

The Role of Victims' Testimonies in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland

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Political violence in Northern Ireland has taken a heavy toll on the population of the country. Almost 3,650 persons died and 48,000 were injured as a result of conflict-related incidents during the period known as the Troubles. Violence had a psychological physical and material impact on individuals and family circles. And more generally social links within whole communities and the society at large have been disrupted. Political violence that erupted in the late 1960s is both a product and the cause of social, political and cultural and historical divisions between two main communities in Northern Ireland and the British state.

The 1994 cease-fires by the main paramilitary groups and the ensuing peace negotiations leading up to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 marked a new beginning in the resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The Agreement provided Northern Ireland with a new constitutional status and political institutions and paved the way for the reform of various institutions such as the police and the justice system. It also provided a framework for tackling issues of human rights, cultural diversity, decommissioning and security. Two paragraphs of the document mention the role of victims of violence in the resolution of the conflict:

The participants believe that it is essential to acknowledge and address the suffering of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation [...] It is recognised that victims have a right to remember as well as contribute to a changed society. The achievement of a peaceful and just society would be the true memorial to the victims of violence (The Belfast Agreement).

However, no global mechanism to deal with the past such as a truth and reconciliation commission has been put in place in Northern Ireland. In various countries in Latin America or Africa, these commissions have been used as an instrument of transitional justice to re-examine the past to “reconstruct history and narrate atrocity” (Winter 90). Victims' testimonies hold a central part in the process of establishing the facts about past violence through public hearings that act as cathartic moments for society as a whole. Franka Winter points out that contrary to criminal trials that individualize violence and wrongdoers,

truth commissions address a collective subject. This collective subject is generally an entire society, which is imagined as ‘sick’ or ‘crazy’ and in need of ‘healing,’ ‘exorcism’ or ‘purification.’ In contrast to criminal proceedings, which seek to restore a

normative social order, truth commissions (at least officially) aspire to change society in its hitherto existing condition. The aim a truth commission seeks to achieve is a broad social sensitization and identification with the “Other’s” suffering, rather than the deterrence of potential wrongdoers (Winter 93).

In Northern Ireland victims’ testimonies have developed through non-governmental initiatives which have provided those affected by violence with a platform to speak about their experience of the conflict. An analysis of the specific Northern Irish context in which testimonies have been produced will allow to assess whether these narratives have spurred a collective reflexion on the past to help rebuild society.

The Holocaust and the “advent of the witness” (Winter 92)

To understand how personal testimonies, whereby a witness gives an account of an event or an experience he/she went through can heal the social wounds from a traumatic past, one has to consider the wider context in which they developed and were increasingly taken into account. Their use has been conceptualised and analysed by various disciplines. At least two of them, history and psychology, offer a conceptual framework that can inform the role of personal testimonies in a post-conflict society.

In psychology, testimonies by victims of violent events have been analysed as a process whereby the person can work through their trauma and re-establish a link with the rest of society from which he or she has been excluded because of the traumatic event (Waintrater 65-97). If the long tradition of using eyewitness accounts in historical narratives was abandoned in the 19th century, professional historians re-discovered its value in the late 1960s with the development of oral history projects. Since then, the controversial value of testimonies in establishing the historical truth has been widely debated. However, their subjectivity has been acknowledged and the witness’s narrative is considered true from his/her own perspective. The reliability of their contents depends on the individual’s memory and is influenced by external factors such as the political and social context in which they are produced (Wallenborn 25-34).

This is particularly true of the traumatic experience of the Holocaust that has shaped the large-scale production and collection of testimonies in the 20th century. Annette Wieviorka, the French historian who has worked on testimonies by victims and survivors of the Jewish genocide, claimed that we have entered the “era of the witness” (“l’ère du témoin”). In her book, she shows how the memory of the Holocaust can serve as a template for the study of other historical periods. This model of construction of memory as the basis for a future historical narrative together with concepts and categories that have emerged after the Second

World War ('genocide', 'crime against humanity') have been explicitly or implicitly used to explain events in Bosnia or Rwanda, for example.

