Community-based Approaches to Post-Conflict 'Truth-telling': Strengths and Limitations

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Introduction: Truth and the Role of Community

In the last 30 years 'truth commissions' have emerged as a key common feature of post-conflict transition.[1] Around 30 such commissions have been held in virtually every corner of the planet as the primary means for violently divided societies, those emerging from an era of authoritarian human rights abuses, or both, to deal with the legacies of the past. The North of Ireland is not one of them and increasingly looks like the 'exception that proves the rule' given the absence of such an official 'truth-telling' process. However, this does not mean that 'past-focused' initiatives have been absent from the North's post-conflict transition. As Christine Bell argues, what has marked Northern Ireland out from the international norm has been its 'piecemeal approach' to dealing with the past.[2] This has largely been the result of pragmatic political concerns, the 'constructive ambiguity' of the peace process placing a premium on *not* dealing with the past. Despite this, however, a diverse range of initiatives have emerged. Some of these have been high profile, officially even legally sanctioned, such as the public inquiries headed by Sir John Stevens into collusion[3] and Lord Justice Saville into the events of Bloody Sunday.[4] Others have been less well-known, often originating and undertaken in civil society, and with a variety of means and ends in mind.[5]

This article is designed to focus on the work of one such initiative, the Ardoyne Commemoration Project (ACP), and assess the lessons that may be learnt from it for a 'community-based' approach to post-conflict 'truth-telling'. The ACP was a 'community truth-telling' project established in 1998 to record the testimonies of the relatives and friends of all of the conflict-

related victims from Ardoyne in North Belfast. The result was the publication of a book in 2002, *Ardoyne: The Untold Truth.*[6] This paper examines the principles, methods and goals of the ACP in order to highlight the contribution that a focus on community can provide to meet the ends of transitional justice both locally and internationally.

Both the authors were members of the ACP; however, the findings presented here are based primarily on research undertaken between 2003 and 2004 for the Community Relations Council under Measure 2.1 of the Peace II Programme.[7] This research set out to critically assess the impact, value and limits of the work of the ACP as an example of community 'truth-telling'. A series of some 50 interviews were carried out, designed to elicit the views and experiences of a number of key respondent groups. The article will therefore fall into five parts. In the first section we very briefly outline some of the main international and theoretical perspectives relevant to discussing the specific role of 'community' for post-conflict truth-telling initiatives. Secondly, we describe the context, means and goals of the ACP. Thirdly, we describe the methodology adopted for the research conducted to assess it. The fourth section then focuses on what were reported by respondents as some of the strengths of a community approach to 'truth-telling'. Finally, we examine some of the problems with this approach, including the limits of 'inclusivity', the lack of official acknowledgment and investigations, and the problem with 'partial' truths.

While it would not be true to say that the 'pros' and 'cons' of community-based 'truth-telling' can be purely identified with nationalist attitudes on the one hand and unionist on the other, there was, in our research, some broad but notable differences of opinion. As a result, in the discussions of the strengths and limitations of community-based 'truth-telling' the former will deal primarily (though not exclusively) with the findings from respondents from within Ardoyne and the wider nationalist community and the latter on unionist responses. The aim of the article is not only to contribute to future discussion on unofficial approaches to 'truth-telling' but to argue that community approaches can also play a vital part in ensuring that officially sanctioned mechanisms might meet the diverse and sometimes competing ends of transitional justice. However, in doing so there is a danger in reinforcing the 'the two traditions' model of analysis and the notion that the British state was merely an 'honest broker' in the conflict and did not play an active role. This is not the intention of this paper.

Transitional Justice, Truth Commissions and Community

Truth commissions have been defined as 'official bodies set up to investigate a past period of human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law'.[8] Hayner goes on to outline four key characteristics of truth commissions. They are (1) 'past-focused', (2) concerned not with a specific event but patterns of human rights violations over time, (3) in existence for a pre-determined period of time and end with a report of their findings, and (4) 'officially sanctioned', their ability to investigate and disseminate their findings derived from that authority.[9] In other ways truth commissions can differ quite dramatically. For example, truth commissions have varied in terms of the extent of their powers to compel witnesses and evidence, the impact they have upon the future reform of state and other institutions, or their relationship to the formal judicial system.

