

"Many of Those Stories Don't Sit Easily Next to Each Other": Stories about Conflict, Trauma, and Injustice: An Interview with Documentary Filmmaker Dr. Cahal McLaughlin

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Source: *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2016), pp. 57-81

Published by: Canadian Journal of Irish Studies

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44160360>

Accessed: 11-08-2017 13:25 UTC

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“Many of Those Stories Don’t Sit Easily Next to Each Other”: Stories about Conflict, Trauma, and Injustice

An Interview with Documentary Filmmaker
Dr. Cahal McLaughlin

Through the use of broadcast and community based documentary filmmaking, Dr. Cahal McLaughlin’s work urges a rethinking of issues that are fundamental to film production, scholarly research, and community engagement. His corpus of work, which spans over thirty years, examines personal and political processes out of the trauma of civil conflicts in Northern Ireland and South Africa. His documentary and scholarly productions consistently return to difficult questions about how individuals cope with trauma, not only the trauma of violence, but also with the trauma of injustice. Through concerted attention



FIGURE 1. Barred Window, Armagh Gaol © Prisons Memory Archive

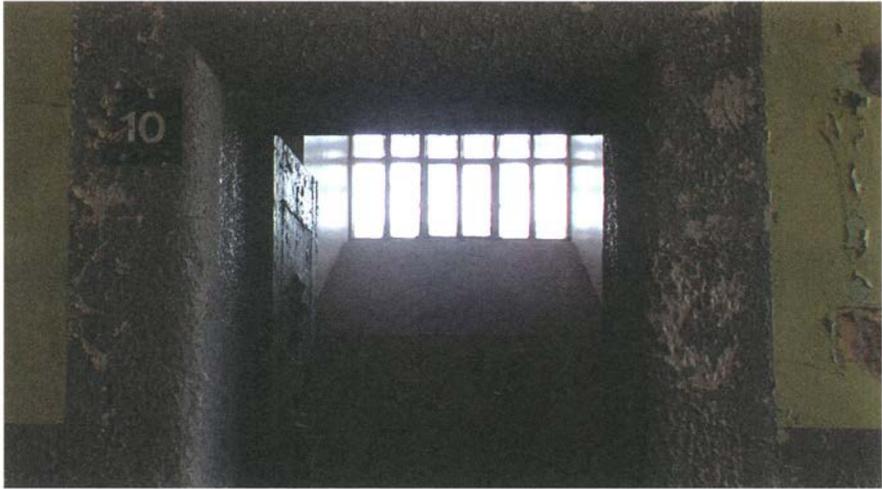


FIGURE 2. Cell 10, Armagh Gaol © Prisons Memory Archive

paid to the methods and methodologies of filmmaking, McLaughlin's corpus of work is engaged with storytelling. It raises questions about whose stories are told, how they are told, to whom they are told, and for what ends. It provokes a critical re-thinking about the uses of personal storytelling about civil conflict and its trauma, especially during the still sensitive processes of reparations, reconciliation, and conflict transformation.

McLaughlin consistently adopts a life-story approach, through which ordinary people whose lives have been deeply affected by political violence share their memories, recollections, and accounts on camera. Amongst them are those who witnessed conflict and who still carry the effects of those events with them; survivors left to mourn loved ones who were killed; former prisoners, police, and prison guards; relatives who visited close family members during their imprisonment; and many individuals and groups of individuals to whom no reparations have been made, and for whom no reconciliation has been reached. Their stories, which can include unresolved guilt, anger, and at times reticence, make for unsettled viewing, and "messy storytelling." By this, I mean that audiences who watch and listen are not necessarily provided with back stories, aided by chronologies or linear accounts of events and voiced-over re-tellings about their significance. Instead, accounts emerge in non-linear ways, in ways that do not "achieve" narrative balance, and which are inflected with emotion. Unanswered questions linger long past the film's footage ends, and the stories, and the contexts in which they are re-told, remain complicated.

There are carefully considered, reflective processes at play in all of McLaughlin's work, whether on film, web-based platforms, or in print. His body of work constitutes more than just a dense collection of oral stories and testimonials; it is also a reflection of McLaughlin's commitment to the principles of participation, inclusion, and community engagement. His work demonstrates the principles of the shared ownership of stories, and participant-driven decision-making. These have recently emerged as some of the most vexed principles in Irish Studies scholarship, including in the Belfast Project at Boston College. The Belfast Project is an oral history project, directed by journalist Ed Moloney and lead researcher Dr. Anthony McIntyre, involving interviews conducted between 2001 and 2006 with over fifty members of Republican and Loyalist paramilitary organizations about Northern Ireland's conflict. Interview tapes were deposited in the John J. Burns Library at Boston College, Boston, Massachusetts. Access to some of the interview tapes by the Police Service of Northern Ireland was obtained through a subpoena issued by the British government to investigate the past, with the potential for criminal prosecutions.