As regards the value of storytelling, Annette Wieviorka has analysed the various phases of the production of testimonies by victims of the Holocaust. These have evolved according to the political context in which societies are willing to shape their collective memories. She shows how the Holocaust has been the only historical event that has prompted such a large number of testimonies, even compared to the First World War that marked the beginning of mass storytelling. The initial testimonies were written by people who later died and who wanted to leave a legacy about a world that would disappear. Then, testimonies by survivors started to be collected after the war by various organisations. However, the Eichmann Trial marked a turning point in the memory of the Holocaust that constructed a certain Jewish identity and was widely made public. Its explicit aim was to give a history lesson based on the vivid and diverse experience of survivors whose testimony was used to educate and pass on an experience to future generations. Later Geoffrey Hartman, Professor of literature at Yale and founding member of the Fortunoff video archives 1982, confirmed the principles underlying the use of testimonies. Without questioning the validity of the use of written archives, to him, testimonies provided more to the historical narrative: "the immediacy of [...] first-person accounts burns through the 'cold storage of history'/l'immédiateté des récits à la première personne agit comme le feu dans la chambre réfrigérée qu'est l'histoire" (Hartman 68).

Finally at the end of the 1970s, collecting testimonies was done on a wide scale. It coincided with the new movement of life writing recording the experience of the voiceless, the destitute, or ordinary people whose memory was deemed as worthy as that of prominent people. At that time, the emotional and psychological experiences of ordinary people started to be exposed publicly on TV shows for instance. Within this context and the emotion stirred by the TV series *Holocaust* and subsequently the film *The Schindler's List*, large-scale programmes of victims account recording were undertaken. Thus, since the Second World War, testimonies have not only been used in the construction of historical narratives but have also acquired an increasing social role in educating people about the past and in working through individual and collective trauma.

The Northern Irish Context

The use of testimonies from victims and survivors as therapeutic and educational tools and as a way to establish the truth about past events within the wider frame of the process of dealing with the past is of particular interest in the Northern Irish context. Until the 1990s, victims and survivors of the conflict had received little attention by government agencies and had had

little room for expression. Marie Smyth has shown that in a context characterised by a “culture of denial and silence about the conflict” (best encapsulated in Seamus Heaney’s poem, ‘Whatever You Say Say Nothing,’ Heaney 52-55), the plight of people who had experienced the consequence of political violence was not a priority as the population was generally concerned about its survival.

In this context, victims were not considered a specific group with specific needs. No particular public policy was tailored for them, except the compensation arrangements introduced in 1968 (Greer). As a result most victims felt physically and psychologically isolated, and not acknowledged. Most of them found support within the limited circle of their family or close relatives and friends. They often used medication or alcohol to cope with their pain or trauma (Fay). Victims and survivors’ feeling of isolation was compounded by the way they were portrayed in the media. Their image was either that of a resilient, courageous, and ‘innocent’ person who then acted as a ‘moral beacon’ for the rest of society (Morrissey & Smyth 11-17), or they bore the stigma of being associated with paramilitary groups and hence were rejected (Rolston).

Since the mid-1990s, victims and survivors’ needs or issues have been addressed in turn by the British, Irish and Northern Irish governments and academics and voluntary organisations. Documents emanating from these various sources have gradually implemented and attempted to conceptualise the resolution of the conflict in which victims and survivors are given a specific role. The European Union through its three successive Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland (known as PEACE 1, 2, 3) has also contributed to this process and has been the main fund-giving source.

One of the main official early documents that focused on victims was the Bloomfield Report. In November 1997, the British government set up a Commission chaired by Kenneth Bloomfield to investigate the situation of victims of the conflict and “to look at possible ways to recognise their pain and sufferings” (Bloomfield). After a large consultation of the victims’ sector and a review of international practice in the field, a report was published in April 1998. Among its twenty recommendations focusing mainly on setting up structures and coordinating policies to provide practical help to victims, the report suggested creating a physical memorial to remember victims. It also hinted at the possibility of creating a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Although Bloomfield retained the idea of a physical memorial, the report mentions suggestions submitted to the commission during the consultation process: these include the idea of a building housing documentary records about the Troubles and oral histories documenting the experience of both prominent and ordinary people.

Within civil society, the work of the organisation Healing Through Remembering (HTR)¹ has shaped the debate on the role of victims and survivors in dealing with the past. Their work reflects the development since WW2 of a growing consensus across various disciplines on the idea that in divided societies coming out of conflict, the need to address the legacy of the past is a necessary element of achieving a long-lasting peace (see IDEA; Rousso; Traverzo; Ricœur).

