PART III

Speakeasy

A report from the discussion forum for researchers

Four speak easy sessions were held in the spring and autumn of 2000. They were attended by a diverse range of researchers. Each took the form of a presentation to highlight a theme and raise issues for discussion.

Issues arising and challenges for researchers

James Magowan - NIVT

Various approaches from observation, through oral history, to detailed statistical analysis were considered. Whilst the scope of work being undertaken was extremely varied, ranging from locally based projects to Northern Ireland-wide research, many issues raised in relation to methodology, and challenges were common.

Dorte Kulle, a researcher with Democratic Dialogue, provided a wide ranging overview of issues facing victims/survivors. Her paper explores the common denominators for moving beyond conflict.

Claire Hackett described the Duchas Living History project based at Falls Community Council. She highlighted ethical and practical issues and the method used to address them.

Cathie Mckimm reflected on her personal and professional experience working with An Crann The Tree also focused on the narrative process as a tool for peace and reconciliation work. In her paper she deconstructs assumptions associated with the narrative process highlighting issues such as the distinction between 'individual' and 'identity'; the problem of listening; the link between imagination and history; and the implications that these issues have on the development of a pluralist culture.

In the final speakeasy session Marie Smyth of Community Conflict Impact on Children, led a discussion on neutrality, objectivity and representativeness. She set out some research principles, reflecting on her considerable experience in the field of community research, highlighting a range of issues faced by researchers and identified techniques for ensuring robust, objective analysis, set in the context of community conflict. She offered the following good practice guidance:

* Be clear on the objective of the research, the methodology, and the evidence required.

* Devise a standardised approach where the same question(s) is/are being asked of a defined sample.

* Establish a means for 'triangulation' i.e. that there are at least three reference points or ways of collecting information on the same issue. This could mean using different approaches and both quantitative and qualitative data.

* When selecting a sample the researcher should set up a sampling framework but then divorce him/her self from the process of selection - that being the responsibility

of an advisory team and associated informants. Confidentiality should be maintained and the matrix encoded.Central to the all of the discussions were the particular challenges faced by researchers dealing with victims/survivors in dealing with such an emotive issue set in a context of prolonged conflict.

In every case it was noted that the subject matter unavoidably involved the researcher in sharing in grief and trauma and this exposure would inevitably result in some psychological impact. The primary challenge is to prepare and support researchers as appropriate.

The potential for research to be both constructive and destructive was discussed. Many people feel they have been exploited by research, they are a statistic or their story can be used by someone else. The challenge is to make the research empowering and to ensure that the contributors are the subjects rather than objects of the work. Here the principle of informed consent is fundamental. This requires setting in place and adhering to strict procedures for recording information and subsequently having it verified. Those contributing to the research directly and indirectly should also have access to the final conclusions and any reports that are published.

Researchers can not ignore their own background, understanding/interpretation of events, and indeed the way they are affected by the process of gathering evidence, particular when undertaking field work. A third challenge therefore is how to accommodate an inherent lack of absolute neutrality and to produce research that is robust and credible. In this regard the work must be valid - it measures what it set out to measure; representative - based on random selection, and reliable - the same enquiry will consistently produce the same result.

Victims and Survivors: A Study of the Dynamics of the Victims Debate in Northern Ireland.

Dorte Kulle, Research Associate, Democratic Dialogue

Methodological Introduction: Approach and Overview of Research.

This is a summary of a draft paper presented to the NIVT 'Speak easy' victims research group on the 9th of May 2000. All statements and assumptions derive from a research period of May 1999 to May 2000. My primary aim was to explore victims and survivors issues, and to try to get a better understanding of the dynamics between the different initiatives.

I am an anthropologist by training and my methodological scope was to participate in events and discussions dealing with the 'troubled' past in Northern Ireland and to conduct semi-structured interviews with as many victims and survivors groups as possible. I conducted interviews with some groups in Derry and other counties but I decided to limit my scope mainly to groups situated in Belfast. This decision was based on the fact that most of the groups are based in Belfast. I would contact a founding member or a senior member of staff because I was not specifically looking to talk to a victim since I am not a psychologist and not directly trained to deal with trauma. I stressed the fact that I was there to listen in a respectful and non-judgemental way, but that I was not in a position to counsel. The 'victims' or 'survivors' would already be bereaved and I saw no reason to contribute to more pain if it was possible to avoid it. However, many individuals did have a wish to tell their story and to receive acknowledgement for their grief. I tried to be as empathetic as possible but I did not expect to completely understand how they felt.

I tried to be aware of my obvious biases and tried to stay politically neutral. Being Scandinavian, and therefore in many contexts given uncritical credit in the way of political correctness, I felt welcome in most situations. I also made sure to tell my interviewees that I would treat my material with discretion and confidentiality. Still, in some cases I felt that people (naturally) were holding back information in order to maintain personal safety in their community. Sharing private experience with a stranger is difficult and I find it very important to be sensitive to the interviewee's boundaries because it involves their lives. Furthermore, the issues are somewhat exploited politically and I would not like to find myself engaging in a genre of 'emotional pornography' used and abused in most public contexts concerning victims.

Initiatives on the Ground

Northern Ireland today is a society in political transition. In tandem with the continuing challenges to the implementation of the Belfast/Good Friday

Agreement, an underlying theme of grief and resentment has arisen from the experiences of 'victims'. This is opening up room on both a public and private level for more constructive discussions about how society should deal with its 'troubled' past, in this context more specifically how to deal with the victims. The issue of dealing with past atrocities was publicly ignored for a long time, but it became relevant during the start of the cease-fires in 1994. The number of victims and survivors groups in Northern Ireland have been growing since, but there can never be enough support for all those asking for it. With the formulation of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in April 1998, these initiatives became more relevant following the support for reconciliation and victims of violence. The Agreement acknowledges the suffering of victims of violence, their right to remember past atrocities and their need for support from both statutory and community-based voluntary organisations. The paragraphs are integrated with the complex issues of reconciliation, which are seen as a kind of 'end product' of a process of mutual understanding and respect between and within communities and traditions in Northern Ireland, and between North and South. An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society. Furthermore, the Agreement states that the achievement of a peaceful and just society would be a true memorial to the victims of violence. Most of these issues were brought forward by members of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and did not initially attract much attention from the larger political parties. The statements are fairly abstract, and for obvious moral reasons it would be unfortunate not to support the needs of victims in a political arena. However, in the course of implementing this agreement, during the process of ongoing talks, and particularly after the early release of paramilitary prisoners, a highly sensitive debate around victims issues came to the fore.