McLaughlin's work has long exemplified participatory processes in storytelling as a creative collaboration. For example, in documentary projects with *Coiste na n-Iarchimi* (in Irish; Committee of Ex-Prisoners) in Northern Ireland and with *Khulumani Western Cape* (in Xhosa; Speak Out) in South Africa, participants in both locations record their stories on camera; but more importantly, they are afforded control, alongside the filmmakers, in production and post-production decisions. They decide to whom, when, and where their stories will be told. These are challenging principles to adopt in filmmaking, where production costs and deadlines often drive decisions. These are also challenging principles to adopt in academic settings, where participatory research and shared decision-making are so often paid lip-service, but where the authority of the researcher and a focus on the measurable "products" of research are trump. Cahal McLaughlin's work explores all of these areas, intersecting with his positions as a long-time documentary filmmaker and as Chair of Film Studies in the School of Creative Arts, at Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

McLaughlin also outlines many of these challenges and contradictions in his book, *Recording Memories from Political Violence: A Film-Maker's Journey* (2010), which I reviewed in this journal. A welcome mix of theorizing and practicality, this examination engages with theories of narrative, multi-narrative storytelling, and memory studies, and with the techniques of filmmaking, including camera choice, pace, narration, music, and sound recordings, and their effects on stories and their reception. More recently, McLaughlin has experimented with web-based platforms in the *Prisons Memory Archive* (<http://prisonsmemoryarchive.com>). It presents up to forty filmed recordings, and permits viewers their own participatory role in selecting thematically organized footage, in order to assemble self-selected accounts of Northern Ireland prisons, as told by prisoners, prison officers, educators, community workers, clergy, and journalists who physically wander the spaces of the Maze/Long Kesh Prison and the Armagh Gaol.

The complexities in stories of conflict, trauma, and injustice are evident in McLaughlin's wide-reaching body of documentary films, some of which involve collaboration with student filmmakers. McLaughlin's films examine political violence in Northern Ireland (*Silent Scream: The Use and Abuse of Plastic Bullets* [1987], *Moving Myths* [1989]) and British impressions of Northern Ireland (*Pack Up the Troubles*, with Lin Solomon [1991], *Behind the Walls of Castlereagh* [1992]). He has recorded stories about politics and sport in Northern Ireland

(*Kicking with Both Feet* [1993]) and the effects of the Troubles on individuals and families (*Living with Violence* [1995], *Telling Our Story: The Springhill Massacre* [2002], *Unheard Voices: Stories from The Troubles* [2009]). McLaughlin is well known for his corpus of films about prisons, prisoners, and for his knowledge of prison films (see “Cold, Hungry and Scared”). His films also address stories of prisoners and imprisonment in Northern Ireland (*A Prisoner’s Journey* [1991], *Inside Stories: Memories from the Maze and Long Kesh Prison* [2005]) and women prisoners and women’s interactions with primarily male prisons (*Unseen Women: Stories from Armagh Gaol*, with Jolene Mairs [2011], *We Were There: Experiences of Women in the Maze and Long Kesh Prison*, with Laura Aguiar [2014]). Working initially with an ex-prisoners’ group in South Africa, he has also filmed stories about post-conflict repatriations in South Africa (*We Never Give Up* [2002], *We Never Give Up II* [2013]).

I spoke with Dr. Cahal McLaughlin on June 6, 2014, the same day as a one-day conference on *The Art of Troubles: Culture, Conflict, Commemoration*, hosted by the Ulster Museum, Belfast, in partnership with the Institute of British and Irish Studies, University College Dublin, and at which Cahal McLaughlin was an invited speaker.

KS: Thank you so much for your time, and for agreeing to do this on a very busy day. Your background is in both broadcast production and community production. Can you speak about the differences between the two?

CM: The main difference is whom you are accountable to. When you are working in broadcast, you have a commissioning editor, and possibly a series editor, and you’re almost always accountable upwards and, to an extent, you’re accountable sideways—to your collaborators. In community production, you’re working with your participants, and you’re accountable to the people who you work with on your films, who participate in your filmmaking and who are your storytellers. That’s a major difference.