For societies emerging from conflict involving protracted violence there is in general a need to address “what happened.” Dealing with the past could be defined as an active process of engagement with the past which endeavours to make sense of the past, to provide redress to those who suffered the consequences, and to resolve the social, economic, and political causes for the conflict in ways which transform relationships and structures at all levels of society, bringing long term individual and societal change (see Moore; Rolston 21).

In their first report dated 2002 (HTR), they recommended developing a network of commemoration and remembering work, a storytelling process known as “Testimony” collecting narratives about the conflict and being archived to serve as a vehicle to learn lessons for the future, choosing a Day of Reflexion, and establishing a permanent living memorial museum. In 2009, the organisation developed their ideas on the link between storytelling and dealing with the past:

HTR has found that storytelling and narrative work is the form of remembering most frequently offered as a vehicle for dealing with the past [...] Many feel that it is important to record and/or share the stories of the experiences of the conflict as a historical resource and a way of enabling society to examine the wealth of meaning and learning connected to the conflict. It is also frequently suggested that the person telling their story can experience a degree of healing, if they are listened to in an empathic way [...] In addition, some express concern that, unless a wide range of accounts are recorded and archived, a singular, exclusive narrative of the conflict will become dominant over time. This is particularly important to address for people who feel their experience of the conflict has been ignored (The Storytelling Sub Group 3).

The issue of dealing with the past was also tackled by the British government through the opening of new public inquiries on events such as ‘Bloody Sunday’ or on the issue of collusion (Cory Reports) and through setting up structures such as the Historical Enquiry Team and the Police Ombudsman charged with investigating the cases of unsolved deaths. On the other hand, two consultations were carried out by The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in the

¹ Since the early 2000s much of the reflection on the process of dealing with the past has been carried out by this organisation made up of individuals from the voluntary and community sectors and from academia.

House of Commons in 2004-2005 and by the Consultative Group on The Past in 2008-2009, the latter linking together the various processes of reconciliation, dealing with the past through truth, justice and information recovery and remembering activities involving victims and society as a whole (Mourlon). In 2009 the Strategy for Victims and Survivors (Victims Unit) recommended that the story of people who had been affected by the conflict should be heard and acknowledged publicly. It also recognised the need to deal with the past and promoted the contribution of victims and survivors in building a shared and better future.

These documents imply that acknowledgement of victims' experience is linked with the process of remembering, reconciliation and establishing truth about past abuses and events, in which telling one's story could be one of the mediums. And that victims have a role to play in building the future society. These consultations agreed on the fact that, although some people feared that revisiting the past might reinforce divisions especially in a society where the past was used to strengthen antagonistic identities, remembering activities were essential in the healing process for society as a whole. Storytelling was one of the forms of remembering.

Storytelling projects

One of the first settings where victims and survivors could voice what had happened to them or members of their family were in victims's self-help groups. Some had been set up during the conflict usually in an informal way, but they were very few (see Wilson; Tyrrell & Kelly; Smyth).² The number of these groups sprang thanks to European funding and later government funding. They provided for a safe place where people could talk about their trauma with people who had shared similar experiences.

I felt very, very, very isolated, until Anne and Thelma started up this group. It's okay somebody turning round and saying they feel sorry for you, but they don't really understand until it happens to themselves [...] And it helped me being able to run in there and tell them how I felt, and they were able to relate back to me because I felt the same way, and then when the group itself started up we met on a Thursday and it was great being able to sit in each other's company and say how you felt. We built up a trust within ourselves, and we actually had other groups coming in to talk with us (Haven 11).

These meetings had a therapeutic element to them, although they risked letting the victims being trapped in their own trauma if not organised in a professional way.

² For example, the groups CROSS (1975, Maura Kiely and Joan Orr) and WAVE (1991).

Other public events took place just after the Belfast Agreement where people talked about their experience for the first time in front of an assembly. This was the case at the West Belfast Festival in August 1998 when Relatives for Justice, a nationalist victims' group organised the conference 'Forgotten Victims.' According to the participants, the event was a moving and cathartic experience, "an exercise in group therapy" (Rolston vi). These public events were all the more important for victims and survivors from the nationalist community since they had felt ignored because it was assumed they were linked with paramilitary associations. Bill Rolston, one of the participants and author of the book *Unfinished Business: State Killings and the Quest for Truth*, commented: "As the example of South Africa's TRC revealed, the sine qua non of truth and justice is that the story of the most marginalised victims has to be officially acknowledged by society as legitimate" (Rolston).