Publicly, the current victims debate revolves around truth and justice, responsibility, compensation and funding of support initiatives. The difficulties facing victims and survivors resemble a microcosm of the processes in society. The initiatives for victims and survivors are related to different kinds of groupings within Northern Ireland, both politically and socially, and reflect the political diversity. In these debates, the relatives of victims are often the most opposed groups politically, despite sharing the experience of personal grief with their opposition. This polarised positions of victims seem extraordinary to an outsider because many victims have had similar psychological experiences, yet are divided by politics. There is also a lot of fear and mistrust in society and these emotions seem to be generated through a constant focus on, and rhetoric maintaining, the existing fear. Fear is a prevalent factor in considerations around activities performed in the victims and survivors groups, and it appears to me that groups have different perceptions of what constitutes a safe and confidential environment. It seems that the mixed inclusive groups see diversity as a constituent of safety while some of the single-identity groups have explained to me that they do not trust certain initiatives because of their inclusiveness. The main difficulty in working with people in Northern Ireland appears to be a lack of trust. The groups that are associated with the more extreme political parties are inherently more exclusive, and they seem to be the most

distrustful. This is not without reason in cases where the groups are from low-income areas, since the conflict has directly affected low-income more than higher-income households.

Behind the scenes a lot of constructive dialogue is taking place although some bereaved relatives find it too risky, both physically and mentally, to participate in cross-community initiatives. On paper, nearly all groups are inclusive, cross-community initiatives, but in reality many activities are still somewhat sectarian and one-sided. In the battle for funding, groups have adapted their objectives to suit the political agenda of the peace process and have deleted all obvious sectarian elements, or have rewritten them to fit the recent single-identity programmes. The single-identity programmes are based on the notion that integration can only occur when the individual has a stable cultural identity and therefore does not feel threatened by the other community. A number of these programmes are seen as cultural awareness programmes and they teach children the Irish or Ulster version of history. There is little basis for assuming that the two dominant communities in Northern Ireland are two distinct 'cultures', but apparently there are differences that are important to the greater part of the inhabitants. It is still not clear whether these single-identity programmes are succeeding in challenging people and bringing the sides closer together or whether they are further dichotomising the communities. Overall, it is difficult to generalise about victims and survivors initiatives because they are so diverse in nature.

The compensation issue is widening the gap between the different sides of society in Northern Ireland. One issue is class distinction, because the economic injustice of the compensation system creates further division among victims and survivors. Some bereaved families feel that their loss is being less recognised if it is not economically compensated for, even though they feel that their loss can never fully be compensated for.. Furthermore, it is often hard for victims and survivors to empathise with the grief of the perpetrating side, and to compensate the 'others' for perceived wrongdoings can seem highly insulting to some individuals. Some survivors have taken on the victim identity to the extent that it overshadows other aspects of their personality. These people are sometimes hard to engage in dialogue and their cases often get hijacked by politics. In general, many of the issues are closely related to political struggles, and often get hijacked beyond the initial concern for the victims in order to pursue an anti-Agreement agenda . A promising aspect of the situation in Northern Ireland is the work of the grassroots organisations that provide the necessary networks for the bereaved. A great number of these people have reached the conclusion, based on their own experiences, that trying to fix the blame is not a fruitful solution to their problems. It is not about getting caught up in issues of pride and honour, but about creating a society where people can co-exist. This does not mean that everybody suddenly has to understand the other sides to the conflict. It is simply a matter of respecting human life. People working with victims have great sympathy for individuals who want to keep the right to be a victim, and they think that, at a private level, no pressure should be put on victims to forgive and forget, but that politically the situation calls for some

collective processes of catharsis.

All victims and survivors have a unique story, and a public space should be allowed for individual grief to be heard. But to argue that all voices have a legitimate need to be heard is also problematic, because levels of victimisation are inevitably categorised and arranged into hierarchies. Because of the nature of the conflict, some bereaved families will have lost a loved one in a bomb explosion while others might have lost a relative in a self-provoked gun battle. In Northern Ireland this has created internal disputes among groups who label themselves 'real victims' or 'innocent victims' and by doing so, they automatically decree other groups of victims to be 'non-innocent'. This can be very hurtful to victims and their families. Lack of public recognition of their grief often makes bereaved relatives associate exclusively with their own category of victim. Discrimination generally perpetuates prevailing separatist/exclusivist attitudes and makes it difficult for some victims groups to co-operate. The recent focus on victims of the conflict has also put pressure on individuals who are not ready to reconcile themselves with previous atrocities, and has created a discourse of victimhood where different perspectives are fighting for the moral high ground. The issues of victimhood, particularly how the term 'victim' should be defined is very sensitive in Northern Ireland at the moment. The range of definitions of the term 'victim' is broad and would to a large degree depend on the context and agenda of the person speaking. In general, all kinds of victims and survivors can be seen as individuals who have had their rights as citizens violated through acts of commission or omission by the state or by another individual. Some of the groups I have talked to in the North consider all people who grew up after 1969 to be victims of the 'troubles', i.e. all have suffered because of the conflict, including those who have merely witnessed other people's grief. This introduces a fundamental dispute about whether all individuals, or only a small part of the population in Northern Ireland, are victims of the troubles and are seriously affected and/or traumatised. Most people I have talked to in Northern Ireland do not like to use this term, because it holds victims in that moment of time when they experienced loss, and it reduces their identification to only that experience. However, it is the most identifiable term, and is easier to use than 'people affected by the troubles'. The term 'survivor' has become more politically correct, because it connotes something more active, someone who has dealt with their circumstances and moved on. A survivor is seen as a victim who has accepted their loss and is able to interact with a society that also includes the perpetrator. The survivor has survived something, is more resilient to hardship and desires to make a better future for the next generation. It is a striving for self-empowerment on the most basic level and giving something back to the community. Another highly disputed question is whether perpetrators should be seen as victims or survivors, because some claim to have been manipulated by people with diverse kinds of authority, or whether one should assign full personal responsibility to the individual for the misdeed that was done. In many ways, a lot of individuals in Northern Ireland can be both victims and survivors depending on their current situation.

Dealing with past atrocities

Dealing with the past in a public and active way has been considered, but many find that the time is not right for a unification in grief, since most cases are still presented in a divisive language related to the conflict over historical events. The different groups have competing, and to an extent, symmetrical psychologies of victimhood and this complicates the issue further. All sectors of the Northern Irish community have suffered, and an unhealthy competition for the moral high ground at this point would only encourage people to fall back into sectarianism. To counteract this, a healthy discussion about responsibility is needed. There is a general call for disclosure in relation to past atrocities and public acknowledgements of wrongdoings. Still, the debate seems to revolve around placing the blame. Even though many groups support the liberal notion of everybody being victims, it does not necessarily follow that they support the notion of everybody being equally responsible for the 'troubles' and for moving on. In many ways it is the 'less affected' that are able to take these politically correct positions without getting involved. Events do not happen in isolation and there are complex dynamics within the society of Northern Ireland; it is not only a matter of bullies from the working class 'misbehaving', but also of a large proportion of society not taking responsibility for their owns (in)actions.