A commissioning editor is looking for a tight story. Quite often, the story is written even before you start filming, with a three act structure, and with the story split in two with an awareness of a commercial break in the middle. In community production, those imperatives no longer operate.

Other imperatives include how your participants think about the story, the overall story, and their contributions to it. In community production, some people have very clear ideas about how they want their stories told; and some people are much more reticent, and they hand back power to you. In the film *Unheard Voices: Stories from The Troubles*, for example, one woman had a very clear idea about how she wanted to illustrate her story, visually, by returning to Ballycastle Beach. Another participant was unsure, and it took a lot of conversation to come up with an idea she was happy with. So it depends. There is a huge range of interest, experience, and engagement from participants. Some people come forward to contribute because telling their story is a burning issue for them, and for other people, they feel like it's an obligation or a duty. They feel they have to do it because of their relative, or because of the community they live in; so what they often tend to do is hand over their story, and hand over responsibility to you, to edit it, and look after it, and bring it out into the world. For others, they are fully engaged through to screening.

KS: Do you try to gauge what participants want out of their participation? Do you have a conversation with them?

CM: We always have one, and sometimes two meetings before filming. On smaller projects, like the film *Unheard Voices: Stories from The Troubles*, we met with everyone twice beforehand, and there was also a residential weekend. All those people came together and met. They told each other their stories, so they understood the context in which those stories would appear. Many of those people hadn't met before, and many of those stories don't sit easily next to each other. For example, the police officer's widow told the story of her husband, and that was followed by the story of a young man who had lost his sister to a loyalist gang, the leader of which turned out to be a police agent. Those stories don't sit well together, but we thought that they needed to sit together. We were also aware that was very risky, not just for the audience, but also for the participants. People may expose themselves to other stories that challenge their own story—not in detail, but in tone, so before we did anything, we talked with them.

We always show the final cuts to people to get their view. We're actually working with them throughout the post-production period. We don't just



FIGURE 3. Cell Doorways, Armagh Gaol © Prisons Memory Archive



FIGURE 4. Cell in H Block 4, Maze and Long Kesh Prison © Prisons Memory Archive

land them with a final cut. We show them the rough cut, and then often, two or three cuts before it goes any further. It's time consuming. Some of our community-based films can take up to a year, even for a very short film.

KS: You've talked about the process of creative collaboration. What are its rewards? And what are its challenges?

CM: The challenges are the length of time, and they're also aesthetic. When you start as a filmmaker you start with ideas about how something might look. The visual storytelling is as important as the oral storytelling. When people are watching they're seeing something, not just hearing something. As people are telling their story, you're always contemplating, "What might work with this? What images am I going to have to shoot to go with this?" In the case where we were filming the prisons, that issue was less problematic because participants were walking around the prison site while they spoke.

The rewards are when your ideas and the participants' ideas come together, or when come up with an idea. Another reward of participatory filmmaking is that you can access constituencies and stories that otherwise would not be trusted to the mainstream media. We've been told this directly, by prison officers. If they didn't have that co-ownership, they wouldn't come near us. We've recorded some people who have been invited to go on television, but won't go on television. So the risks around collaboration are aesthetic, but so are the rewards.

In terms of the challenges, we've given participants the opportunity of withdrawing their material at any point. And that's happened. There was a situation, more than two years ago now, when a prison officer was shot dead on his way to work. As a result, we had two prison officers withdraw from the *Prisons Memory Archive* project. We have an agreement with them for a moratorium, and in ten years, we'll go back to them for their decision to withdraw or contribute. People, particularly if they've worked for the security forces, don't want to draw attention to themselves. Ultimately, if they decide that they don't want those tapes ever shown, we won't show them. We have a commitment with them, and we will follow through on it. This is nothing to do with people implicating themselves or others, as

happened with Boston College's Belfast Project; it's about people putting their faces out there, with their stories, in a society, which is still very sensitive about the past.

KS: You're working with people who tell their stories in contexts that are always changing. What is important to a story one day might not be important anymore; or what might not have been thought of previously is suddenly important. Why is it necessary that these stories be told and heard?