Official truth commissions have become the most recognisable mechanism of 'transitional justice'.[10] Transitional justice is a field of inquiry and practice that is concerned with 'the various judicial and non-judicial approaches to dealing with… a legacy of human rights violations' in societies emerging from conflict and/or an era of authoritarian rule.[11] As such, transitional justice is not defined by a single purpose, logic or structure but consists rather of a 'set of inter-related principles and processes'.[12] These principles and processes may be 'inter-related' but they are also hotly contested by both academics and practitioners. Such arguments often reveal very different underlying social and political worldviews.

Two issues are particularly critical here. First, the imagined role for the law (and by definition those involved in law-making) 'in constituting transition'.[13] Transitional justice can often be theorised as largely the concern and preserve of a narrow (not to say elitist) band of lawyers and policymakers, what we might call 'transitional entrepeneurs', who make change via the law *instead or despite of* wider social and political actors. The second key issue concerns the often competing, if not at times contradictory, ends of transitional justice. These include: the restoration of the 'rule of law'; judicial 'retribution' designed to counter a culture of impunity; recompense and the 'restoration of dignity' to victims; reform of institutions; social and political 'reconciliation'; 'nation-building' and the re-constitution of the past on the basis of a 'shared narrative'. In any given instance of post-conflict transition these ends are likely to be in tension with each other to some degree or another. This has often involved a less than satisfactory 'trade-off' of the (not necessarily

mutually conducive) ends of 'truth', 'justice' and 'reconciliation'.

Clearly there have been many instances where 'official truth-telling' has been critical in 'giving voice' to victims, unearthing past abuses, bringing perpetrators to justice and promoting real progressive social change. However, this is not necessarily always the case. For example, critics of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission have illustrated how both the Christian-inspired ethos of 'reconciliation', and that of 'rainbow nation-building', precluded certain things being said by the relatives of victims and those who had been tortured by the apartheid regime, particularly in the public hearings.[14]   Some have argued that this led to a form of 'second order traumatisation', probably doing more individual harm than good.[15]   The key question is, how can mechanisms of transitional justice and 'truth-telling' be framed in order to avoid such an outcome and ensure, in more general terms, that real political engagement and agency is not denied to a population that has been subject to years of violent conflict? It is in the context of such questions that an analysis of the possible role of community-based truth-telling should be placed. A community-based approach to 'truth-telling' is understood as one in which decision-making over the design, remit, conduct, character and outcomes of the 'truth-telling' process is organised in, with and by members of a given community itself. It is therefore informed by research methodology paradigms from both participatory action research (PAR) and collaborative oral history models.[16]

The Ardoyne Commemoration Project: The Nature of the ACP

The Ardoyne Commemoration Project was set up in the wake of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. A group of around 30 community activists and relatives of victims in Ardoyne came together to find a way to 'remember the dead' of the area and to contest what was seen as a 'hierarchy of victimhood' developing around the 'victims' agenda'. A committee was established and the decision was taken to produce a book recording the testimonies of the relatives, friends and eyewitnesses of all those killed as a result of the conflict from Ardoyne. All (except for one) of the committee members were from Ardoyne. This local basis and orientation were seen both as a central ethos of the project and (practically) the only way to ensure a level of trust and access to carry out the work required successfully. Alongside local participation and control inclusivity was seen as the other key

principle guiding the work of the project. The first task of the project was to work out what victims were to be included. It was decided that the book would include all those people killed as a result of the conflict who had either been born, or lived a substantial period of their lives, in Ardoyne. The emphasis was therefore not on the status of the victim (i.e. combatant or non-combatant), or on the agency responsible for the death (i.e. state or non-state), but that the person killed was seen as a member of the community. This meant that some people killed in Ardoyne (i.e. members of the security forces, non-Ardoyne civilians) were not included. On the other hand, all Ardoyne residents who could be identified as such, whether nationalist or unionist, killed by the British army, RUC, loyalist or republican organisations, were included, as were people from Ardoyne killed elsewhere. Members of the project regarded this as an inclusive approach to 'truth-telling' in that it did not preclude anyone on the basis of their ethnic/religious identity, political affiliation and/or status as a victim. The efficacy of these twin principles (of local control/participation and inclusivity) and the manner in which the ACP acted upon them were central concerns for the assessment research work.