The problem of placing responsibility is particularly complex in Northern Ireland, because the conflict is not solely about a state oppressing some of its subjects in a vertical way. The situation is increasingly becoming more like an ethno-political horizontal conflict and this requires a change in mindset for many individuals. Some Protestants are presently struggling with the many changes following the Agreement, most notably the reform of the police force, which used to be predominantly Protestant. Many feel that they have lost some of the values that for them had characterised their society and that with the Agreement the Governments have compromised their interests due to pressure from 'terrorists' that are not being held to account for their actions. For some nationalists, the Agreement is seen as giving legitimacy to an Executive that has no legitimacy unless it is responsible directly to the Irish Government only. The consequence of these kinds of attitudes is often a traditionalistic exclusionism that leaves people in a position of finger pointing. This focus on the 'antagonistic other' diverts attention away from the spirit of the Agreement, which is tolerance and dialogue. If the focus is exclusively introverted and based on own needs and wants, it will be very difficult to make a transition towards a relatively peaceful society. Yet, such a tolerance is based on the reconstruction of the individual victim's and victimised communities' feelings of personal safety and overcoming of the fear that the violent acts might happen again in the future. Constructive dialogue, i.e. listening, and not just 'waiting your turn', is after all only possible when people see each other as fellow citizens instead of adversaries.

The issue of dealing with past atrocities and how to accommodate people who feel that they have suffered unjustly remains, highly relevant debate, and should

not be the responsibility of the actual victims only, but an inclusive initiative following the needs of the bereaved. Many relatives of victims feel a need to know the truths and arrive at a sense of justice and (dis)closure. Most important of all is recognition and acknowledgement of people's pain and suffering - not necessarily that Northern Ireland needs a truth commission. Some believe this could be a possible way to move forward, but the idea has not had general support. If some kind of truth-telling process or commission should be put in place, it would depend on individuals admitting their testimonies and would not only be a matter of the state owning up to its responsibility. But so far people have not been interested in submitting their testimonies, for various reasons. Guilt and the difficult acceptance of forgiveness are naturally some of the main reasons for perpetrators not coming forward, because it would leave them in a position of being compelled to express gratitude for being forgiven. Some survivors also feel guilty for being spared and it is problematic for some victims who do not want to publicise their gratitude for having survived, in order not to hurt others who are experiencing grief. A number of people have expressed concern regarding such an initiative and would prefer to forget about the conflict and move on with their lives. For some it is simply too painful, and others do not feel ready to confront forgiveness in fear of their suffering being forgotten in the process of moving on. Some can never forgive, and are still hoping to get perpetrators convicted of past crimes . Furthermore, someone else's story might diminish the suffering the survivor feels or it might re-connect the individual with their trauma. The general fear is that people will bottle up their anger and direct it towards the other community once more. The public discourse at the moment is that people need to be heard, yet this is not a absolute political agenda but more an act of lip-service to the groups. A number of projects are working on a collection of life stories to create a more human legacy for the next generation. There is a great concern for the next generation and many initiatives are dealing with youth in order to stop the vicious circle of bigotry and violence. A lot of these initiatives are also talking about reconciliation, a word that prevents some people from interacting because they do not want to be reconciled and give up all their anger. Some groups have resolved this problem either by explaining that reconciliation is merely a process that may lead to being reconciled or by choosing to name their activities as community development work. Another act of reconciliation would be a physical memorial to the dead or other forms of public commemoration, but in general, people have no desire to have another communal memorial built. It may well turn out to be more divisive than actually reconciling. To overcome the divisions, it seems most important to people that the opposed community takes responsibility and the blame for actions perpetrated against their community, and that there is a serious debate about the issue of guilt that goes beyond dispute and accusations.

Common denominators

A possibility for moving beyond the conflict could be some process of reciprocal transactional contrition and forgiveness between aggressors and victims, in order to establish a new relationship of mutual acceptance and reasonable trust between

the different parts to the conflict. This process would probably be more successful if initiated by the victims or bereaved relatives, since these are the original disempowered parties. Many people find forgiveness hard to give and even to receive. I see this as connected to the current hierarchies of victimhood. People spend a lot of energy denouncing the actions of the other side, but spend little time reflecting on atrocities committed by their 'own people'. There is an unhealthy competition for the moral high ground, and even for the victim or survivor there is an aspect of power in forgiving because it puts one in a position above the perpetrator. This seems to be a justified position in many ways, but it is not helpful to the general conflict situation. In order to create a stable foundation for the process to proceed from, it is important that the survivors deal with the consequence the violent acts have had on their lives and perspectives. The act itself can never be undone, but the damaging effect can be reduced if people are willing to let go of their grief, anger and bitterness. This is not to say that the responsibility of dealing with the past lies solely with the victims and survivors, but that they should have an important and active role in the process. A public act of reconciliation has been suggested, but this would probably depend on the existence of a new situation of relative equality of power. This in turn would depend on a broad acceptance of a diverse analysis of the past, recognition of injustices and resulting historic wounds, and acceptance of moral responsibility where due.

In the Agreement there is a call for finding common denominators because many have realised and accepted the apparent symmetries in the experience of suffering during the 'troubles'. Some still see all violent acts as an offence against humanity, i.e. so-called civilised behaviour. This view may stop people from committing violent acts, but may also label the individuals who have committed violent acts as less worthy human beings, i.e. dehumanising the 'other' due to a lack of identification. A more inclusive perspective accepts inhumane acts as a foregone part of the conflict and gives an opportunity for both perpetrators and victims to move on with the acceptance of committed atrocities, while at the same time not trying to silence them. This more humanitarian approach does not compel individuals to understand and sympathise with the perceived 'other', but to tolerate and respect diversity. It seems ironic that, in order to respect difference, there has to be a common denominator, but in the light of the current public blame game, which is aided by iconised enemy-images, it appears to be a sound attempt to try to locate such a solution. It is an ambitious project, but some people working with victims and perpetrators on an everyday basis in Northern Ireland have shown that there was a time for 'an eye for an eye' but that now it might be time to 'turn the other cheek' and accept different truths. This approach is linked to a matter of humanity, and more importantly to the acceptance of inhumanity as an inseparable part.