If these types of therapeutic and cathartic meetings favoured intra-community cohesion, other experiences took place at inter-community level. Some groups refer to cross-community contacts and sharing of their experience (Heaven 13-14). Some organisations such as the Glencee Centre for Reconciliation in the Republic of Ireland organised workshops to facilitate dialogue between various groups of victims and between victims and perpetrators (LIVE programme: Let's Involve the Victims Experience. See White). Although successful, these experiences in cross-community activities are limited even at present. A recent evaluation showed that working in partnership was not a priority for these groups (Deloitte, CRC). One of the reasons is that up to now the definition of who constitutes a victims is still contentious. Although some degree of inclusive definition is being adopted and victims' groups have learnt to work together on specific occasions,³ some victims still think others do not deserve this status (mostly among Unionist groups in the border areas or among more politicized groups). The official definition in statutory documents has always adopted an inclusive approach based on human needs. However, self-help groups very often represent their own community on a very specific territory. Hence the difficulty at cross-community contact.

This situation together with the fact Northern Ireland didn't set up a truth commission explains why storytelling activities in the form of an individual or a group of people telling their personal experience of the conflict have flourished in a piecemeal way since the end of the 1990s. They bear different names: "personal accounts," "testimonies," "stories," "narratives." The Healing Through Remembering Project identified that they fall within three main categories: oral, written and visual and creative arts, which have been delivered in different forms: publications, audio/video material, exhibitions, educational workshops and

³ During events and conferences organised by the Community Relations Council (funding body), the Trauma Advisory Panels and the Victims' Forum.

creative processes (Kelly 2005). The motivations and objectives of such projects include: advocacy or promoting change; healing/therapeutic; documentation/historical record; acknowledgement/commemoration; education. In a lot of storytelling projects these objectives overlap.

I will now focus on projects that allowed individuals to have control over the material that has been made public and will take examples from written, published material that has been disseminated. The stories have all been collected at the initiative of a third party, either from academics or from voluntary organisations.

The BBC Legacy

The Legacy programme ran every morning just before 9 am throughout 1999 and broadcasted people's experience of the conflict on BBC Radio Ulster (BBC Legacy). The idea was born out of the realisation that victims wanted to tell their story. After the Omagh bombing in August 1998, the BBC Annual Report noted that:

Programmes throughout the schedule responded to the needs of the listeners, playing special requested music, opening phone lines and allowing people to pour out their sorrow and their sympathy. Presenters sometimes struggled to keep their composure as the tide of grief flooded over them. Listening figures were the highest ever recorded and one community psychiatrist told us we had provided a mass counselling service for the entire province (BBC Legacy 7).

Anne Garragher, former controller of BBC Northern Ireland had read the Bloomfield report and became aware of the need for people to share their experience. A book gathering the 365 testimonies in written form and audio files was released in 2008 to reach out to a wider public. The series aimed at reflecting the totality of experiences of those affected which could be categorised as either relating the event that the person went through or offering reflexions on the meaning of this event. The book is considered "a memorial to victims" and "poignant oral history of what the troubles have meant—and continue to mean—to so many" (BBC Legacy 13).

The Cost of the Troubles Study

After the 1994 ceasefires, a group of people who had direct experience of violence in Northern Ireland came together and worked in partnership with academics to examine the effects of the conflict on the general population. This group called the Cost of The Troubles Study

(COTTS) published the findings of their research in various books from 1999 onwards. Alongside this scientific research, they organised exhibitions on the impact of the conflict to raise people's awareness and produced a video and a book offering personal accounts of the Troubles.

In *Personal Accounts from Northern Ireland's Troubles: Public Conflict, Private Loss*, Smyth and Fay selected fourteen interviews that aim at a representation of the diversity of experiences and at reflecting the impact of the Troubles: six Protestants, seven Catholics, one ethnic minority, none from people from the British security forces. For the latter group, the authors state that despite their efforts, it was not possible to obtain accounts by them. The purpose of this collection of stories was both educational and therapeutic. According to the authors, the population in general is not fully aware of the consequences of violence and these accounts should prevent a return to violence. They aim at providing the opportunity for various stories to be read and acknowledged by people who do not belong to the same community (Smyth & Fay 1-6).