A total of 99 victims were identified, 50 of whom were killed by loyalists, 26 by members of the security forces (British army and RUC), nine by the IRA, three by the INLA and one by the Official IRA. Six more were members of the IRA killed inadvertently while on active service. One died accidentally and in three cases it remains unclear who was responsible. For an area with a population of 7,500 the overall total of 99 fatal victims represents over 10 times the average of the Northern Ireland conflict-related death rate.

The major work of the project consisted of conducting over 300 interviews, carried out over a four year period, with relatives, friends and eyewitnesses of individual deaths. The interviews were based on an open question schedule devised by the project team and informed by ethical and other considerations. They were carried out by members of the project in a place of the interviewees' choosing (usually their home) and normally lasted anything between 30 minutes to one and a half hours. Informed consent on the nature and purpose of the interview was obtained prior to the conduct of the interview and a level of post-interview support was provided in the aftermath. The interview transcript was then edited by members of the project into a more focused and readable narrative and subsequently, and importantly, returned to the interviewee for their approval. This 'handing back' phase was regarded as a key element of the working process of the project, ensuring that interviewees

had a sense of control and ownership. It was, however, extremely time-consuming and added a considerable workload to the project. Participants in the project were also given pre-publication access to edited versions of all the interviews carried out with others relevant to their particular case. Although the general rule was that changes could only be made to one's own testimony, this did allow any inaccuracies or potentially difficult or sensitive issues of concern to be raised prior to publication.

In certain cases no interviewees were available and/or the circumstances of death were very unclear. When such a situation arose other sources of information (i.e. newspaper accounts, coroner's reports) were employed. It was also decided that the final book should include a series of historical chapters, placing in context the individual stories of particular victims. A number of oral history interviews were also therefore carried out with local people to provide material for these chapters.

The product of this work, the book *Ardoyne: the Untold Truth*, was published in 2002. It was launched on 15th August, the 33rd anniversary of Ardoyne's first conflict-related victims, at a local club to which all of the participants and families were invited. The overwhelming majority (some 300 people) attended and the launch itself became a form of commemoration. Since then the book has sold around 6,000 copies. In 2004 the project produced a DVD, which documents the emergence and development of the project and includes interviews with relatives who gave testimony about what it meant for them to participate in the project. This was launched at a public meeting to which all the project participants and families were invited.

Assessing the Ardoyne Commemoration Project: Methodology

In the aftermath of the production of the book the current authors, both of whom had been very involved in the work of the project, began to consider whether or not it had achieved the goals it had set for itself and what contribution experiences of the ACP might have for similar initiatives elsewhere. This was the primary reason for carrying out the research upon which this article is based, namely, to assess the impact and benefits of community-based 'truth-telling'. To do so it was decided that a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews should be conducted with a number of respondent groups. Five such groups were identified including: relatives and participants (30) who had provided testimony, selected as valid and

representative of the overall profile of those who had participated in the work of the ACP; members of the project (4); community representatives from the wider Ardoyne community (6) selected from various community groups and social institutions (e.g. the Catholic Church); representatives of mainly nationalist community/victims' groups (6) from outside Ardoyne (e.g. members of human rights organisations); and representatives of, or people with an insight into, mainly unionist community/victims groups (6). In the latter case it was also decided to focus particularly on reactions to the work of the ACP within those mainly unionist areas bordering onto Ardoyne. As a result, a number of mainly unionist representatives were included from the Greater Shankill area. It also became evident during the conduct of the research (for reasons that will be discussed later) that there was a need to interview people from mainly unionist areas who had previously lived in the Ardoyne/Oldpark area but who had moved to other parts of Belfast as a result of intimidation and/or heightened levels of community tension in the early years of the conflict.