Following this, one is led to ask: Can there be forgiveness without acknowledgement of the inhumanity of oneself and one's own side? Is it not necessary to admit to the ability to cause pain and to focus on the common inhumanity of people along with the common humanity? From this point of view

there would be less blaming, passing judgement and fighting for the moral high ground, and more focus on the political circumstances and the backgrounds of the individuals, in order to better recognise what might have led them to conduct inhumane acts. This is not meant to justify the use of violence, but rather to acknowledge that violence has been an integral part of the history of Northern Ireland and that sooner or later it has to be dealt with in a constructive way. A way of bringing in collective responsibility along with the personal responsibility of the perpetrator is to stress the importance of empathy. If everybody could recognise that they themselves or someone close to them would be capable of conducting so-called inhumane acts, and would explore the differences in perceptions of when a threat becomes serious enough for some to feel either a pressure or responsibility to defend their 'own side' or retaliate for previous violations, then perhaps Northern Ireland could become a less 'troubled' society. This would allow for public rituals to take place where the different sides could both accept moral responsibility for their part and initiate processes of forgiveness. Over time this may even lead to reconciliation. This is a long process and many struggles will have to give way for a new society where people can co-exist. The hardest struggle to give up might even be the struggle for recognition of victimhood, since the moral high ground is a powerful position and leaves no justifiable room for others to criticise. The trap of this position is a vicious circle of mourning, where the struggle collectively becomes a so-called MOPE (Most Oppressed People Ever) syndrome, which leaves little room for listening and empathising with the struggles of other people.

Northern Ireland has a long way to go before it becomes a peaceful society. The official peace process is a good start, but the failure to implement the Agreement in full is undermining its authority. It seems that the peace process could collapse over the issues of policing and decommissioning of arms. Reconciliation does not harmonise with the present antagonistic approaches, the playing on people's feelings of disappointment and allowing exclusivist agendas to overshadow bridge-building initiatives. Perhaps when the time is right to critically reflect upon their own actions and those of others, a means of tolerance and an acceptance of co-existence will be able to produce an agreement on a new version of normality. The past needs to be dealt with, both symbolically and concretely, and accounts of violent acts need to be heard, shared and remembered or forgotten depending on the survivors' will. In this process, healing may or may not come for individuals who have been traumatised by past atrocities, but the transformation of Northern Ireland from a place of 'low-scale civil war' to a society of relative peace and tolerance could be the grounds from which this healing might begin.

Recommended Reading:

Bloomfield, Sir Kenneth. 1998. *We will Remember them. Report of the Northern Ireland Victims Commissioner.*

Fay, M, Morrisey, M, & Smyth, M. 1999. *Northern Ireland's Troubles. The Human Costs.* London: Pluto Press.

Democratic Dialogue. 1998. *New Order? International models of peace and reconciliation.* Report no. 9. Belfast: Democratic Dialogue.

Hamber, Brandon (ed.). 1998. *Past Imperfect: Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland and Societies in Transition. Northern Ireland*: INCORE.

Hamber, B, Kulle, D & Wilson, R (eds.). 2001. *Future Policies for the Past.* Belfast: Democratic Dialogue.

Montville, Joseph V. 1993. *"The healing function in political conflict resolution."* In Hugo van der Merwe & Dennis J.D. Sandole (eds.), Conflict resolution theory practice. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

The Government of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of Ireland. 1998. *The Agreement. Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations.*

Wilson, John P.1999. *A Place and a Name.* Report of the Victims Commission. Dublin: Stationary Office.

Recording Oral History: Practical And Ethical Issues

Claire Hackett, Duchas Living History Project, Falls Community Council

About Duchas

Duchas is a living history project based in Falls Community Council that deals in the context of nationalist West Belfast and covers the years of the conflict. The overall aim of Duchas is to collect and present a historical record of life in nationalist West Belfast from 1969 onwards. We plan to encourage the widest possible spread of people in the community to contribute their memories and share their experiences. This history is intended to be a tool for recording, interpreting and learning from the past. From the recordings stem the various aspects of Duchas which include:

- the development of the oral history series covering life histories, themes and defining events
- the creation of an archive where visitors can access the recordings
- the creation of a photographic archive
- the development of educational materials based on the oral history series for use in the education curriculum
- the presentation of recorded material in multi-media formats
- contribution to the development of a model of conflict resolution and courses based on this model.
- establishment of interactive learning centre and living history museum in West Belfast

Duchas is therefore a very ambitious and visionary project. There are currently two researchers employed in the project, myself and my colleague Mairead Gilmartin. We are currently working on recordings for the first series, about which I will talk more later. Our initial work has involved setting up the structures for the oral history series, choosing the focus of the first series, doing background research, sourcing contributors and carrying out interviews. This process will be discussed in more detail.

Oral history

Oral history is defined as a method of collecting and preserving tape recorded remembrances of past experiences. The following quotation is taken from the web page of the Regional Oral History office, University of California.
"Oral history is an ideal process for understanding the past and unfolding present and for preserving voices that would not otherwise be heard. Tape-recorded oral history interviews capture firsthand accounts of important events and life experiences from people who observed and participated in them. They fill the gaps in the written record and make history come alive with personal and anecdotal

material to illustrate how decisions are made, what motivates great achievers, how culture, custom and memory shape individual expectations and actions, and how individuals and groups influence the course of history".

Oral history provides a way of recording the voices of people who don't have access to official and establishment versions of history. Therefore it has often been used by peoples who have been marginalised from state and establishment structures in order to record their history. So, for example, the British Library sound archive has collections of recordings about labour history, the women's movement, gay and lesbian experience and the Jewish community. Frequently the motivation to record oral history stems from the belief that telling the story of the people involved in social movements is in itself an act of creating change.

Oral history is also a method of capturing historical events from individual perspectives. Because of this oral history is frequently seen as humanising history. It can provide people with an accessible way of understanding the past. Frequently oral history interviews capture not simply descriptions of events but also processes, reactions and feelings. For the listener, viewer or reader this can provide a means of relating to and therefore understanding history

On a recent visit here Khwezi ka Mpumlwana from the Robben Island Museum in South Africa described how the story of the prison experience is presented to visitors. He talked about the museum staff's realisation that reliance on material objects would tell only the story of the powerful because such material artefacts are primarily the realm of privileged peoples and this is a reflection of inequalities in society. They therefore decided to rely mainly on oral history accounts from as many people as possible involved in Robben Islands's history as a political prison. This he said, has allowed for a complex story with many different perspectives. He spoke about their commitment to giving space to different accounts within a philosophy locating the museum as part of the deconstruction of apartheid and construction of a new and just society. This commitment to the principles of redressing injustice is very much in the tradition of oral history.

Methodological issues: ethical

Perhaps because oral history is often seen as people's history there is an assumption that it is inherently ethical. After all people are telling their story in their own words - it sounds like democratic research - no predefined questions, no reducing people to statistics, no apparent researcher agenda. There is in fact just as much need to scrutinise the ethical practice within oral history as other types of research. In this as in other types of research, informed consent is a crucial issue. I do not believe it is enough to say that people can choose whether to participate in the research. This immediately throws up questions about what people are told about the project and how much control they have over the recorded interview and how the material will be used.