For most of the interviewees, it was the first time they were talking openly about their experience and the first time they were listened to in a sympathetic way. The story of their experience was externalised for the first time. They knew that their story would be published for a wider public and they had control over the editing of their testimony. Through these accounts, the authors wanted to provide a more "textured" and a "deeper" version of history and contribute to movements of history told from below (Smyth & Fay 131-137).⁴ They wanted to challenge the 'history from above' and the official record (Smyth & Fay 137), offering more diverse and sometimes conflicting points of views.

These narratives are usually ten pages long and focus on the experience of the most traumatic events and their psychological and material consequences on the individual and his or her family. They are usually transcripts of interviews whose spoken style emphasizes raw emotions and the symptomatic narrative form of traumatic memories. There are recurring themes such as the heavy use of medication and alcohol, the unsympathetic attitude of authorities and the media or doctors after the event and the feeling of isolation. Those with a political or religious belief seem to have overcome their experience better and their narrative is usually more articulate and structured. Most of them did not seek revenge, and when they did, it was usually right after the event had taken place. These testimonies give an insight into some of the social and political aspects of the conflict, but always told from the perspective of the interviewee.

⁴ The authors explicitly refer to E.P. Thompson's conceptualisation of history. See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Gollancz, 1963).

An Crann/The Tree

At the same period, Damian Gorman, a Northern Irish poet and playwright established the An Crann/The Tree project which sought to tell the story of the Troubles, not by professionals, but the population at large (An Crann). A similar ethos to COTTS was chosen. Creative writing workshops were organised around Northern Ireland and a collection of 83 narratives were published in 2000 (*Bear in mind: Stories of the Troubles*). They are written in various prose styles, poetry and drama but are shorter accounts than in the COTTS publication. They express more varied experiences of the Troubles (some of them not being traumatic) and express a variety of feelings. Their purpose is also therapeutic and educational and they aim at providing a “fragmented, contradictory story of the Troubles” (*An Crann* xi).

These three initiatives represent one of the early movements of storytelling carried out with an inclusive ethos. A number of other publications can be classified as “truth-telling” exercises. They collect testimonies of what they qualify as “unheard voices,” i.e. individuals or communities who have often not been acknowledged because of their real or perceived association with paramilitary organisations, and have been portrayed on the public arena as victims who do not deserve sympathy.

Unfinished Business

In *Unfinished Business: State Killings and the Quest for Truth*, Bill Rolston presents testimonies of relatives on 23 instances of State security forces’ involvement in human rights abuses (Rolston). These accounts are preceded by an introduction setting the historical context based on documents that are in the public domain. As in other instances, these narratives tell stories of pain and suffering but they also document the event. Most of the interviewees have become involved in human rights campaign after the event took place and have fought for the truth to be made on the circumstance of the deaths. Common themes include the misinformation carried by the media and authorities on those deaths; the fact they they were usually denied proper investigations; they were victims of harassment by authorities; they had a feeling of powerlessness; they had fought back and engaged in a campaign for truth and justice (Rolston v-xv; 309-325).

Ardoyne: The Untold Truth

In *Ardoyne: the Untold Truth* (ACP), the various authors engaged in an exercise of community collective memory that aimed to challenge the public perception of a

geographical area, “the Ardoyne,” as being a “terrorist community” (ACP 1). Here again, the idea of getting away with a hierarchy of victims is essential. The participation of the community in the project is emphasized to create a sense of ownership by the people. The project is aimed at writing “history from below” and “providing a platform for the community to write back” (ACP 2). The book collects testimonies of relatives and friends about 99 deaths that occurred in a small close-knit, working class, overwhelmingly nationalist community of North Belfast. They are recorded in chronological order from 1969 to 1998 and divided into chapters that represent the various periods of the conflict. They are always preceded by an introduction defining the historical context of the period. Although it does include “non-nationalist” individuals and despite the inclusive ethos of the project, the divided nature of the area and the difficulty to define the district implies that the accounts overrepresent the nationalist community. However, the perpetrators are not only the security forces but also the Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries to a lesser extent. The themes and the tone of the accounts are similar to the other accounts presented above. Overall, this project is described by the authors as an “unofficial mechanism” (ACP 12) to deal with the past. In their conclusion, they explain that “these testimonies are accounts of ordinary people who are not normally part of the public discourse. It is usually the powerful and privileged who write history.” (ACP 527) They go on saying that “this book represents an effort by ordinary people to redefine who gets heard and what is remembered. It represents a counter-discourse to the ‘organised forgetting’ and culture of denial propagated by the British state” (ACP 528). Finally they claim that “projects like the Ardoyne commemoration Project are important because they create the space for victims and survivors to tell their story. Oral history has often been used as a tool in liberation and resistance struggles throughout the world. It has been used as a tool to challenge official accounts of history in countries such as Cuba, South Africa, Chile, Argentina and Guatemala. It is important that ordinary people get the opportunity to tell their story from their perspective” (ACP 542).