The interviews addressed a number of general areas, including: personal experience of the ACP (primarily directed at those involved, in whatever capacity, in the work of the project); personal responses to the work of the ACP and reflections on wider community responses; issues arising from the conduct of 'single identity' work and the role of 'insiders/outsiders' in community-based 'truth-telling'; perceived impact on community relations; perceived role of community-based 'truth-telling' on conflict resolution and transition; and an understanding of general attitudes to 'truth and justice' issues. To facilitate potentially critical responses from all of the respondent groups it was decided that the anonymity of interviewees would be maintained. The majority of the interviews were recorded. However, this was not the case with most of those carried out with representatives of mainly unionist community/victims groups. The particular sensitivity of the subject matter of the research was reflected in an initial reluctance of some such respondents to be taped. The decision was therefore taken to merely make notes in such cases in order to make respondents feel more comfortable. All the interviews were conducted between May 2003 and March 2004. Archival research on the state of the debate on 'truth-telling' both in Northern Ireland and internationally was also carried out. The findings were then published in a report, *Community, 'Truth-telling' and Conflict Resolution*, launched in February 2005. The following sections outline the main findings of the research.

'You Understand Again': The Strength and Value of a Community-based Approach

Much is made of the positive benefits of engaging in an official 'truth telling' process. It has been said they promote individual and collective healing, closure and reconciliation. Despite wide acceptance of such claims there is limited 'hard evidence' to support this. In the following section the key findings of the ACP evaluation are examined. The empirical evidence contributes to the debate on the role and benefits of 'truth telling' from a 'bottom-up' perspective and approach. The discussion that follows draws on interviews with those who participated in the ACP and community representatives who did not. It provides insights into the ways in which engaging in the project impacted upon individuals, their families and the community in general.

An important outcome of the project was that it afforded recognition to those who participated. It provided a space for individuals to tell their story and for previously excluded or marginalised voices to become part of public discourse. According to respondents there was a lack of public recognition of what their families and community had endured. This clearly added to their grief and sense of isolation. Recognition was also closely linked to acknowledgement and accountability and the equality of victimhood. The restoration of dignity, through recognition and acknowledgement in the book, particularly to the families of alleged informers, was undoubtedly a welcome outcome of the project. It also provided relatives of victims of state violence the opportunity to challenge what they perceived as the 'denial of truth' in official accounts. Whereas the ACP was credited with helping to restore a level of recognition for such families, this has remained an unresolved issue due to lack of acknowledgement and accountability on the part of the state. This tended to reflect a key limitation of 'storytelling'.

The denial of 'truth' and an enduring sense of injustice was a key factor spurring many to participate in the project and 'tell their truth'. This desire or need to provide testimony has connotations that go beyond merely 'telling one's story' and may be better described as 'bearing witness'. In these circumstances 'truth' is used to denounce or challenge a perceived injustice and to set aright an official account. This may assist in 'restoring dignity' because it seeks to give the victim a full role in telling 'the story' of a past violation. There was evidence that 'speaking out' had a therapeutic value for respondents in general. While giving testimony was an emotional experience,

most saw this as a necessary and important thing to do. It was important that someone was listening and that a 'space was found' to talk about personal and traumatic events. For most, however, there was no closure, just learning to live with the grief and loss. Uncovering the 'truth', setting the record straight and public acknowledgement of wrongdoing were seen as an essential part of the 'healing' process. Many spoke of the grief caused by what was perceived as insensitive and often inaccurate reporting of events by sections of the media. Participating in the ACP process was in some sense 'empowering' because it gave control over what was written about victims to their relatives and friends.

There are those who would argue that raking up the past simply causes more problems and simply 'opens up old wounds'. This was not the opinion of the vast majority of respondents. It was felt that the past needed to be addressed in order for society to 'move on'. Respondents were asked if they thought the work of the ACP could damage community relations. This question produced, in the main, a sense of frustration. For many within Ardoyne and the wider nationalist community the whole question of community relations was either of secondary importance or a model of analysis that they found highly problematic. Many people appeared highly sceptical of this model because it excludes the role of the British state and its agents, whom they perceive as having been key players in the conflict. Nevertheless, there was a very strong opinion that similar projects could be beneficial in various communities whatever the religious or political affiliation and saw it as something that other communities should also undertake.