In Duchas we have found that these are keenly debated questions. We set up an advisory panel for the project to provide ideas and guidance. The panel meets every six weeks. These questions of ethics have been part of every panel meeting and I have no doubt that the discussions will continue. The issue of establishing informed consent has been the focus of much debate. A key question has been how to provide to contributors a full explanation about the implications of contributing to the archive in a way that enables people to make informed judgements about what they say. At the same time Duchas is striving to create an atmosphere where full and authentic accounts can be recorded. The challenge for us has been to remain true to both aims. At our panel meetings we have discussed a wide variety of possibilities in order to arrive at a responsible position. This I believe is rightfully an ongoing process. Initial standards need to be set but these need always to be tested against the real life situations that emerge.

We have arrived at a set of guidelines for carrying out the oral history research and we have developed a contributor permission form that we ask people to sign. The following are the information points that we give people before we record the interview:

1. Duchas is a living history project. The aim is to have a centre where people can visit and access the history of West Belfast told by people in their own words i.e. the mini disk recordings.

2. This is a history that has never been fully told before. It is important to tell it now, to explain the conflict as it was experienced here and to communicate the lessons of those experiences.

3. All recordings will be put in an archive for preservation and for access by any visitor.

4. It is also likely that your recordings will be used by taking extracts and combining these with other recordings to present an account about a particular period. This story could be told in books, articles, videos and exhibitions. It might be shown in a number of settings e.g. schools, universities, community groups, festivals.

5. We are asking you to give your permission for your recording to be used and accessed in these ways - this is what the contributor permission form is for.

You also have rights over the recording:

6. You will receive a copy of the recording on tape and a transcript of the interview.

7. If you want to delete any part of the interview after the interview or after hearing your own copy or after reading the transcript, Duchas undertake to remove the relevant section according to your wishes.

8. At any time during the interview you can ask for the recording to pause/stop - please use this if you want to speak off the record.

9. If you wish you can put a restriction or condition on the use of the recording e.g. that it not be used or accessed for 5 years.

We give this information sheet to contributors before interview and cover these points in our own words before we carry out the interview. We want to make people aware that the interview is a matter of historical record that could potentially be accessed by anyone in the future. We also want them to know how their interview is more likely to be widely accessed i.e. in extracts and in combination with other people. The other aspect of this is that in signing the contributor form we are asking them to give over control over what way their material will be used in the future e.g. with what other extracts. We want them to know what control they do have - and that is to approve the recording and request deletions or impose restrictions. The key issue in all of this is that we are as clear as possible about the control they have. They are then in a position to make an informed judgement about whether to take part in the interview.

Methodological issues: Practical

I want to explain briefly the practical processes we have set in place. We decided to record on minidisk. This decision was made because of the quality of sound recorded and because digital recording is compatible with the kind of multi media formats we want to use in the future. We therefore use portable minidisk recorders with microphones. After the interview we copy the minidisk recording on to tape cassette. We have a twin cassette recorder for this purpose. We make a transcript of the recording and we have a cassette transcribing system for this.

We give the tape cassette and transcript to the contributor. If they wish to make any changes we make a note of these, record it on the contributor form and make the deletions on the original minidisk recording. We then make a new tape cassette for the contributor and amend the transcript. We then make another back up cassette copy for the Duchas archive. We are currently in the process of buying a multi media computer and intend to make back up copies of the minidisk recording on CD.

Case study: August 1969 pogroms

Much of the initial work of Duchas involved discussing the issues involved in recording oral history and making links with other organisations. At an early stage however there was also a feeling that we needed to begin the research in order to try out the issues in a practical way. A decision was therefore taken to bring a focus to the first recordings by choosing a topic. We therefore focused on the events of August 1969 when large numbers of Catholic families were burned out of their homes in the Clonard and Divis areas.

We began with documentary research. We read newspaper accounts of the time, looked at street directories and consulted the Scarman report - a government report into the events of 1969 which was published in 1972. The main resources we used were the Linenhall Library, the Belfast Central Library newspaper library and the Public Record office. We also attempted to access photographs of the period through Belfast Exposed, the Belfast Archive Research and Exchange. and newspaper photograph libraries.

We had a number of reasons for doing this documentary research. Firstly we wanted to be informed about the period, the way things had been reported as this would suggest questions for our interviews. Also we intend to present the oral history material with a context. Another reason was to be able to gather some material to stimulate memory for contributors. I want to address two issues we came across in our use of documentary research.

The first issue concerns using government research and reports constructively. Although it is in many ways a flawed report one of the most interesting sources was the Scarman report available for consultation in Linenhall Library. The report is a huge document: it contains detailed information including evidence from individuals and it has maps. The maps proved to be an invaluable resource for us. They show the layout of the area at the time and they are moreover colour coded showing the extent of destruction of houses and businesses. We showed copies of the maps to contributors when we carried out interviews and in this use they were extremely successful. Everyone immediately looked to identify where they had lived. It brought an immediate focus to the interview. Also we found out that people wanted a copy of the map for themselves. A number said they wanted to frame it. We therefore made colour copies of the map and gave it to any contributor who wanted it. It was a good way of thanking people for their contribution.

The Scarman report maps also suggested other avenues for us to explore. For example you can see from the maps that there are several green marks. These indicate public houses that were destroyed. (In fact 24 public houses were destroyed and 36 were damaged). Many are isolated from the other areas destroyed. On the basis of the map information we think that there is a story to be told from pub owners that we don't yet have. We are pursuing this at the moment.

I referred earlier to two issues relating to documentary research. The first, which I have talked about, is the value of it for background information. The second issue is the line between being well informed enough to ask questions and formulating the story too rigidly prior to conducting the interviews.

Prior to carrying out any research Mairead and I thought that the main destruction and terror took place on one night, the night on which Bombay Street was attacked and destroyed. In West Belfast, Bombay Street has become synonymous with the August 1969 pogroms. As we read the newspapers this impression solidified. Only a few street names were mentioned at all and there was a strong focus on the

arrival of British troops. Our assumption was that there were no more large-scale attacks after the British soldiers arrived. Therefore when one of the first contributors referred in her interview to the fact that Bombay St had been destroyed the following night our first impulse was to think the contributor had been mistaken. However it did prompt us to do more research and we discovered that Bombay Street was indeed destroyed the following night even though British soldiers had moved in to Belfast that day. It was a lesson to us to be aware of our own assumptions and the way that documentary sources can support these assumptions.

We have carried out 14 interviews to date. The way we started was to ask the people we were meeting and working with for suggestions - our advisory panel made suggestions and volunteered as did Falls Community Council staff and management committee and people from the other community groups that we were meeting. As an oral history project based in the community these were avenues that were available to us. Some routes proved fruitful and others were dead ends. We began the series with interviews with people who were made homeless. As the story has unfolded we have sought out different perspectives as we are doing with the public house owners. Another avenue we want to pursue comes from some photographs we found depicting travellers bringing lorries to help evacuate refugees. We are also looking for people who took part in the massive aid effort that was co-ordinated at the time. Frequently ideas have come from the interviews themselves. One contributor mentioned the aid work done by Quakers and this prompted us to go to the Society of Friends.