The authors clearly challenge a perceived official history controlled by the British state and/or untrustworthy historians.

These personal accounts of the Troubles have multiplied after a long period of silence that the peace process has allowed to break. The need for people to speak about their experience also comes from the lack of or reluctance to organise a global mechanism to investigate cases of unsolved death and the fact that agents in the conflict have not formally recognised their full responsibility in the conflict. However, there are signs that the issue of “truth and justice” is being partially tackled recently through the setting up of a Tribunal of Inquiries or Inquests on particular events. Despite these developments, reports emanating from these inquiries are often subject to controversies.

These testimonies are meant to challenge what is perceived as the “official account of the Troubles.” There is a sense of mistrust towards accounts made by professional historians and accounts based on prominent figures. They are a sort of people’s history of the Troubles. Until 2014 these accounts were more or less archived in scattered locations and access to these sources was sometimes limited either intentionally or unintentionally. There was no single place where they were archived, so a patchwork of storytelling projects that are either inclusive or exclusive has been flourishing.⁵ This is symptomatic of the competition between each group of victims to be acknowledged, which in turn reflects the divisions within the victims’ sector over the definition of who qualifies as a victim. The recent opening of a digital archive ‘Accounts of the Conflict’ at INCORE, University of Ulster in November 2014 might be a first step towards providing a single repository for these personal accounts with potential dissemination to the wider public. The Stormont House Agreement signed on 23 December 2014 to resolve disputes over contentious issues such as Flags, Parades, and Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland, also allowed for the creation of a similar archive of stories by 2016 : ‘Oral History Archive’ (Stormont House Agreement 5). However these two initiatives pose ethical and legal challenges : will the diversity of experiences be ensured ? Should all the accounts be publicly available ? Who should have access to the database ?

One may wonder what impact those testimonies have on the wider public and how they might be used in the future. All these testimonies have had a therapeutic effect on those who gave them. In the case of the Ardoyne Commemoration Project (ACP), it even reinforced community cohesion. But we don’t know the effect of those accounts on the ordinary reader or listener yet and we don’t know whether it does have an educational value. To what extent can they challenge people’s opinions and attitude is yet to be analysed. One may wonder whether they can have more than an emotional effect on those readers or listeners. A study was carried out in the case of the ACP (Lundy; McGovern). It revealed the antagonistic attitude of the Protestant community: they felt excluded from the project and they did not agree on the inclusive definition of victims. According to them only “innocent” victims should be acknowledged. Furthermore, they were divided on the effect of such an initiative on community relations. Some thought that it could improve dialogue, while others claimed that it could create tensions and reinforce the divide between the two communities. Another group held that the historical account of the conflict was too politicised.

⁵ Several new books represent a specific community: Ken Wharton, *A Long Long War: Voices from the British Army in Northern Ireland 1969-98* (Solihull: Helion & Company, 2008). Here another documenting “Real stories and emotions from those who faced the challenge of The Northern Ireland Troubles” in an inclusive way: Shared Troubles (collection) <http://accounts.ulster.ac.uk/repo/collections/show/147> (accessed on 5 September 2015). A lot of victims groups have their own websites and offer a list of testimonies.

We cannot generalise from this study carried out in a particular context, but it is a first step in studying the impact of such storytelling activities. Research should also be conducted on how these testimonies can be used in the future. They re-open the debate on whether such testimonies can or should be used by historians, whether they are an exercise in collective memory. A pluridisciplinary approach to analyse this corpus of narratives might be useful in understanding the nature and value of storytelling in societies in transition.

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