For many respondents the question of equality of victims had become a highly contentious issue and a particular strength of the ACP was that it was inclusive. All victims from the community, irrespective of their status or the agent of their death, were included. In particular the way in which the project included families of alleged informers was regarded as immensely progressive. It was felt that there had been 'silences' within the community and a reticence to discuss fully and publicly certain events and issues related to the conflict. The project was credited with helping to break down this 'culture of silence' and challenging victim equality *within* the Ardoyne community and at a wider societal level. There was a consensus that any 'truth-telling' process, community-based or otherwise, must be inclusive. Such a perspective was regarded as a way to challenge the 'hierarchy of victimhood' and the distinction made between 'deserving' and 'un-deserving' victims.

Community participation stood out as the single most important aspect of the ACP process for the majority of participants and indeed the wider community. Without exception respondents strongly endorsed the method of 'handing back' the edited version of their testimonies for comment and change and the sense of control it gave them. This practice had created a sense of individual and collective ownership and was regarded as a fundamental strength and positive outcome of the project. In turn, this helped recast relatives in the role of pro-active agents of change and not helpless, passive and powerless victims. This sense of being pro-active resonated throughout many interviews. Overwhelmingly it was felt that the sensitivities of the project necessitated the use of 'insiders' and individuals that were respected and rooted in the community. In a community that has experienced decades of surveillance and less than accurate reporting on the community, distrust of outsiders 'who ask questions' is a reality. For respondents this was closely associated with the issue of access and trust. However, the use of 'insiders' should be balanced against possible negative impacts. There is the possibility that using 'insiders' could conceivably lead to guarded and partial accounts. Being close to the subject matter might produce an inability or unwillingness to contest or argue against what is said. It is therefore imperative that those involved in such work are conscious of this tension and are fully reflective in their practice throughout.

The relationship between 'truth-telling' and justice was also to the fore in the minds of many respondents. For many there was a sense in which the recognition derived from their involvement in the project was itself a (sufficient) form of justice. For others this was very far from the case and they saw a need for legal and judicial avenues to be pursued as thoroughly as possible. Some respondents believed that community-based 'truth-telling' mechanisms should be seen as complementary to judicial mechanisms. They were seen as a framework within which certain ends of transitional justice might be achieved. Yet community 'truth-telling' initiatives are clearly limited because they have limited ability to uncover previously unknown information from outside agencies, obtaining some form of official recognition or recompense, or in pursuing accountability. For these respondents 'truth-telling' may be a part of, but it cannot be seen as a substitute for, seeking justice.

One of the most frequently mentioned positive outcomes of the ACP was the role it played in intra-community conflict resolution. Ardoyne is not a

homogenous community and there are very real and longstanding divisions, some of which are a by-product of the political conflict. There were 13 people in the area killed by republicans; a number of the victims were alleged informers. Such intra-community dynamics meant that 'truth-telling' was a sensitive and controversial issue. The project was credited with providing a mechanism and creating the time and space to help resolve a number of such issues related to intra-community violence. The most important outcome for most respondents was that it created a process to deal with such difficult issues. It was further suggested that the project played a role at a number of different levels in promoting conflict resolution. These included stimulating individual self-reflection and a shifting of long held viewpoints. It also opened a space for community dialogue and debate that has borne longer-term positive results. In particular the mending of a longstanding rift between church and republicans was attributed in no small way to the project. As discussed above, in general respondents were of the opinion that a major strength of the ACP was that it helped push the boundaries and made inroads into the prevailing 'culture of silence' on previously 'taboo' subjects. The outcome was an acknowledgement that all combatants to the conflict must be accountable. Closely associated with this was the view that this had created a new confidence and willingness to 'speak out' about difficult issues in the community, and more widely.

The ACP was a 'single identity' project. This reflected the reality of the area's make-up. The evaluation of the project indicates there are sound arguments for engaging in such work. Perhaps the most overlooked benefit is that it provides the space for internal divisions that are a legacy of the conflict to be addressed. The experience of the ACP suggests that addressing such issues can make a far greater contribution to post-conflict transition than is often assumed. The experience of those involved in the ACP would seem to suggest that achieving recognition in this way could allow for a greater spirit of generosity to flourish. This may, in other words, be seen as a stage in a wider and longer- term process rather than the end in itself.