We are currently working on producing a short video with some women attending a media training course at Springvale. The video will be accompanied by a short booklet and we will be launching these in the autumn. We are very aware that the launch of this material will prompt more people to come forward and we therefore want to present the material as part of a process rather than a conclusion. At the moment we are considering how we can make the occasion of the launch also a workshop event where people can reminisce and come forward for interviews.

Relevance to victim and survivor research

I want to come back to the question of how this is relevant to research on victims and survivors. For me one of the big areas of overlap is the issue of informed consent and making the research experience an empowering rather than exploitative one. I want to introduce some ideas from other writers in this field.

The British Sociological Association's Code of Ethical principles advocates the principle of informed consent when carrying out social research. It argues that researchers should explain the reasons for their project and implications for individual subjects or groups and communities. Subjects should understand that they have the right to refuse to cooperate. They should be told where and when the results of the research will be available.

Informed consent is I believe partly about disclosing your own agenda - explaining why you are doing the research and what will be done with it. It is about seeing people as active subjects rather than objects of scrutiny. One article I read gave a quotation referring to the process of doing research as receiving a gift. "Researchers should never forget that the right and privilege of being an observer is a gift presented to the researcher by his(sic) host and subjects." (Bosk 1979) The author of the article agreed with this emphasis on the obligation of the gift relationship. However she went further: "This emphasis on the obligation of the gift relationship is right but the receiver also has a duty to ensure that the gift is given knowingly and willingly."

I think this is a useful way to look at the issue of informed consent. The greater the gift then the more information, preparation and follow up required from the researcher. More is needed for doing in depth interviews than for conducting a large scale attitudes survey. One thing I believe researchers don't do enough of is to feedback our research to those who have contributed to it. It is a way of thanking our contributors. Moreover, in evaluating our own feelings about presenting our research conclusions to the people who have contributed to it, we can judge how well we have discharged our responsibility of ensuring informed consent.

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Narrative, Imagination and a Pluralist Vision

Cathie McKimm, An Crann The Tree

This paper, which is a synthesis of personal and professional experience, looks at narrative processes as a tool for peace and reconciliation work in the context of experience accumulated at An Crann The Tree over a two-year period. The need to specify at the outset the 'personal' and the 'professional' is both an acknowledgement and a reminder of how difficult it often is to separate these two. Constantly our personal ethics and motivations impinge on our professional practice and vice versa. On reading the NIVT's report Communities in Transition (1999) I was struck by the following contribution by Vivienne Anderson:

> What I do know, however, is that very often it is our own experience of life which we bring to the work we are engaged in, and also, there can be no doubt that most of us who have lived through the past number of years in Northern Ireland also tend to bring with us our own prejudices, baggage, mistrust and fears. [1]

Although it is not the main focus of this paper, it is a crucial and constant challenge for those engaged in the field of peace and reconciliation. The demands of working through conflict with others involves much personal and emotional engagement where boundaries often become blurred and complex. A failure to recognise ourselves as a factor in this process with all our own prejudice and pain may unwittingly lead us to project it onto others causing further damage and distress. As much of An Crann's work over recent months, has been setting aside time to consider such challenges and find ways of supporting those engaged in the demanding work of sharing personal and often traumatic, life experiences.

I will be quoting extensively throughout from a report that An Crann is currently in the process of writing up. The report is both a record and an analysis of two residentials which took place this year to help An Crann find creative and helpful methodologies for practitioners using narrative and artistic practices in the field of peace and reconciliation. Many of the extracts are verbatim accounts taken from the stenographer's transcript. Text that appears between square brackets has been inserted by me for the purposes of clarification.

Narrative

Defining Narrative

The word narrative can be used interchangeably with story or storytelling and is used both in this paper and the work of An Crann to describe all kinds of expression. Be it written, visual, acoustic or tactile, our expressions are embedded with motives, values and meanings that convey, either intentionally or unintentionally, some kind of message or ethical vision of our world, thereby becoming a story of one

kind or another. I will also during this paper, refer to such instances of expression as texts or discourses, employing a recent trend in the human sciences to categorize all human expression as a text (or discourse) - as something that can be read and interpreted in a number of ways.

This definition of what a story is conflicts with many traditional and popular definitions. In Western tradition for example, a story has been defined as something with a beginning, middle and end. This definition creates difficulties for several reasons. Firstly, it usually presupposes a linear and structured arrangement of a story, ordered sequentially across time - maybe even chronologically. Such definitions of story may initially be unhelpful and even an obstacle for those who have been repressed[2] and, or damaged by violence, and are unable to arrange the events of their life in a way that is immediately meaningful to others, or maybe also themselves. Secondly, the definition of narrative with a beginning middle and end is biased towards verbal and written texts and does not reflect those instances of story that arrange themselves through other mediums like sound, paint, or movement. I do not wish to totally reject this traditional view of narrative either, but rather draw attention to the complexities of narrative construction, and the possible dangers of imposing structures on stories that do not fit the experiences of the teller.

Popular concepts of story also negate the above definition of narrative as a process already integral to everyone's life and open to many mediums. There is a strong sense in which story in our society is associated with public performance and oratory. This concept of 'storytelling' is more usually associated with a form of professional narration by those with particular skills and gifts to thrill and entertain. Again this is very focussed on the story as something prepared and rehearsed, rather than something in progress and spontaneous. Connected to this, and also part of the growing culture of mass entertainment through the media, we also have inherited a concept of story as 'artifice', as something contrived and made up that does not reflect the reality of our experience. I would argue also, and perhaps more controversially, that since the ceasefires in 1994, we have witnessed the growth of a new 'movement', particularly dominated by the needs and anxieties of survivors of our political conflict to tell their story. Emerging subtly with this new 'movement' is I believe the emergence of the myth that healing, reconciliation and maybe even justice necessarily follow from the telling of these stories. An Crann, like other organisations working in the field of peace and reconciliation, is therefore having to constantly deconstruct assumptions, often facile assumptions around the definition and role of story in the life of the individual and the community - remembering that the definitions have implications for how our vision and work is shaped and translated by these underlying assumptions.