CM: It's important because we're working against the grain. The mainstream broadcasting industry is subject to political, social, economic trends. South Africa is a very good example of that. When we made our first film there, about twelve years ago, reparations was a contemporary issue. At that point, reparations hadn't been paid, and the government was refusing to consult with the constituency that would have been most affected. There were continual protests and media coverage. When we returned ten years later, some reparations had been paid—the reparations were so small that they made almost no impact on those who received them—but enough to take the issue off of the media agenda. Human Rights Media Centre got funding for the first film, but they couldn't get funding for the second film because it was no longer a contemporary, media issue. The point of the second film, ten years later, was to ask, "What is the impact of the government's reparations policy?" An issue like this is something the media doesn't tend to pick up on because it's not immediate. In the media industry, it's necessary to move onto the next hot topic, but people's lives don't fit such a neat pattern. If you're working at the community level, people's lives continue to have importance.

KS: Many of your projects, and I'm thinking specifically of *Inside Stories* and *The Prisons Memory Archive*, involve multivocality and multi-narratives in storytelling. In your writing, you maintain that viewers and listeners are invited into the stories of the "other." Since you've embarked on filmmaking, have you perceived changes in Northern Ireland, in terms of people's willingness to hear from the "other," and whether they're prepared to hear their stories?



FIGURE 5. Compound Huts, Maze and Long Kesh Prison © Prisons Memory Archive

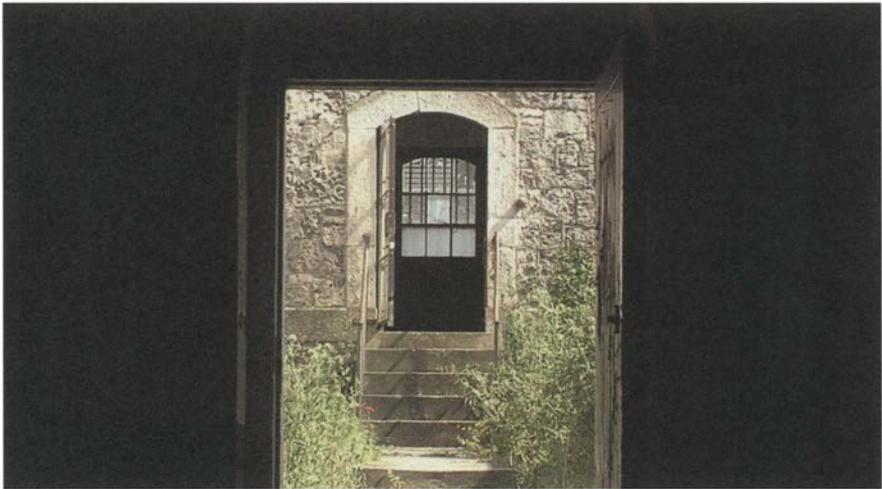


FIGURE 6. Entrance to Circle, Armagh Gaol © Prisons Memory Archive

CM: Our experiences have been very positive. Of course, it's possible that people who come to screenings are self-selecting, and that they're people who want to hear this variety of voices. One of the most interesting outcomes, for us, is to hear members of the audience talk *about* the stories that they've just heard from the "other." An example of that would have been at a film screening in Armagh. Members of the local oral history association, mostly women, listened to stories from local prison officers, from a loyalist prisoner, a republican prisoner, a prison officer, and a social welfare officer. At the end, one woman stood up and said she was from a nationalist community, and that the prison officer's story was the one that struck her as most interesting because she'd never heard that story before. She'd always thought of prison officers as "uniforms," and here was a person talking about their experience of being a young mother and juggling the problems of work and family. Another example was when we screened *We Were There: Experiences of Women in the Maze and Long Kesh Prison*, about women in the men's prison at the Maze/Long Kesh. There's a prison officer's wife, and visually, it's the least interesting to look at, because she stops and stands against the bare wall, whereas the other women walk and talk their way around the prison. But the reason she stands out, and we've been told this in audience discussions, is because no one's heard the prison officer's wife's story before. We've been surprised at the curiosity for finding out about the "other." We're now into our second decade after the end of the Troubles, and most people know the story of their own communities, or at least to some extent. So, we feel validated by people's willingness to hear the "other's" story.

KS: You mentioned the blank space on the wall behind the prison officer's wife. Location is central in your filmmaking practices. You've often asked storytellers to tell their stories in spaces related to those stories. In the prisons, in particular, this can make for very bleak and stark backgrounds. In what ways do spatial locations become a part of the stories being told?