'Whose Truth is it Anyway'? The Limits of a Community-based Approach

While by no means universally the case, there were a number of issues upon which some respondents from unionist and nationalist communities held

clearly different views of the work of the ACP. With certain (but important) caveats, the overwhelming majority of the responses from Ardoyne relatives, community representatives and those from wider, mainly nationalist groups were extremely positive about the work of the project. Responses from unionist representatives were far more mixed. A series of issues emerged in the interviews, some particular to the project and others concerning 'truth-telling' more generally, which will be explored here.

For a number of mainly unionist community respondents the claim in the title of the book to tell the 'untold truth' was criticised because the 'truth' told was partial, both in the sense that it was 'biased and unfair' and 'incomplete'. For some the ACP had produced a work (particularly in terms of the history chapters) of 'republican revisionism', a 'half-truth' that was part of a wider attempt to 're-write the past'. This criticism was also linked to the claim made by the project to 'inclusivity' in two main ways. First, that the boundaries of Ardoyne as defined by the project had not included the neighbouring Glenbyrn estate, sometimes referred to as 'Upper Ardoyne'. It should be said this is a far from agreed upon name for the area and particularly politically contentious following the events surrounding the recent Holy Cross dispute. However, it does illustrate the difficulties that would be faced by projects working in areas where local territorial boundaries are highly politically sensitive. Second (and perhaps more importantly) was the absence of the voices of unionist former residents of Ardoyne who had left or been forced out of the area during the early 1970s, some of whom may also subsequently have been conflict victims. The absence of the voices of this 'other Ardoyne' emerged as one of the most contentious issues for a number of respondents, some of whom had been former residents of Ardoyne and who still saw themselves as 'Ardoyne people'. This issue raises wider questions about the strong localised base of a project like the ACP. While it provided trust and access 'within' the community, the 'insider' research approach adopted could equally preclude even an awareness that such questions existed.

Such criticisms were linked for some to what was seen as the potential damage that 'truth-telling' in general, and that of 'single identity' work and the ACP in particular, might do to community relations. One respondent in particular suggested that the publication of the book had 'shattered' community relations, raising the spectre that it could fuel a justification for future violence amongst young loyalists. A representative of the community sector argued that, while 'single identity truth-telling' might be a necessary

step, it was one that had to lead to 're-appraisal' rather than simply 're-iteration' if it was not to become part of a new 'truth zero-sum game'.

That said, others were more positive about the possible impact on community relations. Indeed, reflecting the complexity of such issues, the same respondent who spoke of relations being 'shattered' at another point argued that such work was not only necessary but should also adopt the sort of model proposed by the ACP. In addition, many respondents (even some of those discussed above) also saw real strengths in the 'partiality' of the community-based 'truth-telling' model. A relativist perspective on the nature of 'truth' was interpreted more benignly by another interviewee as evidence of a 'need for recognition that truth is a multi-faceted thing, highly subjective and needs to be recognised and accepted as such'. Community-based projects were the means to get at 'different truths', giving access to otherwise excluded experiences and points of view. Similarly, the logic of a 'bottom-up' as opposed to a 'top-down' model of truth-telling was seen favourably by many mainly unionist interviewees as the only way to really 'get answers' and avoid the creation of a new site for inter-community competition.

The other main area of critical responses from these interviewees related to issues within the unionist community itself. There were a number of facets to this. One related to the inability to take on truth and justice issues, even if this might be desirable, for fear that it would be seen to be 'moving too close to a republican agenda'. This was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that a number of the respondents were community activists close, politically, to pro-Agreement fringe loyalist parties in an atmosphere characterised by the rise of Anti-Agreement unionism. Linked to this was the legacy of recent loyalist feuds and the sense that the 'violence was not yet' over. A number of respondents argued it was 'too soon' for projects like the ACP to happen in unionist areas. This was accentuated by what was seen as a 'hierarchy of victims' existing within the unionist community, distinguishing between the 'respectable' (meaning security forces) and 'non-respectable' (paramilitary) victims. Again, that a number of respondents had historic links to loyalist paramilitary groups was a factor behind this finding. Certainly many contrasted what was seen as the inclusive acceptance of republican victims in the wider nationalist community with the situation prevailing in unionist areas. Consequently, it was perceived that the principle of inclusivity, which most supported, would be all the more difficult to achieve within unionist areas, never mind the difficulties of achieving equality of recognition for republican

and nationalist victims. In a sense this general tenor of pessimism about (rather than outright opposition to) aspects of community-based 'truth-telling' from unionist respondents was exemplified in the suggestion that it could 'open up a can of worms'. This focused on the potential that any form of 'truth and justice' process had to 're-traumatise' victims and relatives.