Individual and Community; Self and Other

An Crann's vision of enabling people to retell history through personal stories is part of a wider European and world movement of finding new ways to understand

the past and avert the dangers of mass destruction and warfare that have characterised the twentieth century. For example, after the huge success of Schindler's List, Steven Spielberg diverted much of the profits of the film into the 'Shoah Foundation', which would record and videotape the memories of the Holocaust's survivors. To date the foundation has collected 50,000 testimonies in thirty-one languages across fifty-seven countries. The purpose of this massive project is to 'record and videotape the memories of the Holocaust's real survivors - people as themselves and not played by actors, delivering their witness accounts to camera, the only script their own'.[3]

While there is much hope and goodwill at the heart of such visions as the Shoah Foundation and more modest projects like An Crann, the vision is not without its complications, especially if we are not clear on what we mean by such terms as 'personal stories', 'witness accounts', and what it would really mean to hear people speak 'as themselves.....the only script their own'. When we were collecting the stories for *"Bear in Mind"* [4] support staff, helping with the production of the book, often related how difficult it was for them to hear certain stories that they described as 'political' rather than 'personal'. There was even a questioning on some occasions as to whether stories with a strong political bias should be included in the book. We did publish them however, because the paradox is, stories that are perceived as 'political' by a listener, may be experienced as personal by the teller. Conversely, stories that may be perceived as 'personal' by a listener, may carry, intentionally or unintentionally cultural, political messages by the teller. The problem is, it is often difficult to distinguish between the things we want to say for ourselves about our own feelings and experiences, and the things our culture and conditioning speaks through us. Often the narrative styles and values of our culture make it difficult for us to articulate our personal stories. They may force us into certain subject positions that are inappropriate for the feelings we want to express. For example, the victim/perpetrator categories have become powerful subject positions in the narrative style of our current cultural discourse in Northern Ireland. They draw very strongly on the powerful subject positions of 'hero' and 'villain' that have been used in western narratives for hundreds of years. Such narrative styles are embedded with particular moral and ethical points of view that distinguish clearly between what is 'good' and 'bad', or what is acceptable or unacceptable. It therefore becomes very difficult for those who have been categorised by society as 'perpetrators' to articulate feelings of pain and disappointment, or of love and hope; while those categorised as 'victims' are often reticent to describe feelings of hatred and anger. Clearly, the individual's sense of self and identity is powerfully influenced by the values and morality of their particular culture. For this reason, it often becomes difficult for people to articulate feelings and desires that put them in direct conflict with their sense of self.

All of us, to a greater or lesser extent, internalise the values and assumptions of our respective conditioning, experiencing as personal things that we might not have any direct experience of. The fact that we do so, throws into dispute our traditional definitions of the 'individual' and 'identity'. These themes were explored

quite extensively at An Crann's residential in April 2000. Dr. Jennifer Fitzgerald suggested that our views of the individual as a separate and autonomous agent were undermined by at least three premises. I quote extensively here because sooner or later, those involved in the process of gathering stories will be forced into thinking about some of these issues:

The first false premise [of the view of identity as unique, autonomous, separate] is based on consciousness, that is, I know who I am, I know what matters to me. This version of identity comes from the Cartesian philosophical position of 'I think, therefore I am'. It ignores the unconscious, it ignores the desires, the fears which may motivate me, but which are not available to my consciousness. You can see then that this version of identity is already based on a false premise. The second false premise is that assumption that identity is always autonomous, that is, 'I am independent, I make my own decisions, I have got free will'. Now that is already undermined by the idea of the unconscious, because I may be motivated by things that I don't know about, but it also fails to incorporate how every person's psychic identity is formed from elements absorbed from and projected onto other people. I am not as separate from other people as I believe myself to be. We all begin, after all, physically as part of somebody else, and when the baby at birth achieves physical separation from its mother, it is still psychically attached to her - emotionally, in terms of needs and desires, the baby still depends on the mother and believes that they are still fused, that whatever it needs or wants will be supplied by her. Only gradually does the baby learn that they are separate entities, as it develops its own ego (its separate identity). But even as we grow up as apparently separate individuals, our emotions, the desires and fears which drive our psyche, are inclined to spread out and invade the people that are closest to us. We don't truly recognise the separateness of others: we expect others to do what we want or need. (For example, parents can want children to achieve academically, 'for their own good' but really, unwittingly, this is an attempt to achieve vicariously through their children the academic ambitions which were frustrated in their earlier lives). Thirdly, the Western concept of individual identity also treats rational, intellectual knowledge as privileged, as leading by an objective process to truth. But our minds are not as independently rational as Enlightenment philosophers supposed: what we know is only what we are capable of knowing, through the structures, categories, ways of knowing that exist in our culture. If our culture believes in magic, we explain phenomena by magic. If our culture believes in reason, we explain phenomena by reason. In both cases there may be more to know which we can't know, because our culture has not equipped us with appropriate paradigms or criteria. This is quite a radical philosophical area. What I am suggesting here is that from a theoretical point of view, knowledge is not as fixed and unquestioned as most people in the West are liable to believe. [5]

The challenge becomes one of finding a respectful, non-judgemental way of hearing and receiving the stories of others that encourages the contradictions of our own feelings and experiences to emerge - to learn how to listen even when it challenges our own experience and moral vision of the world. It might have been this challenge that Kathy was thinking of in Bear in Mind when she says:

I didn't even have time to think about what I had just come through in prison and all the

other things. I don't know where to begin, to even start dissecting it because it was all probably too much. People are only now beginning to reflect on their grief. I think now they'll start to feel it with everything becoming more steadier. It's like if you could dwell on it or think about it, what will be the outcome of it? Maybe the problems we're facing now are the worst ones and you nearly feel you've no right to start talking until everybody's been heard. Do you understand what I'm saying? [6]

The problem of listening

As can be seen, our identities often become fixed by our culture, by the subject positions that the cultural narrative gives us. Often however, our feelings and experiences bring us into conflict with our subject positions and we struggle to reconcile our feelings and desires with the self that both we and society have come to believe in and validate. This very quickly leads to a second problem - the problem of listening - or more specifically the problem of listening to a story that is in conflict with my experience or interpretation of reality. Also, turned around, the problem of telling my story to someone whom I perceive is not going to listen the way I want them to. Just as people have an urge to fix their own story as an attempt to shore up any self-doubts or anxieties about their own experience and identity, there is also a desire to control the listening of those they entrust the story to. Having the story heard in a particular way, thus becomes a pre-condition of telling the story. The desired process becomes one of listening through confirmation. The teller wants their story confirmed by the listener in a way that validates their experience of it. The teller wants to retain ownership of their story. There are elements of this process of listening through confirmation that are valuable, especially when a person is grieving, it can be comforting to share your story with those who will have empathy with it - who understand what it feels like to be injured or bereaved or imprisoned. However, for many, especially those who have been the victims of political violence, there is a growing need for them to share their story publicly where it may not be received as it was among the sympathetic environment of their own family or community. In the public domain, the story is received and interpreted in many different ways - not always to the satisfaction of the teller. Quite simply, once our stories enter the public domain, we no longer own them - they are open to other interpretations and other readings. Trying to close them off to other readings leads to a process of exclusion - a practice we have become very skilled at in Northern Ireland.