CM: They're crucial. Often stories have a rich cultural context. For example, the Maze/Long Kesh Prison was a very violent prison, and when participants return to that site, the site of their stories, several things are

happening. The first is that the participant is having his or her memory stimulated in a way that doesn't happen in any other normal interview situation. It's been said to us, "it's amazing what you remember when you go back." And, the second is that it guides the chronology, but in a different way. Narratives are time based, but what happens here, instead, is that there's a motivation for memory that's not chronological. It's spatial. Someone is walking down a corridor and they're in the middle of telling a story about something that happened to them in that corridor, when they come to a particular cell. The story gets interrupted, and it gets fragmented. They move into the cell, and tell that story, and then they move back out into the corridor, and resume the original story. It affects how stories are told. There is also a third thing happening here, this time for the audiences—for them, the spaces become part of the story. As participants move the audience through the prison, they bring us much more intimate experiences, a stronger sense of "being there."

KS: Some of these spaces, such as the Maze/Long Kesh Prison, are spaces that are becoming increasingly private, and in some cases, privatized. I wonder what that says about change, and the way that change also fragments stories.

CM: That raises an interesting point. We need to think carefully about how we treat those spaces. The proposed peace building centre that was to be built [at the Maze/Long Kesh site] was a very good example of how one might treat it. Ninety percent of the Maze/Long Kesh Prison has been demolished, so we've recorded something that no longer exists. It took many years of negotiations between the main political parties, but there was a plan to develop it. In its development as a peace centre, they were going to preserve five buildings of the Maze/Long Kesh Prison, without any interpretation whatsoever. The reason they didn't want any interpretation was because it appears to carry the weight of being a republican narrative, such as the 1981 hunger strike or the 1983 escape. Instead, the decision was made to create a space that is open to interpretation, and opens it up to other stories. That compromise was reached. The proposed peace building centre wasn't going to be in the actual site, but next door to it. The peace building centre was to have been a Daniel Libeskind [architect] designed building, all glass with

jagged edges, as only Daniel Libeskind can do. The idea was that there would be an interpretation centre for international storytelling, and a theatre, cinema, and exhibitions.

It was a very creative compromise. But even that proved too much for our First Minister, who pulled the plug on it. The real issue is that we have not addressed, as a society, officially, or in any major way, the subject of dealing with the legacy of the past. We've had the Haass and O'Sullivan report, we had the Eames-Bradley Report, and before that, the Bloomfield Report, and all of those came up with suggestions for officially sanctioned ways of addressing the past. I'm not sure a single one of those ideas has been taken up. The political parties have not been able to reach agreement.' The issue of commercializing, or demolishing these buildings, is symbolic of a much bigger failure to address how we deal with our past.

KS: As well as different spaces, some of your projects also use different platforms. Some of your work is in the traditional realm of filmmaking, but some of it uses web-based platforms. What are the expectations of those specific platforms?

CM: Often the platforms come out of negotiation. The Khulumani Support Group and Human Rights Media Centre in Cape Town were looking for a film. They were looking for something that could travel around to communities, to allow for discussions afterwards. For the film *Unheard Voices: Stories from The Troubles*, we offered participants to put six separate pieces on the Internet. But instead, they've chosen to keep it as a single half-hour film. It has travelled around to seven Good Relations departments in towns and city councils, and with each of those, we've had a discussion afterward. We've had some quite profound and poignant discussions with that particular film, and it has been inclusive of all communities.

Once you go onto the web with the stories, you lose the creation of an atmosphere, a kind of material culture where people sit down and listen and share, not only their responses to the film, but also their own experiences. What you gain online is access to individuals who don't



FIGURE 7. Exterior of Wing, Armagh Gaol © Prisons Memory Archive



FIGURE 8. H Block 5 Entrance, Maze and Long Kesh Prison © Prisons Memory Archive

feel a part of a community, or don't have easy access to screenings. As I said, the people who turn up for a film tend to be self-selecting. That also explains why the discussions are usually very good. But not everyone feels comfortable doing that, and not everybody is able to do that. Certainly in terms of the spread and the reach, the Internet reaches many more people.

What we hope is that people will use web-based platforms in community groups and classrooms. It's too early for us to say that yet, but we do know that *The Prisons Memory Archive* has been used in a couple of university classrooms in the United States and the UK. They've written us to say they're using it in classrooms. We know what happens in some community groups here, because we've been a part of some community group activities, including cross-community settings.