The final major limitation of community-based 'truth-telling' worthy of note was the only one that emerged as an issue for a significant section of mainly nationalist interviewees. This was the extent to which 'story-telling' might preclude other forms of judicial redress, justice and acknowledgement for the families of victims. It was clear that recognition and acknowledgement at personal, community and civil society levels were all identified as potential positives of community-based 'truth-telling'. However, the lack of ability to carry out investigations, open up official records and gain acknowledgement from outside agencies (and the State in particular) were all seen as issues that could not be ignored. In other words, community 'truth-telling' might meet some of the ends of transitional justice, but not all, and nor should it close off other possibilities in the pursuit of justice.

Conclusion: Community, 'Truth-telling' and Transition

Within the context of a deeply divided society emerging from conflict, such as the North of Ireland, a legacy of suspicion, hostility and disillusionment make dealing with the past a particularly difficult and complex task. However, what this paper has sought to illustrate is that engaging in a process of participatory community-based 'truth-telling' can enable previously unheard voices to emerge into the public realm and so help shape the future in a progressive way. There were limitations to the project and not least the issue of partiality raised by unionists. 'Dealing with the past' is undoubtedly multi-layered and complex. We recommend a process that enshrines the strengths and benefits of community-oriented 'single identity' work but which would also allow for this to be combined with parallel processes and information sharing taking place elsewhere.

Delving into the personal and collective memories of a community that has experienced the traumatic impact of conflict over three decades raises acute questions over the potential benefits of such sensitive research. Such considerations profoundly impacted upon the way in which the work of the ACP was carried out. That work was conducted by people from within the

community and through an ongoing process of consultation with the community. What this research demonstrates is that a 'single identity' 'bottom-up' approach can make a contribution to post conflict transition by engaging with communities that have been (and continue to be) on the 'front-line' of the conflict and have suffered disproportionately as a result. The playing out of the conflict has produced conflict related issues *within* as well as between communities. These intra-community issues are often ignored but as this evaluation has shown they need to be resolved if genuine transformation is to occur at the wider societal level. The dominant framework of analysis and influence on policy and practice, transitional justice, tends to overlook community perspectives and the possible benefits and role of 'bottom-up' approaches in 'dealing with the past'. It is our contention that this is a serious limitation and a paradigm shift is needed in order to incorporate such a perspective.

What emerged from the evaluation of the ACP was that, for the overwhelming majority of participants, the best means of dealing with the past was to ensure that those taking part understood precisely what the project was for, felt a sense of ownership and agency over its outcomes and could directly shape and control their deeply personal and often emotionally difficult involvement in it. What mattered was not only what 'truth was told', but the process of 'telling the truth' itself.

Notes

1   Hayner, 2001.
2   Bell, 2003.
3   http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/collusion/stevens3/stevens3summary.pdf,
    13/04/05.
4   http://www.bloody-sunday-inquiry.org , 13/04/05.
5   Healing Through Remembering, 2003; Lundy and McGovern, 2001.
6   Ardoyne Commemoration Project, 2002.
7   Lundy and McGovern, 2005.
8   Hayner, 1994, p.598.
9   Hayner, 2001, p.14.
10 Tietel, 2000.
11 http://www.-grc-
    exchange.org/g_themes/ssaj_transitionaljustice.html#appropriate,
    10/01/05.
12 Tietel, 2000, p.6.
13 Tietel, 2000, p.12.
14 Hamber, 2003; Wilson, 2001.
15 Kaminer, 2001; van der Walt et al., 2003.
16 Lundy and McGovern, 2004, 2006.

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