funny stories. Thats the way I like to remember the past.

Participant Story 7 - The Enemy Within

A lot of people ask about Long Kesh and you try to give an accurate description of how you got on.

Different people have different experiences depending on when they went in to Long Kesh. When I came in the handicrafts were there and as ceasefires came about you were unlocked 24/7, where the prisoners in the 70's were on the blanket and dirty protest with screws beating the shit out of them so they had very different experiences.

As the ceasefires came along it became harder in Long Kesh. Nobody liked the 24 hour unlock and they installed phones on the wings. If prisoners phoned home and the wife wasn't there it done peoples heads in. Their heads were fried. It become difficult being given these privileges. There were no screws and you had no enemy to fight with. We'd bicker among ourselves in the end and the enemy was within.

I liked routine. Id go to my cell at 8 to read. When you had people running about the wings, shouting and doing stuff, it fried my head. We were used to being locked up and then suddenly you have this relative freedom. My routine wouldn't deviate and if it did Id get annoyed and stressed because routine is important in my life.

When I was inside my da died and my ma got Alzheimer's disease so I had to go through that on the inside and the only family I have now is my daughter. I have no close family. I have aunts and uncles in Armagh but I haven't been there in years so I don't know if they are alive or dead. When he was at himself my da would visit but we never discussed the reason I was there. It was never brought up in conversation.

I have completed my thesis on ex-combatants children and psychological wellbeing. Most ex-combatants have not told their children why they were inside. I haven't either. I don't think its guilt. I think its how my daughter might feel about me. It will all come out some day Im sure and I dread that. Her perception of me might change. For now I just want to forget about it. I cant get away from it but I am a different person now. I don't go for jobs or interviews so I dont have to bring it up or explain it. My first job I lied about my

experience. I said I had all the experience for the job when I was really inside all that time. Now I just want to leave the past where it is and move on

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Entry level Editing Software Programs

Apple Macintosh - iMovie

Windows Movie Maker

imovie app (iOS)

Storyboard Composer (Android)