The key reason for putting *The Prisons Memory Archive* online was to provide an interactive documentary. That's its aim. Instead of us deciding the editorial line, or even the participants deciding the editorial line, we wanted to share that negotiation with audiences. We want to open it up so that people can see, precisely, how those stories sit next to each other. If you click on the theme *Coping*, you can see how people coped, how they managed under stress. You're automatically hearing the teacher's story, next to the prison officer's story, next to the prisoner's story. You would get a little assemblage documentary as it were, that offers all of the information under that theme and brings it together so you could create your own story. The idea is to try and share the participatory relationship with the audience, so they can start to feel they're making their own story out of this rich material.

KS: In Northern Ireland, the role of conflict transformation has been taken up by the arts, but there are obstacles, including political will. How can the arts continue to build on a publicly expressed desire for conflict transformation?

CM: My understanding of contemporary art, whether it's theatre, or exhibition, or music is that, in Northern Ireland, it's coming from the ground up. That very little of it is inspired by support from the top down.

There's very little infrastructure. It gets some financial support, some political support, and it gets physical space from the galleries, from the theatres, from the community groups. But the inspiration for it, and the energy for it, and the creativity, comes primarily from the artists themselves.

Whether it's Kabosh Theatre Company, or Theatre of Witness, or any of the exhibitions that are at galleries like Belfast Exposed, or Catalyst Arts, or Golden Thread Gallery, it's primarily the creators and the communities addressing the need for it, and then seeking the funding. To date, I'm not aware, apart from Peace III funding [through the European Union Special Programmes Body for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties], of any official push to organize, validate, or creatively address the past and the present. Peace III did address storytelling; it funded projects like Dúchas [Oral History Sound Archives of West Belfast] and Epilogues [a workshop-based education programme], but these are primarily community-based projects.

There's still contestation over which story is going to get the official stamp of approval, and that's a problem. The Art of the Troubles exhibition, which is on at the Ulster Museum at the moment, is a good example of that. They've had a permanent exhibition on the Troubles, which to put it mindfully, has been very poor. It's been minimal in terms of content, and in terms of creative exhibition. It's been heavily criticized. It's been safe and it's been conservative with a small *c*. Now for the first time, we have a major exhibition of the Troubles Art, and it's thoroughly welcomed. However, if you notice, there's still minimal interpretation. There's no catalogue available, just a little leaflet that you can bring along with you. I think that the single, largest source of paintings have come from Wolverhampton Art Gallery (UK), which has the largest collection of Troubles-related art material. But there's no Wolverhampton catalogue there, and in today's conference on the Art of the Troubles, no one from Wolverhampton is going to speak. I have to be careful here, because I really welcome what they're doing, but they're having to do it very cautiously, it seems, with minimal interpretation. We're still not at a place where we can address the past in a way that we feel comfortable with. We're still not comfortable with that level of cultural conflict because of the reverberations.

KS: In the context of storytelling, and controversy, I wonder about the effects of the Belfast Project. Fintan O'Toole, in 2014, said in the *Irish Times*, that it was a crisis in Irish academia. Does this particular project, and the ways that it continues to unfold, make the methods of oral histories, and the project of storytelling, more difficult for Irish Studies? What might its public reverberations mean for the kinds and the types of stories that you're trying to tell?

CM: I understand what O'Toole is saying. The Belfast Project was flawed structurally. In my view, there's not a party that was involved that shouldn't hold their hands up and say, "this was a mistake." It is part oral history, and part journalism, which produces a tension in aims and outputs. This tension can be productive, but I don't think this happened successfully in this project. Offers were made about confidentiality that couldn't be backed up, and institutions should have been on top of this. The knock-on effect of the PSNI [Police Service of Northern Ireland] getting the first set of tapes, and now seeking all of the tapes, is serious and has been damaging for oral historians; however, I wouldn't say that we're in a crisis. Those of us who work with community groups, individuals, organizations, know that the reality on the ground is not that. When you look at community-based oral history projects like *Dúchas* and *Epilogues*, they have strong oral history principles and they operate ethically, and respectfully. People on the ground know this, so it's not going to do lasting damage, I believe.

It's more a reputational damage that's been done. It will slow things down. It will make it a little bit more difficult, but if you work through collaborative participatory practices, people will trust you.

I haven't done any interviews since the most recent arrests; all our interviews were done in 2006 and 2007. The Belfast Project was mentioned by two *Prisons Memory Archive* participants who withdrew a year and a half ago. They mentioned the Belfast Project as one of the reasons, but it wasn't the only reason, or necessarily the most important reason. Overall, the Boston College saga has had a reputational impact.