This problem of listening, and the desire to own our stories and control the listening was discussed at great length during An Crann's residential. The following speaker introduced a novel way of thinking about the problem of telling and listening by introducing the idea of 'borrowing' that what we might actually do with each other's stories is 'borrow ourselves':

If you remember the magician's trick where they write something down on an envelope and they seal it and they start asking questions, and lo and behold, they open the envelope and there it is. In a lot of cases we think of language like that, and we come here with our

bags and envelopes and so on. We think when we are talking to people, we are handing over letters, and you are reading them and that is how it is done - little parcels, and sometimes big parcels, but that is how it is. In each case you are giving somebody something and you are getting something back and they never actually relate to each other, they never actually exchange, they have all been prepared, they have all been cooked up beforehand. In fact, that is not at all a description of how we live - we can be surprised, shocked, disturbed, exhilarated by what takes place when what Paul Zachary calls the animal of words, you know. It is that kind of muscular exchange which can be gentle and comforting and warm and also have a claw in some part of it, but without those things you don't have a living thing. The living thing is created by all of us.

I prefer to think of the term 'borrowing' [instead of ownership] and what I borrowed from you over the last few days is myself. In a way I have it on loan forever, you know, and I think my views of you, what I have thought when you have been speaking, the things that you have given me when you have been speaking that perhaps you don't know about, are all things that have been borrowed. We agree to that exchange and to that borrowing and lending. You also have what I have, and sometimes you have a sense of myself and my stories which is more real, maybe more appropriate than, well at least as appropriate as mine. [7]

For those who are less brittle and defensive and have become comfortable with a more fluid sense of self, receiving your story back with a different interpretation can become a source of insight, personal growth and maturity as we realise that the 'self' and 'other' are always inextricably linked. Our own stories are already out in the community and we can learn about ourselves by observing what's 'out there'. For those who are feeling weak and vulnerable, however, there is little comfort in this knowledge and it will take many years, and maybe generations, before we find the strength and the courage for such self-reflection and criticism.

Imagination

Defining Imagination

With such a concept of the exchange of stories and stories being open to the interpretation of others, we have already entered the realm of the imagination. Being open to other interpretations, to other possibilities of ourselves is in fact initially, an act of the imagination.
One dictionary definition of the imagination is: 'act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or not previously known or experienced'. [8]

Again, just as it was necessary to deconstruct some cultural interpretations of story, I think it is necessary to do the same with imagination. Like story, there is a sense in which imagination is linked with artifice and fabrication. When we think of imagination, we often think of fantasy, dreams, unreal worlds and people and experiences that are separate and distinct from reality. Using the dictionary

definition however, we can see how the imagination is something we use daily along with other cognitive and emotional processes to construct our discourses. Every time we tell a story, we substitute words and images for events and happenings no longer present. Without our imaginations, this would not be possible. It is the imagination that makes it possible for us to consider other possibilities, to ponder 'what if'. It therefore has the potential to project us into the experiences, feelings and even truths of other people - to make us moral and compassionate individuals with the capacity to empathise, to feel what others feel and see what others see. The following is another extract from our residential report, Dr. Jim Sheehan, inviting us to see how imagination and history work together:

It is a paradox, isn't it, that in some way the imagination and history always work together. There is an interweaving of history and imagination, and an interweaving of imagination and, you know, dare I say it, something called 'the truth'. Because if we don't hold onto some idea of the truth, you know, if we don't we are just in an endless series of places of the imagination. Obviously, these are my own prejudices, but I wonder does the imagination come to our service to point to something that is irrevocably now lost? Here today there is a sense in which the past is irrevocably done and we need to call on the imagination to point to it. We need also to have an understanding. These are my prejudices. We need to understand that that is not just fantasy, that is not just the operation of fantasy. Even if we have a notion of the truth, the truth is the set of meanings that were deposited at a point in time. What do we mean by the term 'conviction'? If we live in a set of meanings, do you know, that guide our world and shape our world to some degree, then I think that is an idea of truth, that there has existed in moments of time, sets of meanings. We might also go back and say, actually, those were narratively constructed, but they were imaginative constructions that had real consequences, you know - truth - not as something that is separate, but something that is totally shot through with the imagination - an idea that is not fully exhausted by the imagination. [9]

In Dr. Sheehan's analysis, he invites us to see how the imagination and truth always work together - are always complicit. Instead of seeing imagination therefore, as something that is made up, invented, and therefore false or contrary to 'what is', we are invited to see it as one of the dynamic processes at work in narrative construction, and a function that can help us to gain insight into the experiences and stories of others. It is the imagination that offers us the possibility of becoming creative and empathic listeners and tellers.

The Impact of Conflict on the Imagination

In many respects, conflict can be seen as a failure of the imagination, a failure to encounter in the stories of others resonances of our own feelings and experiences:

We recognize in violence a desperate strategy to be heard, where it seems the only way to have your voice heard is to silence someone else's. Peace demands a listening heart, something that most of us shy away from because to listen is to allow the other's voice to make a claim on us. [10]

Keeping narrative imagination alive is to keep alive the possibility that in the experiences of other people, even those of 'the enemy' are parallels with our own lives. The challenge thus becomes one of not losing sight of our own subjectivity in attempting to find justifications for our own interpretations of experience and history.

A Pluralist Vision

Conceding to the place of imagination in our stories, our history and our truths, is to acknowledge the plurality of our social existence, of the different views, memories experiences and expectations that we all carry. Is there a place for all of these conflicting voices within society? Rebecca Scott, in her essay, 'Theoretical Perspectives. [on the 'Other'] writes: *Somewhere every culture has an imaginary realm for what it excludes, and it is that zone we must try to remember today.* [11]

I suggest that such zones are created when the listening becomes too challenging; when the stories we hear threaten our own perceptions of self and offend our ethical vision of the world to the extent we feel at risk from 'the other'. Under threat, we become defensive and closed off to the experiences of others - a closure that often leads to misunderstanding, an overt justification of our own ethics and morality, a growing sense of mistrust, suspicion and fear, a re-doubling of the rule-book, hatred and eventually war.

In a society that is truly committed to parity of esteem across all of the social, political, and religious boundaries, there is paradoxically, no universal truths or values that can legislate for equilibrium. There is no utopia. Even traditional pluralist theories for the distribution of political power are fallible. As one commentator has put it *'The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent'* [12]

In whatever shape the government or the statute books take, a pluralist culture is I suggest, one that will be inclusive and listening for and to stories of 'the other'. The stories will at times be offensive, painful and difficult to hear and for that there is no inoculation, only openness and integrity to begin judging ourselves before we begin judging others. Strangely enough this requires more than learning to accept our differences - it means learning to recognise our similarities - even when we find them in the faces and the stories of our enemies

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