FIGURE 9. Landing Cells, Armagh Gaol © Prisons Memory Archive



FIGURE 10. View Of Administration from Watchtower, Maze And Long Kesh Prison
© Prisons Memory Archive

KS: Your collaborative processes have involved community participants; they've also involved student filmmakers. Can you discuss that collaboration?

CM: One of the great things about these projects is that we've been able to collaborate with university students from the University of Ulster and Queen's University of Belfast. Both universities have been very supportive, including in terms of recognizing the value of films to the wider community, and supporting with scholarships.

PhD students have been involved, mostly with post-production. Jolene Mairs made a choice to work with the material from the women's prison, Armagh Gaol, to make the film *Unheard Voices*. Laura Aguilar made a choice to work with the women who interacted in the male prison, the Maze/Long Kesh Prison, particularly challenging their marginalization. They both brought a combination of political awareness and sensitivity to these films. A current student, Jamie McRoberts, is working on an interactive documentary prototype as part of his research.

KS: To what extent do these projects that take up the past also take up a commemorative role in documenting people's lives and their experiences during difficult times? What roles does commemoration play in your filmmaking?

CM: In a sense, these films are memorials. They commemorate a particular incident, if it is a film about an incident, a policy if it is about reparations, and survival, if it is a particular place like the Maze/Long Kesh Prison. They have become audio visual memorials. It is certainly one of the motivations of participants; it's one of our motivations, as filmmakers as well. We're creating something that you can go to, the same way you could go to a statue, or monument, or grave, to remember and to re-live the experience and open up discussion. From that point of view, they're commemorative artifacts.

Most documentaries slip into history after a couple of years. They have a use, and they're broadcast once or twice, and then they disappear, particularly broadcast documentaries. Community tapes usually last a

little longer, maybe a couple of years. But they also slip, mostly because something has changed. There's a risk with documentaries; after a couple of years, their narratives may become less contemporary. For example, in the film *We Never Give Up II*, reparations were paid five years later. But in *We Never Give Up II*, the participants were involved in a legal case against multinationals for reparations; since the film was made, the New York class action case was turned down, so the film, to a degree, has "aged." On the other hand, in *Unheard Voices*, five of the stories remain unsolved, so these remain "active." Of course, the legacy of violence is evident in the way all of the participants tell their stories.

I do think there's something different with the *Prisons Memory Archives*. I think it will lend itself much more easily to memorializing than will other films. Because people were remembering their experience of ten, twenty, maybe thirty years ago, that will not change considerably, although time will affect some of the tone of remembrance. Their life experience forms how they remember, and they may remember it differently now than they did in 2007. But because of the way that was set up, I think, the protocol, the materiality of the site influencing the memory, and the fact that there are no leading questions asked, means that the experience of watching it will tie the memory to the site and to the date of the recording.

KS: As researchers, we think about the stories that we could not tell, did not tell, or the ones we chose intentionally not to tell. Are there stories that you think shouldn't be told? Are there stories about civil conflict that you would have liked to have been a part of telling, or stories that you would have told differently?

CM: Yes. The last part of that question is the easiest: we had some amazing stories that we couldn't tell. We couldn't tell them because the participants decided not to, so they were never filmed. A former governor of the Maze/Long Kesh Prison, for example, had really interesting experiences to tell us. In the end, he decided not to because he'd been involved, as a witness, in a trial about something that had happened in prison, and he said it brought everything back to him. We sent him the consent form, but he said as soon as he was asked to sign his name and write out his address, all this security awareness came flooding back, and he said,



FIGURE 11. View of Cell Wing From Circle, Armagh Gaol © Prisons Memory Archive



FIGURE 12. View of Inertia Areas from Watchtower, Maze and Long Kesh Prison © Prisons Memory Archive

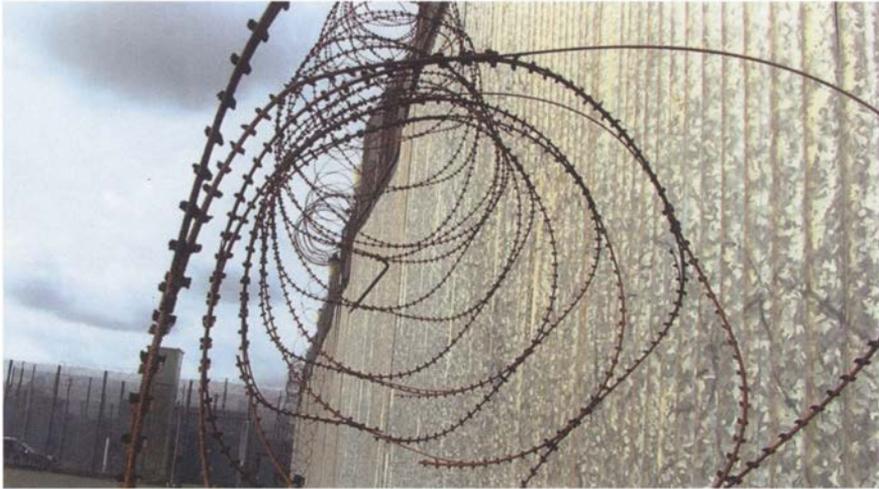


FIGURE 13. Wire and Wall, Maze and Long Kesh Prison © Prisons Memory Archive

“the Troubles might be over for most people, but not for me, I’m not going to do this.” Another case involved a chaplain who was in the Maze/ Long Kesh Prison during the hunger strike period in 1981, and had very close relationships with many of the people involved. In later life, he became sick and, on the advice of his doctor, decided that he shouldn’t talk about it. We don’t persuade people. They have to want to do it of their own volition. Those are stories that we wished we could have had.

Participants share with you the account of their lives that they want to tell, and there’s a risk to that. We knew in some cases that people were telling us things that may be difficult to prove. But the point is that this is a memory project, and memories are fallible. I think the [South African] Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a very good example of that. Memories are not an historical documentation. It’s a construction at the time that you remember, and that’s valuable on its own terms.

But are there stories that should never be told? I’m not sure. It’s all about the context of how you film it, and the context of how you view it, and they are equally important. We do face, sometimes, moral issues. We had a particular prisoner tell a story about a prison officer, who was

subsequently shot dead outside the prison, and many prison officers were shot dead during the conflict. The prisoner had said, “and he deserved it.” However, the way that particular story was told, it was impossible to remove his name and keep the story. The ex-prisoner considered the prison officer’s family, and decided to remove this section. He said, “I was more angry when I said this. I’m not so angry now.” So, that brief section of his walking through the prison has been removed—at his wish, and our agreement.

KS: Finally, I want to ask you about the potential for social change. People who tell their stories must have some expectations about change. What are their expectations? And to what extent do their expectations about change guide your filmmaking?

CM: From the participant’s perspective, we know that people come with different motives, some very personal, and some very public. For example, in the film *Unheard Voices: Stories from The Troubles*, there were many different perspectives. One person wanted to tell her story for the very last time. She wanted public acknowledgement—everyone wants a degree of public acknowledgement—so that she no longer had to tell the story. As she said, she wanted to start to live her life orientated towards her grandchildren, rather than towards the absence of her loved one. At the other end of the spectrum, a man felt a continuing, burning injustice at the lack of prosecution in his loved one’s death. As you know, the vast majority of the deaths during the Troubles have never been successfully prosecuted. He felt like his loved one’s death needed to be investigated. He saw the film as an opportunity to put this in front of the public and say, “something needs to be done here.” He went to every single screening that we did afterwards, and the first person I mentioned didn’t, and one of the reasons was because she had already achieved what she’d set out to do.

Within that frame of self-editing, participants usually realize that it’s important to hear the story by and about the “other.” Although there’s a sense that society has moved on to some degree, which can only work if people feel that they’ve been heard, people generally accept that we must hear these stories if we’re going to have a future. There’s that sense of negotiation of the past in the present in order to move on. It’s not a

dichotomy of the past versus the present. There is also the issue of the next generation. People talk about how young people need to hear these stories. They need to know their history.

I suppose for the filmmakers, and we have to be modest, we would like to think we're affecting social change. We have some indication that that's the case, but we're not sociologists, and we don't measure that side of it. One of the motivations is to provide people, ourselves included, with opportunities, individually and collectively, to make society a more tolerable, and a more tolerant place to live in. ¶

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The *Stormont House Agreement* (2014) requires that issues of the past continue to be addressed. It ensures the establishment, by the Northern Ireland Executive, of an Oral History Archive in which narratives can be voluntarily contributed, a Historical Investigations Unit, and an independent commission for information retrieval by governments.

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